

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1496

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1496.

Witness

John Hynes,  
Ballinagrane,  
Borris,  
Co. Carlow.

Identity.

Vice O/C, 4th Battalion, Carlow Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of B. Company (Clashganny), 4th  
Battalion, South Wexford Brigade, 1917-Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No .. S.2814. ....

Form B S M 2

1496

10

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO, STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1496

STATEMENT BY Mr. JOHN HYNES,  
Ballinagrane, Borris, County Carlow.

A Company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Clashganny early in 1917. There were about forty men in the Company. Seamus Lennon was elected Company Captain. Later he was T.D. for the constituency of Carlow and voted against the Treaty. I was elected 1st Lieutenant. Training included drilling, field exercises, scouting etc. A large number joined the Company during the Conscription period. The people at this time were whole-heartedly behind us and looked to us for guidance.

The Company took an active part during the 1918 General Election on behalf of Seamus Lennon, the Sinn Féin candidate. We organised public meetings, distributed literature, posted up bills and canvassed the electors. On nomination day the man who had been selected to contest the elections on behalf of the Irish Party backed out and he was not nominated. The Sinn Féin candidate, Seamus Lennon, was returned unopposed. The Volunteers then went into other constituencies and worked for the Sinn Féin candidates.

During 1919, the general training of the Company was intensified. I was Acting O/C. of the Company as Seamus Lennon had been arrested. Our Company was "B" Company (Clashganny), 4th Battalion, Carlow Brigade. Doctor Dundon, Borris, was Battalion O/C.

Early in 1920, G.H.Q. in Dublin got information that General Shaw was about to issue an order to the R.I.C. to collect all shot guns in the hands of private individuals on a certain date. G.H.Q. issued an order to all units of the Volunteers to collect the guns before the R.I.C. did so. We raided all the farmers' houses in which we knew

there were guns. Some of the farmers handed up the guns willingly, but in some cases we had to threaten them before they gave up their guns.

Subsequently I attended a Battalion Council meeting held at Clash, for the purpose of submitting reports concerning the raids for arms. The Battalion O/C., Doctor Dundon, presided. The Captain of "E" Company, James Doyle, reported that three farmers in his area had refused to hand up their guns. He stated that some of them said they would give the guns to the R.I.C. before they would give them to us. They were James and Denis Kavanagh, (brothers living together) Newtown, Borris, and Patrick Doyle, Newtown. The Captain of "E" Company refused to call on these people again. Doctor Dundon then called for someone to do the job, and I volunteered to do it. I took a half dozen good men of my own Company ("B" Company) with me. We called on the brothers James and Denis Kavanagh. Denis was not home when we called, but James and his sister were. I told James what I wanted. He said there were no guns in the house. I told him that I knew he had a double-barrel gun and that his brother had a single-barrel gun, and that I would not upset them by searching the house if he gave up the guns without any further trouble. He still refused. I ordered my men to search the house, and instructed them not to take anything except guns, revolvers, field glasses or anything of a military nature. I remained in the kitchen with James and his sister while the house was being searched. One of my men came to me with a double-barrel gun. He said he found it behind the parlour door. After a while all the other men came but they had not found anything. I asked James for his brother's single-barrel gun. He said I should be satisfied with one gun, and that he was not

responsible for his brother's gun and, anyway, he did not know where it was. I told him I was not satisfied and that I was taking him prisoner until I got the second gun.

I arrested him and brought him across the fields in the direction of the next house we were going to raid. He asked the Volunteers who were guarding him to make intercession with me for him to be released and that he would persuade his brother to hand up his gun to us. He told us his brother would be returning from Tinahinch. I released James and instructed two Volunteers to return to the house with him and to hold up Denis on the path and tell him they wanted his gun. I learned later that when Denis came along the Volunteers called on him to halt but he continued to advance and broke in on the two men and knocked them on the ground, and continued into the house. On entering the house he went to look for the double-barrel gun, but found it missing, and he did not come out again.

In the meantime I went to raid Paddy Doyle's; he was known as 'Big Paddy the Tug-o-War man'. It was he who had said he would give the gun to the R.I.C. before he would give it to us. He lived with his sister and father, James. When I called both himself and his father were absent. I placed two men in a shed in the yard to hold up anyone coming in. When we entered the house his sister was having supper. I told her what I wanted and she said there was no gun in the house. I then ordered the men to search the house. After searching the house they returned and reported that they found nothing. I told them to sit quietly where they were. In a few moments I heard a scream outside. I went out to investigate what had happened. James Doyle was the first to return to the house. One of my men gave him the command "Halt!". He continued to approach and caught the barrel of the gun and tried to twist it out of the Volunteer's hand. The second Volunteer hit Doyle with his gun on the hand, breaking it.

It was this was the cause of the scream that I had heard. Doyle told me that he thought the "hold-up" was only a joke. I said "You wanted this gun as well as your own to give to the R.I.C. as you and your son told the local Volunteers that you would give your gun to the R.I.C. before you would give it to us. Which would you rather have, your gun or your son? Because if I don't get your gun I will take your son away". "You needn't wait" he said, "I will give you the gun". He went to a potatoe pit, took out the gun and handed it to me.

We then went on to the third house, that of Stephen Kavanagh. It was now rather late. I knocked on the halldoor. Stephen was in bed but he got up and put his head out through the window over the halldoor and called "Who is there". I said, "I.R.A. on duty". He asked me what I wanted. I said, "I want the gun you refused to give up to the local Volunteers; come down and open the door until I search the house for it". He refused and I told him I would throw a bomb into the house and set it on fire. It was a thatched house. He said, "Wait a moment and I will be down and get you the gun". When he came down I told him the escape he was after making, that I really intended to destroy the house as he had said that he would give his gun to the R.I.C. before us. After trusting his hand into a hayrick he pulled out the gun and gave it to me.

The following night with the same party of Volunteers I went again to Denis Kavanagh's, Newtown, and held him up. He refused to hand over his gun. We commandeered his bike and told him we would keep it until we got his gun. We arrested him and brought him to an unoccupied house. He again refused to hand over the gun. I told him to say an Act of Contrition, and still he refused to give it to us. We locked him in the house and I instructed the Volunteers on whose land the house stood, to release him at 12 o'clock next day. At

11 a.m. the Volunteers saw him escaping through the window on the gable end of the house. He gave up his gun and we returned the bike to him. This man later proved to be very good and useful, and repaired guns for us.

In April, 1920, the R.I.C. evacuated Glynn Barracks. We destroyed it by burning a few nights afterwards. A hunger-strike by the political prisoners in Mountjoy Prison started early in the same month (April, 1920). A general strike throughout the country was called in protest against the treatment of the prisoners to take place on 13th April. An order was issued to all business premises in Borris to close that day. All complied with the order except one man named Kennedy who had a public house and a chemist's shop in the town. When the Volunteers called on him and asked him to close, he refused and sneered at the Volunteers. Kennedy was born into the Catholic faith. He finished his education in Trinity College, Dublin, and lost the Faith. He was continually passing insulting remarks about the Catholic religion. On one occasion when there was a mission in the Parish Church in Borris, Kennedy cleared everything out of his shop window and covered it with brown paper. He left two rectangular apertures over one of which he printed the word "MEN" and over the other "WOMEN". This was intended as a mockery of the confessional. The Missioners were brought to talk to him, but they never made any headway with him. He used to say - "Show me your God and then I will believe". His mother and sister were both very devout Catholics and said several times that they were always praying for his conversion. At one Mission, the Missioner found it necessary to speak about him from the pulpit. In the course of his remarks he stated that it would not be long until the grass would be growing in front of his premises. How true this remark

proved to be will be seen later in this account. Fortunately his mother was dead before the final tragedy occurred.

Kennedy was openly hostile towards the I.R.A. : he was always sneering at them. He even attacked one of our Battalion officers, John Murphy, Battalion I.O., and knocked him to the ground. Following Kennedy's refusal to close on the day of the general strike, the Battalion Council decided to start a boycott of his business. Volunteers in turn picketed his premises with the result that he did practically no business. During the month of June, 1920, the R.I.C. in Killedmond vacated the barracks and we burned it. The I.R.A. boycott of Kennedy's business continued for a long time and quite a number of people, including Father Dunne, the Parish Priest, would like to see it settled. It was arranged that Seán Murphy, the Battalion I.O., and Father Dunne would interview Kennedy with a view to a settlement of the boycott. When Father Dunne and Murphy were on their way to Kennedy's for this purpose they met a Mr. O'Dempsey, Solicitor, Enniscorthy, who was a pal of Kennedy's, and they asked him to go with them, which he did. When they arrived at Kennedy's house they found he was still in bed. It was 12 noon and as he was always out late at night he was never up before that time. O'Dempsey went upstairs to Kennedy and, having told him of their mission, Kennedy said, "I will go down and shoot the two of them". But when O'Dempsey came down to Father Dunne and Murphy he told them that Kennedy had said that he was sorry that anything had ever occurred. Seán Murphy said, "We will call off the boycott so", and they then left.

Kennedy selected a number of the I.R.A. men who had picketed his premises and who were men of substance and instructed O'Dempsey

to institute legal proceedings against them for compensation for loss of trade etc. When we heard of this, the boycott was continued.

Soon after the murder of Thomas McCurtain, Lord Mayor of Cork by British Forces, an order was issued by G.H.Q. to shoot the two worst policemen in every barrack area. The Battalion O/C., Doctor Dundon, refused to carry out this order. He said if G.H.Q. named the men he would have them shot, but that he would not name them. This resulted in Doctor Dundon being dismissed from the rank of Battalion O/C, and Pierce Murphy, Captain of "A" Company, was appointed to replace him.

Kennedy had an assistant chemist working for him; he was Francis M. J. Kelly and I believe his present address is Lackbeg, Burtonport, County Donegal. Kelly was a Volunteer and I told him not to attend any parades, but to do intelligence work for me. He knew everything about Kennedy's activities with the enemy, and he constantly supplied me with information about forthcoming raids etc. Kennedy continued to be very aggressive and most hostile towards the I.R.A.

During September, 1920, Borris R.I.C. Barracks was evacuated and we destroyed it that night. Also during September we raided the mail train at Borris and seized the mails. We got police codes which we sent to Brigade Headquarters. We also got some legal documents which O'Dempsey, Solicitor, had posted to Hector Hughes, K.C., Dublin, in connection with Kennedy's legal action against some Volunteers over the boycott. A few days later P. J. Byrne, a Wexford man who was "on the run" in our area, and I went to Enniscorthy and raided O'Dempsey's office and seized the remainder of the legal papers in connection with the case. Hanagh Kelly came with us and carried our guns to and from Enniscorthy for us.



When Terry MacSwiney died, an order was issued for all shops to close on the day of his funeral. Kennedy canvassed all the shopkeepers in the town to stay open and fight the I.R.A. Two agreed to open; they were O'Brien, a publican, and Denis Nolan, draper. I called on Kennedy with Joseph Mellitt, Captain "G" Company Borris, and requested him to close and he refused.

On the morning of the funeral, Paddy Hogan, an officer of Borris Company, called on O'Brien and Nolan, and asked them to comply with the order. When they heard what the consequences of refusing might mean to them, both of them closed.

Mr. O'Brien, the publican in Borris, asked me and Mellitt to meet Kennedy to talk things over about the boycott. We agreed to do so and went to O'Brien's public house at 6 p.m., the time which had been arranged for the meeting. When we arrived O'Brien told us that Kennedy had called at 5 p.m. and told him that he was prepared to meet us and talk about anything except the boycott. He then left and was not there when we arrived. That finished our efforts in regard to a settlement of the boycott.

Kennedy became much more aggressive. One day soon after that he fired at a Volunteer going through the town. He went out at night time with a revolver in one hand and a flash lamp in the other and fired at anyone he thought was a Volunteer. He very often went to Gowran and accompanied the R.I.C. and Black and Tans to raid I.R.A. mens' houses. Several times he raided Doctor Dundon's and E.P. Hogan's house next door. Hogan's two sons, Paddy and Joe, were officers in the Borris Company. Kennedy, apparently, was not aware that Doctor Dundon had been deprived of his rank. Kennedy drove his car through the town with the wheels on the footpath and fired into Doctor Dundon's house when passing it.

One night Kennedy, with a party of Black and Tans, raided Hogan's house. He forced Hogan at the point of the gun to kneel down and sign a document declaring the boycott off.

In January, 1921, Seamus Lennon, T.D., resigned as Captain of "B" Company (Clashganny). At the time we heard that there was some question that members of the Dáil should not hold ranks in the I.R.A., and I was appointed to replace him. During January we held up the mail train and seized the mails.

Frank Kelly, my I.O. in Kennedy's shop, approached me and told me that Kennedy had asked him to join his gang which he called "a beating up gang", and asked me what he should do. I told him I would bring up the matter at the Battalion Council meeting, which I did. It was decided that Kelly should join the gang so as to be in a better position to get more information. Kennedy had two revolvers, one of which he gave to Kelly and the other to a man named King who was also in the gang, when going on a job. King was an ex-British soldier. We told Kelly that, if there was any danger of an I.R.A. man being killed by the gang, he was to shoot Kennedy who, having given his two guns to Kelly and King, had only a truncheon himself; this was made from the spoke of a cart-wheel.

One night, O'Brien, an Excise-man and one of Kennedy's touts, went into Kennedy's and told him that Seamus Lennon, T.D., was up the street. Kennedy sent for King and with Kelly set out for the bottom of the town to a quiet spot to wait for Lennon who had to return home that way. Kennedy had a truncheon and a flashlamp. He said he would flash the lamp in Lennon's face and then hit him with the truncheon to knock him off the bike. When Lennon came along Kennedy aimed a blow at his head and missed and struck him on the shoulder. The bike swerved but Lennon corrected it and rode on.

Kennedy, being a good runner, followed him for about 300 yards but failed to overtake him. Kennedy returned to Kelly and King and said, "'Tis a pity it being your first night with me that we were not successful, because if you are successful with any little stunt, it makes you more courageous for the next one."

O'Dempsey had for some time been closely associated with Kennedy, and I warned O'Dempsey to discontinue this association, but he ignored my warning.

One night O'Brien, the Excise man who had been watching Doctor Dundon's house, went into Kennedy and told him that Doctor Dundon had gone home. Kennedy, accompanied by Black and Tans, went to raid Dundon's. When Dundon heard them coming he escaped out the back and got up into a loft through a small window and pulled the ladder up after him. There were two maids in Dundon's at the time and one of them, Kate Power, showed the raiders about with a lighted candle. After searching the dwelling, Kate Power heard Kennedy saying to a man whom she took to be O'Dempsey, "He is in it where ever he is, we'll go outside and search the out-offices". They went outside and searched and during the course of the search Kennedy got up and looked into the loft but failed to see Dundon. They returned and searched the house again, and then went out and searched the out-offices a second time. During the raid Kate Power thought one of the raiders was like O'Dempsey. Next morning she saw O'Dempsey on the street, and recognised him by the coat he was wearing as being one of the men who raided the house the previous night. As a result she said that she had no doubt about him and was prepared to swear that the man was O'Dempsey.

One day in the month of February, 1921, I was in Borris and I saw Kennedy driving his car with some Black and Tans in it through

the town. I met the Brigade O/C., Eamon Malone, and Doctor Dundon. They asked me to get some men and protect Dundon's and Hogan's houses as they thought they would be raided. I collected nine men and armed them with shot guns. I had a single-shot Martini. I decided to take over a house opposite to Dundon's on the other side of the street. I put seven of the party into Maloney's Lane to wait there until I had gained entrance to the house. When I was about to open the door I saw a flash-light, and I immediately knew it was Kennedy. I said to Volunteer Lawlor, who was with me, "This is surely Kennedy and he will fire on my men when he comes to Maloney's Lane and if he does we will shoot him when he passes us". Kennedy fired six shots at the men in Maloney's Lane; Volunteer Michael Nolan pulled his gun but it missed fire. Having fired six shots in rapid succession Kennedy ran towards his home, and Nolan shouted to me, "Get him, it's he is in it". When Kennedy was passing I fired twice at him but both shots failed to go off. I said to Lawlor, "Why didn't you fire". He said, "I did but the gun didn't go off". I told him the safety catch was on. We both fired again but by this time Kennedy had gone too far for the shot gun to be effective. My bullet ploughed the skirting round the door.

In February, 1921, the Kilkenny Brigade arranged to attack Gowran R.I.C. barracks, and they asked us to block the roads in our area and to act as outpost so as to prevent reinforcements travelling to Gowran that way. On the night of the attack we trenched the main road between Borris and Gaignamanagh and occupied positions, but the enemy did not come along. The attack took place but the barracks was not captured.

In March, 1921, we seized the mails in Borris. That month we also raided Mount Leinster House. At the time a man named Butler

lived there and we had information that his son, who was an officer in the British Army, was home on leave and we thought that he might have some arms, but we failed to get any.

One night early in the same month I was walking past Kennedy's shop with Eamon Malone, Brigade O/C. Malone said to me, "I admire Kennedy; there is no one here game enough to shoot him". I said, "We are waiting for an order to shoot him". Malone said, "The order has already been sent down". I told him that I had not heard of the order. I believe the order had come but I was not told about it.

At 5 o'clock on the evening of the 15th March I got information that the four spies Kennedy, O'Dempsey, O'Brien and Coburn were in Kennedy's shop and that they were going to a party in a house at the top of the town, i.e. the Carlow end. I went to the Battalion O/C., Pierce Murphy, and told him the information I had received and that I was going to shoot them. I mobilised twelve men at *Marry Doyle's*, Ballingrane, about one mile south of Borris. I divided them into three sections with four men in each. I took charge of No. 1, Section; I put P.J. Byrne in charge of No. 2. Section, and I instructed Gerald Murphy, brother of the Battalion O/C, to take charge of No. 3. Section. The Battalion O/C. did not come with us. Nearly all the men were armed with shot guns. I was armed with a double-barrel shot gun.

I explained to the party the plan of attack which was as follows. I would take my section through the McMorrough-Kavanagh demense and occupy a position behind a wall in the lane opposite Kennedy's shop. I instructed P.J. Byrne to proceed along the railway with his section and to take up position in the Church grounds. No. 3. Section was to take up position in *Maloney's Lane*. From my

position I had a clear view of Kennedy's shop and could see and easily recognise the spies when they came out on the path, and when they reached the position occupied by No. 2. Section I would blow a whistle to let them know that they were the spies and to open fire on them. If any of the spies tried to escape up the town No. 3. Section would attack them, and if any retreated back to Kennedy's, my section would come into action. I gave No. 3. Section four placards with the words, "Spies and Informers Beware", and also a flash-lamp. I told them that when the job was completed I would again blow the whistle that No. 2. Section (the centre section) and No. 3. Section (the upper Section) would come along and put the placards on the spies. We had the flash-lamp as I had been warned not to get blood on myself or on any of the party.

The three sections then set off and occupied the position allotted to each. When I arrived in Borris I was informed that two of the spies, O'Brien and Coburn, had already gone to the party. We were only about three minutes in position when Kennedy and O'Dempsey came out on the path. As arranged, I let them proceed until they reached the position occupied by the centre section and then blew the whistle. Byrne opened fire on them with his revolver. Kennedy drew his gun and fired six shots in rapid succession, and both he and O'Dempsey ran back towards Kennedy's house. They went behind the school steps which was about thirty yards from my position, and Kennedy re-loaded his gun. When they came out into our view again my section opened fire. O'Dempsey was the first to fall; Kennedy fired six shots at us and then fell shot dead. One of Kennedy's bullets smashed the cocking piece of one of our guns and another of his bullets struck the muzzle of the same gun. O'Dempsey did not fire; he was unarmed.

The two men were lying on the street; both were dead. I blew the whistle for the centre and upper sections to come down and put the placards on them. They did not come as they had retired from their positions at this time.

The following day a Lieutenant Grundy came to Borris. He went to Father Dunne, the Parish Priest, and told him he was going to have reprisals for the shooting. When Father Dunne told him the history of Kennedy, Lieutenant Grundy said, "Dunne, if no one else shot him I would have done so myself". There were no reprisals.

O'Brien and Coburn left the town and never returned. Coburn lived with his father in a gate lodge on the McMorrough-Kavanagh estate. He had been in the Black and Tans and was dismissed for shooting someone. I heard afterwards that he was arrested by the British and hanged.

During the Truce some of the Brigade officers, Pierce Murphy and myself, were instructed to go to the Royal Hotel in Carlow to meet Gearoid O'Sullivan who was to hold an inquiry into the shooting of O'Dempsey. O'Sullivan did not turn up and we were never given any reason for his not having done so. Subsequently an announcement from G.H.Q., Dublin, appeared in the newspapers that O'Dempsey was not shot as a spy. But the facts are as I have stated.

About March, 1921, some R.I.C. men and Black and Tans, about twelve or fourteen in all, came to Borris and occupied the Protestant school-house. As I have already mentioned, the R.I.C. evacuated the Barracks in Borris the previous year and we burned it.

The Brigade had arrangements completed for an all-out attack on Bagnalstown R.I.C. barracks. The 4th Battalion was to attack

the barracks and the other Battalions were to block all roads leading to Bagnalstown. With about sixty shotgun men and sixteen riflemen I went to the pre-arranged assembly point - Slyduff Bridge which was about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the barracks. Soon after we arrived there, a dispatch rider came and told us that fifteen lorries of military had arrived in Bagnalstown and were guarding the barracks and all approaches to it, and as a result the attack had been called off.

I heard afterwards that a Volunteer had told his girl friend that the attack was to take place, and she told a Black and Tan with whom she was also friendly at the same time, and that was how the enemy got information about the attack.

In April, 1921, I was appointed Vice O/C. of the 4th Battalion. No one held this appointment previously.

In June, 1921, the Vice O/C. of the Brigade, Tommy O'Connell, sent a dispatch to me by Danny Kavanagh, Publican, Ballymurphy, instructing me to shoot a Constable Farrell of Borris Barracks. If the shooting was not carried out before 12 noon the following Sunday we were not to do it as a Mission was starting in Borris at 12 noon on Sunday and he was afraid that if it was done during the period of the Mission the Missioners might condemn it, and make propaganda out of it.

Constable Farrell was a notorious character. G.H.Q. had information that he was connected with the shooting of Thomas McCurtain, Lord Mayor of Cork. He was on the 'black list' for a long time and G.H.Q. Intelligence was trying to find his whereabouts. When they discovered that he was stationed in Borris they ordered that he be shot.



I got the dispatch at about 5 o'clock on Friday evening. My information was that Farrell slept in the barracks (the Protestant school-house) and went to his home at the top of the town (the north end) at 8 o'clock each morning for his breakfast. I decided to shoot him on Sunday morning.

I selected three men to do the job with me. They were Dan Kavanagh, Jim Breen and Tom Lennon. I instructed Kavanagh and Breen who were armed with rifles to snipe the barracks while Lennon and I, who were armed with double-barrel shotguns, were shooting Farrell. We took up position behind the demesne wall. I saw Farrell coming along on the middle of the road. I fired at him and he fired three shots at me. I fired again. Farrell ran and got into the cover of the wall and continued running towards the barracks and collapsed on the middle of the road opposite the barracks. We retired. The R.I.C. and Tans in the Barracks kept up heavy fire for some time. They put Farrell in a motor car and brought him to hospital where he recovered.

Just before the Truce a dispatch rider gave a dispatch to Seán Murphy the Battalion Intelligence Officer. It was from G.H.Q. and, having read it, Murphy said, "This is not for me; it's for the Battalion O/C., Pierce Murphy." The dispatch was dismissing him from his rank as Battalion O/C. for failing to give the order for the shooting of Farrell.

In addition to the activities which I have recorded, we carried out numerous other operations of a minor character including road blocking, cutting telephone wires etc. We also lay in ambush on a few occasions but the enemy did not come.

At the Truce there were seven Companies in the Battalion:

they were :-

"A" Company	Ballymurphy,
"B" "	Clashganny,
"C" "	Rathanna,
"D" "	Ballyglisheen,
"E" "	Morley,
"F" "	St. Mullins,
"G" "	Borris.

SIGNED: John Bynes

DATE: 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 1956

WITNESS: Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
 BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
 No. W.S. 1,496