

W. S. 1,017
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1017

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,017

Witness

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Sorrento Road,
Dalkey,
Co. Dublin.
Identity.

Vice-Comd't. Ballaghaderreen Batt'n. Irish Vol's.

Comd't. 2nd Battalion East Mayo Bgde. 1919 - .

Subject.

East Mayo Irish Volunteers, 1913-1921.

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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STATEMENT BY GÁRDA PATRICK CASSIDY,
2 Ormond Terrace, Sorrento Road, Dalkey, Co. Dublin.

I was born and reared near Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon. In 1913 a unit of the then Irish Volunteers was formed in Carracastle, a short distance outside Ballaghaderreen, and I joined this unit then. P.J. Ryan was in charge and the strength was around one hundred men. We had no arms of any sort. When the Volunteer split took place as a result of Redmond's attitude and his speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, all the Volunteers, with the exception of a few, became members of the new National Volunteers. Ballaghaderreen was the home place of John Dillon who was then the vice leader of the National Party and was a very great stronghold of the Party. The Dillon's had done wonderful work for Ballaghaderreen and the surrounding district, and they were very popular with the people. The National Volunteers continued up to the general election in 1918 and they then died out.

When the split in the Volunteers took place and the National Volunteers were formed, a unit of the Irish Volunteers was also started in Ballaghaderreen and I joined them. This unit was about fifty strong and comprised men from the town and surrounding district. We were not popular in the area. P.J. Ryan was again in charge. We drilled and trained as best we could. Ryan and another man, J.J. Coleman, did the instructing and, of course, as before, we had no arms. The first great war was at its height now and the British Army were conducting intensive campaigns for recruits. They brought Michael O'Leary, who had won the Victoria Cross, to speak at one of their recruiting meetings, but we gave them a bad reception by

continuously booing, shouting and singing rebel songs.

Approaching Easter Week, 1916, the position became very sensitive. We all felt that something big was going to happen in the near future, but not one had any idea of what it would be. When the Rebellion did start, we were left like sheep without a leader. We had received no orders and no arms. Alec McCabe came to Ballaghaderreen then and we all expected that something was going to be done, but nothing happened. After the collapse of the Rebellion a number of our men were arrested by the R.I.C., including Ryan, Coleman, Cuniffe and J. Kelly, and interned for a while. Kelly was released early under the Cat and Mouse Act, which was an Act or law under which prisoners could be released without prejudice to their re-arrest and imprisonment without further trial.

After the Rebellion, the Volunteer organisation in Ballaghaderreen faded out and practically ceased to exist until just prior to the general election in 1918 when it was revived again. Dominic Doherty from Liscull was responsible for getting them going again, and he was made Commandant. Some time in 1919 I was appointed Vice Commandant. Small units existed as follows:

Carracastle	-	^{REGAN} Eddy Ryan in charge.
Derrynacarte	-	Charles Gannon.
Rooskey	-	Sean Robinson.
Aghalustia	-	P. Garahan.
Doocastle	-	Peter Kennedy.
Liscull	-	Hubert McDonagh.
Lavey	-	Tom Egan
Edmonstown	-	Michael Coleman.

Sinlane - Tom Dunleavy.
Tibohine - Thomas McGarry.
Cloontia - Mick Lydon.
Brusna - P. Freyne.

During the 1918 elections we had trouble with the Nationalist or Dillon-Redmond followers. They defied us to hold a meeting in Carracastle which was nearly one hundred per cent. an area of Redmondite supporters. We mobilised every man we could and marched in then and immediately clashed with the Dillon-Redmondite crowd. A right row developed but the R.I.C. intervened and separated us and got between the two parties. The R.I.C. actually fired on us but did not hit any one. We fired a few shots back at them from revolvers we had - just a few. The Nationalists, supported by the R.I.C., forced us out of the village and we had to suffer defeat and abandon our attempt to hold a meeting. Actually we had no one of any outstanding importance to speak at the meeting, if we did get holding it. At other meetings held around Ballaghaderreen there was always clashes with the Redmondites, but nothing very serious. The Redmondites were beaten in the election, but this was only accomplished by a great volume of personation and by falsifying the register of voters and so forth. Dead and absent voters "recorded" their votes. Volunteers from Co. Clare had come up to Ballaghaderreen for this election, and they all voted for some one who was on the register but was either dead or absent from the country. Even then, we only won by a small majority.

Prior to the general elections and in the early part of 1918, the conscription crisis, as it is known, broke on us. A huge meeting was held at Ballaghaderreen at which

John Dillon and de Valera spoke from the one platform, probably for the first time and the last. Of such dimensions was this meeting that a great volume of the people could not get into the town and were crowded along the roads leading to the meeting place. The Volunteers prepared to meet the threat of conscription by intensive training and the construction of dug-outs to hide in. Bandages and first-aid dressings were made and stored, and food collected. We collected a few shotguns and we also got one service rifle which was used for instruction purposes. This weapon was got from Headquarters.

A large number of men joined the Volunteers when conscription threatened, but when things settled down, the most of them faded away again. A collection for funds to fight conscription was made by the Volunteers and a large sum of money was obtained.

Early in 1919 the first Dáil met in Dublin and every Volunteer now had to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the Government of the Irish Republic. All our men subscribed to this oath without disaffection, and we now became the I.R.A., or Army of the Irish Republic, although the "Volunteers" was the name more generally used in referring to the organisation.

The Dáil now floated a loan and I was instrumental in collecting about £1,800 for the Loan. There were other large sums collected by others also. We made everyone who had any means at all subscribe at least one pound. Father Mulligan of Carracastle took charge of the money and took it to Dublin.

The remainder of 1919 was really a quiet year. We

continued training, recruiting and organising, but nothing outstanding took place. Later in the year, the Sinn Féin Courts began to operate. The organisation of the Courts was really the responsibility of the Sinn Féin organisation, but it really developed into being a Volunteer job. The people took their troubles to the Sinn Féin Courts and lived up to the decisions given. The British Courts still continued to operate but on a much lesser scale than previously.

A boycott of the R.I.C. was now started in an effort to make them resign from the force. We cautioned traders not to serve them with goods and the people were warned not to associate or speak to them. Posters were put up in the town and surrounding districts to this effect. The boycott worked fairly well. The police, when refused goods, got annoyed and helped themselves and forced people to give them supplies, and then began to summon the traders and others and bring them to court on every little trivial offence that they could find. Anyone who was known to be a Volunteer was particularly subjected to this treatment. This was an act of revenge for the boycott. We did not succeed in making any substantial number of the police resign; rather, I think the boycott had the opposite effect and only hardened them and made them sullen and arrogant towards the people. The boycott did, however, have the effect of developing a deep void between the police and the people, and this was all to the good in view of what was to happen later.

In the latter end of 1919 and early 1920, the R.I.C. began to evacuate a number of their smaller stations throughout the country and concentrate their men in larger forces, principally in the towns and important points.

Carracastle Barracks in our area was evacuated and we destroyed this building by burning it on Easter Saturday night, 1920. The withdrawal of the R.I.C. from the countryside generally gave rise to another problem - that unruly elements among the people would have a free hand to indulge in their antics, such as, petty robberies and the like. The Volunteers were now ordered to police the country and they did this very successfully, even in the towns or other places where the R.I.C. were in large numbers. The Volunteers were purely a voluntary force (unpaid) and each man had of necessity to work at his own trade or calling to earn his living. He now had to take on the duty of being a policeman as well, and this was a great strain on the organisation. The men, however, assumed this duty with enthusiasm and, in fact, in many cases often paid out monies out of their own pockets to meet expenses.

We had to arrest a number of individuals in the area for such offences as petty robberies, illegally cutting timber and suchlike. Such offenders were tried by court martial and a number of them were deported, while others were let away with fines. The fines were collected by the Volunteers and all paid up willingly - they were scared of the deportation. Prisoners were detained at specially selected places, usually out of the way - houses in bogs and so forth. Such places were generally known as "unknown destinations". There was one of these detention places at Kiltimagh and another in Cloontia in our area. The people living around those places helped us out with food, and we had some funds of our own also for this purpose. The guard and the prisoners had to be fed.

At this time the monies to pay the Old Age Pensions for the Ballaghaderreen area used to come by train I think from Dublin. There was a small military escort guarding the money. We decided to take this money and we held up the train at Kilfree junction. About ten of our men took part in this operation, under Captain McGowan of the Pibohine Company. They had a couple of old revolvers, and the rest of them were armed with shotguns. We surprised the guard or escort which consisted of a few soldiers, armed with revolvers which we took, and the money, about four hundred pounds which was a welcome addition to our funds.

The seizure of the Old Age Pension monies gave rise to some trouble in our Battalion. Some short time after, our Battalion O/C Doherty came to me and told me that I was to take over command of our Battalion, that he was leaving for America. He did not give me any details, but I gathered that Brigade Headquarters had taken a poor view of our having taken the Old Age Pension monies and he was dissatisfied with the conduct of things by the Brigade Staff and the lack of activities in the area, and wanted a free hand to conduct operations as he thought fit. He did not agree with the Brigade Staff.

The Battalion had now been organised on a firmer basis. I now assumed the command, and Jim Mulrennan was Vice O/C, Dan Caulfield, Adjutant, Dick Gallagher, Quartermaster, Joe Darcy of Ballaghaderreen, Intelligence Officer, and Forsythe, or Downes (he went by both names), Transport Officer. The Battalion Engineer was John Garahan. Later on, Mulrennan was wounded and captured on the 27th March, 1921, and Mick^{Mc} Dermott of Rooskey became Vice O/C. The companies comprising the Battalion

were Cloontia, Derrynacarte, Aghabustia, Lavey, Carracastle, Kilmovee and Rooskey. Our battalion was the 2nd Battalion, East Mayo Brigade. John Corcoran of Kiltimagh was the Brigade O/C. Maurice Mullen was Brigade Adjutant, Joe Sheehy, Brigade Quartermaster, and the I.O. was Foley from Swinford. The Brigade was comprised of the 1st Battalion, Kiltimagh area; the 2nd Battalion was Ballaghaderreen, the 3rd, Swinford, and the 4th, Ballyhaunis.

A general raid for arms, or rather a collection of arms in the area, was ordered by Headquarters in the harvest time of 1920. It would appear that General Headquarters had received information that the R.I.C. were going to collect all arms in the country and we were ordered to forestall this move of theirs by collecting them before they could get them. All we had to collect in our area was a few shotguns and cartridges. We got no rifles of any sort. We had one old Martini rifle and a large sporting type rifle for which we had no ammunition. The shotguns were kept for us in friendly houses, the owners of which had places for hiding them. During the raiding for arms carried out by us, Volunteer ^{CALLAGHAN} Gallagher from Ballaghaderreen was shot in the stomach. He was one of a party raiding a house near Tibohine. The owner of the house allowed them inside and, after doing so, fired on them from the landing of the stairway with a shotgun, hitting ^{CALLAGHAN} Gallagher in the stomach. He died from the wound shortly afterwards. We informed the owner of the house that we were going to shoot him for this, but he accommodated us by clearing out of the country shortly afterwards, and did not return as far as I know. This was the only shooting affair we had during this operation. In all other cases we got the guns without trouble.

At the time of the issue of the Dáil Loan, the R.I.C. tried to arrest me but I avoided them and, after that, I was always on the run, although the police did not come near the house again for a long time. Some time in 1920 they again raided my house for me. I was there when they arrived but again succeeded in avoiding them. A good few of our lads were arrested at this time in a large-scale round-up by the enemy.

After the boycott of the R.I.C., referred to, and when they were making themselves very unpopular with the people by their acts of petty revenge, about ten of us went into Ballaghaderreen one night and, having gained an entrance to the courthouse, we saturated it with petrol and set it on fire. It was totally destroyed and no harm was done to other property and no one was injured. The courthouse was situated only a few hundred yards from the R.I.C. Barracks. As a result of this, all their court sittings had to be held at Frenchpark.

We co-operated with the Sligo Brigade who bordered us and particularly with Jim Hunt of Gorteen. The police usually went to the court at Frenchpark on cycles, and Hunt ambushed them at Ratra. We co-operated with him in this, by scouting and blocking roads to protect the ambush party. Hunt captured some rifles there. Captain McDonagh of the Sligo Brigade was killed at this ambush and I think two R.I.C. men were also killed. The Sligo men, of course, retained all the arms captured.

The night of the ambush, Tans and Auxies from Boyle came into Ballaghaderreen and burned several houses that were friendly to us and broke windows and did a lot of destruction. They did not shoot anyone. They were mad

with drink and instituted a reign of terror in the place. A company of Auxiliaries now took up a station in Ballaghaderreen, and Black and Tans reinforced the R.I.C. Two of the Black and Tans made themselves particularly objectionable. They were always drunk and went around terrorising and assaulting the people. One of them was from Belfast. They accosted the Bishop, Dr. Morrisroe, one day and demanded that he should kiss their revolvers. The Bishop and the Dillon's complained about this to the Tans' headquarters and they, the Tans, were transferred to Roscommon town. The British authorities set up a Court of Enquiry to enquire into the incident, and General Tudor arrived in Ballaghaderreen for this. Dillon and a number of the leading citizens of the place were to give evidence at this court. The enquiry party were ambushed at Four-Mile-House in South Roscommon on their way to the court and never arrived there. The news of the ambush soon spread to Ballaghaderreen, and the youngsters of the town chalked up on the walls: "Tudor can go home. The I.R.A. have settled the Inquiry." News of the ambush was received from the Post Office. Tudor remained in town until a heavy escort of armoured cars arrived to take him away. The enquiry was never held.

We raided the Excise office in Ballaghaderreen and burned all the documents and records in it. In February, after consultations and planning with the Sligo Brigade, it was decided to attack and capture the police barracks in Ballaghaderreen. Both the Sligo and East Mayo Brigades were employed for this. The barracks was a strong one and well fortified with steel shutters on all windows. It formerly had been just an ordinary house but they had taken over the next house to it and it now

consisted of one complete section. The garrison was strong, consisting of a District Inspector, eight or ten Sergeants and a large force of R.I.C. and Black and Tans. They had a number of machine guns in it, and it was sand-bagged and protected by barbed wire. The Auxiliaries had been withdrawn from the town at this time. The barracks was situated near the railway bridge.

Our force planned to blow in the front of the barracks around the door with a large mine and then to rush the place. The mine was constructed of a beer barrel which was filled with gelignite and then concreted around. The mine was made by the Sligo Brigade and brought to Cloontia. How to get the mine to the barrack door was our next problem. It was nothing unusual to find loads of hay parked in the streets occasionally, and it was decided that this was the best plan. The mine was to be built into a load of hay and parked convenient to the barracks from whence it could be easily wheeled to the door. I took the mine to Ballaghaderreen, loaded in the centre of a load of hay, on a market day and parked it in a lane near the barracks where it would be handy. Allowance had been made when loading the hay for the attachment of cables to the mine for exploding it. The firing of the mine was to take place from the cover of an archway some distance away, by attaching an exploder.

The attack was timed to take place I think at midnight or at 1 a.m. The Tans were at this time enforcing a curfew in the town. A party of Tans would come out of the barracks and fire a number of shots. This was the signal that curfew was in force. The Sligo men, as did ours, came into the town and took up their allotted positions. There was a big number of men

engaged, including large parties who were out blocking the roads leading to the town. A few rifles were available and some revolvers, but the main armament was shotguns. Jack Downes and Eugene Kelly, the Brigade Engineer and I and another man, whose name I forget, were to push the cart to the door and Kelly was to explode the mine.

On the night that the attack was scheduled to take place, Kelly and the others and I went to where the mine and load were parked, and were engaged in connecting the cables to the mine when a strong light was flashed into the lane, and I could see what I took to be some civilians entering the lane. Kelly jumped off the cart and got on a bicycle and made off, I think, to our Headquarters for the operation; Jack Downes jumped against a door leading into a garden and forced it open and went through it; and our third man disappeared also. I stayed where I was. I had a revolver, which I now had in my right hand, at the ready. We had strict orders not to fire on any account until the mine went off. After a few minutes I went up the lane to make my way to our headquarters. The civilians I saw entering the lane did not appear again, but I could not, alone, wheel the cart to the barrack door, and I wanted to contact our headquarters to see what was to be done. As I went up the lane, I saw four police or Tans standing against a wall, Morley's wall, and facing the railway. I am sure one of them, a red-headed man, saw me, but he turned and looked the other way. I still had the revolver in my hand, and it struck me that the policeman did not want to see me. I went up the lane and made my way to our headquarters.

Alec McCabe of the Sligo Brigade was there, as was Seán Corcoran of our ^{16.}Brade, and I told them what had

happened. They had a consultation and finally decided that the cart could not now be got to the door as the police were out, and to call the operation off; and this was done. The mine was taken by a party of police, Auxiliaries and some military engineers to Aghalustia bog, about four miles from Ballaghaderreen where they blew it up. The explosion at that distance shook the town of Ballaghaderreen, and packages fell from the shelves in the shops. A high sandbagged post was now erected at the barracks, over the front door, which commanded a view of the whole front of the barracks and the street.

After the Ratra ambush, Captain McGowan's house was raided by Auxiliaries from Boyle. They found McGowan in the house and beat him until he was unrecognisable and then shot him dead. His father was in the house at the time.

In the latter end of 1920, Peadar Deignan, McGuirk, Frank Webb, Johnny Merriman, I and a few others were on the run and staying in different places. We now decided that we would keep together and constitute ourselves as an active service unit and, in this way, the nucleus of a column began. We had one service rifle, two Martini rifles and three revolvers, two of which were service pattern. The remainder had shotguns, including a couple of duck guns. We slept in houses close to one another, and the occupants or owners provided us with food. When we were in an area that was not considered safe, we always had one of our men on guard duty. This unit went into Ballaghaderreen on two or three occasions and sniped the barracks and, on one such foray I think, two or three police were wounded.

One of our small column, named McGuff, was an

engine-driver and he went with Jim Hunt down to Gorteen, and at Kilfree junction they commandeered the engine from a train which had steam up. They uncoupled the engine from the train, and Hunt and some others got on it to the tender. Guff drove the engine along the line past the barracks in Ballaghaderreen, and Hunt and the others fired in through the barrack windows. The line ran behind the barrack and was high, and they were able thus to fire in over the steel shutters on the window. Guff stopped the engine down the line and reversed it past the barracks again and repeated the firing. Two policemen were believed to have been knocked out. One policeman was in the act of shaving when the bullets entered his room, and he almost cut his throat. He never appeared again in the place. Unfortunately both Hunt and Guff were arrested later that day.

Kilmovee barracks, situated about three miles from Ballaghaderreen in the Ballyhaunis direction, held a small garrison of R.I.C. and Tans. It was situated on a strong point and well fortified, and would be almost impossible to capture. One Sunday morning we sniped it from a nearby wood. We thought that we might have found some of the garrison outside the barracks as they had become quite bold owing to their immunity from attack up to that. We had constructed a mine for to attack this barracks but abandoned the attempt, as it was not considered feasible. When we sniped them that morning, they returned our fire. We had no casualties and I don't think they had any either. Shortly after this incident, the garrison evacuated this post and we then burned it down.

We also went to the Liscull area to try and bring off an ambush there. We occupied a position for a couple

of days but no enemy force showed up. We raided the local Post Office and fired shots, and got a man to go to the barracks and report us as being in the area, to try and get them out but to no avail - they would not oblige. For this attempt we had a big party of Volunteers, about forty all told, but not well armed. We had three service rifles, a few revolvers and a number of shotguns. A big portion of our party had no arms and they were used for relief duty. We did not mine the road.

We cut a trench across the road at Tullyhill and placed dummy mines in the road. The Tans came along to this and spent several hours there before they discovered that the mines were dummy and that they had been fooled. The day before the Truce we went into Ballaghaderreen and sniped the ~~barracks again~~ *Black Tans in the Sports Field. P.B.*

The Truce was a great relief to us, although for quite a while we could hardly believe it existed. No one ever thought that the mighty England would sign or agree to a Truce with a band of practically untrained and almost non-armed men whom previously they had always referred to as robbers and murderers. Our morale was high at the advent of the Truce and our men were growing more anxious every day to get to grips with the enemy, and the only deterrent was the lack of arms, ammunition and other supplies. We believed that, given any kind of a decent chance, even when the odds were very much against us, we could beat them every time; our men were hardier and more wily, and we had a tradition of suffering and hardship behind us and had all to gain and very little to lose. We were fighting for an ideal on a voluntary basis while they were professional soldiers only.

Not much was done in the area regarding the

manufacture of munitions. A number of the concrete type of road mines were made and also a number of cart-box bombs. The road mines were filled with gelignite, or rather provision made for that purpose, and were also bound with iron. We also made buckshot and loaded it into cartridges.

Intelligence sections were organised in the Battalion headquarters and also in each Company. We did not appreciate then the importance of intelligence and did not give this subject the value it deserved. We were not able to make contact with any member of the enemy forces of any value. The Post Office in Ballaghaderreen could not be used for intelligence, as the people who ran it were no good - in fact, were hostile to us. Liscul Post Office was all right and anxious to help us, but had nothing important to give us. Our intelligence was mostly used to keep watch on persons who were suspected of co-operating with the enemy, and watching and recording enemy patrols and raiding parties. None of us ever received any training in Intelligence work. In the Carracastle area there were a couple of men who were suspected of being enemy agents. A few of us dressed ourselves in British uniforms and went to them and had a conversation with them. We confirmed that they at least were foolish enough to answer any questions that were put to them about the I.R.A. They told me where they had seen me, and also other Volunteers. These men were visited by the R.I.C. occasionally. I concluded that their action was more from ignorance than being desirous to hurt us. We took them out and tied them to a tree and gave them a good beating, and warned them that, if they gave any information to the British or ever went into the town again, they would be shot; and they never gave any trouble afterwards. There were no spies.

shot in the area. While a lot of the people around Ballaghaderreen were not in sympathy with us, they certainly would not assist the enemy forces against us. I was instrumental in saving the men in Carracastle from being shot. Some of the Volunteers had learned of how we had visited the men, or how they had given information to us, thinking we were British forces, and they were enraged and decided to shoot them themselves. Fortunately, I met our men on the road and got out of them what they were going to do. I forbade them to do so, and told them, if anyone was shot without orders, I would have themselves shot, and that stopped that.

During the latter part of 1920 and 1921 up to the Truce, we were continually harassing the enemy by blocking roads. We felled trees across them and cut trenches across them. The enemy usually rounded up the men in the vicinity and made them clear the roads again and fill in the trenches. Not many of our men on the whole were captured by the enemy.

When the Local Government or Local Councils were taken over by Sinn Féin, a rate collector in Ballaghaderreen refused to hand over the monies to the new Council, because they recognised the Dáil as the Government, and we were called in to act on the matter. We went to his house, but he still refused, and we were obliged to arrest him and bring him to an unknown destination where he was detained for some months. Finally he changed his mind and made out a cheque for fourteen thousand pounds to the Council and he was then released. The day we took him away, the Auxiliaries - a large force - were in the town and patrolling it, and we had a narrow shave in getting him away. They were on one road while we were travelling

along a parallel one.

Frank Shouldice took me into the I.R.B. in Ballaghaderreen in 1918 and a Circle was organised there. They were all Volunteers and we had four or five men from each Company, usually the officers. I was Centre of the Circle and we paid a subscription of threepence per week towards the funds. We met fairly regularly. We held discussions on affairs as they were at the moment and considered what could be done to intensify the fight against the enemy. The Circle really acted as a directing head for the Volunteers. When conditions became lively in 1920 and 1921, the I.R.B. kind of faded out, or rather became inactive; at any rate, it did not serve much purpose then.

SIGNED: Patrick Cassidy
(Patrick Cassidy)

DATE: 4 - 10 - 54

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