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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Patrick Keane,
Lower Gate Street,
Cashel,
Co. Tipperary

Identity.

Member of Active Service Unit
2nd Battalion 3rd Tipperary Brigade, 1919 - .

Subject.

The Active Service Unit,
2nd Battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade,
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY PATRICK KEANE,

Lower Gate St., Cashel, County Tipperary.

I was born in Cashel, Co. Tipperary in July, 1898. I attended the national school in Cashel until I was twelve years of age, and then, for a couple of years, I worked with farmers in the vicinity of Cashel. My father died when I was very young.

About the end of the year 1914 I joined the British Army, and when the Rising of Easter took place my battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment was stationed in Richmond Barracks, Dublin, where many of the prisoners were detained during the weeks that followed the Rising. Except Pierce McCann, who was a native of Dualla, near Cashel, I knew none of the men who were prisoners. The attitude of the men of our battalion towards the prisoners was, I might say, one of sympathy and respect. After the first few executions we found ourselves listening in the early hours of the morning for the sound of shots from Kilmainham Prison and wondering how many more of the prisoners had gone to their doom. There was little we could do to assist the prisoners in Richmond Barracks, but I do remember managing to get a loaf of bread and a tin of bully beef for one prisoner who asked me to try and get him some eatables.

I think that the authorities must have sensed our feelings towards the prisoners, for post haste our battalion was transferred from Richmond Barracks to Templemore Military Barracks. We had very short notice of the transfer, and we were not permitted to bring our rifles with us to Templemore. From Templemore I went with a detachment to France, where in 1917 I was taken prisoner and held by the

Germans in a prison camp at Lamur in Belgium until the Armistice in November, 1918. It was from a German soldier that I first heard of the Armistice, and that night five of us, all prisoners of war, broke out of the camp and made our way to Brussels. Here we met a party of Canadian soldiers, who sent us on to Dunkirk, and from Dunkirk we got a ship to Dover. After a few weeks in the military barracks in Dover, we were given a month's leave and instructions as to what to do at the end of our leave. My instructions were to report to Clonmel military barracks when the month was up.

Returning to Cashel to spend my month's leave there, I found that most of my school companions were members of Sinn Féin or of the Irish Volunteers. They had a hall in Friar St. and I went there with them. While still on leave, I took part with Edmund Grogan in a raid for arms on Wallis's house at Lower Gate St., Cashel. I was, of course, masked and in civilian clothes. I was given a revolver for the occasion by, I think, Grogan. Wallis's at that time catered for British soldiers, supplying them with tea and light refreshments. When Grogan and I arrived, two soldiers were sitting on the window sill outside the house. We ordered them inside where there were five more having tea. We made the soldiers turn around and face the wall and I kept guard on them while Grogan searched the house for a double-barrelled gun, which he failed to find. Later we heard that the gun had been handed into the R.I.C. barracks that morning for safe custody. Next day I met one of the soldiers who had been sitting on the window sill. He did not recognise me and he gave me a most exaggerated account of the raid.

After this incident I obtained employment from James Ryan Connor, The Commons, Clonmel Road, Cashel, and I did not report to the military barracks in Clonmel as I had been instructed to do in Dover.

While in employment with Ryan O'Connor, I remember doing duty with the Volunteers guarding two prisoners, both of whose names were, I believe, Ryan. I cannot say what they were arrested for, or why, but they had been handed over by the Golden Company to the Cashel Company. Both were deported to Co. Waterford and warned not to return. One of them did return about twelve months later and he was shot dead as a spy on the Fourpenny Road near Golden in February, 1921.

During my time in the British Army I had received specialised training in signalling, and during the year 1920, at the request of the late Paddy Hogan, then Commandant of the 2nd Battalion, I commenced to impart this knowledge to the Volunteer companies in Cashel, Golden, New Inn and Boherlan. In addition to signalling, I also trained the companies in foot drill, musketry and grenade throwing. For practice at the latter, we used a round sand stone about the weight of a Mills bomb. My activities in the training of the companies brought me under the notice of the R.I.C., for towards the end of 1920 I was tipped off by a friendly R.I.C. man named Cable that I was under observation by the police.

The Battalion Active Service Unit had been formed at this time, and on the invitation of Paddy Hogan I left my employment and became a member. Hogan was O/C of the Active Service Unit in addition to his other post of Battalion Commandant. He gave me a Lee Enfield service rifle and a bandolier of .303 rifle ammunition.

My first action with the Active Service Unit was an attack on Ballinure R.I.C. barracks, which took place towards the end of January, 1921. As our strength was only eight men, we had no intention of making a serious attempt to capture the barracks, our object being just to worry and harass the garrison. Having occupied a position behind a concrete wall about 50 yards to the front of the barracks, we opened fire at about 9.30 p.m. For about half an hour we kept up an irregular fire, aiming at the windows and the door of the barracks. The police replied, using tracer bullets, and at short intervals they sent up Verey lights. We withdrew from Ballinure at about 10 p.m., but for at least an hour afterwards the police were firing from the barracks and sending up the Verey lights.

At the time there was a brigade order not to shoot unarmed R.I.C. men. I mention this, for one day we caught two unarmed R.I.C. men cycling from Cahir to New Inn. We searched them for dispatches but found none. We took their bicycles and I then took them through some fields away from the road, where I left them after warning them not to move out of where they were for at least an hour. I heard afterwards that they remained in the fields for well over two hours.

In February, 1921, we received an order to go to Golden Garden, between Dundrum and Limerick Junction, and to link up there with Dinny Lacey's column for an attack on a troop train which was expected to pass on its way from Dublin to Cork. We were put into our positions along the railway embankment by Seumas Robinson, the Brigade O/C. The train did not come, and before leaving Golden Garden Paddy Hogan and myself were members of a party which Seumas Robinson addressed. He spoke about the necessity of

units becoming more active in their own areas. He mentioned that our comrades in Cork were then under very heavy pressure and that it was up to us to relieve that pressure. One way, he said, of doing this was to shoot a Black and Tan or an R.I.C. man in every town or village in our areas.

We returned to the New Inn district from Golden Garden, and about a week later Hogan decided that we should start to carry out the Brigade O/C's order. He selected Bill O'Donnell, Tom Nagle and myself to accompany him to Cashel. We arrived in Cashel on the evening of 3rd March, 1921, and separated into pairs. Hogan and O'Donnell went to stay at E.D. Ryan's of Friar St., and Tom Nagle and myself stayed at Miss Nevin's. A local Volunteer acted as contact between both houses. About 7 p.m. next evening Hogan and O'Donnell came to Miss Nevin's, and while they were there a scout reported that there were two R.I.C. men drinking in Cantwell's publichouse, about 100 yards away. Hogan then decided that all four of us would go to Cantwell's, that Bill O'Donnell and myself would stand guard outside the shop doors while Nagle and himself went in to shoot the policemen. All four of us were armed with .45 Webley revolvers. About 60 yards from where I stood, a patrol of eight armed policemen were taking it easy, with their backs up against the railings of Corcoran's Hotel. There was only one policeman in Cantwell's when Hogan and Nagle entered. He was an English man named Besant. They shot him dead in the shop, and Miss Cantwell, who was behind the counter, was accidentally wounded by, I believe, a ricochet bullet. The patrol outside Corcoran's Hotel made no move or took no notice that I could see when the shooting took place. Perhaps they mistook the sounds of the shots for the back-firing firing of a motor car.

The four of us got out of Cashel immediately. We took to the fields and travelled all night until in the early hours of tne morning we arrived at Devereaux's of Lockent, where we had food and took a rest. That evening we went on to Masterstown, where we met three other members of the A.S.U. All seven of us then went to the dump at Garranlea to get our rifles. All we found in the dump was a note from Jack Nagle, Vice O/C of Seán Hogan's column, and Paddy Byrne, a member of our A.S.U., saying that the rifles had been borrowed for an ambush in Co. Waterford, to which the column was on its way.

We then went on to Derryclooney and decided to billet there for the night. Paddy Hogan and I went to the house of people named Dagg and the other five went to houses further in along the boreen in which Dagg's house was situated. Mrs. Dagg made tea for Hogan and myself and we then told her we were remaining for the night. About 10 p.m. we went to bed in a room off the kitchen on the ground floor. There were three other occupants of the house that night: - Mr. and Mrs. Dagg and a young boy of 14 or 15 years, also named Dagg, who was a nephew of Mr. Dagg. Hogan and I were armed with the revolvers we had in Cashel, Hogan having 12 rounds of ammunition and I 10 rounds.

At 7 a.m. next morning we awoke to hear heavy knocking on the door, which Mrs. Dagg opened. We next heard a military officer inquiring if there was not a list of those sleeping in the house displayed on the door. Hogan remarked to me, "The house is surrounded. We will have to fight for it". While the officer was speaking to Mrs. Dagg we had succeeded in getting partly dressed. The next thing that happened was that the door of the room was pushed in by the officer. Hogan fired at him with his left hand from

partly behind the door and I fired at him from the corner of the room. The officer cried "oh, oh" and ran back through the kitchen and out into the yard. Three soldiers who had come into the kitchen followed the officer back to the yard. Hogan then said "You watch the front, Paddy, and I will watch the back".

From the front window of the kitchen I could see that there was a big party of military present. They took cover in the outhouses and behind a low wall or fence to the front of the house. They fired a volley through the windows and door and continued at intervals of 2 or 3 minutes to fire similar volleys. Hogan was firing every now and again through the back window, and I fired an occasional shot anytime I spotted a movement near the outhouses. After each volley from the soldiers, Hogan and I called out to assure each other that we were safe. Suddenly the soldiers opened a rapid fire, and when this eased somewhat I called out to Hogan to know if he was alright, but this time I got no reply. On looking around, I saw him on his knees behind me with his head resting on a chair. I saw blood on the chair and on the floor, and on going to him I saw he was hit under the left eye. I tried to stem the bleeding but witnout success. I spoke to him but got no answer, and I had barely time to whisper an Act of Contrition for him before he died. It was then 7.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, March 6th, 1921.

More military must have arrived on the scene, for the firing was heavier than before. The kitchen by this time was a proper wreck with broken glass, broken delph and mortar from the walls littered all over the floor where Hogan's body lay. The firing then ceased and I heard someone outside shouting, "Throw out the guns and surrender".

Mr. and Mrs. Dagg, who were lying on the floor of another room off the kitchen, then shouted: "Surrender in God's name or we will all be killed". I had no alternative but to throw the two revolvers out through the door and to follow immediately with my hands up.

An officer came out of one of the outhouses with a revolver pointed at me and told me not to move, and I was immediately surrounded by about 10 armed soldiers. The officer enquired why the others were not coming out, and I told him there was only one other and he was dead. Saying, "I don't believe you", he ordered me to walk back into the house in front of him. Inside, he examined Paddy Hogan's body and remarked, "he is dead alright". He told one of the soldiers to call in some more men and to make a thorough search. Upstairs they found young Dagg. Mr. Dagg, his nephew and myself were then ordered out to the yard. The officer told one of the soldiers to harness a pony and cart. The cart was pulled up to the door and three soldiers carried out Paddy Hogan's body and put it in the cart. I was ordered to put my hands behind my back, where they were tied with a rope, the ends of the rope being held by a soldier. All then moved out to the boreen where the main body of the soldiers had lined up. Dagg and his nephew were sent to the head of the column, then followed the main portion of the military, and, escorted by a sergeant, with a soldier still holding the ends of the rope which tied my hands, I was put in the rear behind the cart, from which Paddy Hogan's legs dangled. In this order we moved off towards Cahir. I should have mentioned that when I was brought out to the boreen, I again saw Captain Marshall, the officer whom Hogan

and I had fired at when he entered the room. He was leaning against a fence in the boreen, with his arm in a sling, and his only remark to me was: "Your ammunition was bad". Before moving off, one of the officers instructed the sergeant to shoot the prisoner if they were fired on on the way back to Cahir.

On the Cashel-Cahir road we met two lorry loads of Black and Tans and there was a halt for a few minutes. I was surrounded by the Black and Tans, who wanted the military to hand me over to them, saying that they would take me in. This the officers refused to do, saying that I was their prisoner and that they would be responsible for me. In Cahir military barracks I was placed in a cell in the guard-room until that night, when I was handed over to the military police and with young Dagg taken to a cell further inside the barracks.

Next morning I discovered that there were 14 other prisoners in the barracks, but I knew none of them, nor was I permitted to exercise with them. My cell was on ground level and it had two windows, one of which looked out on to the barrack square and the other looked out on to a small exercise yard where I was exercised. The other prisoners were taken for exercise on to the barrack square. After a few days I managed to hold whispered conversations with some of the other prisoners while they were at exercise, and from them I learned that our guard in the daytime consisted of 4 military policemen and an N.C.O. and that at 7.30 p.m. each evening they were relieved by an ordinary military guard. I also learned from them that the N.C.O. and 3 of the military policemen went off duty at 7 p.m., thus leaving only one military policeman on duty from 7 p.m.

to 7.30 p.m. The room used by the military policemen was at the opposite side of the small exercise yard in which I was exercised. It had a door opening on to this yard, and I often thought that if I could once get into this room I might find a way out of the barracks. I confided in some of the other prisoners that I was contemplating an attempt at escaping and asked if any of them wished to join me. They promised to consider it, and later they told me to try alone as they felt they might be an encumbrance to me and that one would probably stand a better chance of getting away than a number. At this time, too, I was worried by Auxiliaries, who frequented the barrack square in all stages of drunkeness and at all hours of the night, so much so that I slept directly under the window at the barrack square side of the cell where there was less chance of being hit by a bullet fired through the window. One night I did hear footsteps outside the window and low voices calling "are you there? A message from the boys for you". I motioned to young Dagg not to make noise, for I knew that they were Auxiliaries as I had heard their lorries coming in.

One day when I had been about 10 days prisoner, I learned that there was to be a concert in the barracks for the military on the following night. I decided then that the night of the concert would be a good night to make the attempt to escape, but it would have to be between 7 and 7.30 p.m. when there was only the one military policeman on duty with the prisoners.

On the following night (i.e. the night of the concert), at about 7 p.m. I told young Dagg that I intended to make an attempt to get out, and, asking him to say a prayer that I might succeed, I bid him good-bye. I then pounded on

the cell door, and when the military policeman came along to enquire what was wrong, I told him that I wanted to go to the lavatory. The lavatory, by the way, was situated in the small exercise yard and was quite near the door of the military policemen's room. He opened the door and I just put my feet into my boots, which were always kept outside the cell door - I was never permitted to bring them into the cell. The military policeman accompanied me towards the lavatory. He was young and very soft looking. On our way I could see that the door leading into the military policemen's room was open. The light was on and there was no sign of anyone else around. In the lavatory I laced my boots and then returned with the military policeman to the cell door. Here I stooped as if to take off my boots again, but turning sharply around I caught him off his guard and hit him a box on his ear, which knocked him down and he fell in a heap at the cell door. At the end of a small hall which led to the cells I closed the door from the outside. This door had a snap lock and thus he was locked inside.

I recrossed the small exercise yard and went into the military policemen's room. Here I found another door and two windows. The door was locked and bolted and one of the windows was nailed down. The second window when raised opened for about 12 inches from the bottom. Being rather slim at the time, I managed to crawl through. I then found myself in another yard, in which there was a lean-to shed built against a high wall. I made two attempts to get on to the roof of the shed so as to reach the top of the wall, but failed. Leaving this yard by an archway, I came out on to the barrack square and walked cautiously along by a row of buildings, which, I believe, were stables. It was dark at the time and it was also raining fairly

heavily - a factor which was in my favour. When I reached the end of the row of buildings, I could see the sentry at the main gate as he passed the light outside the guard-room about 100 yards away, and I also saw the boundary wall of the barracks a short distance in front of me. When the sentry turned and went back on his beat, I crossed to the boundary wall and moved along it until I was only about 60 yards from the guard-room. Here I entered a urinal and found that on the inside the boundary wall was only about six feet high. In the distance I heard a faint cry of "prisoner escaping". I climbed on to the top of the wall and after a quick glance to see that there was no one about, I dropped down on the outside. The drop was about twenty feet, much more than I had expected, and as I hit the ground I sprained my ankle slightly. The top of the wall was spiked with glass, which cut my hands but I did not notice this at the time.

I crossed the road and entered a field and as I did so I heard the bugles sounding the alarm inside in the barracks. I should say that not more than ten minutes had elapsed from the time I pounded on the cell door until the alarm was sounded. I had no idea of my surroundings and no knowledge of the countryside around Cahir. My only thought was to get as far away as possible from Cahir. I kept to the fields and sometime during the night reached the banks of the River Suir, but could not cross it owing to the height of the water. Near daybreak I saw a farmer's house quite close to the river bank. By this time my ankle was giving me a lot of trouble. It was swollen and very painful and I had to rest it. I knocked at the farmhouse door and it was opened by a man whom I did not know

but whose name I later learned was John Lynch. He brought me in and asked me what was the matter, as I was covered with blood. It was only then that I discovered that I had torn my hands with the glass on the top of the barrack wall. He made a cup of tea for me and I was surprised to learn from him that I was only one and a half miles from Cahir. I asked him what were the chances of getting across the river and he said that when I had finished my tea he would take me to where there was a boat moored about 300 yards away. He also provided me with a stick to help me along. I did not tell him that I had just escaped from Cahir military barracks and he was not curious, at least he did not ask many questions.

The boat was moored at the opposite side of the river, but in answer to a few hails from Lynch a girl came out of a farmhouse and rowed me across. She was a Miss O'Dwyer of "The Moat", Knockgraffin, and after a few discreet enquiries I discovered that I was back within a mile of where I had been captured two weeks before.

I crossed the fields to Fitzgerald's of Masterstown. Fitzgerald, who was one of our best friends, had a surprise for me, for he gave me back my cap and leggings which had been found in Dagg's after the fight there. Fitzgerald brought me to Cooney's of Garranlea, where during the day I was visited by Paddy Byrne, Vice Commandant of the Battalion and a member of the A.S.U. Byrne remained the night with me and next day the remaining members of the A.S.U. came along. They were accompanied by the late Denis Sadlier, who, for the time being, was acting as Commandant of the Battalion. Sadlier prepared a report in code about my escape. He said he wanted it to be sent to Brigade H.Q.

Dagg and his nephew were released from custody on payment of a small fine. In this respect, perhaps, I should mention that when I was a prisoner in Cahir I stated in reply to questions by a military officer that the Daggs were unwilling to admit us to their home on that Saturday night and that Hogan and I had forced our way in.

After about three weeks in various places, the A.S.U. went to Ballydoyle and met Dinny Lacey's column there. Here Sadlier got instructions to go to the 5th (Clonmel) Battalion area to reorganise it. I went with him and we spent a month or so there. During this time Sadlier and Jack Lonergan, O/C Grange Company, received information that Newcastle House, near Grange, was about to be occupied by British military. To prevent that, it was decided to burn the house. With the local company, Sadlier and I went to Newcastle House, where we interviewed the owner, a Mr. Perry. When told of our intentions, he asked to know what we had against him. Sadlier explained to him that there was nothing against him personally but that as the British were about to occupy the house it would have to be destroyed. He then asked if he could remove some valuables and we promised him every assistance to do so. After scouts had been put out, about twenty of our men set to and took out everything movable before the house was set ablaze.

About a week later, Sadlier and I returned to our own A.S.U. and shortly afterwards we again met Lacey's column. Dan Breen was with Lacey on this occasion. I asked Lacey if I might join his column. He agreed, and I remained with him until his column was disbanded some three or four weeks before the Truce.

While with Lacey's column, I remember one evening near the village of Cloheen three of us met a man cycling. We were suspicious of him as at the time it was necessary to have a permit from the British authorities to own and ride a bicycle. We took him a prisoner and brought him to Lacey. He was recognised as a British agent named George Stone. He was held as a prisoner that night, and on the following evening some members of the column took him away and executed him on the road near Fethard.

That same day (the day on which Stone was shot) Denis Sadlier came to the column at Cloheen. He had been appointed Commandant of the 5th Battalion, which, as I have already mentioned, he had been reorganising a few months previously. He had come to ask me to go again to the 5th Battalion area with him. After Stone had been taken away for execution, Denis Sadlier was accidentally shot dead by a member of the column in a field beside the village of Cloheen. They, Sadlier and the man who shot him, were "caffling" with rifles when the accident occurred. That night, in an improvised coffin, Sadlier's remains were removed on a side-car to a cemetery near Nine-mile-house, where we buried him at about 2 a.m. in the morning.

After Lacey's column had been disbanded, I resumed duty again with the A.S.U. in my own battalion area, but I cannot recall any incident of special note which happened from then until the Truce in July, 1921.

After the Truce the A.S.U. took over all police duties in Cashel, despite the fact that both British military and R.I.C. were still stationed in the town.

In 1922 I joined the National Army, in which I held the rank of 1st Lieutenant, and I remained in the army until 1924 when I returned to reside in Cashel.

Signed: Patrick Keane
(Patrick Keane)

Date: 6th December 1955
6th December 1955.

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