

W.S. 1,276
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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NO. W.S. 1,276

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,276

Witness

Liam O'Leary,
8, Main Street,
Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Adjutant, Wexford Brigade, 1920;
Adjutant North do. later.

Subject.

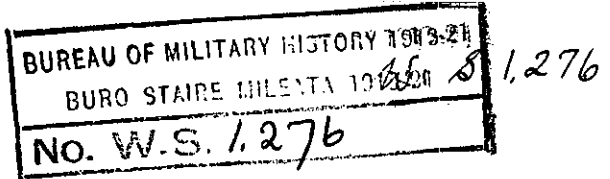
National activities,
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, 1916-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2582

ORIGINAL



STATEMENT BY MR. LIAM O'LEARY,
8 Main Street, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

1916

The Volunteer Hall, "Antwerp", and Dún na nGaedhal, the Gaelic League Hall, adjoined one another in Mary Street, at the bottom of Slaney Street. Nearly all the lads in the League Rooms were in the Volunteers, but some of us, who were not in the I.R.B., knew very little of the inside activities.

The first I knew that something was about to happen was about six weeks before Easter, 1916, when a car, owned by Rev. M. Murphy, C.C., Ferns, and containing rifles and ammunition, was seized in Dublin by R.I.C. and detectives. The two Volunteers, who were in it, were arrested. The driver, named Joe Kenny, was in the Volunteers in Enniscorthy (and drove a lorry for S. & A. G. Davis, Flour Millers, Enniscorthy) and Paddy Doyle, Ferns, who was with him, was a leading Volunteer in the Ferns Company. They were both tried and sentenced to imprisonment. The car was confiscated. Father Murphy was at the loss of it. He is now (1955) Very Rev. Canon M. Murphy, P.P., Cloughbawn.

The next thing was an article in a small paper, called "Spark", or "The Spark", which told every Volunteer to try, by any and every means, to procure arms, that they would soon be wanting them.

About this time also, there were a few unexpected mobilisations at late hours of the night, and a general

mobilisation was called for Easter Sunday, every Volunteer to bring a day's rations. We were around "Antwerp" for some hours and were brought for a route march around the town. We were told, around tea-time, that we might go home but might be mobilised again shortly. We could see comings and goings to "Antwerp" for the rest of the evening and night but were not told anything (only what we could guess).

On Wednesday night, we were all around the Hollow and, at about eleven o'clock, Mr E. de Lacey, who was a teacher in the technical school, came out of "Antwerp" and asked me to go for a walk up as far as his house where he told me that Enniscorthy was "taking the field" in the morning (Thursday) at six o'clock.

The mobilisation was in Irish Street, outside Keegan's, and the Athenaeum was taken over as headquarters.

My own activities for the remainder of the week (Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday) included going with a party in motor cars to raid loyalist houses for arms in the Duffrey district, and, on Thursday night, being given a letter by Seamus Doyle, Adjutant, to deliver to Captain P. Ronan, O/C, Ferns Company. Off with me to Ferns. I found Captain Ronan and seven or eight more Ferns Volunteers in the house of Paddy Doyle, waiting for orders. The Company had been mobilised earlier in the night, but had been demobbed and sent home for the night. All Volunteers present, with the exception of Captain Ronan who waited to mobilise the Company in the morning, came to Enniscorthy with me, where we arrived around 5 a.m. (Friday). For the

remainder of the week, I was on outpost and scouting activities until we were told to go home early on Monday morning.

Before we left headquarters, Rev. P. Murphy, M.S.S.; House of Missions, Enniscorthy, addressed us in the skating rink. He said that we were down for the time being, but "keep your powder dry". He is now (1955) Very Rev. Canon P. Murphy, P.P., Glynn, Wexford.

The Volunteers, as far as I remember, of the Ferns Company who came to Enniscorthy with me on Thursday night were Myles P. & Joseph Breen, Matt Kent, William Kavanagh, James Doyle (brother of Paddy, already mentioned) and John Kavanagh.

1918

During the conscription scare, a working party of Volunteers were selected from the different Companies in Enniscorthy, numbering, I would say, about twenty. Their duties were to make powder, run buckshot, refill old cartridges and deliver same when ready around the county which was then all in one Brigade area. Work started every night from in or around eight o'clock to midnight and continued for the whole summer. T.A. Sinnott and S. Rafter were in charge of powder making; Patrick Keegan took charge of the buckshot party which included Michael Davis and John Davis; and I think Tom Traynor was in charge of refilling cases with the buckshot, helped by F. Gibbons, Tom Roche, Sean Kearney, Patrick Dillon, Ed. Balfe, James O'Brien and Michael Kirwan.

1919-1920

In February, 1920, I was appointed Brigade

Adjutant and, for a good start, my duties were mostly attending organisation of Companies and Battalions in company with Brigade O/C, T.D. Sinnott, and later with Acting O/C, Brigade, Ed. Balfe, the Shannon, Enniscorthy, and sending monthly reports to G.H.Q., Dublin, also distribution of 'the Volunteer' paper, "An tÓglach", to the different Company areas in the Brigade.

About November, 1919, Patrick Dillon, an officer (Captain, I think) of B. Company, 1st Battalion, and myself were sent by T.D. Sinnott to scout around Ballywilliam R.I.C. barracks and to make out a map on same. Neither of us was good at drawing, but we satisfied T.D., who made all arrangements for an attack on the barracks early in the New Year. About a week previous to the operation, it was cancelled. T.D. Sinnott told me afterwards that a Volunteer, who had two brothers in the R.I.C., told him that the R.I.C. knew of our scouting and were waiting and ready for us, with extra police in the barracks. (His story was his own making, and prevented the operation being tried.)

Shortly after this, the Brigade had hard luck to lose T.D. Sinnott as Brigade Commandant - he had some difference with G.H.Q. - and he was replaced by Ed. Balfe, O/C, 1st Battalion, as Acting Brigadier.

The Brigade Council decided to attack another R.I.C. barracks, and Clonroche was selected as it was central for all areas and would be good training to have outposts over a very wide area, from all Battalion areas. Acting O/C, Balfe, took me with him to Clonroche to scout around and make mental maps, which we drew on paper on our return to town. The Brigade Council again

met and made final plans which, with the map, were sent to G.H.Q. for ratification. This was received some week or so later. It was sent, I think, by Dr. J. Ryan (afterwards Minister for Agriculture, etc.)

At that time, an outstanding Volunteer, James McMahon, a Clareman, arrived in Enniscorthy from Kilkenny where he was badly wanted for the attack on and taking of an R.I.C. Barracks at Hugginstown, Co. Kilkenny. He had a plan of a bomb - he called it a tail bomb - which was made with a length of tubing, with a long tail made of calico. A stick of gelignite was placed in the tube and a detonator was attached, with a nail tied in it to prevent accidents. When about to be used, the nail was extracted, the bomb held by the tail, swung around a couple of times, and then fired. McMahon claimed you would take any R.I.C. barracks with them. We found out differently in practice because, when the attack on Clonroche R.I.C. barracks started, the police commenced firing through the loop-holes in the steel shutters, and our bombers had to keep under cover and couldn't take proper aim. Seán Whelan (Waxer) was slightly wounded in this attack.

The selection of the night of March 20th for the attack was a mistake, because March 21st was a fair day in Enniscorthy and word was coming in from all outposts that people with stock for the fair were on every road. The attack commenced about twelve o'clock midnight and I think the O/C, Balfe, called off the attack about 3 a.m. The attacking party consisted of Volunteers selected from Enniscorthy town, and the outposts were from all over the Brigade area.

1920.

The County Wexford Féis was held in Wexford town on Whit Sunday, 23rd May, 1920. Sometime - Whit Monday - T.D. Sinnott called me and said that three G.H.Q. Staff Officers were in Dr. James Ryan's house and that arrangements were to be made to raid houses in County Kilkenny, about two miles from New Ross, and also to provide transport for prisoners and a place to put them.

T.D. Sinnott and myself left Wexford to see Dr. Kelly, who was dispensary doctor in Killane area, to procure the use of his car which was given cheerfully. From there, we went to Ballingale to look for a second car, and the owner, Miss M. O'Neill, offered to drive the car herself, no matter to where, but T.D. wouldn't let her.

We left Enniscorthy that night on bicycles, with about twenty-four to thirty Volunteers in three groups. The group I happened to be with went through New Ross until we met a scout at a place called Dysart, or Dysartmore, who was waiting for us and brought us down a boreen where we met a Staff Officer, Frank Thornton, who took charge of us. We raided a house and took a prisoner, a young man named Jeffares. The other parties also arrested two other men, one named Sullivan. The prisoners were brought to Kelly's, Tombrick, Ballycaaney, where they were guarded, night and day, by members of the Ballycaaney Company. They were interrogated by the Dublin officers and, a few days later, they were released on a back road near Camolin. The G.H.Q. officers were taken by car back to Dublin,

driven by Michael Sinnott, brother of T.D. (G.H.Q. had information that the R.I.C., who murdered Tom's MacCurtain, were harboured in those houses, but I don't know.)

Saturday evening, June 8th, was a half-holiday in Enniscorthy. About two o'clock, I got a message that I was wanted upstairs in John Murphy's, No. 4 Main Street. When I went in, I recognised Frank Thornton from the night in New Ross, and was introduced to Liam Tobin. T.D. Sinnott was also there. I was sent off to fetch Ed. Balfe. I think Michael Kirwan was also there and I cannot remember anyone else. Thornton explained their business, the execution of District Inspector Lee Wilson, Gorey. I was sent on my bicycle to scout about Gorey and find out his whereabouts, etc. Having done that much, I came back and reported at No. 4 Main Street again, about ten o'clock.

Joseph McMahon and John Whelan (Waxer) had been selected, or had volunteered for the job with the Dublin men. Liam Tobin was the only one who could recognise the District Inspector, if not in uniform, as he had seen him ill-treat Thomas Clarke and Sean McDermott when they were prisoners near the Rotunda in Dublin after the surrender in Easter Week, 1916. A motor car, owned by two good Volunteer officers, James Cullen and Patrick Howlin, had been procured. Michael Sinnott, brother of T.D. Sinnott, was selected to drive the party. I got further instructions to get a Volunteer to go with me early the following morning (Sunday, June 9th) on bicycles to Gorey, to scout around and meet the car a bit down the road from

District Inspector Lee Wilson's residence.

I went that night, Saturday, to Kelly's house in Clonee, Camolin, where two as good Volunteers as were in the Brigade area lived. I told my story to them, and John came with me on Sunday morning. We lay in cover for a couple of hours around the place. No car turned up. We got tired and hungry and came away. We met the "boys" about three miles from Gorey, on the Ballycanew road. They had got trouble with the car which delayed them. They proceeded on to Gorey; and we came back to Kelly's where we got a feed. They saw no sign of their "man" that day or on Monday, the next day. John Kelly and James Kelly (no relation) were the scouts on Monday.

The car party stayed at O'Neill's, Ballingale, on Sunday and Monday night. Thornton told us that, if they didn't see their man on Tuesday, they would have to report back and that the local men would have to carry on themselves. The operation was completed on Tuesday as he (Lee Wilson) was returning from the railway station. The Volunteers drove to Doyle's, Coolree, Ballindaggin, where McMahon and Whelan (Waxer) stayed for a few days. Tobin and Thornton moved on to Kildealy area and were brought across the mountain to Borris by the Captain of Kildealy Company, James Kehoe. From there, they went back by train to Dublin.

At a Brigade meeting held at Smith's, Tomalossett, Enniscorthy, November 1st, 1920, and attended by Eamon Price, a G.H.Q. officer, the Brigade, on, I think, the suggestion of Dr. J. Ryan, decided to form a Flying Column with Ed. Balfe as O/C.

The whole county was in one Brigade at the time. Shortly afterwards, the county was divided into two Brigades, North and South, and, later, a meeting was held at a place called the "Black Gates", in Marshallstown, to form a Column for the North, and Jack Whelan (Waxer) was to take charge, but unfortunately he was arrested a couple of days later. Another Brigade meeting took place in Ballindaggin, and it was decided that Thomas Doyle, Coolree, who was, I think, O/C, No. 1 Battalion, would take charge.

