

1555

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1555

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1555

Witness

Thomas Reidy,  
Fowna,  
Kinvara,  
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Battalion Signals Officer, 2nd Battalion,  
South-West Galway Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Kinvara Company, 2nd Battalion,  
Galway Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1915-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,555

STATEMENT BY THOMAS REIDY.

Towna, Kinvara, Co. Galway.

I was born in Towna, Kinvara, in September, 1894, and was educated at Kinvara National School until I reached the age of fifteen. There was no Irish or Irish history taught in school at that time. My parents were both Irish speakers. I often heard my mother say that when she was going to school she was punished for speaking Irish.

My father took an active part in the Land League and United Irish League. I remember in my young days that the old men at social gatherings clasped hands and sang Irish songs together. In the winter time dances were held regularly in our townland. Patriotic songs like "Michael Dwyer" and "The Bold Fenian Men" were sung at these gatherings. I heard stories of the Fenians and so became aware of Ireland's struggle for her freedom. In addition, I read all the books on Ireland I could lay my hands on. Amongst the books I read were A.M. Sullivan's "History of Ireland", "The Green Cockade" and "The Forge of Clohogue". One I liked particularly well was "The Irish Chieftain" or "A Struggle for the Crown" by Captain Blake Foster, a patriotic Catholic landlord of Galway City and Ballykale, Kilfenora, Co. Clare. There were only a few copies printed. This book dealt with the Battle of Aughrim and the Siege of Limerick. It gave a very detailed account of the Irish soldiers dividing into two camps after the Treaty of Limerick.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Kinvara in the summer of 1915. I was recruited by Fr. O'Keenan, C.C., Kinvara. The number of Volunteers in Kinvara Company was about forty. John Burke of Cahermore was Company Captain.

There were no Lieutenants at that time. Drilling took place every Sunday. The drill instructors were Eamonn Corbett, afterwards a member of Dáil Éireann, and Patrick Callanan of Killeenseen, nicknamed "The Hare". Liam Mellowes came and drilled the company two or three times. In addition to foot drill, there was close order and extended order drill and route marches. Two members of the R.I.C. stationed at Kinvara followed us wherever we went, whether it was along the public road or across the fields. Sometimes we lost them in the fields and they laughed when they caught up with us. We had no arms and received no instructions in any kind of weapon.

We knew nothing whatever of the coming Rising. We were told by Fr. O'Keenan to go to Confession and Communion for Easter (1916) and to wear our green Volunteer hats which he had given to us. He also regularly distributed copies of the Sinn Féin papers, including "Nationality" and "Scissors and Paste". He gave them to us free of charge. I remember he got a parcel of these papers every week. One thing especially I remember about Fr. O'Keenan is that he always told us not to insult the R.I.C. as he was of opinion that they would change over and join with us when the time came to fight. I remember also that he told us that there was to be a big parade of Volunteers in Gort on St. Patrick's Day, 1916. This parade did not take place. I never heard why.

On Easter Sunday morning more than half the company turned up at Kinvara Church for Mass and Holy Communion in accordance with Fr. O'Keenan's wishes. The remainder of the company did likewise at Doorus where there was a second church in the parish. After Mass I went home for breakfast. I went to the parade of the company that Sunday

evening as usual. The parade took place at Cartron, a quarter of a mile from Kinvara. I do not remember who was drilling the company that evening. I remember we had no arms on the parade. We were dismissed as usual. We knew nothing of the coming Rising. Things were just the same as on any other Sunday evening.

I heard nothing of the Rising in Dublin until the following Wednesday morning. Pádraig Kilkelly, afterwards 1st Lieutenant of Kinvara Company and later a member of Mid Clare Flying Column, then called to my house and told me that there was an insurrection in Dublin and to go at once to Clonasee near Kinvara. When I arrived at Clonasee the majority of the company were assembled there. Fr. O'Meehan was there also. He addressed the company, saying that the Rising had taken place in Dublin, that we also were going into the fight and that probably some of us were going to our deaths. He said that if there was any Volunteer on parade who wished to leave, he could do so and he (Fr. O'Meehan) would think none the less of him for doing so. He repeated: "Let any man who now wants to leave step out of the ranks". None of the men stepped out.

The R.I.C. had evacuated the barrack in Kinvara a day or two before this. They went to Gort and took Pádraig Fahy, an Irish teacher from Ballycahalan, a prisoner with them. Pádraig had come to Kinvara to see Fr. O'Meehan either on the Monday or Tuesday of Easter Week. I think it was Tuesday morning. A man named Morrissey from Athenry and another called O'Dea from Stradbally were with Pádraig. The R.I.C. were hiding in a grove outside Fr. O'Meehan's house. When Pádraig Fahy and his comrades pulled up in a motor car the R.I.C. challenged them and there was a struggle.

I heard afterwards that one of the two men with Pádraig Fahy was taken prisoner and that Pádraig and the other man went to rescue him. In any event, Pádraig was captured and his two companions got away in the car, which the R.I.C. fired at and hit as it left.

Fr. O'Sehan, having addressed us, gave us General Absolution and told us to collect all the arms and ammunition we could in Kinvara and the surrounding district. We then marched into the town of Kinvara and halted at every house we knew contained a shotgun. At each house the owner was asked to give his gun. The majority gave willingly. Some refused and in these cases we took the guns by force. I remember one such case clearly. Bartly Birmingham, then a Justice of the Peace, struck Pádraig Kilkelly, afterwards 1st Lieutenant Kinvara Company of the I.R.A., Michael Kilkelly, a brother of Pádraig, knocked out Birmingham with a blow of his fist and took the gun. Frederick J. Johnson, a hardware merchant in Kinvara, gave us all the guns he had in the shop (five or six) with a big supply of cartridges. He died quite recently. Mr. Johnson was visited by the R.I.C. shortly after. They wanted to know the names of the Volunteers in the town who took the arms. In spite of threats of shooting, he gave no information to them. In all we collected 20 to 25 shotguns in the town.

Captain John Burke then marched us in the direction of Northampton where we expected to find a gun or two in the house of Mr. Brady-Murray. Northampton is about two miles from Kinvara in the direction of Kiltartan. About a quarter of a mile from Kinvara we saw a small party of R.I.C. coming towards us on bicycles. The R.I.C. sighted us about the same time as we sighted them. Captain Burke ordered us to take cover. We did this, some remaining on the road and

some finding cover inside the fence. The R.I.C. opened fire on us with their rifles. We returned the fire, but as we were armed with shotguns our fire was not effective as the R.I.C. were not within range. However, after firing a few rounds at us they jumped on their bicycles and rode off in the direction of Gort.

We returned to Kinvara, where we collected some food which we brought to a disused house outside the town and cooked a meal. After the meal Captain Burke gave the order to 'fall in'. He told us we were going to march to Moyode Castle to join the other Galway Volunteers who were mobilised there under Liam Mellowes. When we had marched about three miles we met a dispatch rider with a dispatch from Mellowes instructing us to return to Kinvara and await further orders. We returned to the disused house outside the town and that night Captain Burke had a consultation with Fr. O'Meehan, who advised him to disband the Volunteers but to hold our guns and be ready for another mobilisation at short notice. No further orders came. On Saturday evening we heard that the Galway Volunteers under Mellowes had disbanded and we dumped our guns.

The following Wednesday, 3rd May, a party of between 30 and 40 R.I.C. men under a District Inspector came to Kinvara and the surrounding villages and raided for the Volunteers. About 20 Volunteers who had moved out to take part in the Rising were arrested. The R.I.C. had the names of all the Volunteers who had mobilised for the Rising. My brother, John, and I got word about the raids and left the house before the R.I.C. arrived. We evaded being arrested that day and went 'on the run'.

Fr. O'Keenan was between 30 and 40 years old at the time. He was a native of the parish of Clarenbridge. He was a fine man, 6 feet high. He used to come to Hynes of Dungora to teach an Irish class with Pádraig Fahy. He also taught First Aid to the Volunteers at Hynes. He provided us with all the national papers of that time and, generally, was an inspiration to us by his addresses, lectures etc.

A day or two after the 3rd May the R.I.C. came back to Kinvara and searched Fr. O'Keenan's house with the intention of arresting him, but he was not there. They then went to the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, Kinvara, and searched the convent. They went behind the High Altar in the convent chapel and even went into the nuns' cells looking for him and Liam Malloes. The following Sunday the Parish Priest, Fr. Thomas Burke, who was very ill at the time, got out of his sick bed to celebrate second Mass in Kinvara Parish Church and condemned in very strong language the action of the R.I.C. in raiding the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy.

My brother and I continued to evade arrest until the end of June by sleeping in an improvised camp - a cart covered with a tarpaulin. We used hay for a bed and blankets which we had brought from our home to cover us.

In the meantime several residents of Kinvarawere questioned by the R.I.C. concerning the activities of the Volunteers who had mobilised for the Rising. Most people refused to give any information or answer questions in spite of the threats made by the R.I.C. However, eight persons gave statements to them. These people were taken to Dublin by the R.I.C. I heard that it was for the purpose of giving evidence against the members of the company who had been arrested and removed to Dublin. When the

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**ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8**

**Form to be completed and inserted in the original record**

**in place of each part abstracted**

(i) Reference number of the separate cover under which the abstracted part has been filed: WS 1555/A

(ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 1.

(iii) The date of each such document: 19/11/56

(iv) The description of each document:  
WS 1555 Wilson, Michael Thomas Reidy p. 7  
name of person

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

(v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:

**(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.**

( These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

J. Moloney  
Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.



witnesses arrived in Dublin the arrested men of the company had already been deported to England. These people definitely assisted the R.I.C. The principal amongst them was \_\_\_\_\_ who was definitely hostile towards us. The others were young boys who were fooled by the R.I.C. and, for that reason, I would not mention their names. Most of them were on our side afterwards.

About the end of June a party of R.I.C. surrounded our camp in the early hours of the morning while we were asleep. They arrested me but did not take my brother. I was taken to Kinvara R.I.C. barrack and held prisoner for only one day, as I suppose the R.I.C. thought that things had calmed down and some of the local Volunteers who were captured in the general round-up had already been released.

There was nothing eventful after that until the East Clare by-election in 1917. Fr. O'Meehan got a big number of people, including a number of the Volunteers, and a band to go to Ballyvaughan to the Sinn Féin election meeting there. All the available side-cars in the combined parishes of Kinvara and Dooras were used as a means of transport. Hundreds of people, young and old, went to support de Valera's candidature. The young men of the parish joined with the Claremen and marched in military formation through the streets of Ballyvaughan. Our company captain, John Burke, was arrested shortly afterwards and got a sentence of eighteen months for being in charge of the parade. James Lynch of Clarenbridge, now an ex Sergeant of the Gárda Síochána, also got a term in jail. During his term of imprisonment John Burke was on hunger-strike with Tom Ashe, who died as a result of the attempts that were made by the prison authorities to forcibly feed him.

I rejoined the Volunteers when the company was reorganised sometime in 1917. I can't remember the month. It was known as Kinvara Company, 2nd Battalion, Galway Brigade. There were about 20 men in the company. The officers were: John Burke, Capt.; Patrick Kilkelly, 1st Lieut.; and William Quinn, 2nd Lieutenant.

There was no anti-recruiting campaign in our area as there was no recruiting campaign in it. I remember proclamations being posted up forbidding Irish boys to emigrate at that time, the idea being to keep them at home to join in the fight.

In 1918, when the British Government threatened to impose conscription in Ireland, the membership of the company jumped from 20 to about 60, but when the conscription was defeated those who had joined up during that period left again. I remember some <sup>of</sup> these advocated passive resistance, but Fr. O'Meehan advocated the use of every type of weapon, including pitchforks.

After the establishment of An Dáil Éireann in 1919, Sinn Féin Courts, as they were called, were established. Pádraig Fahy, Pádraig Kilkelly and John Fahy were appointed justices for our area. I acted as Court Clerk. There were no regular sittings of the court. It only assembled when there were cases to be heard. The cases dealt with were mostly of a minor nature, such as drunkenness, disorder of conduct, trespass etc. There was no serious crime in the district. The decisions of the court were always obeyed and the fines imposed were duly paid.

In 1919 I collected for the Dáil Éireann Loan in the villages of the parish of Dooras. Other Volunteers collected in the parish of Kinvara. The loan was well

supported in both parishes. I remember getting at least five subscriptions of £2 each from small farmers. The money, with interest, was later repaid to all subscribers.

I remember, probably it was the end of March, 1919, that John Whrisky, a clerk of the Petty Sessions, collected the money due for dog licences (2/6d per dog) in the Courthouse, Kinvara. I, with five or six others, waited near Dungora Castle to hold him up on his way home to Ardrahan and take all the books and the money he had collected. We waited all day, but after meeting a friend of his he went home a by-road. Those with me were Volunteer Michael Hynes, Volunteer Joe Kilkelly, Volunteer Seamus Davenport and one or two others whose names I cannot remember. The money for dog licences was collected on the last Wednesday in March every year.

When Dáil Éireann imposed a boycott on Belfast goods, I, with other Volunteers, visited the shops in Kinvara to see that no Belfast goods were stocked and to warn the shopkeepers not to purchase any such goods.

Early in 1920 I was appointed Company Adjutant. We continued to train and occasionally we were visited by officers of the Battalion Staff.

When the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks in Kinvara we decided to destroy it so as to prevent it from being re-occupied. As it was situated in a terrace it was not possible to set it on fire owing to the danger of the whole terrace being burned down, so we removed all the slates from the roof, broke the doors, windows and stairs. We removed the steel shutters from the windows and dumped them.

Some time later we heard that the R.I.C. were going to occupy the Courthouse, so we did the same with it and burned all the books and records that were found in it.

We also carried out a general raid for arms in the company area. We got only a few shotguns, as practically all the arms had been collected during Easter Week, 1916.

Company activity increased greatly from the autumn of 1920 onwards. We harassed the enemy in every way possible. We constantly blocked the roads and cut the telegraph wires. On one night we cut down six telegraph poles between Kinvara and Ardrahan.

On one occasion, acting on instructions from the Battalion H.Q., we held up the mail car and captured the mails, which we then censored. We found nothing except copies of the "Hue and Cry" which were addressed to the R.I.C. at Lisdoonvarna. These we sent to the battalion and the mails were returned to the post office.

During this period we prepared six ambush positions which we occupied and remained in position all day, but no enemy forces came. The positions were selected on routes which we expected the enemy would travel. One of these positions was near the village of Crushoa; another was on the Kinvara-Ardrahan road and others at Dungora, Kinvara, Ballyclara and Drimharsna. The latter position was outside our company area.

The officers at the truce were:

John Burke - Capt.  
John Glynn - 1st Lieut.  
Wm. Quinn - 2nd Lieut.  
Thos. Reidy (myself) - Adjt.  
Michael Hanlon - Q/H.

## Other members of the company were:

Peter Burke, brother of the Company Capt.

John Callinan

John Dealy

Patk. Hanberry

Michael Hynes )  
 Willie Hynes ) brothers

Pádraig Kilkelly )  
 Michael " ) brothers  
 Joe " )

James Whelan

John Whelan

Martin Hynes

Thos. Reidy )  
 John " ) Brothers

Jack Tobin

James Picker

Paddy Burke )  
 Richard Burke ) brothers

Thomas Kilkelly

John Burke

John McInerney

John Kilkelly

Michael Hanlon

Patrick Quinn

Stephen Leech

David Hanlon

Patrick Burke.

Immediately after the Truce I was appointed Battalion Signal Officer with the rank of Staff Lieutenant. I underwent a course of training for eleven days at an officers' training camp at Crusheen, Co. Clare. I afterwards spent nine weeks attending signal courses. I attended a three weeks' course at each of the following three camps: Kilbocanty, Kiltortan and Dorrybrien. Having completed this course, I then gave instructions to the signal section in every company in the battalion.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

(Investigator)

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