

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1544

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1544.

Witness

Sergeant Patrick Meehan,
Garda Siochana,
Carndonagh,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Company Lieutenant.

Company Captain.

Subject.

Activities of Hospital Company, 2nd Battalion,
East Limerick Brigade, and East Limerick
Flying Column, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2856.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1544

STATEMENT OF SERGEANT PATRICK MEEHAN

Garda Siochana, Carndonagh, Co. Donegal

I was born at Hospital, Co. Limerick, in 1897, where I received my early education.

I first became associated with the National Movement in 1918 when I joined the Irish Volunteers. I also became a member of the local Sinn Fein Club. Eamon Lynch told me about the existence of the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) organisation. He introduced me and I was accepted and enrolled a member. I was then appointed Lieutenant in the Hospital Company.

During the year 1918, all our spare time was devoted to training and organising, also work in connection with the general election held that year. In 1919, the companies were organised into battalions. Hospital Company, of which I was then a Lieutenant, was in the 2nd Battalion, East Limerick Brigade. Eamon Lynch was O/C. of the 2nd Battalion in the early stages. Liam Hayes was appointed in his place at a later date. The brigade was under the command of Sean Wall.

In 1919 we concentrated on training. We also provided guards for the Sinn Fein arbitration courts then operating in the country. Litigants were persuaded to take their cases before these courts and in most cases were satisfied to abide by the decision.

On 13th May 1919, an attack was made on a party of R.I.C. at Knocklong railway station who were carrying J.J. Hogan as a prisoner to Cork Jail. The attack was planned by Dan Breen, Ned O'Brien, Sean Treacy, Seamus Robinson and others. Hogan was rescued and a couple of R.I.C. were killed, including Sergeant Wallace, who was in charge of the escort. Dan Breen and Sean Treacy were seriously wounded. It was necessary to move them from place to place throughout the county as there was considerable police and military activity and the area was combed in an

effort to capture the wanted men. My company was very often called upon to provide a guard with the result that I spent all my time at this work and could not devote any time to my own work at home.

The first major engagement I took part in was an attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks on 27th May 1920. About two weeks before the attack I was called to a battalion conference at the house of Patrick Carroll at Castlefarm where plans were discussed for the attack. My company was detailed for road blocking in the Bottomstown area between Bruff and Hospital, about seven miles from Kilmallock. Tom Hayes, Jim O'Brien and two other men on the run in the area and myself were instructed to report to Kilmallock on that night to take part in the attack.

On our arrival at Kilmallock the whole party of riflemen, about 30 in all, were divided into five sections. The section to which I was attached was instructed by Sean Lynch, O/C., Galbally Battalion, to enter Clery's Hotel and take up positions in the top windows of the house directly opposite the barracks. On arrival there we were admitted by an I.R.A. man who had booked a room in the hotel early in the afternoon for that purpose. The guests, staff and proprietor were removed to a place of safety. We then quietly took up our positions and awaited the signal to open fire, which was to be three lamp flashes from the roof of Carroll's house where the main attacking party was located. All was very quiet for some time, then the awaited signal flashed out. Thirty rifles barked immediately. Bombs exploded to add to the din, the police returned the fire almost immediately and the fight was on. Rifle grenades fired from the barrack burst with a roar against the wall of the hotel where we were stationed, but none of them were high enough to reach the windows where we had taken up our positions. Fire was kept up incessantly for about two hours; by this time

the roof of the barrack was in flames and from our position we expected to see the R.I.C. surrender at any minute. Next we saw was a signal to cease fire and then heard a call to the R.I.C. to surrender. The answer was 'No surrender'. Again we got the signal to open fire and the battle was on once more. The R.I.C. continued to fire and the rifle grenades kept bursting on the wall below us. The fight went on until about 6 o'clock in the morning when the roof of the barracks collapsed. We thought that was the end of the fight, but when some of the men who were in position in Carroll's house came out on the street to have a look at the burning building, one of them, Liam Scully, a native of Kerry and an Irish teacher in the district, was shot. As he lay in the bullet swept street a Volunteer rushed out and carried him out of the line of fire. He was brought to the dressing station, convenient, where it was found he was dying. He was given the last rites of the Church by Rev. Father Woulfe, C.C., Kilmallock.

We got the order to retire; the fight had been going on for about seven hours and reinforcements were likely to arrive any time; we had practically exhausted our supply of ammunition and would not be in a position to take on another fight just then. A small party was kept behind to cover our withdrawal. When all was quiet, a party of R.I.C. emerged from a corner of the building they had succeeded in occupying and which escaped the flames. The covering party opened fire on them and one R.I.C. man was shot through the stomach. The building was reduced to ashes, never again to be occupied by British forces. I was obliged to cycle back to Hospital, a distance of nine miles, carrying a rifle in daylight.

The 'Belfast Telegraph' dated 29th May 1920, gives the following version of the fight at Kilmallock:-

DEATH BEFORE SURRENDER

Irish Police Heroism

Burning Barracks the Tomb of Two

Six Comrades Wounded

Fighting rages over five hours

Kilmallock Barracks were attacked at two o'clock on Friday morning. The attack lasted until 7.15 o'clock, when the raiders withdrew, leaving the barracks in flames.

Sergeant Thomas Keane and Constable Joseph Morton were killed, and the bodies lie in the debris.

Constable Hoey was seriously wounded, and Sergeant Tobias O'Sullivan and Constables Holmes, Barty and Hall wounded, but not seriously.

Communication is interrupted.

Such is the bald official announcement relating to a desperate affair which constitutes one of the most appalling tragedies enacted in Ireland in recent times, and which furnishes convincing proof of the extreme lengths to which Sinn Fein is prepared to go in the endeavours to sweep away every semblance of constituted authority. It also demonstrates that loyalty and devotion to duty for which the Royal Irish Constabulary is so justly famed. Against great odds the little garrison of less than a dozen men, for five hours, fought valiantly in defence of their barracks and of their lives, and when, through the combined effect of rifle fire and incendiarism - the latter a cowardly form of tactics for which Sinn Fein Marauders are notorious - the survivors were forced to evacuate their building, they emerged with fixed bayonets, determined to fight to the last. The assassins, however, though in overwhelming numbers, were indisposed apparently to face cold steel, and they decamped, but not until another constable had been shot down.

RAILWAY TRACK TORN UP

Preliminary to the attack the Sinn Feiners took the customary precautions for isolating the town. Telephone and telegraph wires were cut, every road leading to Kilmallock was either torn up or barricaded sufficiently to obstruct all and every form of traffic, while the permanent way in the Great Southern and Western Railway was torn up for a considerable distance, thus impeding means of communication in this direction.

During Thursday night small groups of men were to be observed coming into Kilmallock, undoubtedly in accordance with pre-arranged plan, and this unusual circumstance excited in the minds of observers a certain amount of suspicion. There was, however, no development until about two o'clock, when the inhabitants were disturbed by a series of loud

explosions, followed by volley after volley of gunfire. The attack on the police barracks was mainly directed from Cleary's Hotel, the Provincial Bank and O'Harlish's fruit establishment, all of which buildings had been taken possession of by the raiders, who were all heavily armed, and had in addition a plentiful supply of grenades and petrol and paraffin.

TERRIFIED TOWNSPEOPLE.

The police, on being aroused, immediately took up their appointed stations and returned the fire. For hours the town reverberated with explosions, and the inhabitants were too terrified to leave their houses. Meanwhile, those who had been evicted by the assassins had fortunately procured shelter with neighbours. Volley after volley was directed against the barrack buildings and the police, with perfect fire control, emptied their rifles in the direction of where their assailants were securely hidden.

At a later stage, and still under cover of darkness, a large number of heavy weights were hurled on to the roof of the barracks. The object of this became apparent, for when a number of holes had been made bombs of large and small calibre were thrown into the apertures, and later bottles containing petrol and paraffin followed. By some means the assassins contrived to secure ignition of the roof, which was soon a seething mass of flames. Untenable from the outset, the position of the little garrison was not extremely parlous. The flames spread with alarming rapidity, and when the roof commenced to fall in the police who were stationed in the upper portion of the premises were compelled to beat a retreat to the ground floor.

"NO SURRENDER"

The garrison was several times called upon to surrender, but they resolutely refused, preferring to gallantly fight on in the hope of assistance reaching them. Their hopeless position was pointed out to them, but the only response was a more intense rifle fire. The flames were gradually creeping on the heroic constabulary, who then sustained their first casualty. Sergeant Keane, the senior officer present, fell a victim to a bomb, and a few minutes later Constable Morton was mortally wounded. The depleted band, with Sergt. O'Sullivan now in command, fought on valiantly, but the barracks at length became untenable. After firing a few withering volleys in the direction of the Sinn Feiners, the gallant constabulary fixed bayonets, and, bloodstained, smoke begrimed, torn and tattered, they charged into the street. A fierce fusilade of shots greeted their appearance, and Constable Hoey was shot in the back, dropping to the ground seriously wounded. The majority of the Sinn Feiners doubtless under the impression that there were no survivors, had by this time stealthily crept away, and the few who remained to gloat over their devilish work, at the sight of the bayonets fled precipitately.

1,000 SPENT CARTRIDGES IN A HOUSE.

The street in which the five hour battle was waged presented an awesome spectacle. There was scarcely a whole

window pane left in any of the buildings, the walls of which were chipped in such a manner as to bear eloquent testimony to the fierceness of the firing. In one of the houses forcibly occupied by the Sinn Feiners, over a thousand expended cartridges were found. Later the remains of the murdered police officers were recovered from the ruins of the barracks, but in such a charred condition as to render identification impossible.

District Inspector Egan arrived in the town later with police reinforcements. The remains of Sergeant Keane and Constable Morton were found on the ground floor, and beside one of the bodies was discovered Rosary beads.

Sergeant Keane was aged about 50, and had 30 years' service. He leaves a wife and a large family. Only the previous day he had been transferred from the Dublin Depot to Kilmallock.

Constable Morton is stated to be a native of Thurles, was aged 48, and leaves a wife and seven children. He had 30 years' service and was to have retired from the force next month. His bereaved little ones were to be seen yesterday crying bitterly outside the barracks.

Constable Hoey had only been a week in Kilmallock, and he is not expected to recover.

All the survivors sustained injuries of a more or less serious nature, mainly by reason of falling masonry. Sergeant Sullivan had a most miraculous escape. He was struck by a bullet in the left breast, but a pocket book diverted its course and saved his life.

One of the attackers is stated to have been killed.

BANK MANAGER'S STORY

Mr. Cyril C. Andrews, manager of the Provincial Bank, formerly an accountant in Ballyshannon and previously in Cavan, gives a thrilling story of the occurrence:

"I was aroused", he said, "about 2.40 by two men, armed with revolvers and carrying flashlights, who appeared mysteriously in my bedroom and ordered me immediately to vacate the premises. I asked them not to unduly alarm my wife and they assured me that they would not do so. My wife and myself and our children were then allowed to dress and conducted under an armed guard by the back of the premises through the Fair Green to the Lyons' Hotel.

"On our way out we had to scale a garden wall. Before leaving I asked the raiders to save the bank property, so far as they could, and they promised to do so, and were all the time most courteous to my wife and myself.

"Arrived at Lyons' Hotel, we were told to remain there until the firing had ceased. A guard remained outside the hotel, while the attack was in progress, and by their orders windows were closed and lights put out".

"Sergeant O'Sullivan, who was in charge at Kilmallock garrison on the night of the attack, was immediately promoted to the rank of District Inspector of the R.I.C. in recognition of his defence of the barracks. He was subsequently shot dead in Listowel, Co. Kerry".

Shortly after the Kilmallock fight, a flying column was organised in East Limerick. This was the first active service unit formed in Ireland and it proved so effective that the idea was adopted in every brigade area throughout the country. I joined the column shortly after its formation. At that time it was 30 or 40 strong, all armed with rifles. The column was under the command of Donnchadh Hannigan. Guard duties at the time, while resting, were very heavy as we usually provided our own guard.

In November 1920, I got instructions to return to Hospital and arrest a National School teacher named Michael O'Meara against whom there was very strong evidence that he was giving information to British forces. At the time there was a strong garrison of R.I.C. and military in Hospital. O'Meara lived in the town and we had to take good precautions so as to be able to enter the town without attracting attention. I dressed up as a woman of the tinker class complete with shawl which covered a Peter the Painter automatic with which I was armed. My confederate, Jim O'Brien, dressed in ragged clothes. On receipt of information that O'Meara was at home, we proceeded to his house where we found the front door open. We quickly ascended the stairs. O'Meara, who was in bed, when he heard the noise on the stairs, attempted to block his door with a dressing table. We pushed in the door and ordered him to get dressed quickly. He was very slow about getting dressed and, realising the necessity for getting him out of the town quickly, we pushed him out, dressed only in his trousers. We took him to O'Neill's of Ballinacurra, where we got him dressed and, later handed him over to Tom Keogh, O/C. of Herbertstown Company.

O'Meara was held a prisoner in that area for about two months before being tried by courtmartial, as there was danger of witnesses who were to give evidence being followed by Crown forces. He was eventually tried, found guilty and executed.

I returned to the column after arresting O'Meara and, shortly afterwards, a number of us was sent home to rest for Christmas. During that time two of our men, Thomas Murphy and Davvy Tobin, were surrounded in a house and after a fight were fatally wounded. We mobilised again on 2nd or 3rd January 1921. During that month a number of ambushes were planned but on each occasion we failed to make contact with the British forces.

The next engagement I took part in was an ambush of two lorry loads of British forces on 3rd February 1921. We had information that a number of lorries with British forces aboard passed on certain dates along a road from Pallas to Fedamore and Caherconlish with pay for the personnel stationed there. In this action we joined forces with the Mid-Limerick Brigade. Our O/C., D. Hannigan, took charge of the combined units. We had a long march across country beforehand. The situation and plan was then explained to us which was as follows:- A convoy of British forces was expected to move out from Pallas to Fedamore on that day. It was decided to allow the convoy, if it moved out from Pallas, to pass through to Fedamore and attack it on the return journey. This would give us the advantage of obtaining knowledge of the enemy strength. The positions for each section of the column were already selected and each man got his instructions as to his position and action when there. The positions were not to be occupied until the British forces passed on the outward journey. In the event of a convoy not passing that day, the positions could be occupied at a later date.

9.

Two lorry loads of British forces passed through early in the day - I would say about midday. We took up our positions, quietly, as detailed. We had not very long to wait until the return of the lorries was signalled. At the Pallas end of the ambush positions the road forked sharply, right and left. Here, farm carts were in readiness to block the roads, but kept out of view. On receipt of the signal that the enemy was approaching the carts were wheeled out blocking both roads. When fire was opened on the first lorry as the driver came up to the road fork, he attempted to turn left, finding his lorry blocked, he suddenly swerved on to the road on the right but crashed into the road block there. The driver, who was the District Inspector, managed to jump clear, followed by another R.I.C. man who was in the front of the lorry along with him; both were in civilian clothes and made good their escape. The D.I. concealed himself in some hay at a farmhouse some distance from the scene of the ambush. The three men in the front lorry were shot dead almost instantly. Of eight men in the second lorry, six were shot dead or seriously wounded by the first volley from our positions. Two of them, members of the old R.I.C., managed to get into a prone position at the rear wheels of their lorry and kept up fire from that position for a short time. Eventually some of our men moved to a position on the roadside and brought fire to bear on them; in a short time the entire engagement was over. We gathered up the rifles and ammunition and burned the lorries. It was only then that I learned that Liam Hayes had been wounded during the action, the finger and thumb of his left hand were badly shattered necessitating amputation shortly afterwards. John English's farmhouse and two or three other farmhouses in the area were burned down on the following day.

The column then moved to Bulgadin in the Bruff area where Liam Hayes received medical attention. A British patrol passed through the area during our stay there, but our scouts did not

report to us when they noticed that they were moving away.

We then moved to Athea and, on Easter Sunday morning, all the members of the column received Holy Communion. From that on we had neither rest nor sleep as the British forces were aware of our location. The column was billeted in houses extending over a distance of five miles from Whiskey Hall to Teenakilla Cross in the parish of Glin. Scouts guarded against surprise from the hills.

On Easter Monday, while we were resting, some were asleep in bed, an outpost of ours at Whiskey Hall reported the rapid approach of some 60 Black and Tans in Crossley tenders. A scout at once hurried to Danagher's, Wood Lawn, where Sean Finn, D. Hannigan and James Colbert were billeted, to inform them of the presence of the Tans in the vicinity. The movement of the scout did not escape the observation of the Tans, some of whom jumped from the lorries and opened fire on him. The alarmed men rushed from the house, half dressed, only to find themselves partly surrounded by the Tans who at once opened fire on them; in the fight that followed our men were gradually forced back towards the Shannon. My section was billeted some distance from the scene of action, but on receiving notification of what was happening at Wood Lawn, we moved up to the assistance of the party surrounded there. On arrival, we were informed that Sean Finn had been shot dead and that the Tans, on finding the body, took it away and withdrew from Ballyhahill.

The column was then posted in positions around Ballyhahill village which they held until 3 a.m. on the following morning awaiting the return of the British forces. Definite information was received at that time, indirectly from enemy sources, that the British military authorities had ordered a concentration of troops from Limerick and Tralee into the Athea-Ballyhahill

area, having the capture of the column for their objective.

On receipt of the information a hurried conference was held and it was decided to withdraw the column in the direction of Galtee Mountains to the Kilfinnan and Ballylanders area. After about eight or nine days we were receiving information about an enemy column operating in the area. Our column spent three days lying in ambush but failed to contact. The combined column was divided up and billeted in various houses in the area, while an effort was made to get information of or make contact with the enemy.

On 1st May 1921, the Western column occupied the old Churchyard situated on a steep hill, one side of which was overlooking the road along which the enemy cyclist column was expected to pass. At the same time, Sean Carroll was crossing an open field to cross the road to a position marked out for him, directly opposite and beneath the positions occupied by the West Limerick Column. The road led to a crossroads, over 100 yards from the occupied positions and led round a sharp bend. One of the roads was at right angles to the field in which Sean Carroll's men were. Suddenly four lorry loads of British forces, accompanied by an armoured car, swung round the bend at high speed. They immediately opened fire on Carroll and his men who were taken completely by surprise and entirely exposed to enemy fire. Some of the British cars advanced along the road and engaged Carroll and his men front and flank. Three men of the column were killed - Paddy Star, James Horan and Tim Hennessy. Volunteer Casey, whose ammunition was exhausted, was captured, taken immediately to Cork, tried by Drumhead courtmartial and executed next day. Carroll and his men from Mid-Limerick kept up the unequal fight for a long time until, ultimately, the enemy boarded

their vehicles and withdrew. That night the combined columns withdrew to the Lackelly, Kilfrush and Kiltteely areas.

On the following morning a scout brought word to the I.R.A. section at Lakelly, under the command of Dan Allis, that a strong cycling patrol of Black and Tans was in the Emly road. May Moloney volunteered to go for the column O/C. - D. Hannigan and other members of the column, so that they could attack the patrol. She mounted her bicycle and had scarcely rounded the bend in the boreen when she rushed back and shouted: "They are on top of ye". The I.R.A. party, about 12 in number, got over the fence into a haggard and emerged at the far end, where they were immediately observed by the British forces, who opened fire on them at short range. Jim Frahill, Pat Ryan, Bill Riordan and Tom Howard were killed immediately. The sound of the firing attracted further reinforcements of the British forces operating in the area. At the same time some units of the column had moved in to support their surrounded comrades and a pitched battle took place over an extended area. The enemy cycling patrol that surrounded our men in the haggard, in the first instance, had withdrawn when attacked by outside members of our column. In an effort to withdraw unnoticed, they removed their tunics and, leaving their bicycles behind, they escaped from the immediate vicinity of the scene of the first engagement. Men of our column later discovered the bicycles and tunics. They also found the bodies of their dead comrades. We conveyed the bodies to Moloney's of Killcollane where they were wrapped in sheets.

I was instructed to go Davern's of Hospital and procure four coffins. I succeeded in getting the coffins, had them concealed in a load of straw and taken to Killcollane. I handed them over to Ned Keogh, company captain there, who had charge of the arrangements for the burial. The four men were then

13:
10.

buried in a disused cemetery at the back of P.K. Hogan's of Herbertstown.

After this, the column was reduced in strength. It was considered unwise to maintain a column on such a large scale and a number of men, including myself, were instructed to return to our battalion and company areas and there harass the enemy at every opportunity so as to relieve the pressure by British forces on the columns operating in the area. All the time we were in constant touch with the brigade and column commanders.

Together with five or six men armed with rifles, I stayed around Hospital for some time. We then received information that some of the R.I.C. in Emly were in the habit of visiting a shop in the town, named Hanley's, in the early part of the day. We moved quietly into Emly in the early hours of the morning and took over Hanley's place, which was situated in a very commanding position and gave us a good field of fire in the direction of the R.I.C. Barracks. On this occasion, in addition to our rifles, we had a Hotchkiss machine gun, which had been captured in the Mitchelstown area at an earlier date.

We held all callers at Hanley's from early morning until midday, but the R.I.C. did not leave their barracks up to that time. We had scouts and small armed covering parties posted around the town; the telephone wires were also cut. The R.I.C. may have noticed this activity and got suspicious, or else they had information of our presence in the town and thought the place was entirely surrounded. We carried out some sniping attacks in the area afterwards, but only succeeded in wounding one R.I.C. man.

Up to this, I was 1st Lieutenant of the Hospital Company and my appointment as captain was confirmed by the Brigade O/C. about this time, which was early in June 1921. Shortly

afterwards, I received information that two sergeants of the R.I.C. - named Sweeney and Murphy - whom we were anxious to get were in the habit of visiting the house of a Mr. Mitchell, Petty Sessions Clerk in Hospital. As a result of this information, four of us took up positions, two men on each side of the street, in shop doorways convenient to Mitchell's house, on 10th June 1921. After some time in position, one of our men - Michael Murphy - was informed by one of our scouts that a Black and Tan was moving up the street in his direction and was having a look into the shops on his way. When the Black and Tan approached, Murphy walked out from his position and shot him. This action spoiled the chances of having a shot at the two R.I.C. sergeants. Fire was opened on us from the direction of the barracks; we had a small covering party on that side of the town; they opened fire on the R.I.C. and gave us an opportunity to withdraw and make a safe getaway.

This was the last engagement in which I participated prior to the Truce on 11th July 1921.

Signed: S. McLaughlin, Esq.

Date: 7 ¹² / ₅₆

Witness: J. Conway

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1544