

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1685

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,685.

**Witness**

Michael McMahon,  
59, Francis St.,  
Kilrush,  
Co. Clare.

**Identity.**

Vice Comdt., 2nd Battalion,  
West Clare Bgde., I.R.A.

**Subject.**

'F' Company (Kilrush), Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Clare, 1917-1921;

West Clare Brigade, Flying Column,  
1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

File No S. 3003.

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STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL McMAHON

59 Francis St., Kilrush, Co. Clare.

I am a native of Moyasta, Carrigaholt, Co. Clare, where I was born on 27th September 1893. My father was a farmer who was evicted from his house and farm when I was three years of age, that is, in 1897. The landlords concerned were - Wesby, in the case of our home farm, and Henry Keane in the case of adjoining land at Killena of which my father was also the tenant. The reason for the eviction was that my father had taken an active part in the Plan of Campaign and was under suspicion of shooting a landlord's bailiff.

My father subsequently went to the United States. He died in New York after some years. At the time of the eviction our family numbered nine children. Another was born later. Of these ten children, the eldest followed my father to the United States and, down to the stopping of emigration by the British authorities in 1914, seven more of the children emigrated to the United States.

With my mother and one sister, I remained at home. I was their sole support, and I was employed at the local flour mills in Kilrush - Glynn & Sons. I am now the firm's commercial traveller for the area of west and south Co. Clare.

In 1914, I joined the Irish National Volunteers, remaining a member until the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, pledged the support of the organisation to the British regime in connection with the first World War. I then withdrew from the organisation. The local unit (Kilrush) of these Irish National Volunteers continued for awhile with small membership. This small membership dwindled still further progressively and the unit eventually faded completely out of existence.

The late Peadar Clancy (R.I.P.) reorganised the Irish Volunteers throughout West Clare in 1917. I then joined. My unit was F/Company (Kilrush) 2nd Battalion, West Clare Bde. The battalion staff then consisted of - Commandant, Sean Flanagan; Vice-Commandant, S. Hanrahan; Adjutant, James Lorigan, Q.M., P. McInerney.

Our activities then consisted of drill, principally close-order drill. We also got a certain amount of instruction in the use of arms - not very thorough instruction, but of use as an introduction to the subject. As time went on we carried out raids for arms; that is, people known to have arms were visited and the arms - shotguns, as a rule - were collected. In practically no case had force to be used in such cases, except, possibly, a display of force in very few instances. We also undertook a money collection for our arms fund.

In due course, Kilrush became in effect a garrison town, being occupied by military, marines and R.I.C. Later, of course the latter included a number of Black and Tans.

When the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union was formed in Kilrush in 1917-18, I became a member and, with other Volunteers, secured positions on the committee so as to offset ex-British soldiers and sailors in the Union who were hostile to the national movement. Similarly, we (the Volunteers) took over control of the G.A.A. Committee from non-Volunteers. I also became a member of the Kilrush Sinn Fein Club and was appointed delegate on the West Clare Executive and attended all their meetings with the late Sean O'Dwyer, Chairman, Kilrush Sinn Fein Club.

When the Volunteer G.H.Q. gave instructions for the Volunteers to get control of the Local Government bodies, I was selected a candidate for the Clare Co. Council by a joint convention of Sinn Fein and brigade staffs. The election was unopposed as all opposition was withdrawn.

At the first meeting of the newly-elected Co. Council (June 1920) a resolution was unanimously adopted declaring allegiance to Dáil Éireann, and an order made that no further minutes were to be sent to the British Local Government Department, Dublin Castle. The British authorities declared the Council an illegal body and proclaimed their meetings. After the first meeting, held in the Courthouse, Ennis, at which all members attended except those in gaol, all subsequent meetings were held at different centres throughout the country, usually in National Schools. Early in 1921 - I think March - the East Clare Brigade took possession of Na Pogue Castle, Quin, the residence of Lord Dunboyne, and one of such meetings was held there on a Sunday night prior to the official meetings called for Monday following.

The usual practice in convening meetings of the Council was as follows: An agenda was sent to each member by post, instructing that a meeting would be held at the Courthouse, Ennis, on (date) at 12.30 p.m. A similar notification was also sent through I.R.A. dispatch stations notifying the real place and time of meeting, usually a day or two in advance of that given in the official notification.

The Courthouse, Ennis, was invariably surrounded on the date of the officially called meeting - you will find a full report of the Na Pogue meeting, and similar ones, in the files of the "Clare Champion".

The minutes of the meeting were taken by the late Sean Scanlan, Co. Council Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Chairman of the Co. Council was Comdt. Michael Brennan.

For obvious reasons, the official secretary was not present at the meetings; he was a Mr. Studdert, a loyalist. The Assistant Sec. was Mr. M.J. Carey, who was subsequently appointed secretary. He gave every co-operation in the functioning of the Council.

Following these events, the rate collectors were warned by the British Local Government Department that the rates could not be passed on to the Clare County Council - an "illegal" body. This created the necessity for the I.R.A. to seize collectors' warrants and official rate books. The commandant of each battalion was then appointed to have rates collected in each area by the I.R.A. The late Canon Kennedy, President, St. Flannan's College, Ennis, was appointed County Council Trustee, replacing the usual bank trustees. In this way, the functions of the County Council went on without interruption, financing of hospitals, homes, etc.

The roads maintenance was abandoned for I.R.A. military reasons as the roads were trenched and bridges broken by the I.R.A. to prevent enemy movements on lorries. Otherwise, Local Government in the county continued to function very smoothly up to the Truce, when officials took over again.

During this period several members of the County Council were arrested and received terms of imprisonment for being members of an "illegal body". I was raided for several times but evaded arrest.

I wish to relate here how the rate books and records were seized in this battalion area. These books were kept in the District Council offices at Kilrush Workhouse where the staffs worked. The main building was occupied by a company of British military (Scottish Borderers). Turf was the fuel supplied to the District Council offices, so two Volunteers (Joseph O'Dea and Senan Keane), both now in the U.S.A., took in a load of turf and a couple of sacks to draw in the turf to the storehouse. When finished discharging the turf, they went to the Clerk's offices, demanded the books, piled them into the sacks and took them out under the eyes of the military sentry.

Sinn Fein or Republican Courts functioned fully in this area. However, I had no personal contact with them.

A number of Volunteers were appointed as I.R.A. police after the Brehons or Court Judges were elected and these carried out the Court decrees. The Courts functioned in this battalion area without incident and received the full co-operation of the public and legal professions.

Following the Belfast boycott decree, I was appointed Director of the boycott for West Clare. I appointed volunteers at Kilrush and Kilkee railway stations who had access to the railway office and they inspected manifest sheets and invoices. I also appointed a Volunteer at the shipping offices, Kilrush, to keep check on manifests there relating to goods coming from Limerick. All goods coming from Belfast were held up and the consignee ordered to have them returned to the sender. This was done on all occasions. Once, when a steamer owned by Messrs. Kelly, Belfast, arrived at Kilrush with a cargo of coal for the railway, I interviewed the chairman and secretary of the Irish Transport and Workers' Union and asked to have the discharge of this steamer held up until I reported to brigade H.Q. After three days, we allowed the vessel to be discharged following a conference with the firm's representative from Cork. He was then Sinn Fein representative on the Cork Harbour Board (I forget his name).

Our organisation enforced a complete boycott of Belfast goods on this brigade area.

About July or August 1920, I was appointed Battalion Director of Organisation and subsequently <sup>acting</sup> Battalion Adjutant following arrest of Seamus Lorigan who had held that post.

Sean Flanagan, Battalion Commandant, has covered the I.R.A. activities including the principal engagements - the attack on enemy at Kilrush by the combined East and West Clare Brigade Column in April 1921.

I took an active part in the preparation of the plans for that operation and was in charge of our local men in the

attacking party against the Marines at Coastguard Station, Cappa which attack formed part of the main operation plan. In the preparation of the plans I provided sketches of the hostile positions and of the routes generally followed by the hostile patrols. The objective in the plans was to attack the strong R.I.C. and Black and Tan patrol which moved nightly through the streets of Kilrush. The strength of this patrol ranged from 12 to 16 men.

The plans provided for a selected position being taken up by the I.R.A. in Moore Street through which the patrol usually moved. While this attack was in progress, covering positions were also to be held by I.R.A. parties in front of the Workhouse, occupied by the Scottish Borderers and Black and Tans, and in front of the Coastguard Station at Cappa, occupied by Marines. The purpose of the covering parties was to prevent these garrisons coming to the aid of the patrol. The plan as arranged miscarried to the extent that the patrol did not enter Moore St., but went back to the R.I.C. barracks earlier than usual by Henry St. and the Square.

The route taken by the patrol had been checked nightly for the previous month by our Intelligence officers. This check gave every reason to expect the patrol to return via Moore St. on its route to the Square. The explanation for this not happening on the occasion in question was that the District Inspector in charge of the R.I.C. had "gone on a drunk" that day and the sergeant in charge of the patrol took advantage of this circumstance to cut short the period of patrolling duty and to take in the patrol earlier than normally would have been the case.

The I.R.A. held on to their position hoping to draw out the patrol again. Later, at approximately 11.p.m., an R.I.C. sergeant and constable came up a side street on to the Square. These were shot - Sergeant McFadden was killed and Constable Hopkins wounded.

On hearing the firing, the military moved out but were repelled. Their casualties are not known. The Marines at Cappa did not come out, but sent up Verey lights and opened fire with a machine gun. Firing continued to be exchanged at the military post and at Marines in the coastguard station until 5 a.m. or so when signals for I.R.A. withdrawal were given.

We retired from Cappa, taking two Marines prisoners. They had been captured earlier outside the station. The I.R.A. had no casualties.

The East Clare column O/C. - Commandant-General Michael Brennan - was in charge of attack on the patrol.

Brigade Commandant Sean Liddy was in charge of covering party on the military post (Workhouse).

Brigade Q.M. Tom Marrinan and Brigade I.O. Clancy were in charge at Cappa, while I was the local officer there familiar with position and in charge of our own men at that post.

Battalion or company officers were in all parties or in covering positions approaching enemy occupied positions

After this operation in Kilrush there was no further engagement of any consequence up to the Truce. The fact that Kilrush had been virtually occupied throughout a whole night by the I.R.A. without any effort by the British being made to dislodge them put the very strong local garrison of military and police in a poor light. Probably to offset this, they put out wildly exaggerated reports of the strength of the I.R.A. attacking party and that it included I.R.A. columns from Cork and Kerry.

At the date of the Truce I was battalion <sup>Director of Ordnance</sup> adjutant and was appointed battalion vice-commandant after that date.

Signed: Michael MacDonagh

Date: 8-10-57

Witness: James Larkin