

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,625

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.
DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1625.

Witness

Michael Govern,
Clooney,
Moynalty,
Kells,
Co. Meath.
Identity.

Q/M, Kells Battn., No. 3 Bgde.

Subject.

Moynalty Coy., I. Vols., Co. Meath,
1917 - '21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2946.

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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL GOVERN

Clooney, Moynalty, Kells, Co. Meath

I was born at Reillystown, Moynalty, in the year 1892. I attended the local National School until I was 14 years of age. After leaving school I started work with a local publican. When my father, who was a Water Bailiff for the Board of Conservators, died in 1915, I approached a Captain Wilkins of the Board for his job and was told that my place was out in France fighting for my country. This reply upset me very much and had a big influence later in my determination to join the local Irish Volunteers and fight at home.

A company of Irish National Volunteers had been formed in Moynalty about the summer of 1914. The strength was around 38. We were drilled by ex-British soldiers named Garrigan and O'Reilly. In the spring of 1917, the company was still in existence but only in a very loose formation. In about the month of March at a general meeting at which every man turned up, we were addressed by a man named Sweeney and another man from Irish Volunteer H.Q. in Dublin. Sweeney told us that we would be known as the Irish Volunteers in future and that our job was to fight for Ireland at home and not in France. As he said this, more than half the men left the ranks and went home. Of the 18 who remained a few later dropped out.

That night, Patrick O'Reilly was appointed Captain, Michael Reilly 1st Lieutenant, Ned Govern, adjutant, and I became Q.M. We drilled once a week and kept together as a unit for the remainder of the year and, by the spring of 1918, our strength was 26. Early this year, new companies were formed in Kilbeg, Nobber, Meath Hill and Drumcondra.

During the conscription crisis the Parish Priest, Father Brogan, organised an anti-conscription meeting at which a

a committee was formed to oppose by every means possible any attempt to enforce conscription in Ireland. This committee organised a collection for the purpose and a sum of £140 was collected which was held by the P.P. We received no new recruits into the company at the time. At a by-election in Co. Cavan in July, most of the members of Moynalty Company spent a couple of days in Bailieboro canvassing for the Sinn Fein candidate - Arthur Griffith - who was elected. The Volunteers on the occasion were in charge of Sean Dardis and a man named ~~Cogan~~, who was later shot dead by the Tans.

In February 1919, during the hunger strike in Mountjoy Jail, the well-to-do farmers and pro-British element in the area were warned by the local I.R.A. not to attend hunt meetings in the county while the strike lasted. After the death of Thomas Ashe on hunger strike, we received a dispatch from Sean Boylan, Brigade O/C., to prohibit the holding of fairs about to be held, in sympathy with his relatives. Next day, a fair, which was to be held at Mullagh, was stopped by the Moynalty Company.

About this time, the various companies in Co. Meath were formed into battalions. Our area became the Kells, or 4th Battalion, and comprised Kells itself, Moynalty, Newcastle, Nobber, Kilbeg, Milltown, Mullagh, Meath Hill and Drumcondra. Patrick Farrelly became O/C. Thomas O'Reilly, vice O/C., M. Cahill, adjutant, Thomas Govern, Q.M. The brigade staff then were: Sean Boylan, O/C., Seamus Finn Vice O/C. and adjutant, Seamus Higgins Q.M., Patrick Clinton I.O. and Eamon Cullen, engineer. After about three months, Thomas Govern resigned as battalion Q.M. so I was appointed in his place. In the harvest of the year, on the instructions of the brigade O/C., all shotguns were collected in the battalion area. About 90 shotguns were collected and placed in dumps in Moynalty and Newcastle.

In early 1920, Moynalty Company were instrumental in collecting a sum of £40 for the White Cross Fund. Bart Reilly was local treasurer. In the summer of this year, Tom Duffy of Navan established a Sinn Fein Court in Moynalty, and similar Courts in other areas. I was appointed one of three Parish Justices for the Moynalty area. I represented the I.R.A. while the other two represented Sinn Féin and some other group. The other two men appointed were Phil Reilly and a man named ~~Mr~~ *Wick Lynch of Newcastle*.

Some short time later, a young farmer who was a Volunteer was shot dead in a land dispute at Rosemount. His name was Clinton. With other Volunteers I helped in the arrest of some of those responsible and handed them over to an escort in charge of Sean Boylan. The man who actually fired the shot that killed Clinton was an ex-British soldier named Gordon. After a mock trial by the British authorities who had arrested him first, he was found not guilty and released. He was, however, later arrested by the I.R.A., courtmartialled and sentenced to death. He was duly executed by the I.R.A. After the trial by the I.R.A. of the other men involved two of them were deported to England.

Mullagh, Moynalty and Drumcondra R.I.C. barracks were evacuated around this time. On the instructions of the Brigade O/C. they were burned down. I helped in the burning of Moynalty and Drumcondra barracks. While we were burning Moynalty, the sergeant, who lived in a private house at the back with his wife, tried to leave, but was ordered back by one of our sentries on duty there. The Drumcondra barracks was attached to a hotel known as Singleton's. As the fire took a hold on the barracks, some of our men had to get on the burning roof and break it so as to prevent the flames spreading to the hotel. In the burning of Mullagh, one of our men was trapped inside when it was set on fire, but managed to escape through an upper window. A day or two later,

we raided the Courthouse at Moynalty, destroyed all the equipment there and removed legal documents, ledgers and files.

In December 1920, G.H.Q. sent us, by the night mail from Dublin, two boxes of explosives which were intended for the demolition of bridges in the area. The two boxes were taken off the train at Tankardstown by two members of that company. With five others I met the two Volunteers and brought the two boxes in a pony trap to Moynalty. I later handed over one of them to the Carnaross Company, keeping the other box for our own use.

Our box of explosives, with some shotguns (which were surplus as each Volunteer had his own arms) cartridges and revolvers were stored in two disused houses in the townland of Salford. One of the houses in which the explosives were housed stood on the roadside, while the other house stood some yards up a nearby laneway. On Saturday night, 20th January 1921, some of the local Volunteers lit a fire in the house on the roadside to try and dry out the cartridges, the cases of which had got damp, with the result that they stuck in the guns. On Sunday morning, 21st January 1921, Ned Reilly, one of three brothers in the Volunteers who lived in a house opposite the disused house on the roadside, saw a motor car containing four R.I.C. in charge of District Inspector Rowland of Kells, pull up at the disused house and enter, having first commandeered two local men, one of whom was a Volunteer, to accompany them. Ned Reilly sent his sister, who was a schoolgirl, to warn Captain Patrick O'Reilly. Patrick O'Reilly met me and told me of the incident and, at the same time, sent a brother of his to notify other Volunteers in the locality. By now I had met Pat Farley, the Battalion O/C., and three other Volunteers. We decided to rescue our stuff. We armed ourselves with one rifle, two revolvers and three shotguns and crossed into a field

behind the two houses. After creeping along a ditch we had a good view of the house on the roadside. The police had left one of their men in the car and placed another as a guard on a nearby bridge. We opened fire on the R.I.C. man in the car. He immediately took cover and was lost to sight. Pat Farley, who carried the rifle, fired on the R.I.C. man on the bridge who also disappeared, as we thought, into the eye of the bridge underneath. In the meantime, the other policemen, with the two commandeered men, were removing the stuff from the house in the lane when the shooting started. They had already collected the stuff from the house on the roadside and placed it in the car. By this time, Patrick O'Reilly's brother had mobilised other Volunteers. They did exactly what we had done; they crossed into the field and observed the position and joined us. All was now confusion. We could not see the R.I.C. anywhere but we made for the car. James Curran, who was able to drive, got into it and, accompanied by Pat ^{O'Reilly} ~~Farley~~ and some of the Volunteers present, drove it to the Newcastle company area where the stuff was dumped. Pat ^{O'Reilly} ~~Farley~~ collected a number of the local company from Castletown and brought them to Moynalty to search for the R.I.C. James Curran drove the car back to the laneway to collect the stuff there. It was found in the laneway where it had been dropped by the commandeered men. There was no sign of the R.I.C. He brought the stuff to the Newcastle company area also. He then drove the car into a crevice and wrecked it.

I was due to attend a Battalion Council meeting that night. On the way I met a friend of mine who lived in the gate lodge of a Colonel Farrell of Waterstown. She told me that the R.I.C. were located in the house of Colonel Farrell and that they had arrived there while the Colonel was at last Mass. She also told me that the Colonel had gone to a military post at Whiteswood, Nobber, for military assistance and that they had come to the rescue.

Following this incident most of the men involved had to go on the run, including Tom O'Reilly, the vice O/C. of the battalion and a member of the Newcastle Company. The Newcastle men as well as the Moynalty men had actually passed through the yard of Colonel Farrell on their way to Moynalty, fully armed, while the R.I.C. within looked out and knew every man present. A short time later, Colonel Farrell was fined a sum of £200 by the I.R.A. for not having conveyed the information that the R.I.C. were located in his house to the I.R.A. instead of the military.

As most of us were now on the run we decided to form a column and set up a camp in a disused house at Rosemount, near Newcastle. We were supplied with food by the local people and seized sheep from local farmers for our midday meals. Peter Reilly of Newcastle Company became the O/C. of the column which numbered fifteen. Battalion meetings were often held in this house.

After a fortnight we moved to another disused house in Killeeter near Mullagh from which we sent scouts each day to observe enemy movements in Mullagh and Bailieboro. About a week later we received word that a motor car containing four R.I.C. had arrived in Mullagh from Virginia. Patrick O'Reilly, Vice O/C. in charge of six members of the column took up an ambush position on one side of the Virginia road to attack the car as it returned. They were armed with shotguns. As the car drove into the ambushade, the man in the key position, whose duty it was to fire the opening shot, took aim and pulled the trigger. The cartridge failed to explode. His companion fired on the car as it went on its way but it was out of reach of the fire. After this, several attempted ambushes were laid but nothing ever came of them.

With six other men in the area I was accepted into the I.R.B. by Sean Boylan in March 1921. It was about this time

that the brigade area was reorganised. We ceased to be the 4th Battalion of Meath Brigade and, instead, became the Kells or 1st Battalion of No. 3 Brigade, 1st Midland Division. Michael Cahill became our new Battalion O/C. Thomas O'Reilly remained Vice O/C. Thomas Lynch became battalion adjutant, and I remained battalion Q.M. Our old Battalion O/C., Pat Farley, became Brigade O/C. 3rd Brigade; his brother Sean Farley, Brigade Vice O/C. T.P. McKenna became adjutant and David Smith became Q.M.

On the night previous to the Truce Patrick O'Reilly, Battalion Vice O/C., with 20 men, took over a room in a house near Maudlin Bridge, Kells, for the purpose of ambushing a party of four military who came each day in a lorry to collect some barrels of water from the river at Maudlin Bridge. At 2 a.m. Paddy Farley, Brigade O/C., called and ordered me to go to Carnaross to arrest a man named Christopher Farrell a suspected spy. I selected two of the men in the room to accompany me. We arrested Farrell and took him to a house in Salford where we placed two Volunteers to guard him. I arrived home at 7 a.m. on the morning of the Truce.

Around 11 a.m. that day Patrick O'Reilly and his men fired on the four soldiers as they arrived for the water. The driver started up the engine and got away losing a couple of barrels as they did so. The military were from Kells Workhouse. As O'Reilly and his men retreated across the hills to the back of the Workhouse they were fired on by members of the garrison. The four soldiers carrying the water were not armed.

I went into Moynalty village that night and heard that Patrick O'Reilly was in a ^{house} ~~pub~~ there. After a while, I noticed a party of Tans in civilian clothes arrive in a motor car. All carried revolvers. They had a civilian

named Weir with them who wore a mask. Weir was a suspected spy and was manager of the gas works in Kells. I sent word to O'Reilly to get out of the ~~place~~^{house}. He had only just done so when the Tans searched it for him. If they had caught him they would certainly have finished him off. Weir was there to identify him.

Signed: Michael Green

Date: 4 June 1954

Witness: John J. Daly

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