

N.S. 1,371

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,371

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,371

Witness

John McCormack,  
Castleconnell P.O.,  
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Commandant Second Battalion,  
East Clare Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,  
Clonlara, East Clare, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. S.2686

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1371

W.S. 1,371

STATEMENT OF JOHN McCORMACK

Castleconnell P.O., Co. Limerick

formerly Commandant, 2nd Battalion, and Captain  
of Clonlara (A) Company, 2nd Battalion, East  
Clare Brigade.

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I was born on 23rd September 1898, at Cappavilla House,  
Clonlara, Co. Clare, where my father was an extensive farmer.

I believe it was while I was attending the Christian  
Brothers Schools in Limerick city that I joined the Fianna  
Boy Scouts. About the commencement of 1917, I became a  
member of the Irish Volunteers when a company was established  
in Clonlara by Michael Brennan immediately after his release  
from jail in England. I was the first captain of that company.

Though I served right through the Anglo-Irish struggle  
up to the Truce in July 1921, as a company and battalion  
officer and as a member of the East Clare flying column, and  
participated in all the major engagements of that brigade,  
I do not feel fit enough to attempt an account of my  
experiences in the fight for independence. There was one  
encounter, however, in which I happened to be in charge of  
the I.R.A. forces about which my memory is quite clear and  
I am prepared to record all that I know about it.

The encounter in question arose as a result of my own  
decision to capture the mails which were being conveyed on the  
mid-day train from Limerick to Ennis on 15th June 1921.  
At that particular period I had a very strong suspicion that  
some person in the Cratloe district was acting as a spy for  
the British forces and it was because of this that I decided  
to raid the mails in the hope that we might find something  
which would help to identify the spy.

I selected Woodcock Hill, about half a mile from Cratloe

railway station as the venue for this operation and had under my control a party of thirteen men to carry it out. Each man had a gun - either a rifle or a shotgun - and they all belonged to the locality, with the exception of Christy McCarthy, who was 'on the run' and was a native of West Clare. I got the men to erect a barricade of stones on the railway line in the cutting at Woodcock Hill, and also sent a Volunteer named Bentley, a member of the Cratloe Company, into Limerick where he was to board the train and give a signal to us as the train approached Woodcock Hill that the 'coast was clear' or, in other words, that there were no enemy troops on the train. The signal arranged was that Bentley would wave his cap out the carriage window about 200 yards from where we were waiting at Woodcock Hill.

As the train approached us, no signal appeared. The driver, a man named Sullivan from Limerick City and a sound supporter of the I.R.A., on seeing the barricade in front of him, guessed that the train was going to be held up. He was carrying as passengers a detachment of British soldiers and he feared that the I.R.A. might be unaware of this and thus fall into a trap which he did not wish to avoid. Instead of bringing the train to a halt, he put on steam and drove through the barricade which was not a very substantial one. As the train was passing, I noticed a soldier with his head out of the window. I fired at him but can't say with what result. The train halted at Cratloe Station. Here the officer in charge of the British troops ordered all the civilian passengers to alight and then made the driver reverse the train back to Woodcock Hill.

Unfortunately, we had no knowledge of what was taking place at Cratloe Station, as it was out of our view.

Thinking, however, that on reaching there the soldiers might 'phone to Ballycannon military post, about five miles away in the Meelick direction, to send out reinforcements, I decided to cut the telegraph wires at Woodcock Hill. For this purpose, I procured a hedge cutter from a neighbouring farmer named Michael Collins, but when I had cut the first wire the cutter snapped at the rivet. There were several other wires to be dealt with, so I sent one of the party named James O'Halloran of Portrine, Cratloe, to Goggin's house close by to get some kind of a tool to cut the rest of the wires. In the meantime, I remained on top of the telegraph pole. O'Halloran was just about to enter the back door of Goggin's, which was 40 yards or so away, when I noticed the train reversing from Cratloe. I shouted to the men to disperse, jumped off the pole myself, ran across the railway line and flung myself over a wall along which I ran until I got over a hawthorn hedge that provided me with cover from view and view until I got clear of the enemy.

When James Halloran heard my shout to disperse, he saw the threat coming from the enemy in the reversing train and, with his Martini Henry rifle, opened fire on the military. I believe it was his action saved my life as his shooting attracted the attention of the soldiers in his direction and thus enabled me to get away.

Two of the I.R.A. party, however, were not so lucky as I was. Christy McCarthy and Michael Gleeson, 1st Lieut. of the Caherdavin Company, who had left their position with the main party, came to watch me cutting telegraph wires. When the train came back from Cratloe they attempted to move off up the side of Woodcock Hill which contained poor

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cover. Both of them were riddled with bullets. All the rest of the party got safely away. The British forces took the bodies of McCarthy and Gleeson on the train to Ennis and also captured two rifles which they had been using.

Signed: John McCormack

Date: 11th March 1956

(John McCormack)

11th March, 1956.

Witness: D. Griffin

(D. Griffin)

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