

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO BTAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S. 1533**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1533.

Witness

W.A. Tynan,
Main St.,
Monasterevan,
Co. Kildare.

Identity.

Q/M, 5th Battalion,
Laois Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Killenard Company,
5th Battn., Laois Bgde., and prison
experiences 1917 - Jan. 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S.2770.**

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,533

STATEMENT BY W.A. TYNAN

Main St., Monasterevan, Co. Kildare,

formerly of Ballybrittas, Co. Laois.

My first association with the I.R.A. (then known as the Irish Volunteers) was in the Spring of 1917, when I was just over eighteen years of age. I attended at Nolan's, "The Hermitage" one Sunday evening, and in a field of Mr. Nolan's about ten men, mostly from the Killenard district, received military instruction from Mr. Owen Nolan. Amongst those present were Mr. John Nolan, later to become Battalion O/C, and Mr. Thomas Hyland, who became Laois Brigade Adjutant.

This training went on regularly after that, and the number of men increased, there being no other section of Volunteers within miles. They trained regularly and fitted themselves as best they could with various types of firearms, mostly of the shotgun type. A company was formed with officers:

John Nolan - Capt.
Thos. Hyland - 1st Lt.
W.S. Tynan (myself) - 2nd Lt.
James Slevin - Quartermaster.
William Bannan - Adjutant.

When England tried to force conscription in 1918, and the young men of Ireland turned out in large numbers to resist it by force, the Killenard Company, being already partly trained, were capable of instructing the various anti-conscription bodies, which assembled at Ballybrittas, Courtwood, Emo, Killenard and Portarlington. Large numbers of young men offered themselves from every district

and by the end of the year nearly every young man wanted training. Volunteer H.Q. then started re-organising. A battalion was formed at a meeting held at the house of Thomas Tynan (my father), Ballybrittas, at which the following companies were appointed: (A) Killenard, (B) Portarlinton, (C) Courtwood, (D) Emo, and (E) Vicarstown; this was known as the 5th Battalion, Laois Brigade. The Battalion Officers appointed were:

Battalion O/C - J. Nolan
 " V.O/C - T. Hyland
 " Adjt. - James Lewis, Morette.
 " Q/M - W.A. Tynan (myself).

Captains of the five companies were:

Portarlinton - James Hayes
 Killenard - Joseph McCormack
 Courtwood - Thomas Tynan (my father)
 New Inn (for Emo) - William Moran
 Vicarstown - Thomas Connell, Long Road,
 Vicarstown.

Public drilling, training parades and military training took place continuously from then onwards during the conscription menace. When the danger of conscription passed, large numbers fell away and only genuine fighting men remained on.

At this time I was also an active member of the Sinn Féin organisation and took a leading part in the raising of funds for the first National Loan, 1919-1920. For the Ballybrittas polling area I was selected to organise and appoint the following collectors:

Richard Hipwell - for Coolroe area
 William Carroll - for Courtwood area
 James Phelan - for Cappakeel
 Daniel Flynn - for Morette
 Thomas Scully - for Emo
 Joseph Molloy - for Ballybrittas
 Daniel Bracken - for Ballycarroll
 Stephen Hughes - for Killenure & Jamestown.

The total sum subscribed for the loan in the area amounted to £397, which was all paid up in full.

The first interesting engagement I took part in as an I.R.A. officer was the burning of the Heath R.I.C. Barracks on April 3rd, 1920. Emo and Killenard Companies were charged with the task. Thomas Hyland, Battalion Vice O/C, and myself (Battn. Q/M) were in charge of the operations. Unknown to us the barracks had been vacated that evening, and so a fight was avoided. After surrounding the place and approaching with caution, armed only with shotguns, we called for surrender. On receiving no reply, approach was made, entrance forced, and the only occupant being the wife of the R.I.C. Sergeant, we had her removed to safety, and burned the barracks.

At a Battalion Council held at Tynan's, Ballybrittas, on the night of the 28th July, 1919, a discussion took place on the shortage of ammunition. After the meeting it was decided to raid Price's Hardware Stores, Portarlinton, where it was hoped some could be obtained. Michael Gray, Brigade O/C, and Frank Gowing, Brigade Q/M, were present and agreed to take part in the raid. At 3 o'clock in the morning Michael Gray, Frank Gowing, Thomas Hyland, James Lewis and myself left Ballybrittas and cycled to Portarlinton. An entrance was forced into Price's shop and the place searched. We succeeded in taking away about 20,000 rounds shotgun cartridges, cartridge cases, powder caps, etc., and had them conveyed to safety before daybreak.

From this onwards every effort was made to capture and secure by every means, firearms of every description. I had a contact in Mountmellick, a Protestant man, who secured for me a few revolvers and various types of

ammunition. During this period the enemy was obstructed where possible, and regular raids were made on trains for mails, letters sorted, and information of enemy movements etc., discovered. At this time there was very little arms in the Brigade area and Brigade Officers were pressing H.Q. for a supply.

During the first week of August, 1920, H.Q. sent word that some small arms would be given and I was appointed to go to Dublin H.Q. with Frank Gowing, Brigade Q/M, to collect same. We received instructions to call at 32, Bachelor's Walk, Dublin. There we met Tom Cullen, later Major General, who gave us a collection order for the small arms at Andy Clarkin's coal office. We discussed the question of rifles with Tom Cullen, who accused us of not doing our bit in Laois. We pointed out that there were no rifles in the whole Brigade. On hearing this he promised to examine the position, if we called back next day. On calling to Clarkin's coal office, we were told that arms could not be handed out until Saturday morning. Frank Gowing had to return home, and I remained. On Friday I went to see Tom Cullen, re the rifles; he informed me that he would allocate Laois Brigade ten rifles, if I would guarantee that they would be stored safely and put to use in ambushes, etc. I gave the necessary undertaking, and he told me that they would be sent on within a week, probably by canal. The rifles did come along in about ten days, but I was then in military custody. On the Saturday morning, I purchased a suit case and went along to Clarkin's for the small arms. I collected about three Peter the Painters and three long and two short Webleys with a fair amount of ammunition. I was instructed to carry one loaded Webley, and to use it if necessary as

protection of the arms. I came on the train to Kildare, got my bike and cycled home. On the way I ran into a patrol of R.I.C. with rifles at Monasterevan, but was not halted, and cycled innocently through with my case of guns on the cycle carrier. These guns, ammunition, etc., were stored in my home at Ballybrittas when the house was searched and I was arrested a week later, but the arms were not discovered and were removed that night, 26th August, 1920, to a place of safety.

On the 26th August, 1920, I saw a military lorry stopped on the Cross in Ballybrittas just across from my home. Mindful of my promise to Tom Cullen that the guns would be used, I decided to hold them up and seize any equipment in the lorry. My father was away on business, my mother was away on holidays and I was in charge of the shop at home. I sent for Volunteer Tim Kearney, and asked if he would accompany me. He agreed; I gave him a loaded Webley, took one myself, and partly disguised ourselves. I then closed up the shop, went out backways and came down on the lorry from behind, and called on the soldiers to surrender. The two soldiers immediately surrendered and pleaded with us to save their lives. We searched them, placed them facing a wall, searched the lorry, found no arms, but took away any useful equipment, which we concealed, and then set fire to the lorry with petrol found in it. We instructed the soldiers not to stir for fifteen minutes; I rushed home, opened the shop, and was standing at the shop door a few minutes later when one of the soldiers rushed up to me asking me where was the post office and telling me they were after being held up by two armed I.R.A. men. I accompanied him to the post office telephone, from where he phoned the Curragh, and in a half hour afterwards

Ballybrittas was full with British military and R.I.C. from Portarlinton.

About this time the battalion was arranging to attack Portarlinton R.I.C. Barracks, and I had a plan of the barracks and also the plan of attack concealed in the house. There was also a document relating to the shooting of R.I.C. Officer Lynch, for having arrested and beaten Kevin O'Higgins, having him strapped to a side-car and publicly driven in this manner to Portarlinton Station, and afterwards giving perjured evidence against him at the courtmartial. These documents, firearms, etc., were safely concealed in my home. When the military arrived I was paraded for identification before the two soldiers on the burnt lorry, but both said I was not one of the raiders. The house was then searched from top to bottom, and in one room (my father's) eleven shotgun cartridges were found. I was then taken to the yard, and told I was going to be shot if I did not disclose where the shotgun was concealed. On getting no satisfaction from me regarding the gun, it was decided by a senior military officer who arrived, to search the house again. Every nook and corner was again examined by a senior officer, I being taken along with them to each room. In the last room to be searched, a false arm in a chair was found to contain documents. These were: (1) plan of Portarlinton Barracks; (2) plan of attack; (3) shooting of R.I.C. Lynch. Lynch was present, and was shown the plan in my presence. Immediately after this I was arrested and taken by heavily armoured escort of five lorries to Curragh Camp. Two lorries preceded and two lorries followed the one in which I was carried. On being arrested I telegraphed my father to come home. On the road to the Curragh I met

him cycling home near Clogheen. I pointed him out to the officer in charge, and he blew a whistle and stopped all the lorries, then changed his plans and gave an order to proceed again. I did not suspect what was his intention, but it must have been to arrest my father. I was placed in a cell in the then Beresford Barracks, Curragh Camp, and the following morning at daybreak I heard a knock at my cell door, and a voice asking my name. On being told he said, "Your father was brought in a prisoner about an hour ago". I enquired who was speaking, and he said: "A friend who cannot be named". He whispered that I would not be allowed to see or speak to my father, but that in the morning I would be allowed out to the toilet to wash and shave, and that if I remained long enough my father would come along. I waited in the toilet in the morning as directed, and my father arrived. We had about fifteen minutes talk and made certain plans. He was released after about a week, and I was transferred to Mountjoy, to be later courtmartialled.

On Saturday, the 18th September, 1920, I was taken in an armoured car from Mountjoy prison to Marlboro Barracks. When the courtmartial was held, the President of the Court was Major (Batt. Lieut.Col.) L. Herapath, C.B.E., 2nd Batt. West Riding Regt., with a Captain (unnamed), R.C.A., and a Captain (unnamed), 1st Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, the transport, stationery, etc., being provided by the officer commanding 15th Hussars.

The first witness, Lieut. T.A. Bookett, 1st Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment, swore that he found paper and plans of barracks in a chair in the house of Thomas Tynan, Ballybrittas, and that he immediately arrested me. The second witness, Lieut. H.P. Miles, Kings Shropshire

Light Infantry, swore he found eleven rounds of sporting ammunition (produced). The third witness, Capt. R. Bryans, 2nd K.S.L.I., swore that he arrested Thomas Tynan, my father, at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 27th August, in the bedroom where the cartridges were found. At this stage of the court proceedings, my father, who had come as a spectator, was again arrested and placed beside me, but was again released after the court.

An R.I.C. Sergeant and two constables gave evidence of seeing the officer find plans for attack on the barracks and witnessed my arrest. They were called by number, and no names mentioned. I refused to recognise the court. The charge against me being "Found in possession of plans and documents containing statements the publication of which would be likely to cause dissatisfaction to His Majesty in contravention of Regulation 27 of the Restoration of Order to Ireland Act", I was sentenced to two years hard labour, six months remitted.

There is a book called "The Administration of Ireland 1920" written by "I.O." which refers to the courtmartial and quotes some of the documents captured.

After receiving my sentence, I remained in Mountjoy prison for a short period, and while there met Kevin Barry, who was suffering from a broken arm he received after his arrest. The Saturday previous to his execution, I was transferred with about sixty other prisoners to Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast. We were taken in a destroyer from Dún Laoghaire to Belfast, and had a very rough passage. My occupation in Mountjoy was sawing up ammunition boxes for firewood, and in Belfast I had to break stones. All political prisoners were together and had the same occupation,

breaking stones. This work was very hard and many prisoners suffered very much from rheumatism, etc., from sitting all day on a heap of stones in the cold weather of November and December. The food in Belfast was the best received in any prison.

As far as I can remember, it was sometime after Christmas, 1920, when with about forty other prisoners I was taken to Walton Prison, Liverpool. We were all handcuffed in batches of six, and on arrival at Liverpool were stripped by force and given convict clothing to wear. All prisoners refused to wear same, and held out as long as possible, many remaining naked in their cells with nothing but a sheet for several days. Work in this prison was the making of post office mail bags. After about a month in this prison I was taken with eleven other Irish prisoners to Usk Prison in Monmouthshire. On the journey from Liverpool to Usk, we were handcuffed together in batches of six with a chain around us in our convict prison clothes. My occupation in Usk prison was darning socks, cutting timber and making mail bags.

I completed my sentence at this prison, was released on the 23rd December, and arrived home on Christmas Eve, 24th December, 1921.

Immediately after Christmas I rejoined the organisation and was appointed Laois Brigade Intelligence Officer on 1st January, 1922. The treaty having been signed, there was not then any great need for military activities, and duties chiefly consisted of police work and punishing law breakers.

Sometime in January, 1922, the British vacated the barracks at Portlaoise, and same were taken over. This was our chief training centre from that onwards. Prior to my arrest in August, 1920, I had been appointed one of the three Parish Justices for Ballybrittas Court Area under Dáil Éireann. After return from prison, I took my seat in the court, and the cases to be dealt with chiefly consisted of trespass and petty larcenies.

The final meeting of the Laois Brigade before the "Split" was held in the Courthouse, Portlaoighise, and G.H.Q. was represented by Mr. Patrick Fleming. The meeting broke up in disagreement, each officer agreeing to go his own way, for and against the treaty. I went against the treaty, as did all the Brigade Officers, excepting Mr. Michael Gray, Brigade O/C. After the meeting there was a rush by both sides to get to Abbeylaois Barracks, but we, the anti-treaty section, succeeded in getting there first and established Brigade Headquarters there.

Signed: *D. J. Ryan*Date: 9/10/52Witness: *Sean Brennan* *Recd. Col.*

(Investigator)

