

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 879.....

Witness

Brian Monaghan,
Drumkeelan,
Mountcharles,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Vice O/C. 3rd (Donegal) Brigade,
1st Northern Division.

Subject.

National organisations and activities,
Co. Donegal, 1913-1923.

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STATEMENT OF BRIAN MONAGHAN,

Drimkeelan, Mountcharles, County Donegal.

The Irish Volunteers were organised in my area at the end of the year 1913. At the start of the Volunteer organisation, it was a question of, where all nationalists of the various shades of nationalist opinion substantially joined together in the Irish Volunteers as a counter to the Ulster Volunteers organised by Sir Edward Carson in the North of Ireland.

All the young men of military age together with a sprinkling of older men joined the Volunteers. Drills were held weekly. A man named MacMenamin and a P. J. Croal, both ex-British Servicemen, acted as drill instructors to the Mountcharles Company. On the committee which was in charge of the Volunteers were Joseph McManus (a brother of Seamus McManus, the writer), Robert Meehan, Johnie Doherty and Thomas McCallion, John Tierney and Patrick Keeney.

At the outbreak of the Great War in August, 1914, a split took place in the local Company due mainly to the attitude adopted by John E. Redmond, M.P., Leader of the Parliamentary Party, towards the War. His pro-British outlook caused a cleavage in the ranks of the Volunteers and all his followers left the local Company of the Volunteers. Those who remained attached to the Company became rather dormant from the split up to and including Easter Week, 1916. The organisation of the Volunteers, however, kept together in some shape or form but did not show much life.

GLENFIN B.M.

Previous to 1915, a native of ~~Mountcharles~~ named Dan McGlinchey, emigrated to Glasgow. After his arrival in Glasgow he must have become prominently associated with Irish Volunteer circles in Glasgow and was also, apparently, associated with the I.R.B. organisation.

McGlinchey returned to Mountcharles area from Glasgow about the year 1915. On his return he had a full Irish Volunteer uniform which he occasionally wore at Volunteer functions. This man was then, apparently, active in the I.R.B. Councils.

In Easter Week there was no attempt at a mobilisation. Dan McGlinchey gave instructions to the active Volunteers to collect petrol and revolvers. As far as possible these instructions were carried out.

In 1916 the Company had only one Lee Enfield rifle which was the property of Joseph McManus. Outside the effort to carry out the instructions of Dan McGlinchey concerning petrol and rifles, no further action was taken.

After Easter Week Dan McGlinchey's home was raided by R.I.C. for arms. No arms were found and no local arrests were made.

Years 1917 - 1919.

The Volunteers were reorganised in the year 1917. About twenty young men joined up at first. As there were no arms available for instructional purposes the Volunteers made wooden guns which were used for drilling purposes. The Cumann na mBan were organised about the end of the year 1917. The leader and instructress of the local branch was a Miss O'Callaghan from Limerick County. This lady was employed locally as a teacher and was subsequently married to Gerald Crofts, the singer. About thirty local girls joined the Cumann na mBan. I cannot now remember who was Captain of the local Company of the Volunteers in 1917. I was myself Captain about 1918.

I think the first Brigade organisation was got going about 1918. This Brigade comprised a good portion of West Donegal stretching from Bundoran to Glencolumbcille. Ernie O'Malley came into the area and attempted to hold military classes in Donegal town. This effort of

O'Malley's did not, however, prove a success as he, apparently, got discouraged and gave up the idea.

Sinn Fein Organisation:

A Sinn Fein Club was started in Mountcharges^l district before Charlie F. Dolan contested the North Leitrim Bye-Election in February 1908. About 1908 a local Sinn Fein band was started in conjunction with the Club. The Club lapsed shortly after its formation and no further evidence of Sinn Fein activities existed up to the Roscommon, Longford and Kilkenny Bye-Elections in the years 1917 and 1918.

Seamus McManus, the writer, purchased the band instruments. This band remained in existence notwithstanding the active hostility of the Ancient Order of Hibernians to it from 1908 up to the time of the Bye-Elections mentioned above. During the Bye-Elections this band came into prominence again and helped by its activities the cause of the Sinn Fein party. The band took a prominent part during the years 1917 and 1918 in the celebration of Sinn Fein election victories.

The Sinn Fein organisation and the Irish Volunteer organisation being practically composed of the same personnel carried on their work without any difference on matters of policy and both organisations became most efficient during the 1918 General Election.

The I.R.B. Organisation:

In the old days before any popular idea of organising Republican Organisations existed, the British military used to march from the town of Buncrana to Finner Camp passing through Barnesgap. It was their invariable practice to camp out at Barnesgap and to hold an open-air dance at which a lot of girls attended. There was a local teacher named Richard Bonner who was imbued with the Fenian tradition and this man had very strong views on the collusion between the military personnel and the people and had very decided

objections to anyone attending their functions, especially their dances. Bonner decided to put a stop to this fraternisation. So he collected a number of men whom he organised and had in readiness for a particular dance at Barnesgap. Bonner, in his charge of his men, attended the dance and they made their protest against any of the locals associating with the British soldiers in Donegal area. He succeeded in breaking up the dance and used physical force in doing so. Owing to his actions at this time he was arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. After his release he was dismissed from his school. It can be taken for granted that at the time of this incident at Barnesgap, Bonner was an old member of the I.R.B. and that his membership probably dates back to an association with the I.R.B. leaders who were prominent in that organisation in the years 1870-'80 period. Bonner died in or about the year 1917 and a monument was erected to his memory in the Abbey Graveyard, Donegal town. I would advise a representative of the Bureau of Military History to call on Mrs. Bonner who is still alive and her son, Sean, who lives locally and they will perhaps be able to add to the facts I am now stating.

In the year 1915 or thereabout the I.R.B. organisation was being reorganised in this part of Donegal. The following organisers visited the area to my knowledge :- Bulmer Hobson, Denis McCullough, Herbert Newman Pim: Seamus Dobbyn and Liam Gaynor visited the area also probably much later on. It is difficult for any single person to give any estimate of the local strength of the I.R.B. The organisation was secret in nature and an ordinary member would only know the small number of members in his Circle.

I cannot state exactly how the first local Circle was started. The following men were active members of the organisation :- Patrick J. Sweeney, Croagh, James Maguire, Drumlitterfin, Hugh Lenaghan, Killymard. One of the principal planks of the local I.R.B. policy was the disruption and disorganisation of the Hibernian

organisation. The Hibernian organisation seemed to have taken upon themselves the duty of obstructing all efforts at organising the I.R.B.

I joined the I.R.B. in the year 1915. Dan McGlinchey approached me and asked me if I would agree to join the organisation. I did so.. I think that McGlinchey started the local Circle, of which I was a member, on his own initiative. There were about a dozen men in the Circle. The Circle met regularly and as part of their activities they held dances to raise money for organising purposes.

Later on after 1916, the I.R.B. influenced the appointment of Irish Volunteer officers and they had sufficient influence to appoint officers in the local Sinn Fein organisation. About 1917 or 1918 Dan McGlinchey went from this district and after his departure the I.R.B. organisation seemed to have dropped out of things.

Tan War Period:

"C" Company, 2nd Battalion area:

The probable strength of "C" Company, 2nd Battalion, in the year 1920 was approximately 20 men. William McGroarty (deceased) was Captain. Frank McManus, Drimnalust and Andy Higginsbottom were Lieutenants. Frank Conaghan, Dromore, was Quartermaster and Mick Dawson was Company Adjutant.

All the activities ordered by the Battalion Staff were carried out by this Company. These included raids for arms on Unionists' houses. In nearly all cases the nationalist population having possession of arms handed them over to the Volunteers.

General Raid for Arms and raids for Office and Telegraphic Equipment.

The general raid for arms was carried out as a result of an order made by General Headquarters that all the arms in civilian hands were to be taken up by the I.R.A. simultaneously on an appointed date

in September 1920. This order was carried out on an extensive scale in the Mountcharles area. All the houses of Unionists who held arms were raided. The area to be covered in the raid was so large the raiding operations had to be spread over two nights consecutively. The Frosses Company carried out the raids in Mountcharles area. At one Unionist house an exchange of shots took place and some of the Volunteers got hit by shotgun pellets.

As a result of another General Headquarters order we carried out raids on the local Post Office and on the local railway station where we removed telegraphic apparatus.

The Mountcharles Company in conjunction with the Frosses Company carried out a raid on a passenger train at Inver Railway Station where a guard on the train was removed. This action became necessary following the guard's refusal to obey a General Headquarters order to railway employees to cease operating trains carrying British troops, munitions or military equipment.

A general boycott was carried out on the Army of Occupation, soldiers, police and Black & Tans. This boycott included association and the supply to them of all kinds of food and drink. This boycott was carried out efficiently and had effective results. The British Courts were boycotted and Republican Courts were set up to deal with all matters of local disputes. Generally speaking the boycott on British Courts proved most effective amongst the nationalist population. The only people using British Courts were Unionists and loyalists. The I.R.A. supplied a police force to implement Republican Court decrees and carry out any orders issued by Court authority.

The British attempted to set up local machinery to collect information and intelligence about the movements and activities of local members of the Volunteers and of the Sinn Fein organisation. These attempts by the British to obtain information proved abortive.

Military Operations:
Attack on Mountcharles R.I.C. Barracks.

The attack on Mountcharles R.I.C. Barracks took place on the night of the 15th August, 1920. A Sergeant and five police garrisoned the barracks. The Sergeant's name was Farrelly and the Constables' names were Murray, Scanlan, Bruen, Fleming and Satchwell.

The barrack was part of a terrace of houses and the Volunteers occupied positions front and rear of the barrack. This attack upon Mountcharles barrack was in the nature of a supporting operation to a major effort being made on the R.I.C. barracks in Donegal town when a large body of Volunteers had planned to attempt to capture the barracks. The men at Mountcharles had taken up their positions in the front and rear. They opened fire on the barrack. This fire was from one rifle and a number of shotguns. After the first volley was fired a demand was made on the garrison to surrender. The garrison refused to surrender and defended their post. After some time this sniping operation on Mountcharles was called off.

The plans to attack Donegal barracks, which were made for a large-scale operation, miscarried as apparently a lot of the men allotted for this attack failed to turn up and the idea of an attack had to be abandoned by those who went armed to the vicinity of the barracks. Joe McDevitt was in charge of the men who mobilised in the vicinity of the barracks. This planned attack on Donegal barracks embraced men from all over the Brigade area. From the 2nd Battalion the following men turned up to the vicinity of the barracks for the attack :- Paddy Meehan of Ballymachill, O/C. 2nd Battalion, Johnie Harley, Drumard, Daniel Meehan, Killian, Joe H. Gallagher, Ballymachill; Michael Gallagher, Mountcharles, attended and supplied the transport.

Sometime after August, 1920, the local police showed signs that they intended to evacuate Mountcharles barracks. Plans were made to rush the barracks before the police evacuated it and capture the police equipment. A number of men were selected for this operation

which was planned for daytime. The men allotted to the job were placed in pre-selected positions convenient to the barracks. At the time the attack was to take place a military lorry came into Mountcharles and halted at the barrack door. We heard later on that other military lorries were close to the village on the roads. It looked as if the military had information about our plans. It came to our knowledge later, however, that the military were moving from Finner Camp to Killybegs on that day. These movements by the military prevented the attempt to rush Mountcharles barracks which was called off. The barracks were evacuated a short time later and the building was burned by the Volunteers the evening the place was evacuated. The garrison of Mountcharles Barracks went to Donegal Barracks, which was then a very strong post and a defence was put up to resist any attempt at successfully attacking it.

Before this attempt to rush Mountcharles R.I.C. barracks a number of us lay in ambush at a place named Turris Hill to ambush a party of police who were in the habit of supplementing the Mountcharles police on Fair Days in Mountcharles and on this occasion the police failed to turn up.

Ambush at the Glen, Mountcharles.

From the evacuation of the barracks in Mountcharles the police were in the habit of sending men into the village to do police duty on Fair Days. On the morning of the 22nd February, 1921, which was Fair Day, seven of us went into position at 7 a.m. to attack the police going from Donegal town into the Fair. The men taking up positions were :- Brian Monaghan (myself), Mick Dawson, Willie McGroarty, Michael Ward, Paddy Kelly, Andy Higginbottom, Joe Gallagher (Harry) and Charles Murray. We were armed with rifles. Four or five police came along on cycles accompanied by a party of military numbering about thirty soldiers. The military were also cycling. About 1 p.m. when the police who were leading the military, came into our position,

we opened fire on them. The police and the soldiers immediately got off their bicycles, took whatever cover was available and replied to our fire. The exchange of fire lasted for about ten minutes. We were then forced to retreat. We suffered no casualties in this engagement. One of the police, Constable Satchwell, was killed, and others of the police and military were wounded.

Later on that night or about 1 a.m. on the following morning a composite force of R.I.C., Black & Tans and military came into the village of Mountcharles and broke into and burned the following houses:- Bernard Callagher's , James McGrory's - both of which were totally destroyed. Bernard McGrory's (senior) and Miss S.A. McManus's were partially burned. In Miss McManus's house the police were carrying out a search as well as setting the premises on fire. One of the police force, a Constable Hughes, was shot dead on Miss McManus's stairs by another member of the raiding party. It was believed at the time of the shooting that the shot policeman was mistaken for Joe McManus, a brother of Miss McManus. A Miss Mary Harley, aged 21 or 22 years, whilst in the act of escaping from Bernard McGrory's house at the time the police and military were attempting to break into it was fired on and shot dead by the raiders.

The shooting of Constable Hughes apparently created a sort of panic amongst the raiders which caused the men in charge to call the whole raiding parties together and they were ordered to evacuate the village without doing any further damage. If this theory is correct the shooting of Constable Hughes proved a most providential incident for it saved the other houses in the village from being attacked and burned. This operation in Mountcharles and subsequent reprisals by the police and military parties was the last local major incident which took place between February and the Truce. The military and police authorities instituted a most intensive system of raiding and searching for all the Volunteers who were now all on the 'run' and were unable to sleep with any safety in houses that were likely to be raided.

The only activities we were in a position to carry out was the blocking of roads, the cutting of communications and other minor operations which tended to keep the police and military authorities on the alert and moving.

Donegal town contained in those days a large hostile unionist populace. These unionists were a source of extreme danger to active Volunteers in the area and their presence compelled the Volunteers to act with great caution in any plans they were making to carry on the fight.

An aspect of the work of the Volunteers from this area which was rather important and should be stressed by me is that a lot of the young men from this district had to emigrate to Scotland and obtain employment there. Those emigrants returned periodically to their homes especially when the spring and harvest work required their attention. The majority of the men from our area obtained work in Scotland in the coal mining districts and in and about Glasgow and Tyneside areas. When they arrived in Scotland they invariably contacted the local Volunteers in areas where they were working and linked up with them. They proved most useful in the procuring of arms by purchase and other ways, obtaining explosives particularly in coal-mining operations where they were able to purloin a considerable quantity. Part of this work by the local Volunteers was carried out under the direction of officers sent into Scotland by the Quartermaster General of the I.R.A. who had an extensive and widespread organisation in England for the procuring of arms and munitions of warfare. Some of the material obtained by local Volunteers was sent across to their home areas by them by ^{various} secret channels. Their efforts tended to relieve the lamentable scarcity of arms which existed in our home areas.

Truce Period.

When the Truce was declared on the 11th July, 1921, all the boys on the 'run' returned home. The immediate problem then was to start

a course of military training which would enable all Brigade, Battalion and Company officers to instruct their men on at least the elementary principles of good soldiering.

A Brigade training camp was established at a place named Drimarone where all Brigade, Battalion and Company officers were called to and received a course of training on the various aspects of military matters. This course embraced Close Order Drill, Open Order Drill, Manoeuvres, Attacking and Defending Positions, Engineering, the Use of Explosives. At this camp the Engineers got instruction in the manufacture of explosives and the use of home-made explosives in Land Mines etc.

The subjects covered by the various officers in the training camp were conveyed to the men in the Companies and an intensive course of training was carried out and all the possible preparations made for a resumption of military activities in the event of the peace negotiations breaking down in London.

Another camp was held in a big mansion - Breenagh - near Churchill. At this camp a course of more advanced work was carried out than was attempted at Drimarone.

After December 1921 and ^{the} signing by the Irish Plenipotentiaries in London of the articles of agreement for a treaty between Ireland and Britain, a sharp difference of opinion took place on the question of the treaty in both the ranks of Sinn Fein and the I.R.A. Immediately after the signing of the agreement in London this division in the ranks became apparent and old comrades took opposite sides - some for and others against the acceptance of the proposed treaty.

This state of affairs continued in our area from early 1922 up to about March 1922 when it was decided to put the question of agreeing to accept the treaty or rejecting it to each individual I.R.A. man at a Company mobilisation convened for this purpose. This step was taken and the majority of the men of the Companies of this

Battalion voted against the acceptance of the Treaty.

Fighting at Pettigo.

Sometime about early June 1922, a party of men from this Battalion went to Cliff House, Belleek, which is situated close to the Six-County frontier. This occupation of Cliff House was undertaken as a precaution against an anticipated invasion of Donegal by British Army forces then stationed in strength in all Six-County Border districts. At this time a party of former I.R.A. men, who had taken the Treaty side and were then known as Provisional Government forces, occupied positions in and close to the small town of Pettigo. A clash took place at Pettigo between those Provisional Government forces and the British Army. This clash developed into a battle in which artillery was used by the British Army against us at Belleek. The British forces being much stronger in numbers and much better equipped compelled the retreat of all our forces.

This incident seemed to heal the division in the ranks of the former I.R.A. as both the treaty supporters at Pettigo and the anti-treaty supporters at Belleek took a hand at actively opposing the advance of the British Forces. Unfortunately this ^{temporary} feeling of old-time unity disappeared as soon as the military operations against the British forces came to an end.

A General Survey of the Civil War in the 3rd Donegal Brigade Area:

At the time the British Army evacuated Finner Camp, near Bundoran, a party of I.R.A. forces (anti-Treaty) from Sligo Brigade took over the Camp from the British. Finner Camp was occupied by these men up to about early August when they were forced to evacuate by Provisional Government Forces - now known as the Free State Army.

A number of military posts were held by Republican (anti-Treaty) forces when the Civil War started. Local Free State Army forces supplemented by some officers and men from areas outside County Donegal commenced a series of attacks on individual posts held by our forces. These attacks were carried out one at a time, the pressure being concentrated until the defenders were forced to evacuate. In Mountcharles we occupied a large mansion known as 'Hall House', which had been used by the Marquis of Cunningham as a residence. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War we were forced to evacuate this post.

From the start of the Civil War in County Donegal, the campaign developed on the republican side into a series of attacks by our men on Free State Army-held posts. The cutting of telegraphic and telephone communications, the cutting of roads and attacks on Free State Army patrols took place. The Free State Army authorities concentrated on rounding up and imprisoning all anti-Treaty partisans, both those who opposed them in arms and those who were politically opposed to the Treaty. Another aspect of the Free State Army activity was a policy of shooting important prisoners and selecting other important prisoners and holding them as hostages. These hostages were to be executed if military activities by their comrades were not discontinued. The Free State Army also resorted to a reprisal policy in which the houses of prominent republicans were burned. The burning of my home is one example of this policy.

The tactics employed by the Free State Army in County Donegal were apparently designed to create a state of terror amongst the civilian population and panic amongst active I.R.A. men.

I do not propose to dwell any further with the events of the Civil War. The history of these times and the local happenings which I could detail have been recorded in the various local and national newspapers. The general outline I have given is sufficient from me.

In concluding this statement I would like to pay a compliment to the work of the Cumann na mBan who helped the Volunteers in various ways, catering for them and looking after their comfort and safety. I would also like to pay a compliment to the people who kept us, provided us with shelter and food and who were prepared, although many were poor, to supply our wants in food and other necessaries such as tobacco, cigarettes etc.

Signed: Brian Monaghan
(Brian Monaghan)

Date: 13th July 1953
13th July 1953.

Witness: Brian Mac Ruairi P.C.
(Brian Mac Ruairi, P.C.)

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