

W.S. 1,273

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,273

ROINN  COSANTA.

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,273.....

Witness

Denis McDonnell,
Main Street,
Shanagolden,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Second Lieutenant Irish Volunteers
Shanagolden, Co. Limerick, 1917 - .

Subject.

Shanagolden Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Limerick, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S.2568.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1273

STATEMENT BY DENIS McDONNELL,

Main St., Shanagolden, Co. Limerick.

I was born in the parish of Shanagolden on the 15th October, 1898. I was sent to the local national school until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I started working on my father's farm.

A company of Volunteers was formed in the village in the month of May, 1914. A man named Timothy Madigan was the chief organiser and principal officer. The strength of the company was about 80 men. Our drill instructors were two British ex-soldiers named John Mulvihill and Maurice Langan. On one occasion Con Colbert - executed after Easter Week, 1916 - paid a visit to the village to review the company. A short time later it ceased to exist following John Redmond's call on the Volunteers throughout the country to join the British Army.

Early in the year 1917 the company was reorganised. I joined the company again. Our strength at first was only sixteen men. Tim Madigan became Company Captain; David O'Brien, 1st Lt.; and I became 2nd Lt. We had no arms of any kind. Routine drilling continued throughout the year and up to the conscription scare of 1918, when our strength increased to about 50 men. We collected or obtained a few shotguns around this time. When the scare was over most of the new members left, which reduced our strength to about 20 men. We drilled and paraded to the end of the year. During the general election at the end of this year I went to Croom, East Limerick, with other members of the company to canvass for the Sinn Féin candidate and was on duty at the

polling booths on the day of the election. Seán Finn, Brigade O/C, brought a number of the West Limerick Volunteers to Waterford to assist the Sinn Féin candidate there on the same occasion. The Sinn Féin candidate in West Limerick was returned unopposed.

Routine meetings and drilling continued during the year 1919. All shotguns and arms in the company area were collected in the autumn of this year. Early in 1920 the R.I.C. evacuated their barracks in the village and went to a barracks in Foynes a short distance away. In the month of May the Company Captain, Tim Madigan, received an order from the Battalion O/C to burn down the evacuated barracks. With the other members of the company, in charge of the Company Captain, I participated in carrying out the order.

In the first week of July General Lucas, who had been captured in the Fermoy area of Co. Cork, was brought under an armed guard of I.R.A. in charge of Seán Finn and Seán Ford to the residence of Michael Dore, Ballyliston, Kilcolman, and handed over to Tim Madigan. I was one of the local company who guarded him for about a week. He was later taken across the Shannon to Co. Clare.

Around this time several robberies took place in the area. Local people were in dread of their lives. Day after day we received reports of sheep, pigs, turkeys and farm produce being stolen or seized by armed men at the point of a shotgun. All this was done in the name I.R.A. The Sinn Féin courts had not been established in the area, neither were there Volunteer police. We set about finding the culprits and succeeded in arresting a number of them. They were all farmers' sons and were not members of the

I.R.A. We seized their arms and warned them of the consequences if they were caught again. They had all been identified by the people who had been robbed. Later one of these same highwaymen was elected a member of the County Council. He then stood as a candidate for An Dáil and only missed being elected by a few votes.

In the month of August the Company Captain with seven members of the company, including myself, held up two R.I.C. men in the village with the intention of seizing their revolvers. They were not armed. In our disappointment we seized their tunics and burned them. On the following night two lorry loads of R.I.C. and Tans arrived and burned down the local creamery and a shop owned by a man named Henry Reidy. They also set fire to the shop of a man named Michael Kennedy, but with the help of neighbours this shop was saved. When they called at Reidy's they found four men playing cards. They arrested the four of them and brought them for a distance of five miles from the village where they released them. One of the four before being released was stripped naked and severely beaten. His name was Jerry O'Connor. I should have stated that a short time before we held up the two policemen a Black and Tan named Huckerly - a half-caste - shot dead an old man named John Hynes in the village.

By the end of the year a large number of active I.R.A. men in the brigade area were 'on the run'. Most of these were formed into an active service unit or flying column. The column numbered about 25 men. Seán Finn became O/C of the column. No member of this company joined the column.

On the 28th December a patrol of R.I.C and Tans arrived in the village from Foynes. They surrounded the home of the Company Captain - Tim Madigan. He and his brother Willie were taken by surprise. Tim dashed for liberty and was shot dead 100 yards from his own door. They left the body where it lay. Willie was arrested. By order of the authorities the funeral was confined to not more than 100 people. Most of the local company, however, attended. That night we assembled at the graveside and fired a volley over the grave. After the death of Tim Madigan David O'Brien was appointed Company Captain in his place.

Our main activities from January, 1921, consisted of blocking and trenching of roads in our area and the cutting of telephone communications. Raids and searches by the R.I.C., Black and Tans and military became more intense as the year progressed. Seldom did a day pass but they paid a visit to the village, where they ill-treated the people and smashed in the windows of shops and houses. Residents were rounded up from time to time and compelled at the point of the gun to fill in the trenches in the roads. Each time they were filled in we opened them again the same night.

In the month of February Seán Finn, the Brigade O/C, planned an attack on a train from Foynes to Limerick at a place called Barragone. He had received information that a number of R.I.C. were to travel on a particular day to Limerick by this train to give evidence at the trial of Willie Madigan. Finn's intention was to hold up the train and disarm the R.I.C. He asked the Company Captain, David O'Brien, to select a man of the company to board the train

at Foynes for the purpose of signalling to the ambush party at Barragone the number of R.I.C. on the train. O'Brien selected an I.R.A. man named Mick Hission.

Just previous to the attack Seán Finn and the column assembled in Ballyhahill. Early on the morning of the 17th February, assisted by the local company, the column took up positions at the selected point - on the embankments of the railway and near a bridge overlooking the railway. The attacking party had been divided into three sections; in all they numbered 24 men. Most of the column men had rifles. I had a shotgun and was in the section near the bridge in charge of David O'Brien. Finn himself was in charge of the second section. I don't remember who was in charge of the third section.

As the train approached the ambush position Con Boyle of Rathkeale Company, carrying a red flag, stepped into the middle of the railway tracks and flagged it to a stop. Before it do so Mick Hission was seen to wave a white handkerchief several times, indicating that there were more than three or four R.I.C. on the train. Immediately the train stopped we opened fire. As we did so a Black and Tan got out of one of the carriages and crept along under the train to the engine, where he compelled the driver at the point of a revolver to proceed to Limerick.

In the following month Seán Finn was shot dead near Ballyhahill in a surprise raid by military and Tans. The trenching of roads continued, while the military and Tans, in ever increasing numbers, raided and searched the area and patrolled the countryside at will. Apart from the routine work of the time, activities in our area were very few up to the Truce.

After the Truce I attended a training camp at Fairylawn, Loughill. I later joined the National Army and was commissioned Captain. I served for two years.

Signed:

Denis McDonnell

(Denis McDonnell)

Date:

6/10/55

6/10/55

Witness:

John J. Daly

(John J. Daly)

(Investigator)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,273