

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1581

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1581.

Witness

Seán D. MacLochlainn,
County Manager,
Lifford,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Adjt., 4th (Donegal) Bgde.

Subject.

Activities of Ballybofey Coy.,
I.Vols., Co. Donegal, and
prison experiences
1918 - 21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2893.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY: 1873-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1873-21

No. W.S. 1.581

STATEMENT BY SEÁN D. MacLOCHLAINN,

County Manager, Lifford, Co. Donegal.

I was born at Carowmeena, Moville, Co. Donegal, on the 29th June, 1897. I received my primary education at the local national school and later attended secondary school at the Diocesan Seminary, Derry.

I obtained a position and was posted to the Hibernian Bank, Granard, Co. Longford, in August, 1913, where I served until October, 1917, when I was transferred to Monasterevan, Co. Kildare.

Seán Cawley and Paul Cusack organised a Sinn Féin Club in Granard after their release from Frongoch prison. They were arrested and interned for a period after the 1916 Rebellion. I joined the club on its formation. I also joined the Irish Volunteer Company organised by Cawley and Cusack at that time.

On my transfer to Monasterevan I got in touch with men such as Jim Behan, George Lawlor - now Garda Superintendent - Fintan Brennan, Joe Reid ^{P. Martin} all members of the local Sinn Féin Club. I found that there was no Volunteer unit organised, and with the assistance of the men mentioned I proceeded to organise a company. Probably by reason of my previous experience in Volunteer work, I was appointed captain of the company.

In 1918 preparations for the general election kept us busy. The conscription scare was responsible for increasing the strength of the company, which numbered about 200 at its peak. We marched to several anti-

conscription meetings held in towns within a ten mile radius of Monasterevan.

In 1918 companies were organised into battalions and brigades. Our Battalion O/C was Eamon Malone, and Battalion Headquarters was in Athy, where I often cycled to staff meetings. Seán O'Farrell was O/C of the brigade, with headquarters at Carlow.

Raids for arms were carried out during this period. In nearly all cases they were handed over quietly. Some owners of shotguns reported the loss to the R.I.C. so as to save explanations at a later date.

Eamon Moran, Ballysax, O/C of the adjoining ~~battalion~~, promised us four or five service rifles, ^{I WAS} and instructed ~~me~~ to arrange for their collection and transfer to my company area. In company with another Volunteer, I travelled by pony and trap on a Sunday afternoon to collect them. Our shortest route brought us through the Curragh Camp, chief training centre of the British army in Ireland. We collected the rifles and returned by the same route without incident.

At this period all our spare time was devoted to training. Our company being the nearest to the Curragh Camp, our main plan, in the event of hostilities breaking out, was to cut the railway lines and destroy bridges, so as to contain the British forces in the Curragh Camp for the longest possible period. Training, for the most part, was based on this type of work.

I had an experience at a Battalion Staff meeting in Athy which impressed me and, in fact, all present, with the importance in the careful handling of weapons.

While members of the staff were sitting around a table before the meeting commenced, an officer was about to pass a revolver across the table when he accidentally discharged it. The man sitting nearest to me cried out, "I am shot", at the same time clapping his hand over his heart and falling back. We immediately opened his shirt and examined him, but could only find a bruise mark and slight skin abrasion. On further examination, we found that the man, who was a carpenter by trade, had a folding two foot rule in his pocket. On inspection of the rule, we found that the bullet had struck the brass hinge, which appeared to have deflected the bullet upwards, as it was later found embedded in the ceiling directly overhead.

During my stay in Monasterevan, I was constantly under police surveillance, probably on account of my association with the Volunteer movement. When I went for a walk in the evening, I very often noticed a member of the R.I.C. following me at a distance. As a result, I found it necessary to set out in an opposite direction to the one intended when proceeding to a company parade or staff meeting.

In the end of 1918 I was transferred from Monasterevan to Cookstown, Co. Tyrone. Two mornings after my arrival there, my digs were raided by R.I.C. I got a transfer from the Monasterevan Company and contacted some members of the Cookstown Volunteers. At that time there was only the nucleus of a company there. The A.O.H. was very hostile to Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers. There was also a strong and bigoted section of Orangemen in the area, also a number of Ulster Volunteers. All this made it very difficult for the Irish Volunteers to organise or operate around Cookstown. We managed to do some training secretly, and also carried out some raids for arms.

The British secret service got some information about my association with the Irish Volunteers. Some nine or ten months after my arrival in Cookstown, the Ulster Volunteers raided my digs. Fortunately, I was absent at the time, as I would be lucky to get away with a severe beating, or perhaps shot, as these were the tactics adopted by that force.

My bank manager, who was a Protestant, on hearing about the raid and the reasons for it, decided that he would have me transferred at the first opportunity. A vacancy arose in the Hibernian Bank, Ballybofey, and I was immediately notified of my transfer there. As the transfer did not interfere with my status, I was obliged to accept it without demur. In all, I spent one year in Cookstown.

On arrival in Ballybofey, I was attached to the Volunteer company there, then under the command of James McCarron, an ex British army pensioner, who was killed later in an ambush at a place called Trusk outside Ballybofey. The Ballybofey Company was about 40 to 50 strong.

Ernie O'Malley came to the district in 1920 to organise the brigade. I was summoned to a brigade staff meeting under Harry McGowan, who was appointed Brigade O/C, and I was appointed Brigade Adjutant.

Shortly after the appointments were made and the lists of officers sent to G.H.Q. for ratification, word came through that a raid had been carried out on a house in Dublin where Richard (Dick) Mulcahy was staying, that he managed to escape but left behind a nominal roll of officers from various brigades throughout the country. The documents fell into the hands of the British authorities.

Fearing that my name might be on the list captured, I asked the Brigade O/C would it be advisable for me to go 'on the run'. He said "no", he thought I was not suspected and would be the only person in a position to keep the brigade organisation going. As a result, I continued to work in the bank, devoting all my spare time to organising and training the brigade.

In the early morning of the 7th December, 1920, British forces raided McGee's Hotel, where I was staying, and captured me in bed. A number of officers were rounded up and arrested at the same time. James McCarron, Company O/C, Edward McBrearty, who had been appointed O/C of a battalion a short time before the raid, James Dawson, Battalion O/C, Letterkenny, and James McMonagle, Company ~~Company~~, Letterkenny, were amongst the number. We were taken first to Drumbo Castle, then occupied by British forces, and from there to Derry jail. After spending some time there, we were transferred to Ballykinlar Camp.

Passing through Belfast on our way to Ballykinlar, we were violently attacked by an Orange mob. These were mainly shipyard workers and were armed with iron bars, bolts, etc., which they hurled at us, many of the prisoners receiving nasty wounds. I had a scarf knitted in the green, white and gold colours, which I waved from the lorry. This incited the mob to renewed violence.

We were subjected to a rough treatment in Ballykinlar, and on a few occasions the British sentries fired at prisoners in the compound without provocation. On one occasion I was sitting in a hut with a number of fellow prisoners, when suddenly a shot rang out. On going to investigate, we found two prisoners, named Tormey and Sloane,

lying at the back of the hut; both men were dying.

On examination it was discovered that the two men were killed by the same bullet. It passed clean through the body of one man and struck the man behind him.

On another occasion a number of prisoners were lined up near the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp. We took up that position to wave good-bye to some men who were being released. The sentry ordered us to stand back. We refused to move. He raised his rifle and took aim at me. I stood fast, thinking he was trying to frighten me. The sentry moved his aim slightly and fired. My comrade dropped dead beside me. He was Tadhg Barry from Cork City. He was a member of Cork Corporation. All the members of the Corporation were arrested at an earlier date. Some were later released. Barry was one of the members detained.

Reports reaching the camp went to show that the Volunteers had become inactive in the Ballybofey area after the arrest of the officers there. After consultation it was decided that one officer from the area would apply for his release so as to get some activity going again. It was decided that James McCarron would be the most likely man to be released on application. An application for release entailed giving an undertaking to the British authorities by the person concerned that he would not engage in subversive activities against British rule. He would also be obliged to report to the police in his area every 24 hours. Applications for release required recommendation and the sanction of our Camp Commandant, and was only resorted to in exceptional circumstances.

McCarron gave the required undertaking, returned to Ballybofey, formed a small column and went 'on the run' immediately. He got information that some British officers were in the habit of fishing on Trusk Lake outside Ballybofey. The officers usually took a guard of three or four men, who acted as scouts around the lake while they were fishing, and took a light truck from Drumboeto convey them there. Acting on this information, McCarron decided to ambush the party. On the morning of the 2nd June, 1921, he blocked the narrow road leading to the lake and occupied an ambush position close by. The blocking of the road was a bad tactical error. On that morning, one officer, accompanied by three men as escort, and a driver, arrived by truck. On sighting the road block, the officer immediately concluded that an attack on his party was contemplated. With his escort, he dismounted from the truck, instructed the driver to remain where he was and keep his engine running. Making use of available cover, the officer and his men worked their way to a position which brought them in the rear of McCarron and his men in the ambush position. The British forces opened fire and McCarron was wounded. A Volunteer named Paddy McAteer rushed to his aid and was endeavouring to drag him to cover when another burst of fire from the British fatally wounded McCarron. McAteer was also wounded but managed to crawl out of the line of fire.

The British party then returned to their truck and the driver was sent back to Drumboe for reinforcements. In the interval, the Volunteers had an opportunity to withdraw from the position, taking their wounded comrade, McAteer, with them.

I was released from Ballykinlar in December, 1921, and returned to Ballybofey. I was anxious to find out what was the position with reference to my future employment in the bank. Not receiving any definite information, I set out for home to procure some clothes, as by that time I was in ~~my~~ rags. My clothes were completely worn out during the twelve months in Ballykinlar. After a few weeks at home, I got instructions to return to Ballybofey and take up my job in the bank. I was later informed that the townspeople of Ballybofey got up a memorial to have me returned to the town.

Signed: *[Signature]*Date: 16.2.27Witness: *James Conway*

(Investigator).

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