

W.S. 1,357

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,357

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,357

Witness

Patrick Whelan,
7, Shears Street,
Dungarvan,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Member of I.R.A.
Dungarvan, 1919 - .

Subject.

I.R.A. activities, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford,
1919-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2675

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK WHELAN,

7, Shears St., Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

I was born in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, in 1901. My people belonged to the farm labourer class. I went to the local Christian Brothers' school and, after leaving school, I became a telegraph messenger in the Post Office, Dungarvan. Later on I became a postman attached to the Dungarvan area.

It would be sometime early in 1919 when I joined the Volunteers here. My company was known as 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, West Waterford Brigade. The O/C of the brigade was Pax Whelan, Dungarvan. The Commandant of the battalion was George Lennon, Dungarvan. The Captain of 'A' Company was a man named Spillane, and Paddy Lynch of Dungarvan, who was afterwards Vice Commandant, was, at that time, 1st Lt. of 'A' Company.

We were about ten strong when I joined up. This number increased later to about fifteen, and it is of interest to record that eight men of this company were subsequently members of the West Waterford Flying Column when it was formed sometime about the month of September, 1920, so far as I can remember.

We had very little arms. There may have been one or two revolvers and a shotgun or two. I do remember we had one Lee Enfield rifle which was taken from a British soldier home in Dungarvan on furlough. Pax Whelan, Brigade O/C, and George Lennon were responsible for getting this rifle. They were arrested, charged with taking the rifle and did a term of imprisonment.

There is not much to say about the year 1919, which was spent mostly in drilling and general training.

Raid on office of Petty Sessions Clerk:

Early in 1920, along with about seven others of the Dungarvan Company, I raided the office of the Clerk of the Petty Sessions (whose name was D.J. Brennan) in Dungarvan. The raid took place at night. The lock of the office door was broken and all documents relating to court work or R.I.C. correspondence was taken away and burned. There was no interference by police or military.

Amongst others who took part in that raid whose names I remember were: George Lennon, Paddy Lynch, Jimmy Fraher and Micky Morrissey, all from Dungarvan. I do not know whether any of the party carried arms that night; I know I did not.

Attack on Stradbally R.I.C. barracks.

In the month of May, 1920, five or six of us were picked to go to Stradbally, Co. Waterford, to help in a night attack on the R.I.C. barracks there. Stradbally is about 10 miles east of Dungarvan on the sea coast.

Lar Condon of Dungarvan was in charge of our party, which left Dungarvan about 8 p.m. in a commandeered motor car. We were armed with shotguns; a few had rifles. We had reached Ballyvoile Bridge, which is about halfway to Stradbally on the coast road, when a scout brought word that a strong force of British military were in the Ballyvoile neighbourhood. Apparently Lar Condon decided that it would be useless to proceed with the small party he had, so we were ordered to return to Dungarvan. We did so without meeting any enemy troops.

The attack on Stradbally barracks was carried out that night by men from the local company and from the Kilrossanty and Bonmahon Companies. The attack was, I believe, broken off when word of approaching British military reached the attackers. These were most likely the same party of military which were reported to us as being in the Ballyvoile district and were en route to Stradbally, five miles further to the east.

Raid on Income Tax office.

Late in the month of April, 1920, I took part in a night raid on the Income Tax office at Dungarvan. About half a dozen of us did the job. Files of papers and ledgers were taken away and subsequently destroyed. I was not armed on that particular occasion. I cannot say how many of the others carried guns.

Disarming of R.I.C. at Dungarvan railway station:

Early in the month of August, 1920, the house of a man who was a British Mercantile Marine Officer was raided at a place called Carrigmourna, about five miles east of Dungarvan. This man's uniform was taken away by Pat Keating, then Captain of the Kilrossanty Company.

On August 8th, 1920, Pat Keating arrived in Dungarvan early in the morning and put on the Mercantile Marine uniform over in the Gaelic Field. He then went to Dungarvan railway station and on to the platform. At the same time about eight or nine I.R.A. proceeded to the station and hid in the toilet rooms there. The idea was to hold up and disarm any of the local R.I.C. who might come along escorting mails to be put on the train at Dungarvan.

Previous to this, mails had been frequently held up by us and taken away for examination. As a result of these raids the R.I.C. provided an armed party each day to safeguard the mails en route from the Post Office, Dungarvan, to the railway station. Shortly before the 7.55 a.m. train from Rosslare, Co. Wexford, to Cork pulled in, Pat Keating came on to the station platform. I was at the far end of the platform. Constable Kelliher of the local R.I.C. was the first to appear. He was held up by Keating and taken to where the others of our party were in hiding. Next to arrive was Sergeant Hickey and two constables. As they passed Pat Keating, the Sergeant, seeing Pat in the Mercantile Marine uniform, saluted him. Pat then shouted "hands up", and as he did, our lads came out and proceeded to disarm the three R.I.C. men, taking their revolvers and belts. Sergeant Hickey put up a show of resistance. I remember him firing from a revolver without hitting any of our lads. However, he was set upon and quickly disarmed too. The captured guns were then handed over to me. I took them away to a dump in an outhouse of a farmer named Patrick Ryan at Springmount, about a mile west of the town of Dungarvan.

All of our lads got away safely. The names of some of those who took part were Pat Burke, James O'Keeffe, George Kiely, Patrick Power and James Morrissey.

In September, 1920, the West Waterford Flying Column was formed. The first members of the column were: George Lennon, O/C; Paddy Lynch, 'Sonny' Cullinane, Eddie Kirby, Jim Bagnall, George Kiely, Pat Keating, Jim Prendergast and myself. A few weeks after the formation of the column we were joined by 'Nipper' McCarthy and Mick

Mansfield of Old Parish, Dungarvan. At that time I had left my job in the post office to go on the column. We were armed mostly with shotguns. There was one rifle, a police carbine and a couple of revolvers, so far as I can remember. Ammunition was very scarce indeed.

Ambush at Brown's Pike.

It was in the month of September, 1920, when a Crossley tender with five R.I.C., driven by a Black and Tan named Poots, was seen leaving Dungarvan and going in the direction of Clonmel. George Lennon got the column together and we went hurriedly to Coolnagower, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Dungarvan, where there were eight rifles dumped in the house of a man named Thomas Dreaper. Having got the rifles, we proceeded across country until we reached the main Dungarvan-Clonmel road at a place known as "Brown's Pike", a little over two miles north west of Dungarvan.

We had run the two miles from Coolnagower and were barely in attacking positions when the tender with the R.I.C. came in sight, travelling very fast towards Dungarvan. We opened fire, Lennon firing at the driver and missing him. The R.I.C. replied to our fire but continued on at a furious pace and were quickly out of our range. I do not know whether we inflicted any casualties on the enemy. None of our party was hit in the exchange of shots.

Destruction of Colligan R.I.C. barracks.

Colligan R.I.C. barracks, which had been evacuated, was burned by the column in late September, 1920. The building was set afire with petrol and totally destroyed.

Attack on Captain Marshall's servant.

On the evening of October 6th, 1920, myself and three others noticed a soldier going to the railway station at Dungarvan carrying a box. We were unarmed at the time but decided to stop the soldier and take the box, which might possibly contain ammunition. We waited until we got the 'Tommy' in a quiet spot, jumped on him and took the box. He was unarmed. When we opened the box we discovered that it contained only the personal effects of Captain Marshall of the 'Buffs' Regiment who was going to England on holidays.

Piltown ambush.

It would be about the end of October, 1920, when the column officers George Lennon, Mick Mansfield and Pat Keating held a conference at the house of Mrs. Pottle, Ballymacart, Old Parish, Dungarvan, as to the best means of bringing the British into a position suitable for ambushing. It was there and then decided to stage a feint attack on the R.I.C. barracks at Ardmore, Co. Waterford, and ambush any relieving force coming out from Youghal at a place called Piltown Cross about 4 miles north of Youghal on the Youghal-Dungarvan main road. Piltown Cross is about the same distance east from Ardmore. Pat Keating, Jim Mansfield, Commandant of the 3rd Battalion (in whose area Piltown was), and I were detailed to carry out the feint attack at Ardmore along with the local company.

On the night of November 1st, 1920, the three of us went by bicycle to Ardmore. I carried two grenades with the detonators out of them. When we reached Ardmore and had a chat with the Company Captain, Jim Mansfield and he

proceeded to place men in firing positions near the R.I.C. barracks. When this was done I inserted the detonators into the grenades and handed one grenade to Pat Keating. Pat and I walked up the village street until we were immediately outside the barrack door, when Pat threw his grenade in through the fanlight. I got mine in also.

When the grenades exploded we ran to a position with cover nearby. Jim Mansfield joined us. The Ardmore Company then opened up on the barracks with shotguns. The R.I.C. replied with rifle and machine-gun and sent up Verey lights. A party of British Marines stationed in the coastguard station about half a mile to the south also joined in with rifles and Hotchkiss. When we saw the Verey lights go up we considered our job in Ardmore done and immediately left for Piltown Cross.

Arriving at the Cross somewhere about 10 p.m., we met up with the column in ambush positions and I collected my rifle which was brought to Piltown for me. I then took up a position with about eight other men behind a fence on the road facing south towards Youghal. The time was now about midnight. The party I was with had a few rifles and shotguns. Another lot of our lads, I cannot say how many, were lined inside a fence on the north side of the Youghal-Piltown road and near a trench which had been dug in the road. This party was armed with shotguns.

Shortly after midnight scouts reported the approach of the enemy and then came a lorry of troops. As the lorry reached the road trench, fire was opened by the shotgun men on the enemy's flank and by us facing them. The lorry stopped, the driver having been killed in the first burst of fire. A few more volleys were fired by us when we heard

shouts of "we surrender" from the military. As a matter of fact, they put up no sort of a fight at all.

On hearing the shouts of surrender, a few of us, myself included, got out on the road, where we saw some of the Tommies lying wounded (one at least was dead - the driver of the lorry) and others standing around with their hands up. Their officer had jumped out of the lorry and in over the fence amongst our shotgun men, who disarmed him and made him prisoner.

We proceeded to disarm all the soldiers and two R.I.C. men with them. The latter were threatened with shooting unless they promised to resign from the R.I.C. They gave that promise and were released. One of these policemen, Prendergast, was shot dead some time afterwards by one of our lads at Youghal Bridge.

Those of us on the column took away all the captured stuff, which consisted of (so far as I can remember) 17 Lee Enfield rifles, 2 police carbines, some grenades and a couple of thousand rounds of .303 ammunition. We brought the captured material to Clashmore and then eastwards to Comeragh in the mountains.

At that time - November, 1920 - the column was about a dozen strong, with George Lennon in charge. We lay in ambush many times during November and December, 1920, but were not lucky enough to contact any enemy forces.

Ambush at Metal Bridge, Tramore.

On the night of January 7th, 1921, three commandeered motor cars left the Comeragh district with about fifteen men

armed with rifles to take part in an ambush prepared by our comrades of the East Waterford Brigade at the Metal Bridge, about a mile east of the town of Tramore, Co. Waterford. George Lennon, Column O/C, and Pax Whelan, Brigade O/C, were with us that night. Paddy Paul of Waterford City was in charge of the East Waterford men.

When we arrived near Tramore about 9 p.m. Paddy Paul, Pat Keating and myself were told to go in to Tramore town and start a feint attack on the R.I.C. barracks there. Instructions were issued not to interfere with the telephone wires so that the garrison in the barracks could phone Waterford City for assistance. The military coming out from Waterford (8 miles to the east) would then be ambushed by us and the East Waterford men at the Metal Bridge. The latter is a railway bridge spanning the main Waterford-Tramore road.

Paul, Keating and I got in to Tramore alright and fired with revolvers at the windows of the R.I.C. barracks. Immediately the garrison replied with rifles and grenades. Verey lights were fired off. Having accomplished our mission we returned to the main body of men at the Metal Bridge.

Our party from West Waterford were stationed on high ground overlooking the bridge on a road known as the Glen Road. This road ran down on to the main road and my position was that of second man in off the main road. I was armed with a rifle, revolver and grenade. All of our party were on the Tramore side of the Metal Bridge, whilst the East Waterford men occupied positions on the other side (the Waterford City) of the bridge. About midnight we heard the noise of lorries coming from the direction of Waterford City and we prepared to attack when

they reached a barricade erected at our side of the bridge on the main road and immediately adjoining our position.

Before the military lorries ran under the bridge and up to the barricade, which would bring them under our fire, the East Waterford lads in positions on the other side of the bridge opened up on the military, who stopped their lorries and engaged our lads there. While this was going on, Pax Whelan fired up a Verey light and by the glare we saw a military lorry halted just underneath the bridge. We fired on this lorry, with what result I cannot say. I think there was nobody in it but the driver. Firing continued on the Waterford side of the bridge. We could see nothing from our positions; certainly none of the military came along under the bridge towards where we lay.

We remained in our positions for at least half an hour, when the order was given to retreat. We pulled out in a north westerly direction towards where we had left our cars. We then learned that the British military were in that vicinity, with the result that we had to retire on foot in a westerly direction to avoid encirclement by enemy forces. We returned to the Comeragh-Kilrossanty district, ten miles to the west, that same night (actually it was the early morning of January 8th, 1921).

After the Tramore affair the column was disbanded for a while so as not to be too much of a burden on the people with whom we constantly billeted. I returned home to Fivemilebridge and, after a day or so, came in to Dungarvan, where I met another column man, John Riordan, who was on his way to the home of his sister in Dungarvan. I accompanied

John, and we were no time in the house when a party of military surrounded the place and took us both prisoner. We were unarmed at the time of arrest.

I was brought to Dungarvan barracks with Riordan, where I was questioned for a long time about my association with the I.R.A. I gave no information, of course. I was not ill-treated by the military in Dungarvan. From Dungarvan I was transferred to Fermoy military barracks, and whilst there I was often taken out - handcuffed - as a hostage with raiding parties of soldiers and Black and Tans.

From Fermoy I went as prisoner to Kilworth, Co. Cork, and from there to Cork detention barracks. In company with about sixty other prisoners, I was eventually put aboard a British gunboat called "The Heather" and brought up to Belfast. Amongst the prisoners, I remember seeing the famous "Flyer" Nyhan of West Cork, Stephen O'Neill, Clonakilty, and John Cotter, Bantry, all well-known I.R.A. men in Cork. On leaving the gunboat at Belfast we were pelted with bolts, nuts and stones by jeering Orange shipyard workers as we were marched to Belfast gaol. From Belfast we were taken to Ballykinlar Camp, Co. Down, where I was interned until the general release of prisoners in December, 1921.

During the subsequent Civil War I took the republican side and fought at the siege of Waterford City. I later served with the 1st Battalion Column under Commandant Paddy Curran of Glenmore, Dungarvan, until the cease fire order of March, 1923.

Signed: Patrick Whelan
(Patrick Whelan)

Date: 27 - 2 - 56
27.2.56

Witness: T. O'Gorman
(Investigator)

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