

W.S. 917

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILE' TA 1913-21
No. W.S. 917

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 917.....

Witness

Tom O'Grady,
Cloonacool,
Tubbercurry,
Co. Sligo.

Identity.

Centre of Cloonacool Circle, I.R.B., Co. Sligo,
1913 - ;
Member of Irish Volunteers, same area, 1913 - .

Subject.

National activities, Tubbercurry area,
Co. Sligo, 1913-1918.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S.422**

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Statement of Mr. Tom O'Grady,

Cloonacool,

Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo.

The first Republican organisation to be established in this locality was the Sinn Féin organisation. After Sinn Féin was properly organised, Alec McCabe with some prominent Sinn Féin leaders organised the I.R.B. One Circle of the I.R.B. was organised in Cloonacool with about seven members. Another Circle was organised at Mullinabrena. Séamus O'Mearain was Centre of this Circle, consisting of 11 members: I was Centre of Cloonacool Circle.

About the end of 1913 or very early in 1914 the I.R.B. organised the Irish Volunteers in our immediate local areas. The I.R.B. in the years 1914 and 1915 exercised control in the Volunteer Companies.

Sinn Féin at this time was the organisation which initiated an urge to get all other Republican organisations going. At the time of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in Dublin Andy Lavin and I travelled to the city to attend it. We had a two-fold object in view: one was to attend the funeral, and the other was to obtain arms and ammunition for the Volunteers. We had a prior arrangement with The O'Rahilly to meet us after the funeral to discuss the question of supplying us with some arms. When we came to Dublin we found that The O'Rahilly was ill. Mr. Eamonn De Valera met us, as The O'Rahilly's deputy. Andy Lavin, in the interview with De Valera, was speaking for the parish of Mullinabreena: I was speaking for the Cloonacool area. At this time Colonel Moore was very active all over the country organising the Redmondite Volunteers. He visited Co. Mayo and other places. Colonel Moore's people issued an advertisement in local

papers, pointing out that all who joined their organisation would get Martini rifles. Previous to my visit to Dublin, the Cloonacool Company of the Volunteers instructed me to affiliate with Colonel Moore's organisation in order to get rifles. I told De Valera what Moore had done in the matter of advertisement and promises. We had money with us and we told De Valera that we were organising a new Company and that it might happen that this Company would affiliate with Colonel Moore's section. I have a very distinct recollection of what De Valera told us. He said that we or our Companies should not tamper with matters of principle. He said that they - Colonel Moore's crowd - would use the promise of Martini rifles as a publicity stunt in order to get recruits. He said then, "Go back to your Company and advise them to keep on as you are". He also said that he had doubts that Moore's people had rifles for disposal. As a result of our visit to Dublin a consignment of 12 single barrel shotguns came along for us by a man named Kane of Ballyshannon and Andy Lavin and 12 Harrison & Richardson revolvers came from Dublin to us through Tubbercurry.

In Easter Week 1916 we had very little arms locally. Alec McCabe came from Dublin to Ballaghaderreen where he met Joe Kelly. McCabe wanted the use of a car and Kelly had no car. Kelly then went into Jerry O'Dowd's garage in Ballaghaderreen and took possession of a car he found there: both men started off for Tubbercurry. When about 2 miles out of Ballaghaderreen, they met the owner of the garage. At the time O'Dowd came along, the car they had commandeered had run out of petrol. When O'Dowd pulled up Kelly immediately produced a gun and told O'Dowd that he had commandeered the car. At O'Dowd's appearance, McCabe took to the fields and went across

to Achonry Creamery and stayed at the Creamery that night - Monday or Tuesday night of Easter Week. Next morning McCabe suggested that something should be done: he remained at the Creamery while I went into Tubbercurry to rouse the men there to action. In Tubbercurry I met Padhraig O'Donlon, Pat Sweeney and Pat Dyar. These men were leaders in the town. When I gave Donlon the message from McCabe, his attitude was that to do anything in the nature of attacking British forces would be madness. Dyar's comment was a recommendation that we should go out on the Square and say the Rosary. After my failure to achieve any results in Tubbercurry, I returned to Achonry and contacted McCabe again. At this time Lavin, who had gone in another direction, had also returned. The wildest rumours were circulating and owing to these rumours, it was decided that nothing should be attempted. We could not leave McCabe, a stranger in our midst, so we took him down to a house in Rinbane, Ballymote, owned by Michael McLoughlin. McCabe was being looked for by the police and we got information that the police had become aware of his whereabouts. We then shifted him to a nearby house belonging to Mark Conlon. He remained in hiding there for about nine months and afterwards he appeared for the first time in public at the Longford bye-election - McGuinness'.

Late in 1916 we got instructions to collect money for the National Aid and Prisoners' Dependants Fund. We started locally and collected roughly about £70. When we had collected the money we sent it on to the present Judge Davitt. Thirteen men in Cliffoney area were arrested after 1916 and were sent to Frongoch. After we had collected the £70 and sent it to Judge Davitt, the necessity for supplying the dependants of the men with some funds became urgent. We made an application to

Judge Davitt for a repayment of the money we had sent on to him: he sent back roughly £70.0.0 to us and we distributed this among the dependants of the men in Frongoch. Cheques were issued to each of the dependants by Mr. P.P. Condon, Sligo.

During the time that Alec McCabe was "on the run" in Conlon's house, he arranged that he get married. He was married in Ballinacarrow Church by Father Batty Quinn, P.P., Ballymote - later, Canon Quinn. This marriage took place about the end of August 1916 and was celebrated at 12.40 a.m. There were only about 5 people present: the bride was Miss Norrie Dawson of Ballymote.

When the McGuinness election took place in Longford 7 of us went by car to Ballymahon to attend a public meeting there. This was the first occasion Darrel Figgis appeared on a public platform since the Easter Week Rising.

From the end of 1916 to the end of 1919 the local activities consisted of training and drilling of Volunteers.

Pat Nicholson was for about 40 years Secretary of the United Irish League in Cloonacool. About 1918 he began to notice a change in the outlook of the people. When some of the younger elements of the population joined the Sinn Féin organisation, it was considered good policy by them to infiltrate into the United Irish League ranks in order to entice the members of that organisation. When Nicholson saw what was happening he decided to hand over the organisation of the League to Sinn Féin. On his advice, the younger elements of the League went as a body into Sinn Féin. Owing to Nicholson's attitude in this matter, it appeared that, overnight, the local U. I. L. Branch became the Sinn Féin Branch. In addition, the League rooms in which the U. I. L. had held their meetings and which was their Headquarters became the Headquarters of Sinn Féin and,

later on, when the Volunteers were organised, it became Volunteer Headquarters.

When the British Government tried to enforce Conscription in Cloonacool we organised a Defence Fund to fight it. One of the Trustees of the Fund was the Reverend Felix Burke, Curate in Tubbercurry. Father Burke had under his control as Trustee the sum of approximately £150, which was collected from the half-parish of Cloonacool. This money was entirely in Father Burke's hands. When the British, in their wisdom, decided to drop the threat of conscription here, I was Secretary of the Sinn Féin organisation in Cloonacool and I received instructions from the Headquarters of the Defence Fund people in Dublin to use all the influence we could to have the anti-Conscription Defence Funds devoted to the Volunteer movement. On receipt of this communication from Dublin I called a meeting of the Sinn Féin Club on a Sunday morning. The primary purpose of this meeting was to send a deputation after Mass to Father Burke to ask him to hand over the money. It was Father Burke's custom, when saying Mass, to have his breakfast supplied by a Mrs. B. Brennan in Cloonacool. We decided that our deputation would call on Fr. Burke immediately after his breakfast and bring to his notice the instructions we had received in connection with the anti-Conscription Funds. The members of that deputation were John T. McDonnell, William Mullarkey and myself. Both McDonnell and Mullarkey were old Fenians. When I, who had the job of explaining to the priest the purpose of our calling on him, started my explanation he ordered us 'out to Hell or he'd kick us out'. He threw some papers we had with us about the place. McDonnell refused to be intimidated by the priest. A loud voiced argument took place between the priest and the old man, and Mullarkey and I kept them apart. We then retired from

the room. On leaving the house I noticed that Mrs. Brennan was acting in a most praiseworthy manner, considering the circumstances. She was standing in a room we passed through in an attitude of prayer.

We did not get the funds we sought. Father Burke went from house to house later on and handed back to each contributor the amount each had subscribed. In partial explanation of his attitude towards Sinn Féin I should mention that Father Burke had been a Chaplain in the British Army and had received shell shock whilst on foreign service in the 1914 War.

I shall now conclude this statement as, from the year 1918 onwards, the records of the various activities which were carried on locally can better be told by the younger men who took over from the men responsible for the early organisation of Republican activities in Tubbercurry and the surrounding district.

Signed Tom O'Grady
(Tom O'Grady)
Date 30/12/53
30/12/53.

Witness Patrick Mullarkey
30th Dec. 1953.

(Patrick Mullarkey)
30th Dec'r. 1953.

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