

W.S. 1.161

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,161

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,161.....

Witness

Patrick O'Carroll,
 1 St. David's Terrace,
 Naas,
 Co. Kildare.

Identity.

Member of Naas Company Irish Volunteers,
 Co. Kildare, 1917 - .

Subject.

Naas Company Irish Volunteers,
 Co. Kildare, 1917-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S 2470.....

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY

MR. PATRICK CARROLL, 4 ST. DAVID'S TERRACE,
NAAS, CO. KILDARE.

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When I joined the Naas Sinn Fein Club at its inception in 1917, I was one of those who had caught the contagion that sprung from the Rising a year before, the symptoms of which were a burning desire to justify the course taken by the men who had rebelled against the continuance of British rule in this country. I had spent some time, on leaving school, in the "Leinster Leader" office, where I purposed practising journalism and I think it was there I first contracted the contagion that gave rise to the above-mentioned symptoms. At that period also the body politic was affected by another malady which took the form of extensive agitation for the breaking up of untenanted land, and as Imperial nostrums had failed to assuage it, those affected, or disaffected, went about finding the remedy themselves in clearing out cattle and putting in their place human beings. The outbreak was at its height in 1918 in the Clane district where the smallholders were agitating for the purchase and acquisition of land on Captain Dunne's estate at Blackhall and the first service I was called upon to render was the delivery of a despatch entrusted to me by the Club President, Mr. O'Kelly, for delivery to Mr. Geoghegan, Victualler, at Clane. A pleasant recollection of that service was the hospitable reception I experienced at the hands of Mr. Geoghegan.

My next duty had not such pleasant accompaniments. It was in connection with the potato shop established by the Club to counteract the profiteering then prevalent amongst some of the retailers in the town. A licence to sell the potatoes was required by the R.I.C. and as this requirement was ignored the President and some others spent a short

period in Mountjoy Prison in default of a fine for not having the licence. I was one of another batch of members summoned later on for the same offence, but when the case came before the Court the late Seamus O'Kelly instructed Mr. Lamphier, Solicitor, to get it adjourned, as he had received a communication from Sinn Féin headquarters that there was to be no more submission to imprisonment because it was expected that the British Government were out to conscript Irish political prisoners. As the "shop" had closed down, the case against us was later on withdrawn.

Volunteer organisation went on actively until 1920, and the Naas Company then formed of club members, made several raids on Sallins railway station, where English newspapers taken from the trains held up, were burned. Mails were also seized and government correspondence abstracted and censored. In the month of July of that year a further raid was decided upon, but as more attention was now given by the police to the protection of Sallins Station we went on to Straffan instead. The train was duly held up at the revolver point and large parcels of English papers were seized. A priest travelling on the train on seeing the work we were engaged in, left his compartment and came to assist us. Another passenger on the train was a newsboy carrying a large satchel slung from his shoulder. He also came to our assistance but his eagerness in the work was not altogether disinterested as we discovered him hiding some of the papers in his satchel, the value of which would later be considerably enhanced owing to our operation. We therefore completed the job without further assistance from him.

A re-organisation of the Volunteers was effected later on in the year when Peadar McMahon, one-time Lieutenant General in the Free State Army, and now Secretary, Department of

Defence, visited Naas. The Naas Company was inspected by him in the Sinn Féin Club room and he explained that under the new organisation scheme the oath of allegiance and obedience had to be renewed by every member. Mick Cush, assistant at Mr. Gorry's medical hall, was appointed O.C. of the Company and Louis Moran, First Lieutenant.

The first operation carried out by the newly formed company was the collection of all firearms in the town and district. For this purpose groups of the Company were told off for different areas. Eddie Whyte, Mick Byrne and myself collected around Tipper, The Fishery and Craddocktown.

Raids on the mail trains at Sallins were renewed, and on one of these, Seán Kavanagh who was on the lookout for a particular Government document, was one of the raiding party, the others being Tony Callaghan, Charlie Kavanagh Junior, Seán Rafferty, Mick Byrne and myself. We also had with us four members of the Ballymore Eustace Company. The mail bags were thoroughly searched and all official letters censored. The bags of mails were then replaced in the mail van.

When Mick Cush was arrested he was succeeded by Louis Moran as O.C. of the company. The latter later on left Naas and for a time Seán Rafferty carried on, but when he was arrested in turn we were for a while without an O.C. As members of the company were complaining of our inactivity, I took it upon myself to order a special parade at the football field. This led to some dissatisfaction and differences of opinion, which at length were composed.

Another raid at Sallins in 1921 had for its object the burning of Belfast flour sacks. Tom Lalor was then O.C. and others told off for this raid were E. Whyte, Gus Fitzpatrick, Mick Byrne, Tony Callaghan, Tom Perkins, P. Gill and myself.

After this I renewed an application I had made a year previous together with Seán Rafferty to be sent on one of the columns on active service, and was informed that our own Battalion (the 2nd) was about to form an active service unit of its own and that I would be put on. Meanwhile the company was ordered to dismantle the telephones at Punchestown Grand Stand on the eve of the annual races. This order was duly complied with, and on the Thursday following at a Battalion Council Meeting at Two-Mile House I was appointed to the newly-formed column. The column headquarters were located at Baltiboys, Co. Wicklow. Proceeding at once to Ballymore in company with Jack Winders we occupied an empty house with the appellation of "Shamrock Lodge" and next day went to Blessington. Here we called on Tom Byrne who provided us with supplies of bedding and other articles. These we took with us to Baltiboys where the column was under the command of Martin Neill, Ballymore. A fortnight's leisurely life followed and then a raid on the mails carried by the Dublin and Blessington Steam Tram took place. Carbury Murphy who was at that time O.C. in Blessington was one of the raiding party.

In the month of April, 1921, we were ordered out at 4 a.m. and after a long march across country we occupied a hill to await an expected police patrol which, however, failed to put in an appearance, and towards evening we headed for Russborough, the residence of the Countess of Milltown. There we occupied a hay loft and I had my first experience of what are locally known as the "feeneens" that is hay seeds which, on getting between one's shirt and body are not conducive to peaceful slumber. For some reason or other the disbandment of the column was announced next day and as a return to Naas was, for me, impossible I accepted an invitation

to go with Paddy Hanlon, Blessington, and Paddy Farrell, Baltiboys, and try to get in touch with another column. We reported to Tommy Byrne, Blessington. He informed us that Blessington Company was about to be separated from Kildare Battalion and attached instead to the 1st Dublin Brigade and that Gerald Boland O.C., and Paddy Garret were coming to arrange matters. When they arrived, G. Boland inquired of me if I knew what had been done with the arms of the disbanded column and I told him they were dumped at Russborough. That night we went to Russborough and took possession of the dumped arms. Myself and Hanlon were served with revolvers and ordered to go out on a collecting tour - a mission then regarded as very dangerous, as the British Forces had orders to shoot on sight any persons discovered collecting for the I.R.A. A couple of weeks later I was promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant of Blessington ("E") Company. At that time a column was formed under the command of Tom Watkins of Tallaght and was mobilised at Ballyknocken and I was sent on there for a period of training. Before proceeding there I obtained permission for myself and Paddy Hanlon to go to Donard where Seán Cullen commanded the local company, in order to dismantle a telephone in the local Post Office.

The column at Ballyknocken was in need of bedding and other requirements and these were obtained by a raid on a store that supplied such articles to the British Military when encamped in the Glen of Imaal. Soon after, a number of I.R.A. men arrived from Dublin under the command of Paddy O'Brien who, it will be remembered, was an officer in the Four Courts when it was held after the Treaty was signed in London, and who was badly wounded there. Notwithstanding his wound he afterwards took part in the attack on Enniscorthy and was again wounded - this time fatally, for

he died a few days later. He was a strict disciplinarian and although he never smoked himself he was indulgent to those under him who did, and relaxed the strictness of his orders in this respect whenever he deemed it safe to do so. He had the fullest confidence of all who served with him and deep and genuine sorrow reigned throughout the I.R.A. ranks when the news was received that he had succumbed to his wounds.

There were now about 40 men in the camp at Ballyknocken, the centre of which was a house acquired for the purpose. The camp was fortified and put into an effective state for defence purposes. Among the Dublin contingent was E. Dwyer who later on represented one of the Dublin constituencies in the Dáil. On one occasion a force of 700 British troops suddenly made their appearance in the neighbourhood and hasty preparations were made to repel an attack on the camp. The British arrived at the outskirts of the village, at a distance of about 200 yards from the camp and, when we had been assigned to our positions, strict injunctions were given by the O.C. to reserve fire until the British were well within range of the shotguns which were to be employed with rifles to receive them. The British occupied three points on the rising grounds in our neighbourhood partially surrounding us and as we awaited their further advance we suddenly saw them retreat instead. They retired by the same route by which they arrived. One of the villagers later reported that he had overheard a conversation between a group of the British officers, in the course of which one of them remarked that the district was a veritable death trap and a further advance would have been disastrous.

At the end of the training period at Ballyknocken the Dublin Section packed up and returned to the city. Now occurred a remarkable episode that narrowly missed bringing to a sudden close the careers of myself and two others of the remaining column. A seizure of the mails from the steam tram at Balrothery was ordered and undertaken by Seán Cullen, Paddy Hanlon and myself. Seán Cullen went to the city first to commandeer a taxi to convey the mails away when seized. When Seán arrived with the taxi and its driver it was driven up a laneway off from the main road. Hanlon was placed on guard over the driver and the taxi and Cullen and myself then went and held up the train and seized the mail bags. Cullen carried three of them and I the remaining two. We were conveying them along the road towards the laneway where the taxi was kept in waiting when, to our consternation, a large lorry filled with auxiliaries unexpectedly came round a bend of the road not 200 yards off, travelling at their usual high speed. We had no time to make a dash for it and try to get away. I was the first to see the lorry and I shouted a warning to Cullen and also to Hanlon to let the taxi driver go. I then shouted to the engine driver of the steam tram to go on, which he did. On came the lorry without relaxing speed and, dropping the mail bags on the roadway, we jumped behind a ditch and taking out our guns resolved to sell our lives as dearly as we could. Up dashed the lorry, driving over the mail bags on the road and passed on along the road until it disappeared. For a moment we were dumbfounded and then a number of women and girls who had witnessed the extraordinary occurrence came and beseeched us with tears to get away as quickly as possible or we would surely be captured and shot. A short distance away there was a quarry where men were at work

loading a lorry with stones. I went there and ordered the driver of the lorry to come with me. He refused at first but when he saw that I was armed and determined he consented to accompany me. He then asked for a revolver saying that if the Auxiliaries came again they would listen to no explanation, and he would like to put up a fight rather than be taken tamely by them. I was unable to comply with this request and told him so. He then came along with me. When we came out to the road, on came another load of Auxiliaries and again they passed on without taking any notice of us whatever. The mail bags were put on the lorry and we drove off along the main road and reached Ballyknocken in safety. Here the mails were censored and then returned to the postal authorities.

When the tram arrived at Terenure the loss of the mails was of course duly reported and the Auxiliaries at once set out to scour the country for the raiders. Believing the byeways to be the most likely on which they might intercept the raiders, the Auxiliaries followed these, while we kept to the main road all the time and so escaped them. We heard that the engine driver was questioned closely by them afterwards and they refused to believe him when he asserted that the mails were taken at Balrothery which they had passed on patrol at the time the raid was reported to have been carried out. It was reported also that the engine driver received a mauling for his supposed misleading story.

We also made a collection amongst our comrades for a small monetary compensation to the driver of the lorry who was an ex-British soldier, and who I afterwards heard served with the I.R.A.

After that episode we several times lay in ambush on the road from Dublin to Blessington on the lookout for

patrols. On one of these occasions a furniture van unexpectedly loomed in the distance and one of our party mistaking it for a patrol lorry fired on it. The bullet went through the van but fortunately no other harm was done. At Bohernabreena near Tallaght there is a small chapel where a British Army Sergeant was expected to attend divine service on a certain Sunday. This man had for some time been making himself particularly obnoxious to the people of the district, so we went there to meet him. We waited until late in the afternoon but without success and returned to our base. We learned on the way back that the Sergeant was actually at Bohernabreena that day but travelled by a different road and so escaped us. A week later he was again in luck when we missed him at Valleymount.

Next the Truce was announced and we celebrated the announcement by a feu de joie. I returned to Naas and from there was sent to a signalling instruction camp at Mount Seskin near Brittas, Co. Dublin. After completing a course of instruction, I in turn was engaged in giving instructions in signalling to I.R.A. companies for some time.

My next destination was an officers' training camp at Glen na Smol, where the late Paddy O'Brien was O.C. There were officers there from different brigades all over the country. Suddenly, one night, an alarm was raised that the camp was surrounded for attack. The Truce, it was reported, had been broken by the British. We tumbled out in all kinds of wearing apparel, some half dressed, some in their shirts, and others without boots. We all, however, had our arms but a hasty inspection showed that we were without ammunition and that the quartermaster had disappeared. Fire was opened from the hillsides around and our only hope seemed to

be in retreat. As we advanced along a public road, one of our men dropped, threw up his arms and rolled over. Others ran to his assistance and, on his shirt being opened a splash of red was seen on his breast. Altogether six men fell in this fashion. In the height of the retreat a halt was called and the O.C. said there was nothing further for it but a charge on the enemy. Then as we formed up, he coolly announced that the alarm was a false one to test our discipline in such an emergency. I returned to Mount Seskin where there was now a Battalion Camp and was appointed to the staff there under the command of Tom Watkins. One night he sent me out to fire a few rounds so as to make it appear that an attack was being made on the camp. I took up a position at some distance and opened with a few rounds, taking things easy as I had been assured that the ammunition in the camp had been put safely away. To my surprise, however, bullets began to whizz past me and I was not long in taking cover.

When the Treaty was signed, headquarters sent out mines to be set on all the roads around the camp at Kilbride to which I had now been transferred. This was a precautionary measure, but later on the mines were removed. I was put in charge of 25 men and ordered to proceed with them to Beggars Bush Barracks, Dublin, to have them equipped and armed. Kilbride Camp had, at this time, been taken over from the British. When we reached Beggars Bush Barracks we were regarded with suspicion by those in occupation, so that they were not inclined to comply with our demand for arms. Our Brigade O.C., Andy McDonnell, then appeared on the scene and tried to exercise his influence on the men in charge to provide us with the arms. As it was known that he as well as Gerald Boland were on the side of the "Anti-Treatyites" his efforts failed in this respect. He then called me to

one side and whispered to me to take my 25 men over to the place where the arms were stored. I did so, and on arrival there saw an empty lorry outside the entrance to the stores. We entered and by means of a feigned order I succeeded in getting the arms. I then ordered the men up on the lorry and we cleared out and returned to Kilbride. The camp at Kilbride was taken over from the British on 21st March, 1922.

When the split occurred in the I.R.A. over the "Treaty" Tom Watkins was in command at Kilbride and I held rank as First Lieutenant. We were both loyal to the Republic and a parade of the garrison was ordered to ascertain how matters stood in this respect with regard to the rest of the men. A number of them declared themselves in favour of the "Treaty". These were at once disarmed and ordered to clear out, which they did. Neil McNeil next arrived with a Free State Force in lorries but he was refused admission to the camp. He explained that he had come with the back pay that was due to us. This we regarded as a ruse to gain admission, and we declined to permit him to enter on any pretext. He did not press his demand for admission any further and returned with his men.

The next occurrence was that Commandant McNulty of the Free State Army came and gave an assurance to our Commandant, Gerald Boland, that he would not interfere in any way with the Republican Army in our area or attempt to win any of them over to the side of the Free State. A little later a report reached us that a motor bicycle had been stolen and suspicion fell on a certain individual. Tom Watkins and myself went to the suspected person's house and recovered the missing machine which belonged to a Dublin dentist to whom it was returned. The man who had taken the bicycle was arrested and we took him to Crooksling and while he was in custody there he informed us that McNulty was trying to organise local companies in our area

on behalf of the Free State Army. Myself and Tom Watkins made an appointment to meet McNulty at Brittas, where it was stated he was at work as an organiser for the Free State Army. When we went there McNulty was accompanied by a Captain Dowling and we arrested both of them and took them to Kilbride Camp. They were later removed to Brigade Headquarters at Bray. Next day the Free State Army authorities sent out an armoured car to Kilbride to demand the release of the arrested men. The armoured car pulled up on the brow of a hill about 400 yards from the camp. The Officer in charge of the armoured car, whose name was Flanagan, then advanced alone and unarmed towards the camp, waving a white handkerchief. He was admitted to the camp and said he came to demand on behalf of the Free State Army the release of McNulty and Dowling. We replied that the prisoners were not there. He said that if the prisoners were not delivered up to him he would blow the camp to smithereens. Tom Watkins told him not to be so sure of his ability to do so, and added that if we liked we could detain him as a prisoner also. Flanagan then asserted that the troops with the armoured car had orders to open fire on the camp if he had not returned to them within 15 minutes. To this threat Watkins smilingly replied that the armoured car was pulled up directly over a mine which had been set there and that at the first act of hostility towards the camp he would explode the mine. At this counter-threat Flanagan became panic stricken and asked to have a message sent at once to the armoured car and crew. Watkins said he would comply with this request provided he saw the message before it was sent. Flanagan agreed to this condition and submitted the message which was to the effect that fire was not to be opened on the camp until he had returned. Some further conversation followed in the course of which Watkins

gave him his word that the prisoners were not in the camp. Eventually Flanagan was permitted to go. He returned to the armoured car which at once drove off without creating further trouble. We were left in undisputed possession of the camp until some time after the Four Courts in Dublin had been attacked.

Signed *P. O'Carroll*
(P. O'Carroll)
Date 12th May 1955

Witness *M.F. Ryan Comd't.*
(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.

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