

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 851

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 851

Witness

Jeremiah Kiely,
Ballinvullen,
Castlemahon,
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Identity.

Member of Monagay (Co. Limerick) Company
Irish Volunteers, 1913 - ;

V/O.C. 1st (Newcastle West) Batt'n.
West Limerick Brigade.

Member, Battalion A.S.U.
Subject.

West Limerick Volunteer activities,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT

BY

JEREMIAH KIELY, BALLINVULLEN, CASTLEMAHON,
NEWCASTLE WEST, CO. LIMERICK.

V/O.C. 1ST (NEWCASTLEWEST) BATTALION,
WEST LIMERICK BRIGADE.

I joined the Volunteers when they were started in Monagay near Newcastle West in November, 1913. It was a Committee was in charge at first and then when Officers were appointed I became the 2nd Lieutenant.

The time of the Split in the Volunteers about October, 1914, the Irish Volunteers had the best of it in Monagay Company. We had a certain amount of arms but the Redmondite Volunteers had arms too and refused to give them up. We had orders to raid their houses for them, which we did. This was a hard thing to do to neighbours and left a lot of bitterness. We didn't succeed in getting any of the rifles, however, because they offered resistance. In fact, we were fired on from one house but nobody was hit. Some days later, our 2nd Lieutenant, Seán Collins, and our Company Adjutant, Tadg Collins, were attacked and injured by the men from two of the houses we had raided.

The ordinary training - drilling, parades and marches - took place all through 1914 and 1915 and right up to Easter Week, 1916. The police didn't interfere with us at first, but when the people who used to make pretty free with them turned round to boycotting them, they got rather sour. One night in 1915 two of them pulled me off my bike and searched me but I had no arms or anything incriminating on me.

The whole Battalion was mobilised for Sunday at Easter, 1916, and paraded at Glenquin Castle. We had not a whole lot of arms then, except the Drumcollogher Company. We expected rifles and ammunition from the arms ship. When nothing happened we were dismissed that evening and each Company marched home again. There were about 20 police watching us that day but they didn't leave the road.

I first heard of the fighting in Dublin when I came into Newcastle West on Easter Monday, but hadn't heard anything of MacNeill's countermanding order until later. All the Battalion was told to be ready but no orders came and the next thing we heard of was the surrender. Dan Collins, O.C. Monagay Company was arrested and interned.

Tadg Collins, our Company Adjutant, got a large quantity of powder and shot from J.J. King, who was later Secretary to the County Limerick Board of Health. We made or filled shot-gun cartridges with heavy shot and extra charges of powder.

While Con Collins, later a T.D., was 'on the run' for the most part of 1918, men of 'A' Company did guard for him in turn, brought him despatches, delivered his replies and did everything possible for his comfort and that of his people.

When the sentenced prisoners were released from the English gaols in June, 1917, there were Volunteer parades

at Rathkeale and Newcastle West to welcome them home. All Volunteers of the 1st Battalion mobilised to do honour to Dr. Richard Hayes, Con Collins and Frank Thornton.

Apart from this there is nothing very much to tell about what we did in 1917. We carried on with our parades and our drilling but we had no arms - at least we didn't display the few we had before Easter, 1916, and which we had hidden away safely.

In 1918 I became O.C. Monagay Company when Daniel Collins, the Company Captain, was arrested and sent to Belfast Gaol. He got four months for being in military uniform and for giving words of command. During his absence in gaol, the whole Company took part in tilling his garden.

In the Spring of this year the most active Volunteers of the 1st Battalion took defensive action against a campaign of looting, and violence started by British ex-soldiers in Newcastle West. Many times from January to March the men of Monagay and Killoughteen Companies marched into Newcastle West at night to reinforce the local Company. The affair ended in the shooting of an ex-soldier by the future Brigadier Garrett McAuliffe, who had fought in Dublin in Easter Week, 1916. McAuliffe was arrested and sent to Belfast Gaol. However, the action of the Volunteers completely suppressed the ex-soldiers, though these were supported by the R.I.C.

Twenty-one members of the three Companies concerned were armed with revolvers when engaged in these police duties.

When conscription was threatened on the country a big crowd of recruits flocked into the Volunteers so that in Monagay we had two Companies really. However, most of the new recruits left when the danger was over. We had collected a lot of money which I held. This was to have been for the purchase of food for the people in the event of conscription being attempted and of a fight happening and then, possibly, a blockade, which would bring hardship and a shortage of food.

Afterwards I was told to hand back the money but Dan Collins, who was now out of gaol and was Company Captain, again, told me to keep back £40 for the purchase of arms. I did this but some of the prominent people connected with the Volunteers said to hand it back to the subscribers and this was done.

In December, 1918, 19 members from A, B, C and D Companies of the 1st Battalion travelled to Waterford for the General Election Campaign. I was one of them and we were armed with batons. We went to defend the Sinn Féin election workers from Redmondite and ex-soldier mobs and to afford the right of free speech to all. Twice we had to charge the mob - in Thomas Street and in Ballybricken Square.

Dan Breen and Seán Hogan were 'on the run' in the

Monagay Company area during February and March, 1919. This was after the ambush at Sologheadbeg in Co. Tipperary, in January. Eight of us armed with revolvers kept guard over them and Captain Dan Collins was responsible for their safety. He got the hint that there was a spy in the area on the track of Breen and Hogan. On receipt of a despatch from Brigadier Seán Finn, Collins, with six other Volunteers all armed with revolvers, cycled to Moanroe where the spy was detained after being caught. This spy had been tried and when the party arrived he was already shot. The shooting squad dispersed when Collins and his men arrived. After this, warnings were given to local houses where men 'on the run' stayed just in case of raids by Crown forces acting on information supplied them by the executed man.

In April, 1919, the Monagay Company held two meetings to consider the taking of Strand R.I.C. Barracks. This was in the Company area. Higher authority gave no encouragement but left the matter open. Tadg Collins, our Company Adjutant, offered to attempt it by stratagem with five companions, but only two others (Seán Collins and Edmond Cregan) volunteered and the remainder did not approve of the venture. Though it seemed daring at the time, it required only resolution to make it a complete success.

That Summer these same three men volunteered to experiment with the making of explosives and asked the Rev. Michael Hayes, brother of Dr. Richard Hayes, if he could procure them a book on the subject, through G.H.Q., or otherwise. Fr. Hayes promised to try but nothing came of it.

In September, to try to get things going, the same three Volunteers had all arranged to shoot a plain-clothes policeman at Newcastle West station. This R.I.C. man, Constable Michael O'Brien, was transferred to Limerick City on the Saturday before the Monday night fixed for the attempt. This night had been fixed a week beforehand, so as to have darkness rather than moonlight for the shooting and the get-away.

Armed with revolvers, Captain Dan Collins, myself and six others, including incidentally the three mentioned already, carried out two raids in October, 1919, at G.P. Curtin's near Newcastle West and at Henry O'Donnell's of Killeedy. An old rifle, a shot-gun and ammunition were got at the latter place.

Seven of the above party (I was not with them this time) went to Killeedy armed with revolvers and swooped on a crowd of ex-soldiers who were disturbing the peace of the area. This was 3rd Battalion ground, but the raiders belonged to the 1st Battalion. Anyway, the ex-soldiers gave no more trouble. This was in November.

The following month, the eight of us who were on the arms raids in October carried out a raid, along with Garrett McAuliffe, O.C. 'D' Company (in charge of the raid) and six of his Company, and also with some men of the 2nd Battalion. This raid was at Ballycommane and was to compel Maurice J. Curtin to submit to a decision of the District Court of West Limerick. Tadg Collins was selected to act as spokesman. To reinforce his argument, we all carried

revolvers. Curtin, who had previously sought police protection, now submitted.

In February, 1920, a number of Volunteers of the 1st Battalion (ten in all including myself) were selected by Brigadier Finn to take part in an attempted ambush of R.I.C. men on the road between Croom and Ballingarry, on their return from police duty at Croom racecourse. The first attempt (at dusk in the evening) failed, owing to lack of proper arrangements and the road being crowded with civilians. On the proposal of Tadg Collins, Adjutant, 'A' Company, another attempt was made by himself and Edmond Cregan and three men from the 4th Battalion. They made a detour and got ahead of and lay in wait for the R.I.C., but as the latter made some delay before they again passed it had grown too dark to distinguish them from the throng of civilians going home from the races. The Volunteers on each occasion were armed with revolvers.

On 3rd April, 1920, Ardagh R.I.C. Barracks was to have been destroyed. It had just been evacuated. It could not be burned, however, without great danger to the thatched houses of the village. So, doors, windows, floors and roof were completely wrecked and then one gable was undermined and knocked out with a battering ram. Two miles away at Newcastle West there was a strong enemy garrison, but the destruction of the Barracks was carried out without interruption. Practically all 'A' Company with six from 'D' and one from 'E' took part. Nine of the Monagay men carried revolvers in case an enemy force appeared.

Two days before this the vacated R.I.C. Barracks at Strand was burned. This operation had to be carried out in face of a pretended message from a man of standing in the national movement that the Crown forces were aware of the intended burning and had plans laid to take the Volunteers by surprise. The job went ahead, however, practically all 'A' Company taking part while eight of us acted as an armed guard and directed the work.

During April, too, Tadg, Seán and Michael Collins ('A' Company) captured two police bicycles and which were used thereafter for Volunteer work. They were used to travel to the second attack on the R.I.C. Barracks at Brosna in County Kerry in the following month.

April 23rd to 26th: There was an attempted ambush of a D.M.P. man of 'G' Division home on leave, at Dually near Newcastle West. John J. Hogan (rescued at Knocklong) was in command of this operation. The first night scouts reported that the 'G' man was drinking with a cousin at a public-house on the outskirts of Newcastle West. The local men wanted to lie in ambush in a quarry between the public-house and the 'G' man's cousin's house, but J.J. Hogan thought this too near the town where a strong police patrol used be out. The party lay in wait beyond the cousin's house and between this and the old home of the 'G' man. The result was (as the local Volunteers had feared) that the 'G' man turned in with his cousin and spent the night there. At that time there was a strict rule made by G.H.Q. that Volunteers should not go into the houses of inoffensive people without special leave from their Brigadier (who in

this case was not available).

The party lay in ambush again on the following night but the scouts could not trace the 'G' man. The ambush party was armed with revolvers and shot-guns. It consisted of the usual eight members of 'A' (Monagay) Company who attempted most of the jobs and an equally active five from 'B' (Newcastle West) Company under the C.O. Garrett McAuliffe.

Dan, Seán and Tadg Collins of 'A' Company were organising a third attempt when word came from the Rev. Michael Hayes, then C.C. in Newcastle West, that the 'G' man had resigned from the D.M.P. and was not to be molested. Neither was he and he is living in the town to this day.

In May, seven of us in 'A' Company, armed with revolvers, carried out five raids in the area to frighten families having sons or brothers in the R.I.C. into using their utmost efforts to get their kinsmen to resign from the Force. Just one resignation followed.

Cornelius Cregan of 'A' Company and Captain Garrett McAuliffe, O.C. 'B' Company, took part as riflemen in the famous attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks. A very considerable number of members of 'A' and 'B' Companies of the 1st Battalion offered to go into East Limerick for that fight but were ordered by their Brigadier, Seán Finn, O.C. West Limerick, to stay at home and prepare for the intended attack on Newcastle West R.I.C. Barracks.

Following the Kilmallock attack, the Newcastle West

operation had to be abandoned owing to lack of ammunition. The 18 men who had volunteered for Kilmallock, as mentioned above, acted as armed guard at the wake and funeral of Liam Scully, the Kerry teacher killed in action at Kilmallock, when his remains were brought into the Newcastle West Battalion area.

On 17th July a particularly obnoxious R.I.C. man was ambushed and killed and his revolver and ammunition taken, at Sweeps' Cross on the Newcastle West-Rathkeale road. Three men each from 'A' and 'B' Companies, armed with revolvers, carried out this operation.

In August a letter from a spy to the D.I. in Newcastle West was captured by stratagem by Volunteer Patrick Aherne, of the 2nd (Rathkeale) Battalion. Tadh Collins and Seán Collins of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, took the letter to Brigadier Finn. He travelled to Fortmiddle near Bruree, where the spy worked, to make enquiries. Later he took a party of men, including Tadh Collins, to capture the spy, but the latter had already been taken away by a party from the 3rd (Drumcollogher) Battalion. The Brigadier and his party then searched the house and found the spy's private papers, including a rough draft of his first letter to the D.I., and the latter's actual reply. They then repaired to the house of Michael Duane of Feohanagh where the spy was tried and sentenced to death. Under cross-examination by Tadh Collins he gave the names and addresses of three other spies with whom he was in touch - two in Kerry and one in Cork. This information was forwarded to the Volunteers

in the localities concerned through Con Collins, then T.D. for West Limerick. The execution was carried out at Clonmore the following night.

From September, 1920, forward, 'A' (Monagay) Company area was Battalion H.Q. and the main energies of the Company were absorbed by the Brigade and Battalion Columns. The routine work of road trenching and blocking, carrying despatches, providing security patrols and scouts for H.Q., etc., was carried on as before. Also, a Battalion dump and a dug-out were constructed in the Company area. All the privately-owned arms and ammunition in the area had been collected (with or without force) before a state of war had arisen.

Police work was carried out by William Flavin of Rathcahill, near Newcastle West.

In October, 1920, the Brigade Column was divided into two - Garrett McAuliffe taking charge of No. 2 Column. When he fell sick, Tadg Collins was elected by the Column to take charge. Acting on local information an ambush was laid on the main Newcastle West-Drumcollogher road of a cycle patrol of Black and Tans who were supposed to bring the pay to the Drumcollogher garrison every Friday. Everything pointed to success but the patrol did not come and probably the local information was at fault.

After this preparations were being made for a night attack in Drumcollogher town when Brigadier Finn recalled No. 2 Column. The men felt they were on the right track

and were most reluctant to obey; but the man in charge insisted on strict obedience to authority.

I had an encounter of an unusual type with the Tans one day. I was down at the sawmills in Newcastle West when three of them came in. One said to me "Are you a Shinner?". 'I am', I said. He said 'Stand up'. I stood up and he hit me a slap in the face, giving me a black eye. I hit him back and there and then we fought it out. He gave up when I knocked him down two or three times. The other two Tans who had been impartial onlookers then went away, bringing my man along with them.

However, one night after, the three of them came fully armed looking for me in the place where I was stopping in the town, but I wasn't there. I heard afterwards that two of them had already been responsible for shooting several men.

Seven men of the 1st Battalion took part in an attack on a troop train at Borrigane, near Askeaton, all armed with rifles. This was in February, 1921.

In April, four men from 'B' Company, armed with rifles, took part in fights at Lakelly and Sraharla in the East Limerick Brigade area.

In May, 1921, nine men of the Battalion Column acted as guards and directed the work of knocking Glenvora Bridge on the main Limerick-Kerry road by some nine others from 'A' and 'C' Companies. These latter were all armed with shot-guns.

During May, also, the Battalion Column had arranged to go into Newcastle West under cover of darkness to shoot two military officers who used to stay drinking late at Ryan's Hotel. In the afternoon of the day preceding the night for the attack a Volunteer who was not 'on the run' was sent into the town to make the final arrangements re scouting and security with the officers of the Newcastle West Company, and with instructions to be back in good time before the Column need start. The Volunteer got drunk, got into trouble of various kinds in the town and did not return for three days. As there was then great danger that he had given away the secret, the attack had to be called off.

The same month the mails were taken from a mail train at Ardagh Station (two miles from Newcastle West), the arrangements being made by me. I was Vice O.C. 1st Battalion now, having been appointed to that position early in 1921. I was not actually with the Brigade Flying Column as I had to take control of the Battalion during the absence of James Liston, the C.O., with the Brigade Column.

A considerable number of men took part, myself and eight others of the Battalion Column, all armed with rifles and 22 men armed with revolvers from 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E' and 'F' Companies.

May 15th to June 22nd: Brigadier Garrett McAuliffe asked Tadg Collins to bring off something in Newcastle West, where there was an enemy garrison of 2,000 men. Collins and Owen McAuliffe spent five weeks scouting round the town

and into the lanes at night. They lay in wait for Major Peck, O.C. British troops, at the back gate of the demesne, and actually within revolver shot of where the military were billeted, for fourteen hours of a warm Summer's day, but with no result.

They cut across the fields to intercept two R.I.C. men reported to have left the town on foot and to have walked out the Monagay road.

With two other Volunteers they lay in wait all night for a cycle patrol of military who were supposed to traverse the country by night and return at daybreak. During all the time they never laid an eye on one of the Crown forces.

At last, acting on information supplied by the Newcastle West Company, they went into one of the lanes in the town on three successive nights, before bedtime, and on the night of June 22nd shot an ex-soldier spy named Thomas Hanly in one of the houses of the lane. Hanly got five .45 bullets in him, though the house where he was found, and even the lane, were crowded owing to the wake of a local resident. The nearest military outpost heard the shooting and troops from there were on the spot so quickly that Hanly's life was saved.

While the last mentioned operation was in progress an attempt was made to capture military stores at Ardagh Station. Two Volunteers of 'D' (Ardagh) Company boarded the train at Rathkeale and travelled to Ardagh, so as to be able to signal information to the attacking party. As there was a very

strong military guard conveying the stores and as the train was crowded with civilians, the attack was called off.

I was concerned in this and had seven other men of the Battalion Column with me, all armed with rifles. In addition, there were 27 revolver men drawn from 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E' and 'F' Companies.

In June, too, we carried out the burning of Newcastle West Courthouse. The party of military billeted in it were absent at the time and though the main garrison was situated in the demesne and the Castle only 100 yards away, we carried out the job without interference.

I was in charge and I got the burning done after darkness, that is, up to midnight. Myself and three others, armed with revolvers, did the actual burning, while eight riflemen from the Battalion Column took cover immediately round the Courthouse to resist a possible attack by the military and to protect the four of us.

Twenty-three men armed with shot-guns or revolvers and drawn from the six Companies of the Battalion did armed outpost duty at various points as a further precaution against a surprise attack.

July 8th - 11th: Barna in the 1st Battalion area was the scene of the intended and prepared ambush of an expected convoy of military lorries. The pick of the men of the West Limerick Brigade and a number of North Cork Volunteers under Patrick O'Brien of Liscarroll lay in wait

with road mines, machine guns and signalling apparatus. Brigadier McAuliffe was in charge of the West Limerick men. I was among the eleven men of the Battalion Column in the firing line, all armed with rifles and bombs. In addition, there were thirty-eight men with shot-guns and revolvers drawn from the six Companies of the Battalion.

The big force lay in ambush during the four days ending 11th July, 1921. Early on 8th July the lorries passed Westward from Newcastle West to Abbeyfeale. The Limerick men would have attacked but the Cork men thought it better to get them on the return journey when their strength was known. The lorries, however, did not return till after noon, the hour of the Truce, on the 11th July. When they came along some of the West Limerick men were taking up the road mines.

During the Truce period we had an Officers' Training Camp for a fortnight at Longhill near Glin on the banks of the Shannon. I attended this and then came home.

Signed:

Jeremiah Kiely
(Jeremiah Kiely)

Witnessed:

C. Saurin
(C. Saurin)

LT.-COLONEL.

Date: 27th May 1953

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