

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1286

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,286

Witness

Seamus de Roiste (James Roche),  
Kilscannell,  
Ardagh,  
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Captain, Templeglantine Company  
2nd Batt'n. West Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

Templeglantine Company  
Second Battalion West Limerick Brigade,  
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF JAMES ROCHE

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILITAIRE  
I.C. W.S. 1286

Kilscannell, Ardagh, Co. Limerick.

I was born in the parish of Templeglantine in September 1894. I was sent to the local National School until I was 15 years of age. My school teacher was a man named Neligan who had three sons, Maurice, Jack and Dave. The latter joined the Dublin Metropolitan Police and subsequently figured prominently as an intelligence officer for I.R.A. Headquarters. After leaving school I went to work on my father's farm.

A company of Volunteers, which I joined, was formed in the parish in the Autumn of 1913. Our organiser and drill instructor was an ex-British soldier named Patrick White. We drilled with wooden rifles at the time. The company ceased to exist around the latter end of 1914 following John Redmond's famous speech in the House of Commons about that time.

In the Summer of 1915, Ernest Blythe visited the area and reorganised the company. I rejoined. Our strength was about 40 men. Maurice P. Leahy became the first company captain; Thomas Sexton, 1st Lieutenant, and Thomas Boucher 2nd Lieutenant. We immediately started off drilling and subsequently accompanied Ernest Blythe to Monegay, Ardagh, and Meenahela, and helped in reorganising the companies in these places. Beyond reorganising, there was only routine drilling up to Easter 1916.

On Easter Sunday 1916, the company captain marched the company to Glenquinn Castle where we met Volunteer companies from Drumcollogher, Moneygay, Newcastlewest, Killoughteen and Tournafulla. In all, we numbered between 200 and 300 men.

Father Hayes, C.C., of Newcastlewest, and Fr. Wall, C.C., of Drumcollogher, were present. A man named James McInerney of Limerick City was the chief officer. His brother Tom was driver of the car in which the two Volunteers named Keating and Sheehzn were drowned at Ballykissane Pier in Co. Kerry on Good Friday of Holy Week 1916, while on their way to keep an appointment in connection with the landing of arms on the South Kerry coast. No arms arrived at Glenquinn Castle up to 9 p.m. that Easter Sunday. We were dismissed around that time and returned to our company area.

Nothing of importance happened in our area during Easter Week. After the surrender in Dublin all arms in the company were surrendered to the R.I.C. at the barracks in Tournafulla. We had one Howth rifle, a few shotguns and one miniature rifle. I don't remember who issued the order to surrender our arms.

There was nothing doing after Easter Week until early in 1917 when Templeglantine company and other companies in the area were reorganised. Shortly after the general release in 1917, Frank Thornton, Con Collins and others addressed a mobilisation of Volunteers in Newcastlewest. There were at least 300 Volunteers present. Routine drilling continued to the end of the year. In October of this year, I attended a race meeting in Listowel. While I was there an army deserter named Downey was being arrested by the R.I.C. to be sent back to his unit. The local Volunteers went to his assistance. The R.I.C. with batons drawn were charging the Volunteers and local people when I walked into the middle of the fight. I naturally took a hand in resisting the police. I was caught from behind by two R.I.C. in civilian clothes and lodged in the local barracks. I was later brought before a Justice of the Peace and released on bail until January Quarter Sessions.

At the Quarter Sessions I was sentenced to four months in jail. I was taken to Limerick Jail where I spent two days before being sent to Mountjoy jail. Two other prisoners named Stack and Horgan accompanied me to Mountjoy. When we arrived there we went on hunger strike and were removed to the prison hospital where we were forcibly fed twice a day. After about a week we were joined by a fourth man also on hunger strike. After about eleven days of forcible feeding, the four of us were released and were brought by some friends to Fleming's Hotel in Gardiner's Place where we spent six days. While there we were visited by Dr. Kathleen Lynn who examined us, Austin Stack and others. I had been taken to Limerick Jail on 10th January 1918 and was released on 23rd.

The reason for the high feeling against the R.I.C. in Listowel at the time was due to the fact that a Volunteer named Scanlon was shot dead in Ballybunion by one of the garrison there during a celebration parade following Mr. de Valera's election victory in Co. Clare some months earlier.

Following a mobilisation of Volunteers in Newcastlewest on 17th March, I was rearrested on 19th March 1918, at my home. I was taken under an R.I.C. escort to Devon Road railway station, Templeglantine, where I met two Kerry men, Eamon Horan of Tralee, and a man named Horgan, also prisoners. We were taken direct to Belfast jail. Here we met Terence McSwiney, Gerald Bartley and his brother and a number of other prisoners.

Horan, Horgan and I were removed from Belfast Jail on 12th April to Mountjoy once again. Those prisoners held in Belfast jail were to be accorded political treatment as they had been charged with drilling or unlawful assembly. As we had been charged with riot and unlawful assembly of

another kind, we were not accorded political treatment. Twelve Co. Clare men charged with cattle driving, as well as Gerald Bartley and his brother, were removed with us. In Mountjoy we were forced to cut up timber into small chips which were tied into bundles and taken out by Messrs. Wallace, Coal Merchants, for sale. According as we finished our time we were released.

By the time I was released, the conscription scare was over. A large number of new Volunteers had joined the company during the period but they all left when it was over. The strength of Templeglantine Company was then about 50 men. With other members of the company I went to Croom during the election campaign at the end of the year and was on duty at the polling booths on the day of the elections.

Routined rilling continued during the year 1919. In this year an American delegation arrived in Limerick city. Two men, whose names were Walsh and Ryan, formed part of the delegation. The Templeglantine Company, in charge of Maurice Leahy, went by train to Limerick to attend a huge meeting in the Town Hall, Patrick St., on the occasion. Several companies of Volunteers were present from other areas in Co. Limerick and Co. Clare. The meeting was addressed by members of the delegation and other speakers including, I think, Mr. de Valera. The case being put forward was that Ireland should be allowed to send representatives who would be accorded a hearing at a Peace Conference being held in Paris at the time. At the end of the year all shotguns or other arms in the area were collected.

Early in 1920 a reorganisation of the various companies in the brigade area took place. Five battalions formed the West Limerick Brigade. Templeglantine Company formed part

of the 2nd or Abbeyfeale Battalion. Moss Hartnett became Battalion Commandant, John Hartnett, vice-commandant, John Ahern, adjutant, and Daniel Hartnett, Q.M. I was appointed company captain of Templeglantine Company in place of Maurice Leahy who got married around that time. Patrick Ahern became 1st Lieutenant and Thomas Boucher became 2nd Lieutenant.

Following the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks on 28th May 1920, Eiam Scully's body was brought by the West Limerick I.R.A. to Tournafulla where it was kept in a house there for the night. Next night it was brought to Templeglantine and buried in the local churchyard. I made all preparations for the burial assisted by the local company. A priest was present at the burial during which an armed guard was on duty. I was one of the men on guard and was armed with a rifle.

Some of the East Limerick men who had taken part in the attack had come to Tournafulla with the West Limerick men on the occasion. A number of rifles which they had used in the attack were handed over to the West Limerick men for a proposed attack on Newcastlewest R.I.C. barracks a couple of nights later. Our company received three of these rifles and Tournafulla Company received another three. The attack on Newcastlewest barracks never materialised due to the fact that the R.I.C. there obtained an armoured car which was placed outside the barracks, constantly manned, following the Kilmallock attack.

In the month of June 1920, with the help of twelve Volunteers including a few from other companies, I carried out a raid on the mail train from Tralee to Limerick for the purpose of seizing the local mail. The raid was more in the

nature of a warning to local people who were likely to give or were giving information to their friends in the police. I detailed a Volunteer named Dave Roche to board the train in Abbeyfeale with instructions to give a certain signal at Barna station if there were military on board. When the train arrived at the station, two Volunteers ordered the driver and fireman on to the platform. We seized the mail bags for Limerick city and let the train proceed. There were no military on it. We censored the mails but found nothing important. That night we returned the bags to Templeglantine Post Office.

A few nights later, Humphrey Murphy, Battalion O/C. Kerry No. 2 Brigade, had preparations made for an attack on Brosna R.I.C. Barracks. I received instructions from our battalion O/C. to block all roads in our area prior to the attack. On the night of the proposed attack six members of Duagh Company, Kerry No. 1 Brigade, on their way to Brosna, were captured by a party of military at Feale's Bridge. The attack was called off as the I.R.A. were of the opinion that the six men had been taken to and detained at Brosna Barracks.

The attack was carried out, however, on the 19th June by Humphrey Murphy and his men assisted by some of the West Limerick I.R.A. in possession of rifles. These included the three riflemen from Templeglantine Company and three from Tournafulla with others. I took part in the actual attack and was armed with one of the rifles. All roads in our area were blocked with trees.

When the attacking party got there they were divided into four sections. Humphrey Murphy, in charge of one section, occupied a house alongside the barracks. A second section occupied a house partly to the front. I was in a third section

in charge of a man named Buckley, near a Catholic Church 30 yards from the barracks. A fourth section occupied a position at the back.

When all was ready, Murphy called on the garrison to surrender. They refused. He then ordered the men with him to break the roof of the house they had occupied. One of the I.R.A. men in this section named Maurice Sullivan cut the laths and in a few minutes a hole had been made through which two bombs were thrown on to the roof of the barracks. They fell into the barrack yard and exploded there instead of on the roof as intended. It had been intended to throw bottles of petrol through the roof of the barracks if it had been breached by the bombs.

As the bombs exploded, Murphy gave a signal to open fire which was concentrated on the windows and doors for about two hours. The garrison within replied. After two hours, we received the order to withdraw. The attack was a failure. The attacking party numbered 50 men. Thirty of these had rifles, the remainder had shotguns. As we withdrew, an R.I.C. patrol of about 12 R.I.C. left Abbeyfeale Barracks and were on their way to Brosna R.I.C. Barracks when they were fired on by members of Abbeyfeale Company manning roadblocks leading to Brosna. The patrol was compelled to retreat.

At the latter end of June, or early in July, General Lucas, who had been arrested in Fermoy area, was brought under an I.R.A. guard to the house of a man named Sheehan of Templeglantine where he was detained for two nights guarded by members of the local company before being passed on to the Shanagolden Company in charge of Tim Madigan.

Early in September, Sean Finn, the Brigade O/C., and



his small fighting unit of six or seven men who had taken part in the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks, decided to attack a mixed patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans who patrolled nightly from the R.I.C. Barracks in Abbeyfeale to a crossroads a short distance outside the town on the way to Newcastlewest. The crossroads was known as Priest's Cross. With the help of members of Abbeyfeale, Templeglantine and Tournafulla Companies, the attack was carried out on the night of the 18th September 1920. The attacking party numbered 50 armed men, 17 of whom had rifles, the others had shotguns. They were divided into four sections. Three of the sections were placed in extended formation behind a hedge or fence on the left-hand side of the road leading from the barracks to the crossroads. James Collins, company captain of Abbeyfeale, was in charge of No. 1 section. I was in charge of No. 2 section. I don't remember who was in charge of the third section. The fourth section, in charge of Sean Finn, took up a position in a churchyard at the crossroads.

As soon as the patrol left the barracks a local scout immediately proceeded towards the cross and warned the different sections in turn. It had been arranged to let the patrol up to the cross before fire was opened. They had just reached the cross when a man in the 3rd section spoke. An R.I.C. man named O'Mahony crossed over to investigate and was shot dead by one of the I.R.A. men in the churchyard. After firing a volley or two, to which the patrol did not reply, the section in the churchyard withdrew. In the meantime, one of the R.I.C. men ran to the nearby presbytery and brought out two priests, one of whom was a Father Fitzgerald, to attend to O'Mahony. O'Mahony's body was placed on a donkey cart after which the patrol, accompanied by the two

priests, returned to the barracks pushing the cart in front of them with the body of the dead policeman. But for the presence of the two priests, section No. 1 and No. 2 could easily have wiped out the patrol on its return.

About a month later a brigade flying column was formed. Sean Finn became O/C. The column numbered 25 or 30 men who had been on the run for some time. Paddy Ahern and Thomas Boucher, 1st and 2nd Lieutenants respectively of Templeglantine Company, were accepted on the column at its inception. One of their first engagements was an attack on a train carrying enemy forces at Barragone on 17th February, 1921.

At the latter end of March 1921, the column was located in Ballyhahill area where they were joined by the East Limerick Column for a proposed attack on an enemy convoy in that locality. On the 30th March they were taken unawares by a strong force of Black and Tans and military in the early morning. In the skirmish which followed, Sean Finn was shot dead.

A day or two later Donnchadh O'Hannagain, who was O/C. of the East Limerick Column, decided to return to East Limerick and called for Volunteers from the West Limerick Column to accompany him. About 20 West Limerick men volunteered. When the combined force reached Knockaderry, O'Hannagain addressed the West Limerick men and informed them that officers only were permitted to carry side arms and that any Volunteer carrying a revolver would have to surrender it. About six or seven various types of revolvers were collected and handed over to some members of the local company. On the instructions of the battalion O/C., I collected these revolvers on Friday night, the 8th April.

Next night, a general order to block all roads in this battalion area was carried out by the various companies comprising the battalion which was known as the 2nd or Abbeyfeale Battalion.

On Sunday evening, the 10th April, 8 or 9 lorries carrying about 120 military left Newcastlewest. At Barna, about 5 miles from Newcastlewest, they encountered the first trench which they crossed by the use of planks carried on the lorries. I had had no sleep for two nights running and was just settling down for a sleep in a house on the side of the road two miles west of Barna. As the military approached the house in which I was sleeping they saw a number of young boys lighting bushes in the neighbourhood which they took to be a signal of some sort. They dismounted. A number of them raided and searched the house. Jim Kelly and myself were arrested and taken into Abbeyfeale where we arrived at 12 midnight. On the way we had encountered more trenches which the military filled by the use of old railway sleepers used as fences on the side of the road.

After a while the lorries returned to Newcastlewest. As we were passing the place where O'Mahony was killed, they pointed it out to me and accused me of being one of the ambushers and started to beat me with the butts of their rifles. The officer who had arrested me halted the convoy and came back to the lorry where I was being beaten. He ordered me off and handed me over to a sergeant in another lorry with instructions that I was not to be illtreated. The sergeant handcuffed me to the lorry. In Newcastlewest I was lodged in the military barracks. From there I was taken to Limerick Jail, then to Cork Jail and from there to Spike Island. With other prisoners there we smashed up Spike Jail

after which we were all sent to Maryborough from which  
I was released on the 8th December 1921.

Signed: Seamus de Roiste  
(Seamus de Roiste)

Date: 11/11/55  
11/11/55.

Witness: John J. Daly  
(John J. Daly)

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