

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEANTA 1913-21

No. W.S. 992

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 992

Witness

Denis Noonan,
Castlekevin,
Castletownroche,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Kilfinane Coy. Irish Vol's.,
Co. Limerick, 1915 - ;

Lieutenant of Musketry, Kilfinane Batt'n. later.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick,
1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY DENIS NOONAN

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Castlekevin, Castletownroche, Co. Cork.

I was born on 12th August 1898 at Thomastown, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick. My parents were farmers.

In my childhood days I often heard my father and other neighbours who used to gather into our house at night talk of Kilclooney Wood and 1867, but I was too young at the time to appreciate the discussions that took place amongst the locals at their fireside chats.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Kilfinane early in 1915. They were organised, I think, by William P. Manahan who, at the time, was a Creamery Manager in Ardpatrick. The strength of the unit about this time was 18 to 20. Jack McCarthy was O/C. and other members were: Dan Hennessy, William O'Keefe, Patrick Carroll. I remember that sometime about the end of the year, or early in 1916, Ernest Blythe was in the district. He was investigating the Volunteer position, I think.

The only type of drill carried out by us around this time was foot drill. This took place usually at night in fields in the vicinity of the town. The only arms held were a few shot-guns, the property of members and a couple of revolvers. I think at around this time Ardpatrick Company had a rifle or two. I don't know how they procured them.

The Kilfinane unit was attached to the Galtee Battalion. Other units in the battalion were, as far as I can recollect: Ardpatrick, Cush, Galbally, Ballylanders, Mitchelstown and Charleville. With the other members of the Unit I attended a battalion parade at Ardpatrick on St. Patrick's Day 1916. Wm. P. Manahan was, I think, in charge, and all the other companies were also represented.

The Kilfinane unit - still of the same strength - were mobilised on Easter Sunday morning 1916 at Leahy's Cross, Kilfinane. We marched to Ballylanders where we were halted on our way to the mobilisation point for the battalion at Galbally. We were, I think, awaiting the arrival of the rifles from Kerry which were to have been landed with Roger Casement. We returned home about 6 p.m. We were awaiting further instructions during Easter Week but none arrived, as far as I know. In connection with Easter Week, I think that on Easter Saturday night Jack McCarthy used a horse and trap to transport a supply of about 250 cartridges loaded with buckshot to Ballylanders.

Sometime in the week following Easter the battalion O/C. (Wm. P. Manahan) was arrested. He was later interned in Frongoch.

There was a lull after Easter Week, but we still continued to meet in small groups of three or four. This was the position until the Spring of 1917 when, following the release of some of the Easter Week prisoners, there was a re-awakening of the spirit amongst the general public. The old members of the unit were then assembling together as of old, but a couple of members raised the question of being asked to go out without arms in 1916 and left. I cannot now remember the names of the people concerned.

Donnchadh Hannigan was, at this time, in charge of the Galtee Battalion and he initiated a push for new recruits. All new recruits at this time were selected in advance before being approached to join the Volunteers. In the Summer of 1917 the strength of the Kilfinane unit was about 30. At this time I was appointed section commander. The officers of the company were: Captain - Jack McCarthy; 1st Lieutenant - Dan P. McCarthy; 2nd Lieutenant - Jim Condon. The usual drill and parades took place, usually at night. There were, as far as I knew, no extra arms on hands. There was no Fianna or Cumann na mBan

organisation in the district.

During 1917 and subsequent years the Volunteers took an active part in organising the political wing (Sinn Féin) of the movement. As a matter of fact this wing at this stage was mainly composed of the Volunteers and members of their families.

Early in 1918 some dispute arose between the different companies in the old Galtee Battalion. As far as I know it concerned the question of the happenings at Easter Week and later the control of the I.R.B. The battalion was to parade at Kilclooney Wood in connection with the O'Neill-Crowley Anniversary celebrations in March of this year. The morning of the day selected for the celebration was extremely wet and some of the Kilfinane Company, which was to march to Kilclooney, travelled there as individuals. At Kilclooney the company was ordered to "fall in" by Donnchadh O'Hannigan, Battalion O/C., but many of the members failed to do so.

This was one of a number of incidents which led to the holding of an inquiry by M.W. O'Reilly (G.H.Q.) at Knocklong at a later stage. Before this inquiry was held the members of the Kilfinane Company were asked to parade before the officer holding the inquiry. This parade was held at Ballinavreena and Lieut. Jim Condon was in charge. As far as I can recollect, no member of the parade was questioned in connection with the inquiry. The parade seemed to have been called to enable the representative from G.H.Q. (M.W. O'Reilly) to see what kind of a unit this was, many members of which failed to "fall in" at Kilclooney when instructed to do so by the Battalion O/C. (D. O'Hannigan). I think that as a result of the inquiry held by M.W. O'Reilly Seán T. O'Riordan, Kilmallock, was appointed O/C. of the Galtee Battalion. He appointed the battalion staff and at the end of 1918 the battalion officers were: O/C. Seán T. O'Riordan; Vice O/C. Jack McCarthy; Adjutant Pat Carroll; Q.M. Tom Lipsett

Dan McCarthy was Company O/C. at this time.

When conscription was threatened in 1918 there was a big influx of new recruits to the Volunteers. The membership of the company increased to about 120 or so, but the vast majority of the new recruits faded out when the scare had passed. I think the net result of the conscription scare was that the company strength increased by about ten or so. After ^{the} conscription period the strength of the unit would be about thirty five or forty.

Amongst the activities planned if conscription was enforced were an attack on the R.I.C. barracks and the seizure of the post office. Numerous raids for arms also took place about this time from which about thirty shotguns and some 200 rounds of ammunition were obtained. Practically all members of the unit took a hand in these raids.

The political wing demanded practically wholetime activity towards the end of 1918 when the General Election was held. All Volunteers were engaged in the usual election activities, e.g., canvassing, checking voters' lists, acting as personating agents and guarding polling stations and ballot boxes.

The success of Sinn Féin at the General Election gave a boost to the National movements and our activities were looked on more favourably. The usual drills and parades took place. This was the position early in 1919.

The first real engagement in the War of Independence subsequent to 1916, in which our members were concerned, was the rescue of Sean Hogan at Knocklong Railway Station on May 13th 1919. Our members were not engaged in the actual operation, but the Volunteers wounded in the engagement arrived at Clancy's, Cush, Kilfinane, the same evening and arrangements had to be made to remove them to West Limerick area. I was engaged on outpost and scouting duties in connection with the removal.

Arrangements had been made that Garrett McAuliffe would come with a car from Newcastlewest to collect the wounded men. He was to avoid all main roads as far as possible. In order to ensure his safe passage, scouts were posted at all crossroads in our area between Newcastlewest and Cush. A password was arranged for identification purpose. The password was "Maguire".

I was on duty at Ballingaddy crossroads about two miles from Kilmallock on the road between Kilfinane and Kilmallock. I was accompanied by Ned Barrett and Maurice McGrath. When the car arrived the driver pulled up at the cross. He asked our party if we knew where "Maguire" lived round here, so I replied: "I'm your man". I then sent Ned Barrett with him to Clancy's at Cush where they picked up the wounded men (Sean Treacy and Dan Breen). The car passed through Ballingaddy crossroads on its way to West Limerick about 3 a.m. on the morning following Knocklong engagement.

During the remainder of 1919 and early 1920 the members of the Company paraded and drilled as usual. The drill was becoming more advanced and members were being trained in scouting, the use of cover and, occasionally, there would be some few shots at a target with a .22 rifle. At this time I think Dan P. McCarthy became Battalion I.O. and Tom Lipsett became Company O/C.

I think that East Limerick Brigade was formed about this time (early 1920). The battalions composing the brigade were: Doon (1st), Knocklong (2nd), Bruff (3rd), Kilmallock (4th), Kilfinane (5th), Ballylanders (6th).

The Brigade staff were, I think:- O/C Seán Wall, Vice O/C Dan Allis, Adj. Jack McCarthy and Q/M Liam Hayes.

The G.H.Q. General Order for the destruction of evacuated R.I.C. posts and income tax offices did not lead to much activity

in our area. Elton and Glenasheen R.I.C. barracks were, however, destroyed.

On April 27th, 1920, Ballylanders R.I.C. barracks was attacked^K by units from the brigade. The following members of Kilfinane unit took part in the actual attack:- Jack McCarthy, Pat Carroll, Peter Steepe, Dan McCarthy, Joe Kelly, All other members of the unit were engaged on various activities in connection with this engagement. With Paddy Ryan (Kilfinane) three men from Ardpatrick, and two or three others, witness was on duty at a barricade on the Kilfinane-Ballylanders road - about one mile from Ballylanders. Paddy Ryan, who was Company O/C. at the time, was in charge. There was no activity at our position and we withdrew to our own area when the engagement was finished.

At the end of May 1920 (28th) Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks was attacked by the East Limerick Brigade. The co-operation of neighbouring units of the Charleville Battalion of Cork II Brigad was sought in this case and was readily forthcoming. The Cork Brigade, as well as supplying some riflemen for the attack, also rendered great service in cutting lines of communication and blocking roads in its own area. These activities prevented troops from Buttevant and Ballyvonare military posts from reaching Kilmallock until long after the attack was over.

The following members of the Kilfinane unit took part in the actual attack on Kilmallock Barracks - Jack McCarthy (he was in the Kilmallock area making arrangements and plans for a couple of days before the actual date of the engagement), Dan McCarthy, Peter Steepe, Tom Lipsett, Con O'Keefe, William O'Keefe and witness (Denis Noonan). All other members of the Kilfinane Company were engaged on road blocking, scouting and outpost duty.

With four others (Ned Tracey, Jim Bond, William Duane and William O'Keefe) witness was in position behind a wall at the

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south (station) side of the barrack. This wall projected from the gable of Conboy's house. We took up our position about 11 p.m. and the attack was opened about 12.30 a.m. In the interval we were engaged in fortifying our position and arranging loopholes between bags of cement which we had placed on top of the wall. These bags of cement had been taken from Conboy's store. We were all armed with rifles. From our position we were able to cover a steel-shuttered window in the gable wall of the barracks. We kept up an intermittent fire on the window during the attack. Sometime about 6 a.m. I moved from my position to one at the rear of the barracks where there was a party with shotguns, as I was told that there was a possibility that the R.I.C. who, at this time, had been driven into one room on the ground floor, might make an effort to break out. The greater portion of the barrack was on fire at this stage. I remained in my new position until about 7 a.m. when we received orders to withdraw.

I withdrew to the Fair Field where my rifle was collected and went to the railway station where I had left my bicycle. With Dan McCarthy, Tom Lipsett, Peter Steepe, Con O'Keefe and William O'Keefe witness moved off in the direction of Kilfinane. When cycling along in single file about midway between Kilmallock and Kilfinane we ran into a patrol of three R.I.C. men. As we were unarmed we scrambled over the roadside fence and made off across the fields leaving our cycles behind us. I arrived home about 8.30 a.m. on 29th May 1920.

Following this engagement the nucleus of a column was formed by men "on the run". As far as I can recollect, the first members were Donnchadh Hannigan, O/C., Jack McCarthy, Peter Steepe, Dave Clancy, Ned Walsh, Dan Moloney, Seán O'Keefe, Dan Forde, Ned and Dave Tobin, Dave Quann, Tom Howard. One of this party's first engagements resulted in the capture of a patrol of three R.I.C. men at Ballinahinch. This party, who had previously

been stationed at Elton, where the barracks had been closed down, usually travelled once a week from Kilfinane to Elton to collect their rations. They were surprised by the column and disarmed without a shot being fired. I was not present at this engagement which took place early in July 1920.

About this time I was engaged for two or three weeks on the building of a dump at Thomastown, Kilfinane. The dump was built in an outside farm owned by Mrs. McCarthy. We dug a hole 6 ft. deep, 6 ft. long and 3 ft. wide on the floor of a stable. This was lined with brick and covered with concrete, except for a trapdoor made of concrete which was fitted with two rings to enable it to be lifted. The floor of the stable was at all times kept covered with a well-used lot of litter which, of course, could be removed at short notice when the use of the dump was required. This dump was later discovered by the enemy, obviously on information supplied by someone "in the know" as the raiding party walked straight to the house in which the dump was situated when they raided Mrs. McCarthy's farm. It was rumoured at the time that the disclosure was made by a man named Maurice Costello, who was at one time a member of the column but, being found not to be a suitable type, was demobbed. He was "moping" round the Effin area on his own when picked up by an enemy patrol from Kilmallock. He was held for about a week when he was released. Shortly afterwards troops from Kilmallock garrison passed through Kilfinane and on the way raided McCarthy's where they found the dump. The significant

thing about this was that the raiders came from Kilmallock although the dump was in the area controlled by Kilfinane. Costello while a member of the column was often at the dump with or for arms. Apparently no conclusive evidence of Costello's guilt was available at the time, as otherwise he would have been arrested and courtmartialled.

I joined the column about the end of August 1920. The members were, as far as I can recollect, Donnchadh Hannigan (O/C), Peter Steepe, Jack McCarthy, Dave Clancy, Ned Walsh, Pat Carroll, Dan Moloney, Seán Forde, Dave Tobin, Ned Tobin, Tom Howard, Dave Quann, Justin McCarthy, Denis Noonan (witness) and a few others. Early in September we came into Mallow area where we took up a position at Carrig about four miles from Mallow on the Mallow-Fermoy road. We spent two days in this area but there was no trace of any enemy, so we returned to East Limerick.

Towards the end of September we moved on to Ballinamona near Hospital on the Pallas-Hospital road. About 5 p.m. the column took up a position about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Hospital to await a convoy of British military in lorries which usually travelled this road. Several members of the local companies were engaged as outposts and scouts. In all, about seventy Volunteers would be engaged. We remained in position till about 4.30 p.m. but the enemy did not arrive. About midday on that day two British soldiers in a cart drawn by two mules drove into the position.

They were taken prisoners and held until after the column had withdrawn.

Sometime early in October 1920, the column were in ambush position at Ballinavreena on Tipperary-Kilfinane road. The expected convoy of British military did not turn up. On this occasion Mr. Sanders (Land Agent), Sander's Park, Charleville, drove into the position from Tipperary side in a motor car. He was accompanied by two ladies. The men at the Kilfinane end of the position pushed the car with which they were to block the road into position when they saw the car approach. (The car had only then passed the position for the barrier at the Tipperary end. This barrier was not used as it was proposed to allow the car to pass through). Immediately Mr. Sanders noticed the barrier he stopped and reversed his car out of the position, turned it round and went back in the direction of Tipperary. Some shots were fired at him but he got away.

The column under Donnachadh Hannigan arrived in Knocklong area on the 9th December 1920, with the intention of taking up an ambush position on the Knocklong-Ballylanders road, but apparently fresh information compelled the O/C. to change his plans. We billeted in the area that night and on the morning of 10th December 1920, some members of the column were withdrawn to Glenbrohane, while witness (Dennis Noonan) with O/C. and about twelve others remained in Knocklong area.

On the evening of the 10th about 4 p.m. information was received from Galbally that a car load of Black and Tans was proceeding towards Tipperary. The members of the column with about six local Volunteers immediately took up a position extending over about 100 yards behind the roadside fence on the Garryspillane-Knocklong road. Witness, with Dave Clancy and Dan Moloney were stationed behind the fence at the barricade, which consisted of a load of hay - at the Knocklong end of the

position. When the lorry of Tans entered the position, fire was opened by the whole party while bombs which failed to explode were thrown by Justin McCarthy and Maurice Costello. When the firing had continued for about ten minutes the enemy were called on to surrender and the members of the column extended towards Garryspillane end of the position jumped over the fence on to the road. Fire was immediately opened on this party by military who had been following the carload of Tans at a distance and who had left their lorry about a quarter mile from the ambush position and had come in extended order under cover of the roadside fences. Seán Riordan (not Seán T. Riordan), a member of the column, was wounded at this stage and the O/C. (Donnchadh Hannigan) gave the signal to withdraw, but in our position at the Knocklong end of the position we did not hear it. We - Dave Clancy, Dan Moloney and witness - continued to fire on the enemy for some time but as our position was becoming untenable we decided to retreat. We managed to get away under cover of a deep ditch and withdrew to Glenbrohane where we met the other members of the column. / Seán Riordan, who had been wounded, managed to get away safely. He was picked up by Seán Forde in a car and taken to Hennessy's, Kilclooney, where he was attended by Dr. Fitzgerald. He was later taken to Kilmallock hospital where he died after an operation within a few days.

Following this engagement the column remained in Glenbrohane for a couple of days when we moved on towards Knockadea and the Mitchelstown area. On the 15th or 16th December 1920 we were joined by the column from Castletownroche Battalion, Cork 11 Brigade, under Tom Barry. We also met for the first time Dick Willis and Leo O'Callaghan of the Mallow Battalion, Cork 11 Brigade, who were operating the Hotchkiss machine gun captured at Mallow Barracks at the end of Sept. 1920.

The joint columns moved into position at Glenacurrane on the Mitchelstown-Tipperary road on the morning of Dec. 17th 1920,

about 8 a.m. It was a very cold day. The site of the ambush position is about three miles from Mitchelstown. Some short time before midday two lorries and a touring car of military passed through the position in the direction of Mitchelstown. As the convoy usually returned in the evening it had been decided to await their return before opening an attack on them. We waited in the position till about 4 p.m. when the scouts reported the approach of the enemy. The party of local Volunteers delegated to obstruct the road then pushed a pony trap into the roadway at a bend in the road near the western end of the ambush position. When the touring car which was leading the convoy was nearing the obstruction, fire was opened on it by the machine gun crew. At the same time all members of the ambush party opened fire on the convoy while the machine gunners switched their line of fire to the soldiers, still unwounded, who had jumped from the lorries and were lining the roadside fence.

I should have mentioned that when the touring car was fired on the driver was knocked out by the first blast and the car crashed into the barrier. The soldiers on the roadside continued to reply to our fire but Dick Willis, with the machine gun, effectively silenced their fire when he picked on a spot where three or four of them had gathered and let them have a few blasts. About twenty minutes after fire had been opened the enemy surrendered. About 18 rifles, some Mills bombs and 500/600 rounds of ammunition were captured. In addition, a number of bags of mails were found in the lorries. When the mails were examined later they contained a large number of letters addressed to members of the Lincolnshire Regiment stationed in Tipperary. Nearly all the letters so addressed each contained a packet of Woodbine cigarettes and a threepenny piece. The mails also contained a parcel, addressed to Lieut. Riggs, which contained a new whipcord breeches. There was keen

competition amongst the members of the column for this prize but as the only person whom the breeches would fit was Leo O'Callaghan of the machine gun crew, he was awarded the prize.

With Jack McCarthy, Jack Stapleton and two or three others I was positioned at the Mitchelstown end of the site where we were in a position to enfilade the road to the west. Jack McCarthy was in charge of my party. The Hotchkiss gun and crew were in a position a few yards west of the centre of the ambush position which extended over a distance of approximately 200 yards. We were in position on high ground on the south side and overlooking the road. The joint columns were, as far as I know, armed with 35 rifles and 10 shotguns. I think the strength of the joint columns was about 45. There was a party of three or four snipers in position on the opposite side of the road also. The joint columns were under the command of Donnchadh Hannigan. The enemy casualties were two killed, four wounded. We had no casualties.

Sometime during the evening and prior to the arrival of the enemy a Protestant clergyman drove into the ambush position from Mitchelstown side in a pony and trap. He was held up by the scouts; the pony was untackled and removed to a field at the rere of the position while the clergyman was detained until the engagement was over when he was released.

The columns moved that evening to Knockadea where they billeted that night. They remained in this district for another day and then moved into a position on the Kilfinane-Mitchelstown road at Ballinacourtey near Thomastown, Kilfinane. The joint columns engaged at Glenacurrane took up positions on high ground at both sides of the road while the machine gun crew (Willis and O'Callaghan) were in position on a high bridge where they could enfilade the road. This ambush was laid for a cycle patrol which travelled the road at regular intervals. While in position

about 3 p.m. on, I think, December 20th, 1920, Father Ambrose, C.C., drove into the ambush position in a pony and trap. He halted when he had gone a short distance and left the trap. He spoke to Donnchadh Hannigan and Sean Forde (I think). When he had left we evacuated the position and withdrew towards Knockadea. It was stated that Fr. Ambrose had reported that the enemy knew of our position, hence our withdrawal.

After this effort the East Limerick column was disbanded for Christmas. The arms were dumped in the prepared dump at Thomastown already referred to while the Castletownroche column returned to their own area.

When the column reassembled in mid-January 1921, I was instructed by the O/C. (Donnchadh Hannigan) to return to my battalion (Kilfinane) and take up duty as battalion lieutenant of musketry. This duty involved the training of selected men in each company area in the use of the rifle. I was engaged in this duty for some months.

On May 1st 1921, the East Limerick Column was billeted in the Knocklong area. The mid-Limerick column under Liam Forde was also in the district. A cycle patrol of "The Green Howards" came into Kilfinane from Galbally. This information was passed on to the column O/C. He was also informed that the patrol had moved in the direction of Ballyorgan. It was then anticipated that the party would return by Shraharla to Ballylanders. The joint columns (East and Mid-Limerick) took up position on the roadside close to the church and schoolhouse at Shraharla. The patrol of the "Green Howards" did not return by this route as expected, but a convoy (5 or 6 lorries) were noticed travelling along the Kilfinane road in the direction of Mitchelstown. This party would be between 900 and 1000 yards from our position. A shot was, however, discharged accidentally by a member of the Mid-Limerick column and this attracted the enemy's attention. The convoy halted at Shraharla Bridge about

nine hundred yards from our position. The Mid-Limerick column then opened fire on the convoy. As the distance was too great and the enemy party very strong, O/C. East Limerick column decided to break off the engagement and gave the order to withdraw. Some of the mid-Limerick men continued to fight while their comrades and the East Limerick column withdrew in the direction of Knockadea. Two members of the Mid-Limerick column were killed, while one named Casey was captured and later shot by the military on the road to Cork. This operation took place in Kilfinane Battalion area where I was training units in musketry at the time. The joint columns left the area that night and proceeded to Lackelly where they were surprised by the enemy and five members were shot.

The battalion active service unit was formed about this time under Justin McCarthy. This column usually laid in ambush about two or three nights each week in anticipation of meeting enemy raiding parties which were fairly active at night about this time. The column failed to make contact with the enemy. Members of this unit were: Peter Steepe, Matt Brazil, Jim Burke, Jeremiah Fox, Paddy McNamara, Paddy O'Brien, Jack Pyne, ^{DENIS} Dave Noonan (witness). This activity continued up to the Truce.

The officers of the Kilfinane Battalion at the Truce were:

O/C.	Justin McCarthy,	Kilfinane
V.O/C.	Tadhg Barry	Knockanevin
Adjt.	Sean Cagney	Kilfinane
Q.M.	Ned Keane	Clovers, Kilfinane
I.O.	Dan P. McCarthy	Kilfinane

The Battalion Special Service officers were:-

Engineer	Matt Brazil	Ballypurta, Ballylanders
Signals	Nicholas Cullinane	Ballyorgan, Kilfinane
Musketry	Denis Noonan	Thomastown, do.
Transport	Michael Lee	
Dispatches	Thomas Fox	Callane, Ballylanders
First Aid	Joseph Quinlan,	Labbacilly
Communications	Thomas O'Connor	Ballintubber, Kilfinane

The companies in Kilfinane battalion with O/Cs. were:

Knocknevin	Thomas Rea
Knockadea	John O'Callaghan
Ardpatrick	John Devane
Kilfinane	Patrick Ryan
Cush	Philip Ryan
Glenroe	John Lyons
Ballyorgan	Denis Noonan

Signed: Denis Noonan

Date: 18th August 1954.

Witness: P. O'Donnell

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