

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 1443

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1443.

Witness

Michael Fitzpatrick,
Clonee,
Fenagh,
Bagenalstown,
Co. Carlow.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer, 3rd Battalion, Carlow Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Ballon Company, Irish Volunteers,
Co. Carlow. 1917- November, 1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL FITZPATRICK

Clonea, Fenagh, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow.

Before I ever became a member and attached to a unit of the I.R.A. I knew several of the leaders from being secretary of the Gaelic League. I met Messrs. Sean O'Farrell, Michael Keating, Liam O'Dea, Gearoid O'Sullivan and Liam Price who was organiser of the League during 1917. I was personally acquainted with Michael Keating who was O/C. 3rd Battalion at the time, and Liam O'Dea who was also on the battalion staff when they formed the Ballon Company late in 1919. Mr. James Maher was appointed captain; Richard Barry, Lieutenant. I was appointed adjutant. There were 12 other members.

We were instructed in drilling every week by James Roche from Tullow Company, who afterwards became staff captain of 3rd Battalion. When the police left the barracks in Ballon and went into Tullow, our first operation was the burning of the barracks. Five of us set out to do the job at 12 o'clock. We sprinkled the upper floor with a quart of petrol, but one of the boys was so eager to see it burning that he struck a match and all went in flames. Richard Barry got caught in the flames and we had some job before we got to save him. He was burned all over; so that was our first experience and we learned a lesson.

In June 1920, I was selected as a candidate for the County Council. I was returned and attended Council meetings in the old County Home while British soldiers guarded the gate. They were camped in a part of the building. I was personally acquainted with the Master of the Home. His name was Mr. Morrow, a great old man, and several times I brought

dispatches from him to leaders outside. I took part in the raid for arms with other members of the company; we did the job in daylight without masks and the people responded greatly. We got 14 shotguns and one revolver (Peter the Painter type). No one ever informed on us and the police came and made inquiries about who was in the raid and they were told that all were strangers.

In September 1920, the police were ambushed in Tullow. Constable Gaughran and Constable Delaney were shot and the sergeant escaped with minor injuries. As far as I know, the men who took part in the ambush were:- Michael Keating, Liam O'Dea, James Roche, Michael Walsh, James Nolan, Daniel Byrne, Michael O'Neill and Peter Quinn. Patrick Byrne was on outpost between the barracks and the ambush position. All these boys had to go 'on the run' fearing arrest, which was the means of breaking up the battalion for a while. Michael Keating and Liam O'Dea were two good officers and the men had every confidence in them. The military, as a reprisal for the shooting, burned Murphy's two shops the following night. It was some time before the battalion got going again. I remember attending a meeting in Clonmore Lodge where Liam Donohoe was appointed O/C. and Michael Barry adjutant. This was about Christmas 1920.

In February 1921, I was sent by the Brigade Vice-Commandant - O'Connell - to Clonmore with a dispatch for Liam Donohoe. When he read it he said: "I have to go with you to Ballon". Both of us went to his house and had tea and then set off on our journey. We arrived in Ballon about 12 o'clock and met O'Connell and Adjutant Ryan at Maher's. A meeting of the Battalion Council was held outside the village at which representatives of the following companies were present:- Ballon, Grange, Myshall and Kildavin. It was arranged that

ten men from Ballon, 10 from Myshall and six from Grange be ready in one hour's notice for an engagement in Bagenalstown the following Sunday night. During the discussion the Kildavin Captain refused to send anyone, so he was asked to leave the meeting, which he did. The Ballon Captain was ordered to have his ten men at Myshall Cemetery at 7.30 p.m. and the Grange Captain got similar orders. Captain A. O'Neill had orders to be there with his ten men and bring the lot to Aughney's Mill and be there about 8.45. The Ballon men arrived at the Cemetery at the time appointed, but there was no one there to meet them.

After about an hour O'Neill came with four men and, when asked where were the remainder of his men, he said he told them but they hadn't come. By this time, it was getting late and Captain Maher and myself said we would report at Aughney's Mill, so we went on two bicycles and met Commandant Donohoe. We told him exactly what happened and he sent us back to bring on our men and any Myshall men that meant to come. When we got back to the Cemetery we got our men with three or four Myshall men and started off for Aughney's Mill. We arrived on foot in less than one hour, but when we got there the Commandant told us we were late, as the patrol was gone in off the street. It seems we were to fire on the patrol. There was an ambush prepared on the Long Mile which is a straight piece of road between Carlow and Bagenalstown. The military from Carlow would come that way. The Commandant said there was no use attacking the barracks as we had only shot-guns and one revolver, so he ordered us to go back home and mind our arms for another occasion. Of course, we obeyed his order.

The battalion commandant had confidence in Andy O'Neill, but his confidence was betrayed. I forgot to state that

Grange Company sent no men. Those present at Aughney's Mill were:- Eamon Malone, Brigade O/C., Liam Donohoe, 3rd Battalion O/C. and William Flood, captain of Bagenalstown Coy. As far as I can remember, the date of that engagement was 13th February 1921. Very shortly after that night, Liam Donohoe, the Battalion O/C., was arrested and interned in the Curragh and Matt Cullen took his place as Battalion O/C. but only for a very short time. There was a raid for arms on the Protestant Minister's house near Hacketstown and the raiders were fired on from the house. They failed to get the arms, as far as I know. Michael Barry was on this raid. Shortly after this, Cullen and Barry were arrested and Battalion H.Q. was transferred to Rathvilly with Patrick Kearns as O/C. and M. Byrne as adjutant.

I attended a battalion meeting held in Rathoe and Kearns made arrangements to get the Kildavin Company sworn in as they refused previously to take the oath; so he came to Ballon and Andrew Fitzpatrick went with him to Kelly's of Kilcarney where the Kildavin Company was to meet him. Thomas Curry, the Kildavin captain, refused to take the oath and all his men, except two, also refused. Thomas Byrne of Barrack and James Byrne of Kildavin St. were the only two men who took the oath. Both are in America now. Kearns ordered those two men to join Myshall Company.

By this time the Republican Courts were in being. Captain Maher, Ballon Company, got the Court going in Ballon. I was appointed Registrar of the Court. Mr. John Kinsella, Rathrush House, and Mr. John Dwyer, Kilcool, were appointed Justices. We held several Courts, but of course we had to change our Courthouse from time to time. Anyhow, we carried on and never were caught, though the police from Tullow made several

inquiries about us. It was remarkable how the people responded and, more so, those that were fined or bound to the peace. The only solicitor in the county that ever attended our Court was Mr. Samuel Roche; sometimes he would be for the plaintiff and other times for the defendant.

I remember on one occasion the chapel in Ballon was robbed; the shrine box was broken and the money gone. The chapel caretaker - a woman - made a report to Captain Maher and, after taking particulars from her, he got in touch with his own police sergeant. He got information about a man of the tramp class who was seen in the chapel. He immediately got a motor car and followed on in the Kildavin direction and arrested the tramp between Kildavin and Newtownbarry, brought him back to Ballon and had to keep him for two days. He was brought before the Court and the sergeant proved that on searching the tramp he found 10s. 7d. and a jemmy for opening the box. Of course, we had no jail, and the only thing that could be done was to get the tramp out of the parish. Both Justices agreed to leave him in an unknown destination; so, that night, the police left him on the top of Mount Leinster.

About the middle of April there was a general round-up by the military. They stopped in the Hall in Ballon and, that night, searched all our houses, but, luckily enough, they captured no one; we got word in time and got out; but for back luck they captured Patrick Kearns and a few more of his men in Rathvilly and that left us without a Battalion O/C. Andy O'Neill, Myshall, was Vice O/C. and he automatically became 3rd Battalion O/C.; Joseph O'Neill, adjutant and John Byrne, Q.M.

A battalion meeting was held near Ballon the night after the Ballymurphy ambush. A small, low-sized man from H.Q. was present. He took a list of all men in the battalion and all arms of every kind, ammunition etc. He told those present

about the ambush in Ballymurphy and the way the soldiers butchered poor Michael Fahy. He left that night at about 12 o'clock for the 2nd Battalion area. Captain James Nolan, Rathmore, accompanied him into the area. The next two days I was at a Council meeting in Carlow and I left the meeting to go to Michael Fahy's funeral. He was brought from the Cathedral to St. Mary's Cemetery and buried in the Republican Plot. I met Captain Nolan at the funeral and he told me that the man from H.Q. was a spy and was arrested in Baltinglass by the Battalion O/C., Andy O'Neill, and brought back to Myshall for detention.

When I came home, I met Captain Maher and told him the story, so both of us decided to go to O'Neill's house and find out. We arrived at O'Neill's at about 9 o'clock and met Andy O'Neill. He told us that the rumour was true and that the man was in the bed sleeping, but he was waiting for word to come about him. We went down to the room where this man was sleeping and he was snoring like a pig.

I said to O'Neill that he wasn't much knocked about or he would not sleep that way. O'Neill asked us to stop on for awhile as he was expecting word about him, so we stayed on until Tommy O'Connell, James Byrne and Bill Gaffney came in from Ballymurphy area - these three had escaped arrest. They had a look at him (the sleeping man) and questioned O'Neill about the word he got about him being a spy. Tommy O'Connell asked O'Neill did he go out any place and O'Neill told him that he was down in Myshall with him, and that he posted a letter in the post office. O'Connell said that letter would have to be got; so we left Bill Gaffney and James Byrne to mind the house and O'Connell, O'Neill, Captain Maher and myself came down to raid the post office for the letter. We took

positions at the corners and O'Connell knocked at the post office door. The Postmaster, Patrick Murphy, came down, but was very nervous. O'Connell told him he wanted a letter from the office addressed to a Miss Fitzpatrick, Dublin. The Postmaster handed out the letter and we came away. Captain Maher and myself came home and the next day we heard that the man was all right and happened to be Simon Donnelly from G.H.Q.

The blocking of roads and trenching and the knocking of bridges was a general order so as to stop the military from travelling as they were getting very active. So each area got active at this work and, no doubt, it put an obstacle in their way. Every bridge over the Burrin River was put down completely.

I was appointed 3rd Battalion Intelligence Officer and had to keep in touch with eleven companies of the battalion and then report to William Stack, the Brigade I.O., as well as to keep the Register of the Court. By this time, Captain Maher and myself had to keep away from our houses as the police were in search of us. Anyhow, we escaped until the Truce. At the time of the Truce Andy O'Neill was Battalion O/C., John McGill was Vice O/C., Joseph O'Neill, adjutant, John Byrne, Q.M. and Michael Fitzpatrick (myself) I.O.

The following eleven companies formed the battalion:-

A/Coy.	Clonmore	G/Coy.	Killinure
B "	Grangeford	H "	Clonegal
C "	Hacketstown	J "	Myshall
D "	Rathvilly	K "	Kildavin
E "	Tullow	L "	Ardattin
F "	Ballon		

Shortly after the Truce a brigade training camp was started at Duckett's Grove. This was a big mansion and the land was bought by the Land Committee. The Rev. J.C.Kelly, C.C. and the Rev. E.I. Campion, C.C. were the prime factors in the purchase of this holding. I am just mentioning their names

as they were two great men for the Cause. Both are now dead and may they rest in peace.

When the camp opened, Captain Maher and myself went for the first two weeks. There were officers from the six battalions. Commandant McCurtain was in charge with Adjutant Heaslip. It was a very nicely kept camp and we got instructions on the rifle and the use of small arms and we carried out the usual parades and drilling.

When we left, some more of our company went for training and this carried on for the summer. When the brigade camp finished, the 3rd Battalion opened a camp at Clonegal and carried on until Christmas. I was there several times at meetings of our battalion. After Clonegal closing, 3rd Battn. opened a camp in the Big House at Myshall belonging to Brady's Estate. This camp carried on until 29th June 1922. Andy O'Neill was in charge of the camp in Myshall, but I forgot to state that in May 1922, as well as I can remember, O'Neill with James O'Rourke and O'Rourke's son made an unofficial raid on Dunlavin Bank and got away with some money, I don't know how much. The raid was reported to Patrick Fleming who was a Divisional O/C. at the time. Fleming was in Myshall very nearly as soon as O'Neill and dismissed him from the I.R.A. O'Neill went 'on the run' and wasn't heard of until the civil war was over. James O'Rourke was arrested and did a term in prison for the offence. Joseph O'Neill was appointed Battalion O/C. and Michael Fitzpatrick, battalion adjutant, and John Byrne, Q.M. The battalion carried on as usual and, on 29th June 1922, the disaster of the civil war came. One side began firing on the other and, of course, each party went out to see who would fire the best, not taking into account the after effects of such a campaign.

In the summer of 1921 I forgot to state that the I.R.B. was formed in the 3rd Battalion area. Patrick Fenelon, Shangany, was Centre; I was secretary and Joseph O'Neill treasurer. The other members were:- Captain Maher, Daniel Byrne, William Maher, Laurence Donohoe and Andy O'Neill. Paud O'Donohoe was the Chief Centre in Carlow.

During the summer of 1922 I met some of my old friends such as Michael Keating and Patrick Sheppard. I hadn't seen these two since the shooting of the police in Tullow; both were on the column. Liam O'Dea was in the army and so was Liam Donohoe. What a difference now! but I suppose it was to be - history repeating itself. The army under Commandant Curley came to occupy the camp in Myshall, but it was burned down before they arrived. Curley set up his camp and stopped about two weeks.

The school in Fenagh was attacked by I.R.A. and taken during the time and the Free State soldiers came to Myshall. The barracks in Borrís was attacked but the I.R.A. withdrew. There was an attack in Tullow on the barracks; the I.R.A. withdrew. There was no one shot or wounded during these attacks.

On 7th November 1922 I was arrested by Lieut. Donohoe and brought to Carlow. I remained there until 19th December when I was sent with about 50 others to Newbridge Internment Camp. It was exactly one year when I was released, on 7th November 1923. During my imprisonment there I have nothing to grumble about. I got a fair share to eat, had a good bed and clothes, plenty of exercise and plenty of games, I taught Irish step-dancing in the camp and had a few good pupils. Here is a verse one of the prisoners made about the camp:-

"We get up for breakfast,
 Go down to our mess;
 And a breakfast is ours
 In ten minutes or less.
 When breakfast is over
 We walk round to stare
 At the housetops in Newbridge
 In Co. Kildare".

When I came home I was rather weak, as I was on hunger strike from the middle of October until 2nd November. I had to meet a wife and child, 2 years old, and try and keep body and soul together. Debts had piled up and she got no help from any source, so I had to try and do the best I could. However, I won't grumble; it's well to be alive and be able to write this story of the Movement.

I have given all particulars as nearly correct as possible as to dates.

Signed: Michael Fitzpatrick

Date: 13th June 1956

Witness: Seán Brennan Lieut.-col.

