

W.S. 1,247

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1249

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,249

Witness

James O'Flynn,
Abbey Street,
Fethard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Assistant Adjutant,
Third Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

I.R.A. activities,
Fethard Co. Tipperary, 1920-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2563

Form B.S.M. 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO-STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1249

STATEMENT BY JAMES O'FLYNN,

Abbey St., Fethard, Co. Tipperary.

Asst. Adjutant, 3rd Tipperary Brigade, I.R.A.

I was born at Fethard, Co. Tipperary, in the year 1903. My father was then the proprietor of a tailoring and outfitting business at Burke St., Fethard, which he still possesses. My early years were spent in Fethard, where I attended the local "Patrician Brothers" school until I was 14 years of age. In 1917 I went to Rockwell College, where I did the Junior, Middle and Senior Grades, and in June, 1920, I returned home and commenced to assist my father in his business.

My father was associated with the Irish Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements from about the years of 1914 or 1915, and our home was frequented from time to time by some notable men of both movements. It was also used as the despatch centre through which despatches to and from various I.R.A. units passed. During school holidays from Rockwell College I often delivered these despatches and it was in this way that I started to make my first contacts with the local company and battalion officers.

It was not, however, until my return from Rockwell in June, 1920, that I became what I might call officially associated with the Irish Republican Army. At that time I joined 'B' Company, 1st Battalion, which was the local (Fethard) company, and I regularly attended the company parades which were held once or twice a week at night-time and, as a rule, at either Kilnockin Hill or Market Hill.

Although I held no rank in the company, except perhaps that I may have been entrusted with whatever duties would fall to the lot of a Company Adjutant, I was only a short time a member when with the Company Captain, Jerry Whelan of Clamps Castle, I commenced to attend meetings of the 1st Battalion Council. The Battalion Council met at intervals of approximately a month, and the meetings were usually held at Ryan-Wall's house at Magginstown or in some of the houses in the vicinity of Graigue, Clerihan. The staff of the 1st Battalion as then constituted was as follows:

Battn. Comdt. - Jerome Davin, Rathsallagh (now in U.S.A.)
 " Vice Comdt. - James Keating, Brookhill, Fethard.
 " Adjnt. - James Delahunty, Graigue, Clerihan (now in U.S.A.)
 " Q/M - John Purcell, Graigue, Clerihan.
 " I/O - John Delahunty, Graigue, Clerihan.
 " Eng. Off. - Michael Nugent, Springfield, Clerihan.
 " Sign. Off. - John Devereux, New Inn, Cahir.
 " Transp. Off. - Frank Morrissey, Blackcastle, Rosegreen.

In addition to the foregoing, the Battalion Council meetings were usually attended by two officers of each of the five companies in the battalion.

Our main activity in the Fethard Company area during the autumn and winter months of 1920 lay in the blocking and trenching of roads. I spent several nights at this work. Even when an ambush or an attack on enemy forces was not contemplated it was considered desirable to keep the roads blocked or trenched so as to impede the movement of British troops in the area.

In addition to attending the battalion council meetings, I continued to bring despatches which arrived at my home in Fethard to the brigade and battalion officers, and in this way I became fully acquainted and very friendly

with them. Occasionally I stayed overnight with one or other of them.

In February, 1921, due to raids by parties of British forces on my home I felt that I was likely to be arrested at any time, so I decided to go 'on the run'. I was then appointed as Assistant Brigade Adjutant; and from then until after the cease fire order in October, 1923, I remained a fulltime I.R.A. officer.

When I became a member of the brigade staff in February, 1921, its personnel was as follows:

Brigade Comdt. - Seumas Robinson.
 " V. Comdt. - Denis Lacey (killed in Civil War)
 " Adjt. - Seán Fitzpatrick (now Director Fógra Fáilte).
 " Asst. Adjt. - James O'Flynn (myself)
 " Q/M - Dan Breen (now T.D.)
 " I/O - Tom Carew (now deceased).
 " Eng. Off. - Seamus Babington (Carrick-on-Suir)
 " Comm. Off. - Jack O'Mara (now deceased).

In March, 1921, the late Michael Sheehan of Clonmel succeeded Dan Breen as Brigade Quartermaster. Denis Lacey was then away with one of the Brigade Flying Columns and we only saw him occasionally at Brigade H.Q. Seamus Babington lived in Carrick-on-Suir. He frequently visited us and he attended the brigade staff and council meetings. Seumas Robinson, Seán Fitzpatrick, Michael Sheehan, Tom Carew, Jack O'Mara and myself were more or less in constant attendance at the Brigade H.Q.

A brief description of the Brigade H.Q. may not be out of place here. It consisted of a dug-out, approximately 12 feet long by 10 feet wide by 7½ feet high, constructed underneath a field on either Davin's or Houlihan's farm at Castleblake. The entrance was by a trap door situated beside a footpath which ran between Davin's

and Houlihan's houses. This trap door was closely camouflaged with sods of earth and grass, and those entering or leaving secured it behind them. The trap door was also the only means of ventilation and we often had to leave it either open or ajar to ventilate the dug-out. Access from the entrance down into the dug-out was by means of a ladder. The floor and ceiling were covered with sheeting boards and the four sides were lined with similar material. Around the sides was a plentiful supply of shelving to hold papers, correspondence files and various knick-knacks. It was furnished with a table, a large stool and two mattresses. We also had two typewriters, on which Seán Fitzpatrick and myself typed all despatches and reports. Seán Fitzpatrick and I generally slept on the two mattresses in the dug-out. The others, viz. Robinson, Sheehan, Carew and O'Mara, were generally accommodated in some of the farmhouses in the vicinity. There was also sleeping accommodation in another dug-out which was constructed on somewhat similar lines to the Brigade H.Q. It was furnished only with a few mattresses and was only occasionally used. Our meals were supplied to us free gratis and for nothing by Davins and Loobys of Rathsallagh, Houlihans of Castleblake and O'Donnells of Graigue.

The location of the Brigade H.Q. dug-out was known only to the brigade staff and, of course, to the men who had constructed it. It was constructed by a unit usually referred to as the "Special Half Company attached to the Brigade". These were selected men who were often called upon for guard and scouting duties when raids or rounds-up were expected or when anyone of particular importance visited the area. Amongst ourselves we always referred to the Brigade H.Q. as No. 71. Any bulky stuff arriving for

the brigade was usually left at Davin's or Looby's of Rathsallagh.

One of my principal duties as Asst. Adjutant was to attend each day from about 11 a.m. to 3 or 4 p.m. at the dispatch centre. This was really an old cattle shed in a field at the rear of O'Donnell's farmhouse in Graigue, Clerihan. Here I met the despatch carriers from the various battalions and received their despatches or gave them any for their battalions from the brigade. Despatches for G.H.Q. were given to the despatch carrier of the 4th Battalion, who, in turn, handed them over at Limerick Junction railway station to friendly railway checkers or guards for conveyance to Dublin. The location of the despatch centre was for security reasons varied from time to time. For short periods I would meet the despatch carriers at the houses of O'Donnell, Egan and Delahunty of Graigue or at Purcell's of Glenagat before reverting back again to the cattle shed.

Sometime about May, 1921, I recollect seeing a spy who was about to be executed. He was then held as a prisoner in a dug-out near Egan's of Graigue. I had not anything to do with his case, and although I must have heard a lot about him at the time, I cannot now recollect either his name or what the specific charge was against him. I believe he was a stranger in the neighbourhood. I have, however, a clear recollection of seeing Fr. Murphy of New Inn when he came to attend to the spiritual needs of the prisoner before his execution.

Seán Fitzpatrick, the Brigade Adjutant, and myself were in Looby's house at Rathsallagh on Sunday evening the 18th June, 1921, when a messenger arrived to inform us

that James Delahunty, Adjutant of the 1st Battalion, and Patrick Aherne, Captain of the Rosegreen Company, had captured three British officers nearby. The officers were in civilian clothes and had been captured in a bog at Moorstown about half a mile from the Brigade H.Q. They had been brought to the dug-out on Hayden's land at Castleblake, i.e. to the dug-out which I have previously mentioned as being furnished with mattresses and used solely for sleeping in.

Seán Fitzpatrick and I went to this dug-out to interview the prisoners. I immediately recognised one of them as Lieutenant Twogood who was stationed in the military barracks in Fethard. I should also have recognised the other two, Lieutenants Betteridge and Glossop, for all three were stationed in Fethard, but I failed to do so at the time. Lieutenant Twogood had been a customer of my father and the recognition was mutual. We exchanged some casual remarks. At the time neither he nor I had any idea of the fate that was in store for him. Ernie O'Malley (then O/C 2nd Southern Division) came on the scene and took full charge of the situation.

About midnight that night I learned that O'Malley, with Michael Sheehan, the Brigade Q/M, and some members of the Battalion A.S.U., had taken the prisoners away in the direction of Clerihan for execution. Meanwhile I had been joined by Jerome Davin and James Delahunty, Commandant and Adjutant of the 1st Battalion respectively, and by a fourth who may have been Seán Fitzpatrick. We considered that a round-up by British troops would soon be under way to search for the three officers, and we concluded that they (the British forces) would search the area enclosed by the

roads from Coleman Cross on the Fethard-Cahir road, Darcy's Cross on the Cashel-Clonmel road, and from the cross at Blackcastle to Barrettstown on the Fethard-Rosegreen road. We decided to get outside this area, so that night all four of us slept in a field near Hanley's of Ballynattin.

Our conclusion was well nigh perfect and next morning about 6 a.m. we woke up to the sound of the movements of troops on the Cashel-Clonmel road. Between the four of us we had one rifle and 3 revolvers, and as there were some hundreds of troops on the Cashel-Clonmel road alone, there was nothing we could do but to move further away from the troops to a more secure hiding spot on the hill over Graigue. From there we had a perfect view of the troops' movements and we watched them all through the morning until they were withdrawn. Later on in the day we learned that the three officers had been executed at Woodroffe and that their bodies had been found and taken away by the British troops.

It was in June, 1921, too, that the Brigade O/C decided to suspend until the following autumn the activities of the two Brigade Flying Columns. This decision was made in view of the exceptionally fine weather, the long bright days and short nights which were all to the advantage of the enemy forces. The members of the columns were sent back to their own battalion areas to act as small Active Service Units. The two column leaders, Denis Lacey and Seán Hogan, reported to Brigade H.Q. They did not remain very long for their temperament would not permit them to sit in an enclosed space to do administrative work. They moved off to the battalion areas on, I presume, organisation work.

When the Truce was declared in July, 1921, Seán Fitzpatrick, the Brigade Adjutant, was appointed Brigade Liaison Officer and I acted as Brigade Adjutant until the appointment of the late Thomas Lynch to that position. Lynch had previously been Adjutant of Lacey's Flying Column. He was a native of Tralee and before joining the Flying Column had worked for a number of years at the drapery business in Tipperary town. During the Truce period I acted as personal Adjutant to the Brigade Commandant and accompanied him on tours of the brigade area in the sidecar of his motor cycle. Another post which I held at this time was Adjutant of the training camp at Ballinard. This camp was under the command of Captain Prout, who was later a Major General in the Free State Army.

During this time too (the Truce period) the Brigade H.Q. was moved from the dug-out at Castleblake to a disused house on Clery's farm at Springfield. I have a distinct recollection of an animated discussion which took place here immediately after the Treaty was signed in London in December, 1921. Practically all the brigade officers were present. The subject was, of course, the Treaty, and the general consensus of opinion was that it would not and should not be ratified by Dáil Éireann.

Signed: James O'Flynn
(James O'Flynn)

Date: 10-9-55

20.9.55

Witness: J. Grace (J. Grace)
(Investigator)

