

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BUREO STAIRE MILT. 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1125

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,125.....

Witness.

Thomas O'Mahony,

Mason Brook,

Loughrea,

Co. Galway.

Identity.

Member of Irish volunteers

Loughrea and Galway, 1917-1921.

Subject.

Irish volunteer activities

Loughrea-Galway, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2415.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS O'MAHONY,

Mason Brook, Loughrea, Co. Galway.

I was born in the month of December 1897 and was educated at Kilnadeema National School until I reached the age of sixteen years. After leaving school I became apprenticed to the grocery business and served my time at Hanrahan's Grocery and Hardware shop in Church Street Loughrea. While serving my time in Loughrea I joined the Loughrea Company of the Irish Volunteers in the year 1917. The Company Captain was either Charles Coughlan or Patrick Coy. The strength of the Company varied. At one time it went up to fifty but never exceeded that number. There was then little activity except for the usual drilling once or twice a week.

The only thing of importance I remember during my time with Loughrea Company was the part taken by the Volunteers in the General Election of 1918. I took part in the canvass on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidate, Mr. Frank Fahy, afterwards Ceann Comhairle Dáil Éireann. I attended a meeting of Volunteers in Mr. Joseph O'Flaherty's house in Loughrea. I cannot remember much of what transpired at the meeting except that plans and preparation were made for the support of the Sinn Féin candidate. That was about a week or so before Polling Day. Laurence Burke, who was at that time O/C. of the Loughrea Battalion, could, I am sure, give a good account of this meeting and of the whole election campaign. I had left my employment about a month before the election. During Polling Day I acted as escort on cars bringing voters. There were a good many clashes between the Volunteers and the supporters of Mr. Duffy, the Parliamentary Party candidate. The latter were very hostile, the women especially. They were all the time trying to pull the 'Up Fahy' badges from our coats and hats. British Military were drafted

into the town specially for the election. They were not bad, at least as far as I could see they were impartial. The R.I.C., on the other hand, were definitely partial to Mr. Duffy's supporters.

Early in 1919 in the spring, as far as I can remember, I went to Galway City and took up employment there in the Grocery, Bar and Hardware Establishment of Naughton's, Shop Street. I lived in. I joined the Volunteers in Galway immediately after going there. I approached either Sean Broderick or Sean Turk before joining. I attended all parades regularly. Sometimes they were held down at the Docks. I think that Sean Turk was Company Captain. There was only one Company in the City. I remember that Mr. Seamus Murphy, O/C. of Galway Brigade, attended one of the Company meetings. I remember distinctly that at that meeting the Captain of the Company, Sean Turk, protested very vigorously against the postponement of operations that were due to be carried out. He said it was time to do something definite, that there were many cases of failure to put plans into operation and that if there were any more postponements he would take action himself. These were not his exact words, but I remember that they were to that effect.

I cannot remember anything in the nature of military activity in 1919. There was very little activity at that time even on the part of the R.I.C. I cannot remember anything exciting in 1920 until the month of September of that year. I remember quite well the night in September 1920 that an R.I.C. man named Crum was shot in Galway Railway Station. Crum was a Detective who was usually on duty at Galway Railway Station watching people coming to and going from Galway by train. The night he was shot I was on duty collecting arms with a Volunteer named Patrick Coen. Shop Street was the street allotted to us two. Other Volunteers were on duty the same night at the same job all over the City. I remember we collected a shotgun and five or

six cartridges. Coen took possession of them and took them with him. Some little time after 11 o'clock I was standing at the door of my employer's house when Volunteer Thomas Fahy came up to me. I said that I was going to bed. He said that there was a bit of a "stunt" on at the Station and asked me to go there with him as there were some arms coming in on the train. I went with him to the Railway Station and by the time we arrived there the train had just come in. I saw Sean Turk the Company Captain. He spoke to me and said that the two of us would shadow the Detective, at the same time pointing out Crum whom I did not know. There was another man with Crum whom neither of us knew at the time. We found out afterwards that he was a representative of the Dunlop Rubber Company and a civilian. I have forgotten his name.

We walked after Crum and his companion along the platform about five yards behind them. Captain Turk had told me that, if Crum made any attempt to draw a gun, we were to disarm him by grabbing him and wrenching the gun out of his hand. I think Crum and his friend were reading a newspaper which they had got when the train came in. Turk or I did not attack Crum, as there was to be no commotion whatever until whatever arms came in were safely disposed of. The only thing I know of the arms is what I was told by Volunteer Thomas Fahy. Crum paid no great attention to the train as far as I could see. Perhaps something happened to excite him before I arrived at the Station. In any event when he was approaching the arch at the exit from the Station he pulled his gun and fired a shot in the direction of the arch. I could not see at whom he fired. Turk and I grabbed him immediately, seizing an arm each. I think he fired a second shot before the three of us fell to the ground in the tussle. While the three of us were on the ground Crum was trying to fire at us and we were doing our best to disarm him. He succeeded in firing at me,

hitting me in the right thigh. Before he could fire another shot Turk had him disarmed. Turk then fired at him, one shot as far as I can remember.

Captain Turk went off taking Crum's gun with him. I think he did not know that I was wounded. I myself did not know I was hit until I walked a little way along the platform. I felt myself getting weak and sat down on a hamper. I was sitting there about two or three minutes when a man about my own age approached me. Although I did not know him I trusted him the moment I saw him. He said he was a Volunteer and asked me if anything was wrong with me. I told him that I thought I was wounded and he asked me to accompany him and that he would look after me. He brought me to his lodgings at the house of a Mr. O'Neill in Bridge Street near Foster Street. Doctor Waters in the same street was sent for but he refused to come. Doctor O'Malley was then sent for and he came at once. He was a doctor in Doctor Sandes' Home at the time. He made no delay but told me to lie on a couch and to drink about a noggin of something that tasted like whiskey. I think it was Poitin. Doctor O'Malley had brought it with him I think. It very nearly put me to sleep as I was not accustomed to any intoxicants at the time.

It did not take him long to extract the bullet, a .45. The pain was not too bad. I was put to bed and stayed there until the following evening when I was removed to Dr. Sandes' Home in a horse-drawn cab. Dr. O'Malley and Dr. Sandes saw me every day. I was in the Home three weeks when Dr. O'Malley sent me for ex-ray examination. As a result of the examination it was found that splinters from the bullet were embedded in my thigh. I underwent an operation in a few days to have them removed. Dr. O'Malley performed the operation. I remained in the Home for a further three

weeks when I left of my own accord. I had got word that the Home was to be raided and it was actually raided the night after I had left it.

I cannot be definite as to how I got word that the raid was to take place but I think that the information came to me through nurse in charge - Nurse O'Hanlon, a native of the district between Castlegar and Headford as well as I can now remember. All the nurses in the Home were sympathetic to the Volunteers and Nurse O'Hanlon especially so. I think her brothers were in the I.R.A.

It was a strange thing that in Dr. Sandes' Home there was a wounded R.I.C. man and another wounded I.R.A. man, besides myself, receiving medical attention there at the same time. They were both wounded in an encounter between the I.R.A. and R.I.C. at Oranmore. I was a patient in the Home the first night Curfew was enforced in Galway City. It was also the first night that the R.I.C. Auxiliaries arrived in the City. I was on the ground floor and a nurse forgot to close the front door and put out the lights. I was speaking to Volunteer Thornton another patient who who was foolish enough to have two revolvers under his pillow when in walked two Auxiliaries with guns and flashlamps in their hands. They looked around and went out again without much delay. I was recovering from the shock when one of them came back, flashed his lamp around and walked out again.

After leaving the Home I stayed for a week in the home of my old teacher, Mr. P. J. Naughton, who had spent most of his life teaching in Kilnadeema near Loughrea. After a very happy week there I came home by train to Loughrea. I was met at the Station by Lawrence Kelly, Captain Kilnadeema Company, afterwards O/C., Galway South East Brigade, and my brother Patrick O'Mahony, 1st Lieutenant of the same Company, afterwards Company Captain.

I was very lame but able to walk with the aid of a stick and so had to take things very easy for a few months. I resumed active work in the I.R.A. in the early spring of 1921. I remember my first job on recovery was taking a dispatch from Lawrence Kelly, O/C. South East Galway Brigade, to General Michael Brennan of Clare. I brought it from Kilnadeema to Killenena, Co. Clare, across country on foot, a distance of about twenty miles, and delivered it to General Brennan in person. I remained a day and a night with Brennan and his flying column and then returned home. I remember having to rest my wounded leg occasionally on this journey.

A day or two later I was again sent by Brigade O/C. Lawrence Kelly, to the Derrybrien Company Captain with a dispatch. I stayed the night in Derrybrien and next day eight or ten of the Derrybrien Company accompanied me to Ballingar in Ballinakill Company area. We met the Brigade O/C., Lawrence Kelly, and a number of Volunteers from Kilnadeema, Closetoken, Leitrim and Abbey Companies. As far I know we were to ambush an R.I.C. patrol next morning. There was disagreement amongst the Company Officers as to where the ambush should take place with the result that the proposed ambush had to be called off. I cannot remember this very distinctly but I think it was as I have related.

There was an ambush laid for the R.I.C. at Dalystown on Good Friday 1921, in which I took part. General Brennan's Flying Column was there all armed with rifles and some with revolvers as well. There was a large number of local Volunteers under the command of Lawrence Kelly. There would have been about a hundred men all told. A number of them had been sent home because of a shortage of arms. The mails were raided early Good Friday morning hoping that the R.I.C. would come out to investigate. We remained

in ambush from daybreak until about noon when we were withdrawn. After the withdrawal the R.I.C. came out in lorries but came up Kilnadeema and through Knockash instead of coming by the Woodford Road as expected. They passed within about five hundred yards of General Brennan's Flying Column while they were having tea in Boola village. The number of men from Kilnadeema Company was originally about twenty but some of them were sent home because they had no arms. I do not remember any road block in connection with this affair but there were armed outposts in different directions.

One morning in May 1921 I took part in a raid on the Post Office in Woodford. Lawrence Smith, O/C., Loughrea Battalion, was in charge. There were three other Volunteers from Abbey Company with us, five in all. We got some mail bags and brought them to a hayshed four miles away where we examined them. We were armed with revolvers only. We spent all day examining the mails but found nothing of importance. We slept in the hayshed that night.

On the day of the Truce I took part in an ambush of an R.I.C. patrol which was accustomed to travel on foot between Roxboro' House and Kilchreest R.I.C. barracks. They were a protection party for Persses of Roxboro' at night time and usually returned to their barrack in the morning. I remember going with Lawrence Smyth on the Saturday to Dunally in the parish of Peterswell. We went to the house of Jack Fahy, O/C., Gort Battalion. As far as I know Lawrence Smyth went there to collect information as to how many men from General Brennan's Column would be available for the proposed ambush. Another ambush was to take place in the Gort Battalion area and this gave rise to anxiety as to the number that could be spared to us. We stayed at Fahy's Saturday night and came home to Kilnadeema on Sunday evening. There were about six of Brennan's Column at Kilnadeema when we arrived under the command of Captain Hannon, and the Brigade and Battalion O/Cs. had a consultation with them as soon as we arrived.

The ambush was planned to take place at the fishpond about one mile from Kilchreest on the Kilchreest-Gort road. The ambush party moved off in the direction of the fishpond at midnight. The place is about five miles from Kilnadeema cross country. There were about fourteen men in all. Those from Kilnadeema were :-

Lawrence Kelly, O/C., Galway South East Brigade, armed with rifle and revolver.

Lawrence Smyth, O/C., Loughrea Battalion (rifle and revolver),

John Kelly, Brigade Engineer (rifle and revolver),

Patrick O'Mahoney, Captain (rifle),

Patrick Flanagan, Volunteer (rifle),

Dominick Shiel, Volunteer (shotgun),

Michael Walsh, Volunteer (shotgun),

Thomas O'Mahony (myself) Volunteer (revolver).

We arrived at the fishpond long before daybreak and took up positions on the Ballacurra side of the road that is the left-hand side going from Kilchrist to Gort. There was no man stationed on the other side of the road. It was low flat ground. About 9 a.m. four R.I.C. came as expected. They were singing a verse of a song as they came. I am afraid the position chosen by us was not very good because if the R.I.C. passed one point on the road without being hit it would be hard for the attackers to see them after. Only one of the R.I.C. men was hit at this point. The others got cover behind the wall at the opposite side of the road. One of them succeeded in working his way inside the wall until he got well beyond the ambush position. He then came on to the road and commandeered a horse which he rode to the R.I.C. barracks in Kilchreest only one mile away.

The attack lasted about a quarter of an hour and then fizzled out. Our party withdrew because of the danger of reinforcements to the R.I.C. arriving quickly on the scene. The danger was enhanced by the escape of the R.I.C. man to his barrack in Kilchreest. In the circumstances our party was considered too small and we withdrew.

There was a branch of the Cumann na mBan, Kilnadeema Company. It was not long organised before the Truce. I do not think there was any branch of Cumann na mBan in Loughrea or in Galway Company during the time of my membership of them. As regards the R.I.C. I cannot say that I ever came across a sympathetic one. They were all bad to my knowledge except one man in Galway who could have identified me after the Crum affair. I cannot recall his name. He was a man about forty years of age at the time. The general bulk of the population in Galway City was not sympathetic to the Irish Volunteers or the I.R.A. The same applies to Loughrea, but there was a change of heart in that town after 1918. The people of my native area Kilnadeema were one hundred per cent with us all the time.

Signed:

Thomas O'Mahony  
(Thomas O'Mahony)

Date: 10th March 1955-

Witness:

Con Moynihan  
(Con Moynihan)

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