

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILC'TA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,312

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,312

Witness

John Joe Dockery,
Ballymote,
Co. Sligo.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer
Fourth Battalion Sligo Brigade.

Subject.

National activities, Ballymote, Co. Sligo,
1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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N.S. 1,312

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1918-21
BURO STAIRE MILITAIR 1913-21
No. W.S. 1312

312

STATEMENT BY JOHN JOE DOCKERY,

Ballymote, Co. Sligo.

I was born at Ballymote, Co. Sligo, in 1890. and received my early education in the national school there. As a small boy I remember listening to my grandmother (Mary Lavin) telling stories about the hardships suffered by our people under British rule in Ireland. I was fascinated by some of her stories, and as I grew older I wished for the time and opportunity for revenge.

I became acquainted with Alec McCabe about 1915. As a result I was soon connected with the national movement - Sinn Féin.

On Easter Sunday, 1916, I received instruction from Alex McCabe to attend a parade at Tubbercurry. It was generally understood that the assembly was for a football tournament, but it was really a test of strength to find out how many would mobilise. Volunteers enrolled earlier had been issued with armllets and had instructions to wear them that day. A large number of young men paraded with armllets.

I was not issued with arms at that parade. I do not know if any were issued to any members of the parade. Neither did I receive any instructions about any activity for the coming week. From a conversation I had with Andy Lavin and Joe Berreen, I had an idea that a rebellion was contemplated and that I might be called on take part. I was quite excited at the prospect of getting such an early opportunity to take part in a fight for the freedom

of my country. This was my ambition from early youth. However, the week passed and I was not called. A trickle of news came through about the Rebellion in Dublin during the week but it was over before I got the full facts.

In 1917 the Volunteers were organised and a good number took the oath, including myself. At this stage the organisation was on a parish basis. It would be some 18 months later when companies and battalions were organised.

The Sinn Féin organisation, of which I was a member, was going strong in this area in 1918. Prior to the general election in that year, Alec McCabe was put forward as a Sinn Féin candidate, although he was then a prisoner in an English jail serving a sentence, the duration of which I cannot now remember. He was opposed by a sitting M.P., Irish Parliamentary Party, named Seán Dowd, from Bunninadden, Co. Sligo, who lost his seat. McCabe won by a large majority.

On the day of the election the bell-man in the town of Ballymote announced that the candidate, Seán Dowd, was beaten up in Ballinacarrow and, as a result, would not be able to appear in town. I asked the bell-man how much pay did he receive for making that announcement. He said he got 2/6d. I then paid a further 2/6d to announce that "Alec McCabe could not attend to-day as he was a prisoner in an English jail together with some more patriotic Irishmen".

Sometime in 1918-19 the Volunteers were organised on a company and battalion basis. Our battalion was the 4th Battalion, Sligo Brigade. The battalion officers at that

time were: O/C, Alec McCabe; Vice O/C, Jim Marren; Adjutant, Thady McGowan; Quartermaster, Josie Hannon. I was appointed Intelligence Officer and held that position until the Truce on the 11th July, 1921.

Sometime in 1919 Harry Conroy talked to me about the I.R.B. and gave me an outline of the organisation. I decided to join and was sworn in by Harry Conroy. At that time I knew about six men who were members of the circle to which I was attached.

Early in 1919 the Sinn Féin organisation took over tracts of land and arranged for its letting to small holders for tillage and grazing. This occupied a good deal of my time at that period.

In June, 1919, Judge Wakely was staying in Hannon's Hotel, Ballymote. He was the judge who had already sentenced Alec McCabe for cattle-driving. On the night before he was to preside at the court, a number of the Volunteers from the company were mobilised and fired shots through the windows of that part of the hotel where the judge was in quarters. Next day he stated in court that he had been informed that the hotel had been attacked during the night before but that he had been asleep and knew nothing about it. Normally he should hold court for three or four days, but, presumably as a result of the shooting, he left town that evening and did not return.

Paddy Hegarty from Ballina was an organiser in the area. He was in John D. Hannon's, O'Connell St., Ballymote, in October, 1919, when two R.I.C. men walked in and arrested him. At this point, four of the Hannon family - three brothers and a sister, Susan Hannon - attacked the R.I.C.

and forced them to release Hegarty. John Hannon was arrested and got a short term of imprisonment in Sligo jail as a result.

After my appointment as Battalion I/O I organised intelligence sections in each company area.

I received instructions from Mick Collins, through Harry Conroy, to get in touch with an R.I.C. man in each R.I.C. barracks in my area, if at all possible, with a view to getting information of any description, especially information on defence preparation, strength, armament, etc. I made contact with a constable of the R.I.C. in Ballymote barracks. His name was Patrick Madden. He gave me all information about defence preparations for the barracks, also strength and armament, in the middle of the year 1920. At that time the R.I.C. strength (the only detachment of British forces then stationed in Ballymote) was as follows: one District Inspector, one Head Constable, one Sergeant and about 12 constables. Each man was armed with one rifle and one service revolver. Later on a machine-gun and crew were added. Constable Madden kept in contact with me until June, 1921. About that time I think his superior officer had doubts about him and he was transferred to Kesh, Co. Fermanagh.

Sometime in 1920, I cannot remember the date, we held up the goods' train at Kilfree. This hold-up was to enforce the boycott on Belfast goods. We removed all the Belfast goods on the train. Shortly after we raided the goods' station at Ballymote. We were acting on information received from Thomas Doddy, who was in charge of the goods' store. The information was to the effect that a

consignment of Belfast goods was in the store, also goods consigned to members of the British forces in the town. The raid was carried out at midday. The British forces raided the station an hour later.

In 1920 a consignment of arms and ammunition, also a case of bombs (known then as G.H.Q. bombs) arrived at Ballymote railway station. In all, 8 service rifles, 400 rounds of ammunition and 20 bombs arrived in cases. The cases were consigned to merchants in the town. Some were consigned to Mrs. Farry, merchant. This lady was trustworthy and the cases were delivered at her premises in the ordinary way and later collected by us without attracting attention. One particular case was consigned to John O'Gorman, also a merchant. This case was collected at the station by the Volunteers, as we did not consider it advisable to let O'Gorman have any knowledge of it. The whole consignment was later removed to Sligo town.

The R.I.C. barracks, in 1920, was the centre house of three in one block. On one side was the market house and on the other was a business premises. A plan to take the barracks was drawn up in 1920 (I still cannot remember the date). The plan was to take over the market house and bore through the adjoining wall of the barracks, which was estimated to be 3 feet in depth, and through the breach to throw in explosives and then overpower the garrison.

Harry Conroy submitted the plan to Dick Mulcahy. He disagreed with the plan and pointed out the obvious advantages of taking over the business house on the other side, being a much lighter separating wall and saving much time in boring through.

In the meantime, the British forces, whether from information received or experience already gained, I cannot say, took over both the market house and the business premises and had both demolished, thereby leaving the barracks detached and completely upsetting our plans.

Around November and December of 1920 the trains were being continually held up and searched by the Volunteers. In December, 1920, as far as I can remember the date, the passenger train was held up at Culfodda, about four miles on the Dublin side of Ballymote. Travelling on the train was one District Inspector of the R.I.C. and one constable. Both were disarmed and obliged to walk to Ballymote. In a similar hold-up of a train at a later date, four members of the British forces armed with revolvers were taken off and disarmed.

In November, 1920, I was informed that a trader named Hunt in Ballymote had got four automatic revolvers from a friend of his who had been in the British Army. I visited Hunt and tried to get him to hand over the revolvers. He told me to call back the following night when he would then have time to consider the matter. On my arrival at his premises, as arranged, I found 3 members of the R.I.C. already there, whether by accident or design I could not find out. In any case, it upset my idea of obtaining the revolvers for the time being and I was glad to leave without being obliged to answer any questions.

I immediately informed McCabe about the matter and he decided that we would take out Hunt on the following night and force him to hand over the revolvers. Arrangements were made to be at Hunt's place at 9 p.m.

Our plans were completely upset. On that day, fair day, Volunteers fired on and killed one Sergt. Fallon, a member of the R.I.C. in Ballymote. On our arrival in Ballymote, considerable excitement prevailed. A large party of Auxiliaries had reported into town. I had information later that the Auxiliaries' arrival was a result of a wire sent to Dublin H.Q. by the District Inspector which read: "Sergt. Fallon murdered to-day, send Auxiliaries". This message was intercepted by one of Mick Collins's intelligence staff during transmission.

The R.I.C. came out in force that night and burned a bakery owned by myself and my cousin. They also burned the local creamery and Hannon's home in O'Connell St. (This was the house mentioned earlier where Paddy Hegarty was rescued after being arrested by R.I.C.) They also did considerable damage to a number of houses in the town.

As a result of the above mentioned activity and excitement, we never got an opportunity to force Hunt to hand over the automatics. Three other automatic pistols procured from the same source, i.e. the soldier mentioned earlier, were handed over to us at a later date.

In October, 1920, we collected all the arms held under permit in the area. These were mostly shotguns, but we got two service revolvers in the collection. We had information beforehand that the British forces were about to collect all firearms, so we decided to forestall them.

In February, 1921, we got information that British forces were about to occupy the Courthouse in Ballymote. We immediately made an attempt to destroy it with

explosives. To do this, it was necessary to keep up continuous rifle fire on the R.I.C. barracks so as to prevent British forces stationed there from interfering with the party engaged in the attempt at demolition. Probably due to lack of experience in the use of explosives, the Courthouse was only damaged but to such an extent that it was some months later when it was prepared for defence and occupied.

On the night of the 17th March, 1921, a party of Volunteers were in Ballymote for the purpose of locating and attacking a night patrol of the R.I.C. Two armed Volunteer scouts were moving along the street and at the junction of O'Connell St. and Wolfe Tone St. (known locally as Newtown Corner) ran into a patrol of R.I.C. After an exchange of shots, one of the Volunteers, Jim Molloy, was wounded and one R.I.C. man killed. Molloy was taken prisoner. He was later removed to Boyle military barracks.

As Molloy was likely to be sentenced to death for his part in the shooting, it was necessary to make immediate plans to secure his release or escape from custody. After some negotiations a soldier in Boyle military barracks named Neary was contacted through two girls in Boyle named Judge. Neary said he could arrange to release Molloy if he was paid £300. He stated that he needed that amount to bribe his pals who would be on prison guard with him. It was agreed to pay the amount. Neary succeeded in releasing Molloy and was paid his demand.

In April or May, 1921, six Webley revolvers were

sent from our G.H.Q., Dublin, by train to Ballymote railway station. I collected them, and the only means I had of taking them away was by concealing them in various pockets on my person. As I was moving off, a British force patrol arrived. I realised I needed all the luck on my side if I was to get away. Just then I met a girl named Nora Rogers. She made a remark that she could see the outline of a revolver in my pocket. The only thing then to do was to get Nora to walk down the line with me, hoping she would be taken as my girlfriend out for a walk. The ruse worked, much to my relief. I certainly had a bad half-hour.

During the whole period of hostilities I never went "on the run". I managed to bluff my way and "play the game" as best I could. This was the only way I could successfully carry out my work as Battalion I/O. In June, 1921, my contact in the R.I.C. barracks, Constable Patrick Madden, informed me that I had been reported as an active member of the Volunteers. Madden told me that on learning this, he got hold of some gelignite and planted it near my home-place. He then reported to his Sergeant that I had informed him about the location of the stuff. The R.I.C. then raided the place and found the gelignite, and seemed to be satisfied that I was, as they termed it, a good citizen.

In June, 1921, it was reported to me that some soldiers had deserted from the British Army unit stationed at Boyle and were knocking about in our area. One of them was arrested by Volunteers from the 5th Battalion

near Riverstown. I was summoned to act as a member of the courtmartial. Sufficient evidence was available to convict him as a spy and he was sentenced to death. The sentence was duly carried out. He admitted that he was a member of the British forces; he stated he was a private soldier; he was, in fact, a commissioned officer in the British Army with the rank of lieutenant. His name was Watt. A question was later asked in the British House of Commons as to his fate. This gave us the facts as to his identity and confirmed our earlier decision.

In July, 1921, accompanied by Josie Hannon, Q/M 3rd Battalion, I visited Flannery's Hotel, usually frequented by members of the British forces. A short time before our arrival, three members of the British forces had gone into the hotel. I asked the barman to let me know when all three would congregate in the bar. He said they were already at the bar. Hannon and myself walked in, to find one armed R.I.C. man there. We promptly held him up and disarmed him. Now the question was, where were the other two? Just then another R.I.C. man made a break to escape. We followed and captured him in the hotel yard and disarmed him. He offered no resistance. We returned to the hotel and met the third member of the party walking out of the lounge. We disarmed him also. He offered no resistance. I think he came out to surrender. In all, we collected 3 service revolvers and about 24 rounds of ammunition.

The foregoing is an accurate statement of events in which I took part, so far as my memory serves me, from my first association with the national movement in this area until the Truce, which was a welcome respite, on the 11th July, 1921.

Signed:

John Joe Dockery
(John Joe Dockery)

Date:

13th December 1955

13th December 1955.

Witness:

James Conway (James J. Conway)
(Investigator).

