

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 692

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 692

Witness

James Quigley,
Sandpark,
Tulsk,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, South Roscommon,
1917 - ;
O/C. 2nd Battalion South Roscommon Brigade, 1918 - .

Subject.

National activities, South Roscommon,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2000

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF MR. JAMES QUINN

W.S. 692

Sandpark, Tulsk, Co. Roscommon.

I was born at Rathconnor Four Mile House, Co. Roscommon and went to School in Carnalasson Schools and later to Farragher Christian Brothers Schools. My father was associated with the Fenian Movement but it was not through him I inherited my rebel tendencies as he tried to impress on me to have nothing to do with such movements. It was through my association with the G.A.A. that I became interested in the Independence Movement. In travelling around to Football Matches I met and listened to the talk of many of the men who afterwards became prominent in the Movement. Though my football associations I got to know Liam Mellows. In 1916 during the period of the Rebellion our house was raided and searched by Police and Soldiers. I cannot say why this was done. Perhaps my association with some of the men who took part in the Rebellion through Football led them to believe I was also mixed up in it or it may have been on account of my father's Fenian association. I decided then that as I had the name I might as well have the gains.

"Joining the Irish Volunteers".

In the early part of 1917 I joined the Irish Volunteers. I was taken into the organisation by a man named Hyde who was an instructor under the Department of Agriculture and who worked in this area at that time. Jack Brennan of Miltown, Castleplunkett was also present when I joined. This was the beginning of the organisation in this area. I now started recruiting men into the Volunteers and of course we had to be very particular as to the types of men

we took in and fully satisfied of their outlook and sincerity. Later on there was a parade of Volunteers at Ballymoe and I was able to muster over fifty men from my area for it. This parade was for organisation purposes and was reviewed by Hyde.

"Organisation of the 2nd Battalion S/Roscommon Brigade:

After the parade at Ballymoe a meeting was held of the principal men and at this meeting I was appointed to be O.C. of the 2nd Battalion. The nucleus of a Brigade existed in South Roscommon area at this time and Jack Brennan of Castleplunkett was the Brigade O.C. After this meeting we organised units in Ballinaheglish - Clover Hill - Castleplunkett - Donamon - and Ballintober. There was no arms in the Battalion area at this time, perhaps a few shot guns or maybe a Revolver or two. Parades were held once a week in all the sub unit areas. A man named Edward Kearney was our principal instructor. Kearney had served in the British Army and had war experience. I think he was invalided out of the British Army. At any rate he came home before the war was over. He was also a Volunteer and did instruction for all units in the Battalion area. When we started to organise the Battalion our strength was about fifty but by now we had increased to about one-hundred.

"The Conscription Crisis."

In the early part of 1918 when the Conscription Crisis was threatening our strength went up by leaps and bounds and we soon had a strength of over four hundred. Like most other areas when the threat had ceased to exist this dwindled rapidly to about one hundred and eighty and this was about our strength until the Truce on the 11th July 1921.

To meet the threat of Conscription we made a number of dug-outs in which men could sleep. We also made an amount of bandages and collected First Aid material and made a census of all foodstuffs in the area but the most of our activities was confined to teaching our men how to shoot. We got a type of a Service Rifle at this time and taught our men how to take aim with this weapon and how to load and fire. There was, of course, no ammunition available to do firing practices. We also had a couple of revolvers but ammunition for those was also very scarce.

"Reorganisation of the 2nd Battalion":

Some time in 1918 Ernie O'Malley came into the area and put the organisation on a sound basis. I was confirmed in my appointment as O.C. of the 2nd Battalion or Oran Battalion as it was known then. Ned Hegarty of Ballinaheglisish was appointed Adjutant and James Kenny as Quartermaster. Pat Conboy, now living at Fuerty, was appointed Vice O.C. of the Battalion. The Companies comprising the Battalion were "A" Clover Hill, Company Captain, Edward Jackson. "B" Ballinaheglisish, Captain Michael Grady. "C" Castleplunkett, Captain Jack Ryan. "D" Fuerty, Captain Bernard Keating, "E" Dunamon, Captain Patrick Dwyer, "F" Ballintober, Captain Peter Clancy who was later replaced by Aleck Kenny who was also later replaced by Jack Connery. Training in the Battalion continued as heretofore but we had no arms except the few items already mentioned.

"The I.R.A. and the Dail Loan":

The first Dail met early in 1919 and took over the Volunteers who now officially became the Army of the Republic. All members were now required to subscribe to an oath of allegiance to the Republic and the Dail which was its Government. The Dail

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members subscribed to this oath and there were no dissentions. The Dail now floated a loan and the organisation of this issue and collecting of subscriptions developed to a great extent on the Volunteers or I.R.A. The loan was taken up well by the people and well subscribed. Mrs. Kenny from Ballintober gave me £25. 0. 0. towards it.

There was nothing of much note happened in the remainder of 1919. Training went on as usual. Occasionally we made a raid for arms where we knew there were shotguns and such like.

"Evacuation and Destruction of R.I.C. Barracks."

In the early part of 1920 the R.I.C. evacuated a number of their smaller outlying stations and concentrated in larger centres. There were three such Barracks in this Battalion area - Rockfield, Ballintober and Four Mile House. All three were evacuated by the Police and at Easter 1920 we burned and otherwise destroyed these premises and rendered them unfit for occupation again. There were no mishaps during this operation though I believe that in some parts Volunteers were killed or injured carrying out this work. The duty of Policing the county now developed on the Volunteers and this entailed an enormous amount of work. Prisoners arrested by them had to be kept in temporary jails which came to be known as "Unknown destinations" so called because the public or the British Authorities did not know their location. Unknown destinations were generally unused houses or outoffices belonging to some house. Constant guards both on the prisoners and the place had to be maintained while they were in use.

The Sinn Féin Courts were now operating successfully in the area and, with the exception of a small loyalist element, the British Courts were deserted. The people generally and the solicitors and barristers who made use of the Courts abided loyally by their decisions. Local Magistrates were appointed from the members of the Sinn Féin organisation. The Volunteers were mostly members of Sinn Féin as well.

A special force of Police were organised inside the Volunteers to cope with this work. Ned Hegarty was appointed in charge of this force, some of the members of which displayed a special aptitude for this sort of work. Ned Hegarty had been Battalion Adjutant and when he was put in charge of Police work, Seamus McGovern was appointed Battalion Adjutant in his stead. The Volunteer Police or Courts received no trouble from the R.I.C.

"The General Raid for Arms":

Some time in the end of 1919 on the instructions of G.H.Q. a general raid for arms was carried out by the Volunteers in the area. This, like the destruction of the evacuated Barracks was a countrywide operation and gave us an insight by means of press reports of the extent of the organisation of the Volunteers or I.R.A. From this raid we collected a large amount of shotguns and cartridges and a few .22 rifles. We did not get any service rifles or service weapons. We encountered no trouble during this operation and most of the arms were given up voluntarily and it was only a matter of calling for them. The guns were of little value and a lot of them were unserviceable. All this stuff was deposited in dumps in the area.

"Attack on Ballymoe R.I.C. Barracks":

About September or some time later in 1919 an order was issued by G.H.Q. that all R.I.C. barracks still occupied were to be attacked. There was no such Barracks in this area but there was one at Ballymoe which was just outside of it and in the Galway area. We decided we would have a crack at this barracks. About five men armed with shotguns proceeded there and took up a firing position opposite the barracks and opened fire on it. The barracks had steel shutters on the windows and we never had any hope of capturing the place with only shot guns.

The garrison of police did not reply to our fire and after we had discharged a few rounds each, we withdrew.

Enemy Activity:

In the beginning of 1920 enemy activity became very bad and a number of our fellows had to go on the run to avoid arrest. They slept at night in the dugouts which were constructed during the conscription crisis and which came in useful now. These men had to depend on the local people for food during the day. Our organisation and strength remained the same. Later in this year we began blocking the roads to impede the enemy. Some of the blocking was done by cutting trenches. Such trenches were not cut across the roads but along the side of the road so as to catch the wheel of a vehicle and topple it over. The ~~the~~ spoil from the trench was taken away and dumped, then the trench was covered with light timber and topped off with road material. Some hay was then shaken over the trench lightly and this was continued for a mile or so in either direction to mislead the enemy into believing that it was only a load of hay

that had passed the way. One tender load of Auxiliary Police or Black and Tans who were in force in the county by now went into such a trench at Castleplunkett. I do not know if any of them were killed.

"Reprisals and Four Mile House Ambush."

The enemy now started burning houses as a reprisal for our blocking of the roads. They burned Smiths of Emlagh and Jack Brennans of Emlagh in the Castleplunkett area. Jack Brennan had been our Brigade O.C.

On the 12th October an ambush was carried out on a force of police at Four Mile House by the 3rd Battalion. The mixed Company made up from the Clover Hill and Kilbride Companies took part in the attack and were engaged blocking the main Boyle Roscommon road. They used stones and fallen trees. The trees were felled on the Roscommon side after the enemy had passed by going towards Four Mile House. On the Boyle side a block of stones was put down. The enemy drove through this block as it had not been completed when they arrived. After the attack the Tans and Auxies came out from Boyle and shot up and fired off their rifles as they came along the road. They did not shoot anyone however.

We expected that our house would be raided as a result of this ambush and we spent three nights waiting for them to come. We had a Company on duty each night armed with shotguns and a few revolvers. They did not come, however, and nothing happened. As a result we got careless and on the 3rd November they commandeered a small lorry belonging to George Kelly from Tulsk and came to John O'Dowd's House. They took out O'Dowd and kicked him along the road until he showed them where Jack Connery lived and then kicked

him back again. They took out Connery out of his house and shot him. Connery was a Volunteer and probably would not have been at home only that he was recently married. Connery had talked where he should not have done. Some uniforms which were being made for the police prior to they evacuating Four Mile House were burned by the Volunteers and for this and other such activities the police had Connery earmarked so to speak. The R.I.C. must have given his name and information about him to the Tans.

Miss Rafferty of Castleplunkett overheard the Tans discussing who they were going to shoot and Connerys name and my own were mentioned. She had this information conveyed to me. I told Connery but he did not seem to take it serious and as a result got shot. I did not stay at home.

"Attempted attack on Troops at Dunamon":

About February 1921 a man named McMahon came down from G.H.Q. with information that a party of troops escorting arms were travelling by train from Dublin to the West and were to be attacked at Dunamon Station. The troops would be in two parties, one in the front of the train and one in the rear. Our plan was to unhook the front carriages and let them off with the engine and then deal with the party remaining in the rear portion of the train. We assembled about fifty or sixty men at Dunamon for this. We were only armed with shotguns. McMahon was to take charge. For some reason it did not take place. Something went wrong. I dont know what and we disbanded again. We had ^{LORRIES} ~~horses~~ in readiness to take away the arms when they were captured.

"Attempted attack on Military Post - Kilmurray":

Some time in the harvest time in 1920 the British had a force of soldiers encamped at Kilmurray. They were there protecting a farm about which a dispute existed. Kilmurray is in the Castleplunkett area. This British Force was approximately one hundred strong. At a Brigade Council meeting it was decided to attack and capture this Camp. Our plan was to steal up on the Camp when the occupants would be asleep and to rush and capture the Guard. At the same time men would rush the remainder of the Camp from all directions. Selected men from all ranks in the Brigade area were mobilised for this and the attack was to take place a few nights after the Brigade Council meeting. We had scouts watching the Camp continuously. On approaching the Camp on the night that the attack was planned for, our scouts reported that the British Garrison were on the alert and had occupied all the advantage points in the area and were apparently awaiting our attack. As a result of this information the whole affair was called off and we disbanded again. Apparently some one had tipped them off about our intentions. We had only a few Revolvers and a good few shot guns and all kinds of other weapons such as forks, scythes etc. We were depending on surprise and I am satisfied that we would have succeeded had not they been informed of our intention to attack beforehand.

"Attempted attack on Guard at Castlerea Station":

In the end of 1920 the British had a Guard of soldiers on Castlerea Railway Station and it was planned to attack and disarm this Guard. This was also a Brigade operation. I and ten other men boarded the train at Dunamon station and travelled on it

towards Castlereá at night. There were men from Roscommon including Frank Simmons and other areas on the train also. The plan was that we were to jump off the train when it arrived at Castlereá station and rush the Guard and disarm them. We were armed with revolvers. The train stopped at a position about a mile on the east side of Castlereá and we were told that the enemy were waiting for us at the station, having reinforced the guard and were all standing too. We had to detrain there and get away as quick and as fast as we could. Here also there were lorries in readiness to take us and the captured material away. Again the enemy had apparently been warned of our intentions. Some one with a red lamp had stopped the train and given us the warning.

"An Escape":

About the 21st March 1921 three of us were sleeping in an outhouse at our home in Rathconnor: John Brehony, John Gibbons and I. Connery, a brother of the man whom the Tans had murdered was also there. We had come from a Brigade Meeting and on occasions like that we were in the habit of using this place as we would not get back until early morning. Otherwise we would have gone to a safer place. I was awakened by dogs barking. The other members of our party were sleeping soundly. We were armed with revolvers. I heard knocking on the door of the dwelling house and a demand being made to open in the name of the "king". I woke up the rest of our party except Connery and told them what was happening and to keep quiet. Connery was still snoring. Before I woke up Connery, I looked over the door and was amazed to see a soldier with a rifle standing outside.

He was a small youthful boy and this gave me courage. I woke up Connery and told him what was happening. Brehony wanted to shoot the soldier there and then but I would not let him. The rapping at the door continued but was eventually opened and they went into the house but our soldier outside our door remained. There were a few R.I.C. accompanying the soldiers. The Officer in charge of the Military enquired for me. The sentry on our door now started looking around to see what was happening. I kept watching him, prepared as was the others of our party to fight.

After about ten minutes a whistle was blown and shots were fired around the place. All the soldiers and police now began to pass by the outoffice where we were and the horses and ducks and hens began to wander across the yard. The sentry had now moved out of our view also. After a while we heard shouting for "Rodgers" out on the road. The soldiers now came in again and my sister told them that if it was a soldier they were looking for he had gone up the road. Rodgers had gone into a shed and was sucking the hen eggs he found there. They found Rodgers and all now departed.

My mother told me that when she heard them rapping at the door she let them do so for as long as she could in order to give us a chance to get away. They came into the House and on enquiring for me my sister said I must be sleeping at my Uncle Peters in Tulsk. They apparently believed her and inquired where my Uncle lived. She told them between Tulsk and Strokestown and his name was Peter Feeney. She said he lived near Simpsons public house if they knew it. They said they did. The officer in charge of the

of the Military must have been of a gentlemanly type as he did not search my mother's room when he was told she was not well. They asked my father when he had seen me last and he said he did not know.

The Officer now blew his whistle and they departed after firing a few shots outside. Why they fired the shots I do not know. Eventually they got to my Uncle's house after first calling at Simpson's Public House en route. It was now raining very hard. They took Simpson in the Lorry with them and made him show them my Uncle's house. My uncle Peter had served for a considerable time in the London Police and had a pronounced cockney accent and they were amazed to be confronted with this. They asked Uncle Peter for me and he said he had not seen me for two years. They searched the house and after admitting that they had been fooled they left but did not return to our place.

"Some Harrassing Tactics":

Once or twice when the enemy were passing along the roads we fired at them from a distance. We had a few rifles, about four, in the Battalion now. Those rifles were given us by the Brigade Headquarters. This firing was always done from a considerable distance but the enemy seemed to ignore it completely.

"Road Blocks - Removal by the Enemy":

Some time in April 1921 I was sowing corn in a field on my father's farm. I was working a young mare who was inclined to be restless and flighty. I had some scouts around the area watching for the approach of any raiding party. Suddenly some shots were fired and on looking in the direction from which the sound came I could see a soldier standing on the fence who beckoned to me to come up to him. I could not get away. I did so and was told to get into the

lorry which was on the road. I said I could not leave the mare as she was very giddy but was told to hand her over to my father who was present and get into the lorry which I did. There were quiet a number of civilians in the lorry at this time - all locals. On the way along the road we met another lorry - a civilian one, which the military stopped and commandeered. I got on to this lorry and assisted the driver in turning it around on the road. I now remembered that I had a despatch in my pocket. On this lorry there was a bag of bran and I succeeded in making a hole in the sack and pushing the despatch into the hole.

We went down the road to where it was blocked by stones. There I saw a red haired R.I.C. man who had been stationed at Four Mile House at one time. He knew me very well but did not indicate that he recognised me now and needless to say I did the same. The road had been cleared when we arrived and we were all released and allowed to go free.

"Execution of a Spy":

In the end of May or beginning of June 1921 Seamus O'Connor of Meelick who was O.C. of the first Battalion and, I think, Dan O'Rourke the Brigade O.C. brought a man to us as a prisoner. He was an English man and was dressed in civilian attire. I was given to understand that this man was travelling around the country and was suspected of spying for the British. He was courtmartialled in this area and was sentenced to death. The evidence against him was pretty conclusive and he did not deny that he was engaged in such activities. He was given the services of a Catholic priest. He was not a Catholic but he got baptised as one. He said he preferred to be shot

rather than drowned. He was drowned, being first bound and then thrown into the river Suck. His body was never recovered. Joy was his name. Before being executed he wrote a letter to his wife who lived in England telling her he was about to be executed. He expressed no ill feelings towards us. This letter was duly posted to the address on the envelope.

Another individual who lived in this Battalion area was suspected of spying and was fired on. He left this area and never returned.

"The Truce":

When the Truce came we were glad in one way and rather disappointed on the other hand that the fight seemed to be over as we were only getting on our feet so to speak. We had got confidence in ourselves and were now in a better position than ever before to carry on the fight. We now had some serviceable equipment and had started an active service unit or flying column. We had a large amount of buckshot made and loaded into cartridges. We had a small supply of bombs and grenades. These were not made in our area. We also had a small supply of gelignite.

The column comprised twenty-four men. For armament they had three service rifles and the remainder were armed with shot guns, and all the revolvers in the Battalion area.

The column billeted and lived on the local people who were only too glad to accommodate them. They never got into action as a column but were getting into trim and would soon be ready to do so had not the Truce intervened. Seamus McGovern was in charge of the column.

"Intelligence within the Battalion:"

A Battalion Intelligence Service or section was organised within the Battalion and worked very efficiently. They had not much scope in this area as there were no British Garrisons within it.

"Disarming of Lancers at Castleplunkett".

I should have mentioned that at a date early in 1918 four Lancers were held up and disarmed at Castleplunkett by Jack Brennan and a party of Volunteers. The Lancers carried Lances and Revolvers only. I was not at this and cannot give any details.

Signed: James Quigley

(James Quigley)

Date: 18/6/52

18/6/1952

Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't

(Matthew Barry) Comd't,

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