

W.S. 1,332

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MIDEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,332

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,332.....

Witness

John O'Gorman,
Dungloe,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Q.M. No. 1 Flying Column
1st Brigade, 1st Northern Division.

Subject.

Dungloe Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Donegal, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2642.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JOHN O'GORMAN,

Dungloe, Co. Donegal.

The first organisation started in Dungloe was a Sinn Féin Club. The meetings were held in the committee room of the A.O.H. hall. Mr. John E. Boyle was the first Chairman; Patrick Breslin, Vice Chairman, and I was Secretary. The club was formed in January, ~~1921~~¹⁹¹⁷. I was a motor hackney owner and driver at the time.

Sinn Féin had few followers when we started but our numbers increased gradually. Our chief, and, in fact, our only real opponents, were the members of the A.O.H., although we used their hall for meetings, and as our numbers went up, their numbers went down. We started meeting in the committee room while they used the hall, but after a time they were able to meet in the committee room and we required the hall.

In the days of the Land League the Dungloe area had been prominent in the agitation, and the rise of Sinn Féin appeared to bring the old spirit back to life again.

Shortly after the Sinn Féin Club was started a company of the Irish Volunteers was started. I was at the first meeting, which was held in a hollow at Ailtacrin on the Gweedore road. The company was formed by Joseph Sweeney (Major General). We were a loose organisation at the time. No battalion had then been formed. Joseph Sweeney organised the surrounding areas and by early 1918 we had the makings of a battalion.

When the battalion was formed it was known as No. 1 Battalion. The O/C was James McCole, the Adjutant Patrick Breslin. I was 2nd Lieutenant of 'A' (Dungloe) Company.

The year 1918 was devoted to training to resist conscription. We drilled with shotguns. When the threat of conscription passed, we were engaged in collecting arms. We took up the arms of anyone who was unfriendly but we left the arms with friendly people, on the understanding that they would keep them safe and make them available when we wanted them. We had little knowledge of making dry dumps and we felt that the owners would keep the arms in good order. At a later stage we had to take up all arms to keep the R.I.C. from taking them.

Late in 1919 the R.I.C. became active against us. They had a barracks in Dungloe with a Head Constable in charge. Two men - Anthony McGinley and McBride - were arrested for distributing Sinn Féin literature and were taken to Derry jail. Joe Sweeney decided to attack the R.I.C. escort on their return to Dungloe. I had a hackney on the road and on the morning of the day of the attack I had to do a hire run to Mountcharles. I rushed back to be in time. I was instructed to go to Kincasslagh Road station to ascertain whether the R.I.C. would alight there or go on to Dungloe Road station. The R.I.C. could come into Dungloe by either station.

Joe Sweeney and the ambush party were in position at a place known as the Rampart near the old schoolhouse on the Burtonport road about 2 miles from Dungloe. I

got to the station in time and saw that the R.I.C. were going on to Dungloe Road station, and told Joe Sweeney so. I drove my car on to the Cruckamore road, which branched off the road on which the ambush was sited. The main ambush party were in a potatoe field, partly shielded by the potatoe pit which was near the edge of the road. The remainder of the party was placed nearer Dungloe, some with bombs, at a road junction. The ambush party were armed with shotguns and revolvers, many of which were in poor condition.

When the R.I.C. arrived they were fired on by the main party and they ran into the fire of the party nearer Dungloe. One R.I.C. man was seriously wounded. The remaining members of the R.I.C. party, two or three, got away.

Our whole party got safely away. I picked up some of them at Cruckamore road and drove skirting Dungloe, entering the village from the Glenties direction.

I remember the following being on the ambush: Joseph Sweeney, Bernard Sweeney, John Molloy, Patrick McCole, Sheskinarone, Patrick O'Donnell (Kit), Sheskinarone, Chas. McGee, Patrick Breslin, Denis Heuston and Willie Sharkey.

On the 5th July, 1920, two of our company took up position in the front room of John E. Boyle's house, Main St., Dungloe. The men were John Cole and Willie Walsh, Sheskinarone. Sergeant Mooney, R.I.C., accompanied by a Tan, left the barracks to collect post from the post office. Cole and Walsh opened fire on them, wounding the Sergeant. The Tan ran for the barracks and

escaped. Cole and Walsh got out of Boyle's house by the back.

Following on a visit to our area of Ernie O'Malley, a column was formed in the 1st Donegal Brigade. Men were asked to volunteer and, finally, men were selected from each company. The column members were armed with Lee Enfield rifles. We had about 20 rifles. They were the first serviceable weapons we had seen. The column was not held together as a full-time unit. The members were mobilised as required. Three of us were put on full-time service - Charles McGee, James McShay and myself. We made our H.Q. in an old house at Sheskinarone with a good view of the surrounding country. I was appointed Q/M of the column and a dump was made by the Brigade Q/M. The dump was within easy reach of us. It was made of concrete in a bog. The column was called together several times and lay in ambush at different places, but nothing came of it. On one occasion we held up a train for gelignite but got nothing.

On the 8th August, 1920, an attempt was made to hold up two of the R.I.C. at Lackinagh on the Dungloe-Burtonport road. When ordered, the Sergeant (Cafferty) put up his hands, but the constable fired and our party retreated under fire. No arms were captured. It was later reported that the Sergeant was demoted and the constable (Kelly) promoted to Sergeant.

Peadar O'Donnell moved into our area and billeted at Meenmore in the Burtonport area. He had a column of about 20 with him. The ones I remember are: Peadar O'Donnell, Frank O'Donnell, Joe O'Donnell, Con

Boyle, Walsh, Doheny, Ginger McKee, Seamus McCann and Alfred McCallion. Most of the men were natives of Derry City, but there was at least one each from Cork and Tipperary.

In January, 1921, I took part in the ambush of a train at Meenbanad. The train was travelling from Derry to Burtonport carrying troops. Joseph Sweeney and Peadar O'Donnell were in charge. The ambush position was at a point where the single line railway runs through a deep cutting. I was positioned on the top of the embankment with Charlie McGee and a man named Walsh. The line was blocked with rocks and the engine ran into the obstruction. Some of the train lay over against the cutting. I had a Lee Enfield and I was firing down into the train. Bombs were thrown but there was no reply from the troops on the train. There was a machine-gun mounted on the engine, but they made no effort to use it while we were firing. After 15 or 20 minutes firing, a whistle sounded. That was the signal for us to cease fire, so we retired. It was reported that there were 50 British soldiers wounded. We suffered no losses.

About a week later there was a second train attack, this time at Crolly, but I was not there.

Two motor cars which were taken from British loyalists named Johnston and McKay in the Ballybofey area, were brought to our area. I drove the cars. We garaged them at Gortnasade, Kincasslagh. They were kept in a shed with fish barrels packed in round them. A large party of military who raided the place failed to find them.

The roads in our area were very well blocked.

We had a deep cutting at Gortahork, and at Keeldrum we diverted a river across the road.

During 1921 there were several abortive attacks on Glenties R.I.C. barracks. On one occasion I drove Johnston's car to a spot near Glenties, carrying a machine-gun. I stood by the car, and when the party returned with the gun they told me they had fired on the barracks without result.

It was usual for a patrol to leave the barracks at night, and it was the intention to hold up the patrol when it reached the workhouse wall, take the uniforms off the patrol and capture the barracks by a ruse. Like most well-laid plans, it had its weak spot. The patrol did not come out.

An incident which happened in Dungloe should, I think, be recorded. It concerns the arrest of Frank Carney, O/C 1st Northern Division. Frank Carney came to Dungloe without informing the local unit. He stayed at Campbell's Hotel and appeared to be ill. He was not long in the hotel when there was a raid and Frank Carney was arrested.

At that time the civilian population were very anxious to help the Volunteers and they kept a watch on any suspicious strangers. This is well illustrated by another incident. The girl whom I later married and who was listening to me describing this incident, was at that time (1921) serving in Sweeney's drapery, which is beside Sweeney's Hotel (Dungloe). She went into the hotel kitchen for her dinner and saw a trench coat hanging drying in the kitchen. After dinner she went

back to the shop and found a Volunteer named Willie Sharkey enquiring about a stranger who had left the train at Dungloe Road station and walked into Dungloe. My wife went back to the hotel kitchen and took down the trench coat and examined it. She found that "Dorset Regiment" was stamped on the inside of the coat. The man who owned the coat was sitting in the commercial room. She found an excuse to go into the commercial room and saw a military-looking man sitting by the fire. She returned to the drapery. They then saw the man pass up the street to the post office without his coat. Willie Sharkey went away to report. About two hours later a car came down Barrack Hill carrying a party of masked men. They went into Sweeney's Hotel and came out leading the stranger, who was blindfolded. An automatic had been found on him. Before he left the hotel he accused one of the waitresses of betraying him. He was taken to Brigade H.Q. for interrogation.

On the day following, a commercial traveller - a Protestant from Derry - named Humphrey McConnell came to Sweeney's Hotel. He was looking for Joseph Sweeney (Major General) and he told Murry Sweeney, who owned the hotel, that if the captured man was not released the town would be wrecked. The stranger was, in fact, an officer of the Dorsets. He was released and left Dungloe.

It appeared that a local man named Dan Walsh had applied to the British for compensation in respect of damage to a car, and the officer had been instructed to see the car and assess the damage. Like a brave man, he came to Dungloe to do his job.

In June, 1921, the British started a big round-up of our brigade area. All males were arrested and taken before R.I.C. men for screening. We were able to evade them. The raids and searches went on for a full week. The British then packed up and left the area. Most of us who had been dodging them were feeling very happy when they left. I went to my own house at Meenmore feeling that the danger was passed, but two lorries returned, led by a Head Constable Duffy who had been stationed in Dungloe. They made a sudden swoop and I was arrested. I finished as a prisoner in Drumboe.

Signed: John Gorman
 (John Gorman)
 Date: 22 Dec. 1955
 22nd Dec. 1955.

Witness: James J. O'Connor (James J. O'Connor)
 (Investigator).

