

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,614

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1614.

Witness

Timothy Hennessy,
Danesfort,
Co. Kilkenny.

Identity.

Battalion Commandant.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer Activities,
Kilkenny Brigade,
1917 - 21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2938.

Form B S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1614

STATEMENT BY MR. TIMOTHY HENNESSY,
DANESFORT, CO. KILKENNY.

I was born in the year of 1891 at Threecastles, Co. Kilkenny, and I was educated at the local national school there. My father, who was a farmer, took a keen interest in national affairs, and in addition to the usual weekly papers, periodicals, such as, "The Irish Peasant" and "The Nation", were read in our home. The family also took an active interest in the Gaelic Athletic Association, and in the early years of the present century, my eldest brother, Edward, captained the Threecastles hurling team to win the County Kilkenny hurling championship, and then went on to captain the county team in the All Ireland championship series.

In the year of 1904, I was apprenticed to the grocery, wine and spirit business in the retail and wholesale establishment of Messrs. M.L. Potter & Co., High Street, Kilkenny. After a few years there, I became interested in the Irish industrial revival movement and also in the promotion of Gaelic games in Kilkenny city. This brought me into contact with such men as the late Alderman James Nowlan, then President of the G.A.A., the late Patrick Corcoran and the late Peter De Loughry. Although I was not then aware of it, all these men were active members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was of some use to them

in getting the man of their choice elected as Chairman of the County Committee of the G.A.A., and later on, Peter de Loughry, asked me to join the I.R.B. I was hesitant to do so at first, but subsequently agreed and Peter then swore me in.

On the 5th March, 1914, I attended a meeting in the City Hall, Kilkenny, at which the Volunteer movement in the city and county was launched. The speakers included Sir Roger Casement and Thomas McDonagh. The latter was well known in Kilkenny, for he had been for some time on the teaching staff in St. Kieran's college. At the close of the meeting, I was one of hundreds of young men, and some not so young, who handed in their names to become members and who were there and then enrolled in the new movement, the Irish National Volunteers.

I attended the parades and exercises which were held on Sundays and on summer evenings. There was plenty of enthusiasm at first, and good progress was made with military training. A supply of obsolete Italian rifles, for which there was no ammunition, was received from Volunteer Headquarters in Dublin. They served a purpose by being used for musketry drill, but otherwise they were treated as a bit of a joke and, on account of their long barrels, they were nicknamed "gas pipes".

Following the outbreak of the 1914-1918 Great War came the split in the Volunteer ranks. In Kilkenny the Redmondite element made a determined effort to get control of the Volunteers. They were opposed by the I.R.B. men, or perhaps I should say, by Peter de Loughry,,

Pat Corcoran and Ned Comerford, representing the I.R.B. circle. The matter came to a head early in September, 1914, when both sides addressed a parade of the Volunteers in the Market Place. The issue was clear enough, whether the Volunteers would become National Volunteers and assist England in the Great War in accordance with John E. Redmond's pledge to the British Government, or whether we would take our stand as Irish Volunteers with Eoin McNeill and Patrick Pearse whose policy was that the Volunteers were formed to serve Ireland and not England. I was one of a minority of about thirty who favoured the latter policy and who, at de Loughry's request, fell in under Thomas Treacy and marched from the Market Place to a hall in St. Kieran Street, then called King Street. Thus the first Irish Volunteer company in Kilkenny was formed, and Tom Treacy was elected its first Captain.

Shortly afterwards, I assisted in establishing a company in my native Threecastles. One of my brothers, Tom, was appointed Captain of this company, and he held that rank until his death in February, 1921, under circumstances to which I will refer later on in this statement. Other Irish Volunteer units were organised about the same time in Clara and in Castlecomer. As there was then no battalion or brigade organisation, a committee of I.R.B. men, comprised of Peter de Loughry, Pat Corcoran, Ned Comerford and Alderman James Nowlan controlled the Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny city and county, and it was through this committee that contact was maintained with G.H.Q. in Dublin. Captain Ted Kelly, a Volunteer organiser from G.H.Q., came to Kilkenny and stayed at Stallard's of

Danville. On my half-holidays, I accompanied him to various districts in the county to help him to become familiar with the area.

In the summer of 1915, in company with James Lalor, Laurence de Loughry, Ned Comerford, Martin Kealy and Pierce Brett (all members of the Kilkenny company), I cycled to the Volunteer training camp at Galbally, Co. Limerick. Captain J.J. O'Connell (Ginger) was in charge of the camp, and he was also the chief instructor. The course of training lasted for a week, and a very strenuous week it was.

One day during that course of training, "Ginger" O'Connell detailed Ned Comerford and myself to cycle towards Kilfinane to select a fresh camping ground. We were followed by three R.I.C. men on bicycles. Two of the R.I.C. men were soon left behind, but the third, a much younger man than his two companions, overtook Comerford whose bicycle was not in good shape. Looking back, I saw the R.I.C. man and Comerford in a heated argument, and when I returned to them, the R.I.C. man was demanding from Comerford an account of his movements. Comerford drew a revolver and, in no uncertain words, told the R.I.C. man what he would do with him if he did not depart out of his sight. The policeman mounted his bicycle and cycled back the way he had come. That was the end of the pursuit. We continued on to Kilfinane, and we got the site for the camp.

In September, 1915, my employers bought a business premises in the Stoneyford area - about eight miles from Kilkenny city. I was then twenty-four

years of age, and Mr. Potter asked me to go there and try my hand at building up a business in that area for the firm. In addition to the usual wine, spirit and grocery, the new business also included that of wool and corn merchants. I was to reside on the premises, and I realised that, if a success was to be made of the undertaking, it meant working until 11 p.m. on six nights of the week. After some time, I gave him my consent, and I reported to Peter de Loughry and Pat Corcoran that I was leaving to take up my new job, and that in future on Sundays only could I be of any use to them for Volunteer purposes. At that time, I held no official rank in either the Volunteers or the I.R.B. Pat Corcoran passed some remark to the effect that, if things developed as he hoped they would, Potter's business might not concern me so much in the near future. It was a hint about the coming Rising of Easter, 1916.

On Good Friday of 1916, Jim Lawlor came to Stoneyford and notified me that the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday. He told me to parade at the Volunteer Hall in Kilkenny at twelve noon on Easter Sunday. I sent word to my brother, Tom, to mobilise the Threecastles company for the same time. I attended the mobilisation parade on Easter Sunday. About sixty men were present. The available arms were not sufficient to arm half that number. The chief topic of conversation was the news item in that day's "Sunday Independent" which stated that all Volunteer manoeuvres for the day had been cancelled by order of Eoin McNeill. Pat Corcoran had gone to Dublin, and after some hours the parade was dismissed,

with instructions to mobilise again at 8 p.m. that night. There was still no news on Sunday night, and at a further parade on Monday, we learned that all was off for the present. I returned to Stoneyford, and opened the shop for business as usual on the Tuesday morning.

About a week later, British military, accompanied by R.I.C. men, cordoned off streets in Kilkenny, and general arrests of Volunteer officers and men commenced. Captain J.J. O'Connell (Ginger), who came to take charge of the Kilkenny units during the Rising, was, with Alderman Nowlan, Peter de Loughry and Tom Treacy, one of the first to be arrested. Miss Nellie Hoyne, a typist in our firm in Kilkenny, sent me a note advising me to keep out of Kilkenny for the time being. She told me that my name was on the list for arrest, but that Sergeant Lawlor of the R.I.C., a friendly poor soul, had told the military officer in charge that I had left Kilkenny.

During the summer of 1916, I got in touch with members of the Committee of the National Aid and Prisoners' Dependents' Fund, and, with the assistance of the County Board of the G.A.A., organised hurling tournaments to assist the fund.

Early in 1917, a meeting was held in Kilkenny at which the question of reorganising the Volunteers was discussed. I was asked to organise in some areas in the south of the county. I was handicapped for lack of spare time, but succeeded in organising two companies, one in Kells and the other in Bennettsbridge. Sometime later, Battalion areas

were defined, and the Brigade organisation set up. In the summer of 1918, new companies sprang up, mushroomlike, in all areas. That was during the conscription crisis period. I was detailed to get all the information I could about the officers elected to the newly formed companies, and to pass it on confidentially to the Brigade headquarters. Another of my jobs at that period was to provide accommodation for men on the run and for some important men from other counties, including George Plunkett, Michael Staines and Seán Etchingham, who came into the area. This latter problem was solved for me by Mr. John Pembroke who kindly placed his unoccupied farmhouse at Danesfort at our disposal.

About the same time, I was, in my absence, elected Commandant of the 1st Battalion at a battalion council held in Joe Sweeney's house in Thornback on a Sunday afternoon. I was not notified about the meeting, and had gone to visit my home in Threecastles on that day. My brother, Tom, was at the meeting and, on his return, he told me about the election. He too had been proposed for the post, but declined to go forward. He said that he had told the meeting that, as I was living eight miles outside the battalion area, I would be unable to act or to give the battalion the attention it required, but, despite his protests, I had been elected. On my way back to Stoneyford, I called on Pat Corcoran in Kilkenny, and pleaded with him to have a more suitable man, one living in the area, appointed, and pointed out the advantages of having the battalion officers residing in the city. A Mr. Seumas Cullen, who was then a drapery assistant in The Monster House,

had been elected Vice Commandant, and it was decided that he should act for me, but Corcoran insisted that, for I.R.B. reasons, I should hold the Commandant's rank. In these circumstances, I agreed without further criticism or complaint. The other battalion officers were Vincent Dardis, Adjutant, and Thomas Neary, Quartermaster. The battalion comprised six companies which, with their company O/C's, were as follows:-

- A. Company - Kilkenny - William Oakes.
- B. Company - Kilkenny - Kiernan Tobin, and
later Michael Phelan.
- C. Company - Threecastles - Thomas Hennessy, and
later William Hennessy.
- D. Company - Outrath - Thomas Nolan, later
Joseph Rice, and later
still, Thomas Kearney.
- E. Company - Ballycallen - Thomas Minogue.
- F. Company - Dunmore - Patrick Gregg.

During 1919, activities were confined, as far as I can recollect, mainly to organisation work. Lines of communication were arranged, statistics of enemy strength were prepared, and the oath was administered to the Volunteers. The usual brigade and battalion council meetings were held at regular intervals.

In January, 1920, at a Brigade council meeting, the Brigade O/C, Thomas Treacy, stated that he had received instructions from the Chief of Staff (Dick Mulcahy) to capture an R.I.C. barracks. The

battalion officers present at the meeting were instructed to report as early as possible on the barracks in their areas, with this object in view. I inspected two, those at Cuffsgrange and at Freshford. I was keen on the latter, for my brother, Tom, in whose area it was situated, told me that in his opinion the sergeant in charge of the barracks was not of the type likely to offer much resistance. On the Monday following my inspection, the garrison there were, however, reinforced by several extra policemen. Tullaroan barracks was selected by the Brigade Staff for the attack, and final plans were made, but this operation had to be called off at short notice as the the Brigade Vice Commandant received information that the military authorities in Kilkenny were aware of our intention.

A few days later, William Farrell, Captain of the Hugginstown company, called on me, and said that he believed Hugginstown barracks could be taken by attack. It was garrisoned by a sergeant and five constables. Farrell was an intelligent man, and as I gathered from his conversation that he had given the matter much consideration, I told him to ^{go} at once to Kilkenny and lay his plans before the Brigade officers. Subsequently, I attended a meeting in the Gaelic League hall in Kilkenny at which arrangements to attack the barracks were made, and a date and time fixed. The date fixed for the attack was Monday night, March 8th, 1920. On Sunday evening, March 7th, a meeting to make final arrangements was held, following a hurling match in Thomastown. The question of procuring a motor car and having it available, in the event of Volunteer casualties, was discussed. I considered that we could get a car owned by a doctor living at Rockview,

Stoneyford. The doctor's driver, a Mr. John O'Dwyer, was a Volunteer and could be relied upon. The only difficulty was that the doctor might be absent on a sick call when I would call to commandeer the car. When I spoke to O'Dwyer about it, he was only too anxious to help, but pointed out that the doctor did not always take him with him. He kept in touch with me on the Monday, and on Monday night, when we went to the doctor's residence, we learned that he had gone in the car to Ballyhale. As we cycled towards Hugginstown, we met the doctor returning. We followed him back, and when he entered his house, we took possession of the car and drove to the rendezvous at Ballyglass crossroads.

Leaving the car there, we crossed the fields towards Hugginstown, and, as we did so, the attack on the barracks commenced. We took cover until the R.I.C. men surrendered about half an hour later. We then drove the car into the village, and found that there had been no I.R.A. casualties. Spiritual and medical aid had already been summoned for one of the R.I.C. men who was dying from wounds received during the attack. We brought the car back to Rockview and left it in its garage.

The rifles, grenades and ammunition captured at Hugginstown were taken to a dump which I had previously arranged, in a disused factory at Ennisnag, near Stoneyford. Within a week, local people talking amongst themselves were heard to say that the captured arms were in the Stoneyford area, so I arranged with Jim Lalor to have them removed to a safer area. Late one night, we brought them on bicycles to the Bennettsbridge road where Martin Kealy and two other officers of the 4th Battalion were waiting to receive them and to take them to Clara.

Following the capture of Hugginstown barracks, the R.I.C. garrisons were withdrawn from, amongst other places, Bennettsbridge and Stoneyford. On Easter Saturday night of 1920, in compliance with the general order from G.H.Q., the local companies in Bennettsbridge and Stoneyford destroyed both barracks by fire and demolished the courthouse in Stoneyford. To make matters clear, I might mention that these activities together with some others, such as, the arrest and trial of men charged with robbery, took place in the area in which I lived and not in the area of the battalion of which I had been appointed Commandant. It facilitated the brigade headquarters to pass on orders for the Stoneyford area to me and to deal direct with Cullen or some of the other 1st battalion officer in Kilkenny city, where the brigade officers also lived.

Due perhaps to the arrests of the Brigade O/C and Vice O/C about April or May of 1920, there was a lull in activities for a period. I cannot recall recall anything of particular note during that summer. In the early autumn, the Auxiliaries occupied Woodstock House, Innistogue, and soon made the premises where I worked and resided a target for their nightly raids. My employer, Mr. Potter, got information that the premises might be burned down by the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans at any time, and he asked me to meet him at his private residence. He told me that he could not get an insurance company to cover the place against burning. He pleaded with me to remain there, as he felt that my presence would be a safeguard, at least, against robbery, and I agreed.

It was, I think, about September, 1920, that Tom Tracey, the Brigade O/C, (back home from prison after a hunger strike), Jim Roughan, Commandant of the 7th (Callan) Battalion, and I travelled to Dublin to report to G.H.Q. Our instructions were to report at No. 7 Parnell Square, but when we got there, the place was cordoned off by British military. We stayed about Dublin for a few days, but failed to get in touch with any of the G.H.Q. officers. Then, accidentally, whilst walking along a street, we met Dick McKee, O/C of the Dublin Brigade. The recognition was mutual, for we had met before when he came to Kilkenny and attended a brigade council meeting at Nolan's of Outrath. McKee was apparently au fait with our mission to Dublin, for he gave a verbal message to Treacy and then advised us to be very careful on our way back, saying he himself was at that moment being watched by spotters. While I am not sure, I always thought it was in connection with the Auxiliaries in Woodstock that G.H.Q. required us in Dublin on that occasion.

A few nights after my return from Dublin, I had another visit from the Auxiliaries. I opened the door to them, with only my trousers on, and immediately I did so, one of them, a Major Bruce, struck me in the face with the butt of a Colt revolver. Then followed a rather merciless beating. I was knocked kicking for several yards. Outside the shop, I was put standing, with my hands up, while Bruce assembled a drum-head court martial. I was too stupefied from the beating to follow exactly what they were charging me with, but there were references to an I.R.A. murder gang and

Bruce's voice intervening frequently, "Hennessy here is one of them!" and "Hennessy here is a member!". I am perfectly satisfied that he intended to shoot me that night, but the proceedings were, despite Bruce's objections, interrupted by another Auxiliary officer, a Major Alexander. Alexander sent Bruce to search the shop, and the others to search the premises at the rear. He took me upstairs to a sittingroom, and, sitting down at a table, with his notebook out, he said, "Hennessy, I want to ask you three questions! What is a 'Shinner'? Are you a Shinner? And, if so, to what extent are you a Shinner?" I replied by saying that I presumed that he fought in the Great War and, if so, that he must be aware of who won the war for the Allies. He said, "You mean Wilson, the American bloke?" "Yes", I said, "and President Wilson laid down fourteen points for world peace. One of these points was the right of nations to self-determination, to determine the form of government under which they would live. Sinn Féin stands for that right in this country, and, to that extent, I am a Sinn Féiner". As I spoke, the blood dripped from my face on to his notebook. Standing up from the table, he remarked, "I see, Hennessy! What a messy job this is, for a soldier, to be put on!" He walked around the room for a while and, before leaving, said, "There is only one thing that I can do, ^{to do} ~~that~~ that is to give you some advice. Should anything happen around here, get away from this place as quick as you can, and as far as you can! That man, Bruce, wants to shoot you, and he would do it, for the sport it would give him!" Bidding me good-night, he left, taking the other Auxiliaries with him.

Major Bruce achieved notoriety whilst in Woodstock. Amongst his misdeeds were the robbery of cash and goods from Kells (Co. Kilkenny) creamery and he and a party of Auxiliaries seized the mails in Kilkenny Post Office, brought them to Woodstock, and took possession of the money which they contained. The latter job was carried out at night, and, to give it the appearance of an I.R.A. raid on mails, the Auxiliaries were disguised and dressed in civilian clothes. Further particulars of these incidents and of Bruce's career will be found in "Ireland For Ever", written by General F.P. Crozier, who commanded the Auxiliaries in Ireland.

Towards the end of November, 1920, I attended a brigade council meeting which was held in the Gaelic League Rooms, Roches Arch, Kilkenny. Both Treacy and Lalor had been rearrested at the time, and Ernie O'Malley, who had arrived in the area, presided. He asked for particulars of the arms available, made some notes and asked for a man to accompany him as a guide. As far as I can recollect, that was all that transpired at that meeting. On the following day, I sent to Ballyouskill for a Volunteer named Edward Holland, who was on the run and whom I considered to be a most suitable man, to accompany O'Malley.

With some other officers, I again met O'Malley during the following week when he told us to be in readiness for a mobilisation and to get all available arms, including shotguns, ready for action. The next thing we heard was that O'Malley and Holland were captured at O'Hanrahan's near Innistogue, by the Auxiliaries. At the same time, a number of senior

officers, including Peter de Loughry and Jim Roughan, were arrested. A list of their names and addresses was supposed to have been found on O'Malley by the Auxiliaries.

About the end of January, 1921, I got a despatch to meet George O'Dwyer at the home of the late Mr. Patrick Bryan, St. Kierann Street, Kilkenny, who was then the Brigade Quartermaster. O'Dwyer had been on a visit to G.H.Q., and had been appointed Brigade O/C. Only the three of us were present, and we discussed the position in the brigade. O'Dwyer, whom I only knew slightly, was very annoyed at the position, and it was agreed that activities should be put in hand immediately without specifying any particular operation. I assumed from that conversation with O'Dwyer that I was free to act on my own initiative without seeking approval from a higher authority.

At that time, a party of British military left Kilkenny military barracks each morning, and marched to the jail. Their route brought them through a narrow street, Friary Street. I decided to make an attempt to disarm this party, and issued orders to the company officers to prepare the plans. I went to Threecastles and discussed the operation with my brother, Tom, and made initial arrangements with him for the attack.

It was decided to carry out the attack on the morning of February 21st, 1921. I attended a rehearsal of the proposed operation at Shines Hill on the Callan road a few days previously, and was satisfied that the plans showed a good prospect of success. Captain James O'Brien of the Newtown company was appointed to take charge of the operation.

On the morning of February 21st, Tom Hennessy (my brother) and Michael Darmody, a Lieutenant of the Threecastles company, took up their positions at the entrance to the Friary Church and in the laneway directly opposite to it. Their task was to begin the attack by tackling the two soldiers who brought up the rearguard and seizing their rifles. Other Volunteers, to deal with the main body of the military, were posted in houses further up the street, and the necessary transport to make a quick getaway with the arms was located a short distance away.

The military party came along as usual, but, as Tom and Darmody wrestled with the rearguard for the rifles, a girl on the street commenced to scream. Her screams attracted the attention of the main party who turned, and opened fire, with the result that Tom was shot dead and Darmody received wounds from which he died a few days later. In view of this development, O'Brien withdrew the main party of Volunteers from their position before further British forces arrived on the scene. He then reported to me what had occurred. I was still nerve-wrecked from the beating up I had got from the Auxiliaries, and the news of Tom's death and Michael Darmody's serious wounds gave me a further shock.

A farmer named Wallace drove me to Kilkenny, and from there I went to the house of friends named Shanahan at Killaree, near Threecastles. I could not go to my own home where the arrangements for Tom's burial were being made, so I stayed at Shanahan's for the night. I was advised to attend the funeral to

Tulla cemetery, but, while it was in progress, military and police surrounded the graveyard, and I was placed under arrest.

I was taken to Kilkenny military barracks where I was detained for about two weeks before being transferred to Clonmel barracks. From Clonmel I was taken to Kilworth camp for a period, and from there to Cork jail. No charge was preferred against me, and I was interned, first, in Spike Island, and later in Maryborough prison from where I was released in December, 1921, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in London.

SIGNED

Timothy Hennessy

DATE

May 10th 1957

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,614

WITNESS

J. Grace