

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO 'STAIRE MIL' TA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,061

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,061.....

Witness

Laurence Flynn,
St. Brendan's Home,
Loughrea,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Company Engineer, Kilmeen Coy. Co. Galway, 1919-'20.
Brigade Police Officer, South-East Galway Brigade
1920-'21.

Subject.

National activities, South-East Galway,
1920-1921.

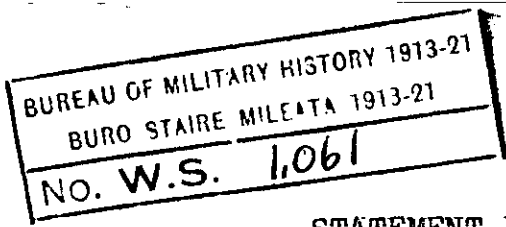
Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2357.....

Form B.S.M. 2

W. A. 1,061



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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY LAWRENCE FLYNN,

St. Brendan's Home, Loughrea, Co. Galway.

I was born at Lisafooka, Loughrea, fifty-eight years ago. I went to school at Kilcooley National School. I lived at home in Lisafooka until the year 1920. I first came to take an interest in the affairs of my country at the age of seventeen. I had by that time heard stories of the Fenian Movement which stirred my imagination. My brother John Flynn took a very active part in connection with the Woodford evictions. The R.I.C. were about to arrest him. Rather than face arrest and perhaps a long term of imprisonment, he chose to emigrate to the U.S.A. James Flynn was from his earliest years deeply interested in the Irish language revival. He was ordained priest in Maynooth and was President of the local branch of the Gaelic League in Ballinasloe up to the time of his early death. Another brother of mine, Father Andrew Flynn, had an equal interest in the Irish language.

My uncle, Fr. Patrick Costello, was Parish Priest of Woodford. During the evictions there by Lord Clonrickarde he took an active part in keeping up the morale of the people and with the late Mrs. MacBride did everything in his power to assist the evicted tenants at Woodford. There is a marble altar erected to his memory in St. Michael's Church, Ballinasloe, where he ministered before going to Woodford. Another uncle, Fr. Michael Costello, volunteered to serve as Chaplain in the Crimean War and was killed in the Crimea.

I was recruited into the Irish Volunteers during the week before the Rising of 1916 by Mr. Peter Sweeney (now

deceased) of Loughrea. Mr. Sweeney had a shop in Loughrea. He told me that there would be a meeting of the Volunteers in a week. He gave me a .32 revolver and told me that I would get further instructions in a short while. I got no further instructions from Peter Sweeney. He was arrested in his own home during Easter Week 1916. I met him on his release and he told me that I was lucky that I was not arrested. He also told me the reason why I was not arrested after Easter Week was that he had omitted to enter my name in the Volunteer roll. Mr. Sweeney was in charge of the Volunteers in Loughrea at that time.

During Easter Week 1916 Fr. O'Farrell, C.C., Killimor, who was a great friend of mine, came to me at my home in Lisafooka. He said he wished to get to Moyode if possible as Loughrea was full of British forces - and that the Volunteers in Moyode would be surrounded. I cannot remember exactly what day of Easter Week that was but as far as I can recollect it was Wednesday. Father O'Farrell said he wanted to get some ruse to pass the British military in Loughrea and asked me to accompany him. We both went on push bicycles to Loughrea and when we were halted by a sentry in Main St. Fr. O'Farrell told the sentry that he was going on a sick call with me. We were allowed to pass by the sentry and then Fr. O'Farrell told me to return home as he was going to stay the night at his own home which was in the direction of Moyode. I went to my own home by another route (the Bullaun road) and arrived safely.

I cannot at the moment recollect any further incident during Easter Week 1916, but I remember that Charles Coughlan, Joseph Gilchrist and James Flynn, all of

Loughrea, were arrested.

At the time of the re-organisation of the Volunteers in 1917 I joined Kilmeen Company. I cannot remember the time of the year. I served in Kilmeen Company until about the end of June 1920 when I was transferred to Loughrea Company. Thomas Burke was my Company Captain in Kilmeen. Martin Dolphin was First Lieutenant and, I think, James Cleary was Second Lieutenant. There were about fifteen men in the Company. In 1919 or early in 1920 Captain Thomas Burke was arrested and was not released until after the Truce. From the time I joined in 1917 there were regular parades twice a week in a big field well removed from public roads. There was roll-call at every parade. The Captain of the Company called the roll and then drilled us. There was forming fours, re-forming two deep, marching, advancing and retreating at the double and so on. He had a Lee Enfield rifle and the remainder of the Company had wooden imitation guns. He taught us the mechanism of the rifle and how to aim, but I cannot remember being allowed to fire at a target. I had an instruction manual entitled "Minor Tactics". I studied it thoroughly and as a result I was often asked by the Captain to take charge of the Company parades, the Captain himself being present as well.

I was also Company dispatch rider. The first dispatch I ever carried was from Michael Hogan, afterwards Colonel Michael Hogan, to Divisional Commandant Brennan, Co. Clare. I took it as far as Woodford (a distance of twelve miles) where I handed it over to Volunteer Stanley - dispatch rider Woodford Company. I also carried dispatches from Michael Hogan to Dublin and delivered them to John Broderick (now deceased) who worked then in

Findlater's, O'Connell St., Dublin. One of these dispatches was addressed to the Chief of Staff Dublin as well as I can remember. I had instructions from Colonel Michael Hogan on no account to let it be captured and if in a tight corner I was to eat it rather than let it fall into enemy hands.

I came to Loughrea late in 1920 as Acting Master of Loughrea Workhouse. I was transferred to Loughrea Company, Loughrea Battalion of the Volunteers. The Company Captain was Patrick Coy. Laurence Smyth was O/C of the Battalion and Laurence Kelly was Brigade O/C. I think Seamus Reilly of Kilreakle was Vice O/C of the Brigade at that time. In Loughrea Company I continued as dispatch rider and did miscellaneous duties including Intelligence work. I went out one night to transfer arms from Leitrim Company to Lisheentynagh and delivered them to Seamus Reilly, afterwards Vice O/C South East Galway Brigade, at Larkin's house in Lisheentynagh. As far as I remember the arms were to be used to ambush a party of R.I.C. at Rathmore, near Killimor. Those with me were Volunteer Richard Burke and James Cleary, both from Kilmeen Company. James Burke was afterwards Captain of Kilmeen Company. We took the arms (five rifles) on bicycles at night-time.

While I was Acting Master of Loughrea Workhouse there was a Black and Tan named Girault a patient in the hospital portion of the Workhouse. One day as I was passing the ward in which he was a patient he called me and said he was afraid that someone might come in and shoot him and that if I gave him a guarantee that he would not be shot while in hospital he would make it worth my while. I told him that as Master of the Workhouse it was my duty

to see that he would not be interfered with. He said "You need not be afraid. I know you are in the I.R.A. and I will give you fifty rounds of .45 ammunition". I did not make any reply but sent a dispatch to Lawrence Kelly, then, or later on perhaps, O/C South East Galway Brigade, asking for instructions in the matter. He replied that the offer of the ammunition should be accepted.

I approached Girault and he handed me over the ammunition as he had promised. He had no firearms with him. I warned him that if anything happened to me as a result of his mentioning the incident his life would lie in danger. He said "If we ever meet where there is trouble with Crown Forces nothing will happen to you". He left the hospital a week later. It was then very late in the year 1920.

About the same time I, as Brigade Police Officer, South East Galway Brigade, had to transfer a lunatic from the County to the Mental Hospital. I got instructions from Brigadier Lawrence Kelly to get a permit from the R.I.C. for a Red Cross ambulance. When I went to the R.I.C. barracks for the necessary permit the Sergeant who admitted me gave me a very cordial welcome. He put me into a room by myself and locked the door. He said there were Black and Tans about the place and that I would be safer with the door locked while he was procuring the permit from the District Inspector. I looked around the room and saw a long Webley revolver in a holster hanging on the wall. I took the revolver out of the holster and put it down the leg of my pants and closed my overcoat. When the Sergeant came back with the permit he said their cook had left and asked me if I would try and secure them a cook to replace her. I told him that I would do my best to

oblige him in the matter. He shook hands with me and I left with my permit and Webley revolver.

I immediately contacted Miss Mary Oliver, a member of the Cumann na mBan. I explained the position to her and she agreed to take the position as cook in the R.I.C. barracks. She understood quite clearly that her duties would consist of more than cooking for the R.I.C. I gave her three pounds out of my own money and told her to learn as much as she possibly could about the R.I.C. and to use the money I gave her if she thought it would help in getting any arms or ammunition. The late Captain Patrick Coy, who was then Quartermaster of the Loughrea Battalion, was with me when I arranged with Miss Oliver to take up the position as cook. He was later killed in County Kerry during the Civil War. Within a week Miss Oliver had obtained three long Webley revolvers, which I delivered to Brigadier Lawrence Kelly. Miss Oliver died in June 1954. She was in receipt of a Military Service Pension.

In a few days' time there was a big raid on the Workhouse. Three lorries of Auxiliaries and Black and Tans from Limerick with local R.I.C. from Loughrea took part. I attributed the raid to the loss of the three revolvers from the R.I.C. barracks because Miss Mary Oliver, whom I had recommended to the R.I.C. for the position as cook, was temporarily resident in the Workhouse before taking up duty as cook. Apparently when the three revolvers were missed the R.I.C. very probably associated the loss of those with the loss of the revolver which I took. It probably then dawned on them that they had been tricked into employing Mary Oliver. At any rate the R.I.C. dismissed her from her position as cook almost immediately they discovered the loss of the three revolvers.

and the raid followed. When the R.I.C. came into my office one of them said that the place was surrounded. The lorries came up to the main gate and all the R.I.C., including Auxiliaries and Black and Tans, rushed into the building along with the District Inspector, Loughrea. They demanded that I should open the door of the boardroom. I had just handed the key of the door to one of the clerks, who dropped it into an ashpit when he overheard the demand. The R.I.C. put me against a wall and covered me with their rifles. They threatened that if I didn't have the door of the boardroom opened while they counted up to three I would be shot. Two of the R.I.C. then put one round each in the breach and as they did so Girault rushed and caught one of the rifles. He pointed it upwards and the shot went into the ceiling. Girault said "Why shoot a man without searching him?"

Then then burst in the boardroom door with the butts of their rifles. Girault said to the District Inspector that they wanted some candles. Girault ordered me to get the candles. I said that I would have to go for them to the hospital, about a hundred yards away. The District Inspector told Girault to accompany me. When out of hearing of the rest of the R.I.C. Girault said "I didn't want the candles at all. It was only a bright excuse". If you have any arms now", he said, "dump them out in the garden. Now", he said, "you're going to be shot to-night and when they are leaving stay as near as you can to me. I gave you a promise and if anything happens I'll be shot first".

When the raiding party was leaving after wrecking the boardroom one of the Tans, who had a good deal of drink taken, called me into my own office. He produced a

written statement to the effect that they had done no damage and asked me to sign it. At the same time he put his revolver on the desk as a threat. The District Inspector (Keohane, still living in the town of Loughrea) was standing in the corridor looking on. Girault rushed in, grabbed the revolver on the desk and ordered the Tan out, at the same time calling on District Inspector Keohane to have him removed. The District Inspector only made a very weak attempt to do so. Girault insisted until finally two R.I.C. came in and took him out. Next morning as I was passing along Barrack St. in Loughrea Girault ran across the street and shook hands with me. I said he should not have done that on the public street. He said "I'm sorry, only for me you wouldn't be alive". I thanked him and left him. He was a grand lad, a South African, about twenty-two years of age. While a patient in the hospital he had letters from his father in South Africa begging him to return home.

There was a sequel to Girault's shaking hands with me. A dispatch arrived from Dublin asking for an explanation as to the circumstances in which I shook hands with the R.I.C. man. Brigadier Lawrence Kelly, to whom the message came, replied explaining the circumstances. His explanation was accepted.

As a result of the damage done to the Workhouse a claim for compensation was lodged by the Board of Guardians. I, as a necessary witness, was summoned to attend the hearing of the case and to give evidence as to the extent of the damage done by the Crown Forces. Being a member of the I.R.A., permission was sought and granted for my attendance at the Court as witness. As far as I can remember the permission was given over the

signature of Mr. J.J. Walsh. The only defence put up by the Crown witnesses was that I gave them no assistance in their search of the premises and consequently they had to break in the doors.

After my appointment as Brigade Police Officer in 1920 I immediately set about organising a police force in the Brigade area, i.e. South East Galway. It covered from Loughrea to Ballinasloe; Ballinasloe to Laurencetown taking in Kiltormer; from Laurencetown to Eyrecourt taking in part of Banagher; back to Killimor, Portumna, Abbey, Duniry, Woodford, Ballinakill, Leitrim, Kilmaine, Killeendeemagh, Kilchreest, Closetoken, Killtullagh, Bullaun, Kilreakle and Aughrim. Generally a Sergeant and three men were appointed by me as Republican Police from the members of each Company in the Brigade. It would now be impossible for me to name any of the men I appointed.

I held weekly meetings, bringing my men from five or six Companies together at the most suitable and convenient point for a meeting. I brought with me to each meeting all correspondence from Headquarters in Dublin and imparted the contents to all present. I did my best to become conversant with police duties and routine as regards parish and other courts. I gave a lecture at each meeting to the members of the force present, impressing on them the necessity for carrying out their duties to the best of their ability and in an impartial manner. I attended all Republican Court sittings in my area, as far as possible, and inquests. I shall now give, as far as I can recollect, details of Court cases during my time as Brigade Police Officer, although I am very hazy on dates

and cannot even remember the date of my appointment as Police Officer.

An ex-R.I.C. man resident in Limerick named O'Malley entered a case in the British Court against one of his own family from Leitrim, Co. Galway. In order to prevent the case being heard by the foreign Court in Loughrea I took steps to have the ex-R.I.C. man (O'Malley) arrested and interened until the sessions were over. I sent a dispatch to Brigade Police Officer, Limerick City. He had O'Malley arrested and interned in Limerick until the Quarter Sessions were over, only a matter of a few days. The case was finally decided in the Republican Court in Loughrea in favour of defendant - Timothy O'Malley, a brother of the ex-R.I.C. man. It was an involved case concerning title to the family holding in Leitrim (Co. Galway).

I remember a case of trespassing. The complainant was a man named Flannery and the defendant was Reynolds. They were neighbouring farmers from Ballyduggan parish, three miles from Loughrea. Reynolds's cattle and horses were alleged by Flannery to have damaged his corn. I ordered Reynolds's stock to be impounded in Loughrea. I had the pound-keeper forced to open the gates of the pound by my police officers. After the stock had been impounded for a couple of hours Reynolds appeared at my office in the Workhouse and demanded that his stock be released forthwith. In order to prevent the R.I.C. from interfering in the case I assessed damage at five pounds (£5) and told Reynolds that if he paid that amount together with one pound (£1) costs he could have his stock back. He paid me the six pounds (£6) on the spot and

I gave him a receipt for that amount. He said he was pleased with my decision. I gave orders to my men to have the stock released immediately. I took it on myself to decide this case in the prevailing circumstances. The cattle were in the pound in the town of Loughrea and I feared that the R.I.C. might become aware of the dispute and deal with the matter. Flannery was also pleased with my decision. He accepted the five pounds (£5) as full compensation for the loss of and damage to his corn. The one pound (£1) costs went to "Darkie" Donoghue, the pound-keeper, who was also process-server for the foreign courts. I cannot remember the date of this case but the corn was fairly high. It might have been June or early July 1920.

About May 1921, but again I cannot be accurate as regards date, I got an order from Dublin signed, I think, by Richard Mulcahy, afterwards General Mulcahy, to clear stock off Ward's farm at Ballyfa, four miles from Loughrea. I cleared the stock off the farm with the assistance of six of my police officers and took them to Ward at his shop in Ballyfa. They were dry cattle and sheep. I warned Ward that if he re-stocked the land I would be compelled to take him into custody. I instructed my men to notify me if the land was restocked. I received information at 5 a.m. next morning that Ward had put back the stock on his farm. I proceeded to Ballyfa with two armed Volunteers and arrested Ward and his two grown-up sons. I brought them to Loughrea. Ward asked me for permission to get a solicitor, which I granted. He engaged Mr. A.D. Comyn. I engaged Mr. Louis Walsh, solicitor from Mr. Patrick Hogan's office, Loughrea. The Justices were Daniel Corry and Lawrence Smyth, O/C

Loughrea Battalion of the I.R.A. Ward consented to give an undertaking in writing that he would not re-stock the farm pending settlement of the dispute between himself and the Land Commission, whereupon he and his two sons were released from custody.

I had my men on regular duty in every Company area to ensure that public houses were not open for the sale of intoxicating drink during prohibited hours. I remember one case of a publican being summoned for a breach of the licensing laws. The publican in question was Miss Furlong of Barrack Street, Loughrea, and she was summoned before the Court for having men on her premises after closing hours. The case came for hearing before Mr. Corry, Justice of the Parish Court. I appeared in the case as Brigade Police Officer. I applied to have the case dismissed as I had learned that the men who were caught on the premises were playing a game of cards while waiting for an I.R.A. Battalion Council meeting. The case was dismissed.

I was a member of the Loughrea Board of Guardians from 1919 to 1921. I was co-opted on the Board to replace Captain Thomas Burke, Kilmeen Company, Portumna Battalion, South East Galway Brigade, who was arrested and interned in Ballykinlar Camp. I attended the weekly meetings regularly every Saturday during that period. From some time in 1920 I was also Acting Master and for a while Assistant Master of the Loughrea Workhouse, but I received no remuneration because I was a member of the Board of Guardians. I was present at the meeting of the Board when it was decided to withdraw from the British Local Government Board. The members present at that meeting were:

James Kelly, Grangepark, Loughrea, (Chairman)
 John Dolan, Abbey, Loughrea,
 Lawrence Flynn, Loughrea.

There was only a bare quorum present. At all our subsequent meetings the outer gates of the building were locked to guard against being surprised by enemy forces. I took charge of the delivery of the minutes of meetings of our Board (Loughrea Board of Guardians) to our own Local Government Department in Dublin. I often took them personally by train to Dublin, giving them there to Mr. John Broderick, Findlaters and Co., O'Connell St., who delivered them to the proper department. Sometimes they were returned per driver or guard of a train. I often had to go as far as Ballinasloe and sometimes Athlone to take them from the railwaymen. Sometimes I contacted passengers on trains who were loyal to the native government and they took the minutes to Dublin. Often they were returned in the same manner.

I omitted to state that I was Company Engineer in Kilmeen Company before I came to Loughrea in 1920. I replaced Bernard Geoghegan, now on staff of Irish Land Commission in Dublin, as Company Engineer when he went to Cork on White Cross administration work. I organised a collection of implements such as saws, crosscuts, pick-axes, shovels and sledge-hammers. I had an idea that the centre could be cut out of a bridge and with tree branches, furze bushes etc. could be made to look as if it had not been interfered with. It would make a trap for enemy lorries if the civilian population kept the secret. Before my plan could be tried I had to come to Loughrea.

I also forgot at the commencement of this

statement to mention that an ambush was planned by Michael ("Occles") Hogan, later Colonel Hogan, brother of the late Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture, and of Professor James Hogan, University College, Cork. It was to take place quite close to my own home at the bend in the road in the village of Lisafooka. The ambush party of Volunteers came in a horse drawn cart from Kilreakle. The horse and cart belonged to the Hogan family, and it was the intention to stop the lorry load of R.I.C. by pulling the horse and cart out in front of them on the Loughrea-Portumna road at Lisafooka. Michael Hogan came from Kilreakle on a motor-bicycle. Unfortunately before the Volunteers in the cart, who were armed with shotguns, reached the appointed spot, the lorry of R.I.C. passed them out on the road. Hogan passed out the R.I.C. lorry on his motor-bicycle between Newtown Daly Cross and Lisafooka. He went down Flynn's Road but before he had his rifle disengaged from the motor-bicycle the lorry had gone out of sight. That was in October 1919. I remember the time of the year as I was coming from Ballymacward with sheep for my brother. As I was passing Hogan's in Kilreakle Michael Hogan told me to put them into the field near the house and to get on a bicycle and head for home to get my rifle. Before I reached home the ambush had been called off.

The next day my brother's house in Lisafooka was raided by R.I.C. and military. They were looking for me but I was not there. They were also looking for the guns that were to be used in the ambush. The R.I.C. got information but I would rather not mention from whom. The information was given by a young girl who had two brothers in the R.I.C. I came to the conclusion that she

did not realise the seriousness of the act. No action was taken by the Volunteers against her or against any member of her family, as it was realised that there was no intention of spying. The girl talked too much but there was no malice behind the talk. There was no recurrence of loose talk by this girl or her family. Her two brothers had a good reputation apart from being members of the R.I.C.

It was the proudest day of my life when, after the signing of the Treaty, I took over the R.I.C. barracks in Loughrea under orders from Brigadier Lawrence Kelly. I walked in accompanied by Martin O'Regan, Adjutant Loughrea Battalion. I remember District Inspector Keohane of the R.I.C. saying: "Hurry up and get finished with this farce as we'll be back again soon". He is back alright in Loughrea, but only as an ordinary civilian. I did not hurry. I took an inventory of everything in the barracks. I remember there were about 200 flash lamps. The Black and Tans were pretty drunk that day but the regular R.I.C. were sober. There was a large crowd assembled outside rejoicing that the day of departure of the R.I.C. had arrived. When I was ready District Inspector Keohane handed me over the keys. The R.I.C. saluted me as they passed out. I returned their salutes individually, and so ended one further chapter of Irish history.

Signed: Laurence Flynn
(Laurence Flynn)

Date: 11th January 1955
11th Jan'y. 1955

Witness: Con Moyrhan
(Con Moyrhan)
(Investigator)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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