

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1622

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1622.

Witness

Michael Hilliard, T. D.,
11, St. Enda's Villas,
Navan,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

Capt., Navan Company.
Brigade I/O.

Subject.

Navan Coy., Irish Volunteers, Co. Meath,
1919 - '21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No 8.2957.

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DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1.622

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL HILLIARD, T.D.

11 St. Enda's Villas, Navan, Co. Meath

I was born at 19 Flower Hill, Navan, in March 1903. I went to the local National School until I was 14 years of age. After the opening of a Christian Brothers School in Navan around this time, I went to the school for a short period. I then went to the Diocesan College in Mullingar for another year.

I joined the local company of Volunteers in June 1919. At the time, the strength of the company was 30. The captain was Joe Woods and the Q.M. was Leo McKenna. I don't remember the other officers. Routine drilling and parades were held weekly. At the end of that year, or early 1920, the various companies around the town of Navan were formed into a battalion which was known as the Navan (or 6th) Battalion of Co. Meath Brigade. The battalion officers appointed were: Patrick Loughran, O/C.; my brother James Hilliard, Q.M.; Kieran O'Connell, adjutant. I am not sure who was appointed battalion vice-O/C. The companies comprising the battalion were: Navan, Bohermeen, Johnstown, Kilbarry, Clongill, Martry, Castletown (near Kilpatrick) and Rathkenny. A short time later, when companies were formed in Kentstown, Dunmore and Yellowfurze, they were incorporated into the battalion.

After the formation of the battalion, drilling was intensified. Classes were formed for instruction in musketry and the handling and use of hand grenades. These classes were held at weekends in disused houses in the area and were conducted by Patrick Kelly, an ex-British soldier, and other ex-British soldiers. Patrick Kelly subsequently became Brigade O/C.

Previous to the I.R.A. attack and capture of Trim R.I.C.

barracks in September 1920, I took part in the blocking of the roads in our area and subsequently took part in the burning of a vacated R.I.C. barracks at Robinstown. Other vacated R.I.C. barracks burned down around the same time were: George's Cross, Wilkinstown and Lismullen. Activities of Navan Company around this time included the arrest and detention of criminals in places which became known as "unknown destinations". They were charged with the looting and robbery of shops, churches and private houses as well as other offences. We had one case of murder. In the latter case a man named Gordon was hired in a land^lagitation to shoot dead a young farmer named Clinton by a party of ten men from or near the same area. Clinton was an I.R.A. man and the Brigade O/C. took a very serious view of the case. All the men, including Gordon, were arrested and tried. Gordon was sentenced to death and was duly executed. The other men involved were deported. The detention and guarding of these criminals for several months in some cases occupied a considerable part of the Volunteers' time especially when criminals were being transferred from one "unknown destination" to another, which involved the employment of Volunteer scouts, armed guards and dispatch work.

Following the attack on Trim R.I.C. barracks, a large scale round-up by military, police and Black and Tans took place in which about 20 members of Navan Company were arrested. They included the Battalion O/C., Patrick Loughran; the Battn. Adjutant, Kieran O'Connell; the Company Captain, Joe Woods, and the Company Q.M., Leo McKenna. Navan Company was then reorganised. Patrick Stapleton became captain; I became adjutant, and James ^BByrne became 1st Lieutenant. At the same time Patrick Fitzsimons replaced Patrick Loughran as Battalion O/C.; Tom Duffy became adjutant instead of Kieran O'Connell, and my brother James continued as Pattalion Q.M. Our company now numbered 20. I attended all battalion meetings with the

captain and took part in the preparation and formulation of several plans for ambushes which never materialised.

Around this period, Navan Company was divided and a new company was formed. It was known as the Ardraccan Company and it took in part of the old company area known as the Commons. Patrick Stapleton, who lived in the Commons, remained captain of the new company. I then became captain of Navan Company; James Gorman, adjutant; John McLoughlin, ~~1st~~ Lieut. and Hugh McGee, ~~1st~~ Lieutenant.

On the night of 18th February 1921, Mr. Hodgett, Postmaster, Navan, was taken from his home by a party of R.I.C. from Bailieboro in charge of District Inspector Hunt and shot dead. His wife was a witness to his arrest and some local people witnessed the shooting which took place on the bridge over the river near the town. Mr. Hodgett was a partially disabled man, a member of the Church of Ireland, and, what was known in those days as a loyalist. The shooting was all the more baffling as he was not connected in any way with the I.R.A. or Sinn Fein. It would appear that the R.I.C. had discovered a leakage of information as to their movements from Navan Post Office. Mr. Hodgett's corpse was recovered next day from the River Boyne; it had a bullet through the body.

For some months previous to the murder of Mr. Hodgett, I was in contact with a clerk in Navan Post Office named Patrick Hughes, who was a member of the I.R.B. and a native of Dundalk. By arrangement, he supplied me regularly with copies of messages sent in code to and from the R.I.C. barracks. The messages were from the County Inspector, R.I.C., or Dublin Castle, or vice versa. I always passed the messages on to Patrick Clinton, Brigade I.O. Around this time, Head Constable Queenan of ~~Navan~~ ^{Navan} R.I.C. had been trying to have his daughter installed in the Post Office as a clerk, without success.

Hodgett would not employ her. It was thought at the time that Queenan wanted to get his daughter into the Post Office for the purpose of seeking information if possible about the I.R.A. or, alternatively, to ascertain if possible how the leakage occurred relative to police movements. It is possible that those messages sent by me to Brigade H.Q. led to the death of Hodgett.

On the last day of February 1921, a stranger arrived in the town and went into one of the local publichouses where he inquired from a man working there - John McLoughlin, our 1st Lieutenant - as to how or where he could contact the local I.R.A. McLoughlin said he could not give him any information as he did not know any one connected with the I.R.A.

A customer in the publichouse, who was employed at ~~Crimmins~~ Hotel, however directed the stranger to Patrick Fitzsimons, Battalion O/C. Fitzsimons sent him to a tailor in Trimgate St. - named Hugh Durr - who was a Volunteer. Durr entertained him until evening and then brought him to the Banba Hall, the old schoolhouse, which was closed down when the Christian Brothers opened a school in the town. It was now the local Sinn Féin Club. Here Fitzsimons had arranged that the local Volunteers would engage him in conversation until it was decided what we were to do with him. In the meantime, I was mobilised by Fitzsimons and after a short conversation with him went to Loughlin (Jack) Rourke, Knockumber, Navan, another Volunteer, and got from him a short parabellum and a few rounds of ammunition and returned to the hall.

While in the hall, the stranger had introduced himself as Michael O'Brien of Silvermines, Tipperary, and said that he had been in the same cell in Mountjoy Prison as Dick Chandler. It will be recalled that Mr. Chandler, who was a publichouse owner of Robinstown, Navan, was arrested by the R.I.C. and Black and Tans after they had burned down his home

National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

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 1622/A
- (ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 2 pr
- (iii) The date of each such document: 3 June 1957
- (iv) The description of each document:

WS 1622 Affidavit Statement Michael Williams T.D. p5 & 6.
detail of a personal nature

(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.

and business premises subsequent to the attack on Trim R.I.C. barracks. He was a Protestant and had no connection with Sinn Féin or the I.R.A. It was a case that received great prominence in the newspapers at the time, insomuch that General Tudor resigned as a protest over the burning of Chandler's home by the R.I.C. and Tans.

When I went into the hall, I introduced myself to "Michael O'Brien"; telling him I was from the flying column. He inquired for Sean Boylan, Brigade O/C., Paddy Mooney and et! other prominent I.R.A. men wanted by the R.I.C. at the time. I said: "I will take you to them". By this time he was anxious to get away from the people in the hall as they had become more or less hostile to him in spite of the fact that he spoke to them in Gaelic occasionally. We proceeded across the Fair Green and on to the Trim road, followed by Patrick Fitzsimons, Thomas Boylan, Hugh McGee and John McLoughlin. When we all arrived at the railway crossing Fitzsimons returned to the town. The others accompanied me along the Trim road. We took him off the main road into Watergrass Avenue, which included the entrance to Beechmount House, the residence of the local Resident Magistrate. Here, I questioned him extensively as to his identity, history, nationality and religion, but he refused to give me any information regarding himself. I explained that I would have to shoot him as a spy and if he would tell me his religion I would get him a clergyman before he died. He again refused to say what religion, if any, he belonged to. I had his hands tied behind his back with my own handkerchief.

he said: "I did not think it was in you to do this. I made a big mistake in dealing with you. If you are ever in a similar position I will show you how to die; go ahead and do your duty".

As he finished,

He dropped dead and fell

on his back. I turned him over and took my handkerchief off his wrists

We left the scene, leaving him where he lay. That night McLoughlin and I stayed in a hayshed. The others went home. The stranger was found next day. The R.I.C. called on McLoughlin at his place of business and questioned him. He later attended the inquest and identified the body as that of the man who called the previous day and inquired about the I.R.A. The stranger spoke with a Scottish accent; he was not a Tipperary man.

On the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Sean Boylan, around this time, a troop train from Belfast should have been derailed at Lougher, Duleek, but, through a misunderstanding as to time or the receipt of details, the job was not carried out.

In April 1921, the Navan or 6th Battalion was incorporated into No. 2 Brigade, 1st Eastern Division, just formed. I attended the first meeting at which the Brigade was established at the house of Michael Jordan, Oldtown, Johnstown, Navan. The Brigade Staff appointed were as follows: Patrick Kelly, O/C.; William Booth, vice O/C.; Thomas Coyle, Adjutant; Michael Hynes, Q.M.; Joseph Hughes, Engineer. I became the Brigade I.O. No. 2 Brigade comprised four battalion areas.

With the reorganisation, Navan, Martry, Bohermeen and Ardraccan Companies became the 4th Battalion of the No. 2. Brigade. The battalion officers appointed were: Thomas Gibney, O/C.; Patrick Stapleton, vice O/C.; Thomas Foley, Adjutant; James Hilliard (my brother) Q.M.; Thomas Killoran, I.O. and Michael Hyland, Engineer. As well as being Brigade I.O., I remained captain of Navan company.

About one month before the Truce I attended a meeting of all Brigade Intelligence Officers of the 1st Eastern

Division. There were nine of us representing each of the nine brigades in the Division. Michael Collins, Sean Boylan, the Divisional O/C., Patrick Clinton, Divisional I.O., and other Divisional officers were present. The meeting was held in Brady's publichouse in Dunboyne. Michael Collins addressed us, issued general instructions and questioned each I.O. individually.

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Signed: _____

Date: 3rd June 1957

Witness: John J. Doherty

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