

W.S. 1,177

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1878-81  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1878-81  
No. W.S. 1,177

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.  
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,177

Witness

Thomas Sheehan,  
Mothel,  
Carrick-on-Suir,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Quartermaster 'D' Company, 8th Battalion,  
South Tipperary Brigade, 1919-1921.

Subject.

'D' Company, 8th Battalion, South Tipperary  
Brigade, 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2484

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STATEMENT BY Mr. THOMAS SHEEHAN,

Mothel, Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary.

I was born on Christmas Day in the year 1895 at my father's farmhouse in Mothel where I still reside. I had two brothers, Patrick and Robert (Bob) and two sisters, Josephine and Mary. I attended the National School at Clonea from the time I was five or six years old until I reached the age of 14 years. I then attended the Christian Brothers' School in Carrick-on-Suir for a further two years, after which I remained at home and assisted my father on the farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers when a Company which was known as "D" Company, VIII. Battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade, was formed in Mothel. This was in the early springtime of 1919. At the start we had only about twelve members and as time went on we became better organised, we got more numbers, and I would say that by the time the Truce came in 1921 we had a strength of about 70 men in the Company. Maurice McGrath was our first Company Commander; my brother Pat was Adjutant of the Company from its formation and I was appointed Quartermaster of the Company at the same time. We had no arms at that time except for a few shot guns which were the private property of some of the members.

We paraded for drill twice a week, generally after work on week nights. Our instructor was a man named Patrick O'Shea who had seen service with the American Forces and who had returned home to this district after the 1914-1918 Great War.

A short time after the Company was formed Seamus Robinson, the Brigade O/C. administered the Oath to the members. At that time Robinson, Dan Breen, Sean Treacy and Sean Hogan were staying in the

Mothel district. They were 'on the run' after the Soloheadbeg ambush and were very much 'wanted' men by the R.I.C. There was no R.I.C. barracks in Mothel, the nearest being that at Clonea about two or three miles away, and the R.I.C. garrison in Clonea amounted to only a Sergeant and three men, so Mothel was a fairly secure hiding place for men 'on the run'. A man named Seamus Clerikan, who was a teacher in the Christian Brothers' school in Carrick-on-Suir, was also 'on the run' at that time and he was staying at our house. From this time, 1919, until the end of the Civil War in 1923 our home was frequently visited by men 'on the run'. Some stayed for long periods and some just for a night, or for a few days at a time.

Early in 1920 the R.I.C. garrison evacuated Clonea and shortly afterwards, about Easter of that year, we demolished the barracks there. The first night we went to do this job we did not make a success of it. We broke in the doors and the windows and set the place on fire, but the fire did not get a proper grip. A few nights later a Volunteer named Thomas Reidy brought out petrol from Carrick-on-Suir and this time we made a proper job of it. The petrol was sprinkled on the wooden floors and on the roof of the barracks: it was again set fire to and when the fire burned out only the four walls of the barracks were left standing.

Towards the end of the summer of 1920 we received an order to collect all arms and ammunition which were held by private persons in the Company area. In many cases farmers and others, who had shot guns, willingly handed them over to us. There were some, however, who refused to give up the guns when we called and in these cases we brought Volunteers from other areas, who were unknown to the occupants of the houses, to raid the places and to seize the guns. In all I should say we collected about 20 shot guns and two or three revolvers.

These guns were distributed amongst the members of the Company for safe-keeping. Those retained by my brothers and myself were securely packed in wooden boxes and then put in a safe place in a field on the farm where we could have easy access to them at any time.

About this time too we had instructions to keep a special watch or lookout for strangers coming to stay or live in the Company area. As a result of these instructions we made a few arrests. One was that of a man named Cyril Bowman. He was rather a small man with a sallow complexion and he spoke with a touch of a foreign accent. No one seemed to know what he was doing, or where he had come from, so we decided to arrest him on suspicion. We kept him a prisoner for about a week in an unoccupied cottage on my father's outfarm. He was questioned and interrogated on several occasions, but eventually it was considered that he was harmless and he was released. He remained in the district and earned a living by breaking in young horses for farmers.

Then we had the case of a stranger named Davin who came to the district and secured employment with Canon Wall, the Parish Priest. Davin drew attention to himself by his persistent attempts to associate himself with the Volunteers although he was not long in the area, and by his offer to plank the Canon's shotgun where it could easily be got by any of the Volunteers. His suggestion was agreed to but when the time came there was no sign of either Davin or the gun. He also was arrested on suspicion, and after being kept as a prisoner in the unoccupied cottage for seven or eight days he was handed over to the Clonea ("E" Company) Volunteers. I cannot say what happened to him subsequently.

Davin's successor in Canon Wall's employment was a man named Cush. He, too, was a stranger to the district. He was not long in

Canon Wall's employment when, one Sunday morning while the Canon was absent in Clonea celebrating Mass, Cush held up the Canon's two housekeepers, both elderly ladies, and took whatever money they had. He then departed going in the direction of Carrick-on-Suir. Hearing what had happened we mobilised whatever members of the Company were available and started a search for Cush. At the same time we sent word to John O'Keefe, the Battalion Commandant, telling him what happened and asking him to try and capture Cush in Carrick-on-Suir. John O'Keefe came out to Mothel that night but, although we searched and watched until late into the night, there was no sign of the 'wanted' man. Next day myself and one or two others went into Carrick-on-Suir to identify him if he was still in the town, but we were too late. We learned that he had hired an outside car, and got away before our arrival.

In November, 1920, John O'Keefe was arrested. Maurice McGrath, our Company O/C., succeeded John O'Keefe as Battalion Commandant, and my brother Bob then became Company Commander.

About this time too the rural postman was occasionally held up and his letters examined. This we did to see if he was carrying any letters addressed to the R.I.C. or to any of the British Forces. We never got any such letters in these hold-ups.

Bob was only a short time O/C. of the Company when we were asked to supply three men from the Company for Denis Lacey's flying column which was then being formed. I understand that each Company in the VIII. Battalion was asked to give three men to the flying column. From those who volunteered from our Company the three selected were - Robert Sheehan (my brother), Thomas Coughlan and Patrick Baldwin. Thomas Power became Company Commander.

In April, 1921, Denis Lacey's Column came into the Mothel and Clonea Company areas bringing with them District Inspector Potter of the R.I.C. whom they had captured some days before. Amongst other places Potter was held a prisoner in O'Hanrahan's Cottage at Munsboro. My brother guarded him there on the evening of his execution. That night Potter was taken by the Column across the River Clodiagh to the lands then owned by a Miss Fitzgerald, where he was executed.. He was buried in a shrubbery beside the river. After the shooting of Potter the Column stayed that night in the Mothel Company area. All members of the Company were mobilised to act as scouts for the various billets. A few members of the Column had a meal and slept the night in my house. Denis Lacey, the Column/<sup>leader,</sup> spent the night in Quigley's, a neighbour's house.

One Sunday, about the middle of May, 1921, the Company was on parade ~~and~~ at a place called Ballynevin when a report was received that a patrol of British troops and R.I.C. men from Carrick-on-Suir were in Clonea. We had the shot guns with us. The Company Commander decided to dismiss the parade and ordered that the shot guns should be put back in the dumps at once. A small quantity of shot gun ammunition was given to a Volunteer named Shanahan who was to take it to his employer's farm and hide it under the floor in the cow house there.

It chanced that at the time Tom Carew, the Brigade Intelligence Officer, Maurice McGrath, the Battalion Commandant, Frank Barrett, the Battalion Adjutant, and "Sniper" Power, a member of Sean Hays's flying column, were all together in my house. All were much 'wanted' men who were 'on the run'. When told that the patrol was raiding in the Clonea area Tom Carew decided that the members of the Company should be got together again with the shot guns, and that we would ambush the patrol if and when it came to the cross-roads at Mothel. The patrol searched the crossroads at Mothel much sooner than was expected and before anything much could be done about getting the men and guns together.

Furthermore, they had captured Shanahan with the ammunition on him and were bringing him with them. They only remained at the crossroads for a few minutes and then went on their way back to Carrick-on-Suir with their prisoner.

A few evenings after this incident my brother Pat, myself and two workmen were busy milking cows in the cow byre when a nurse named Margaret Ryan who was cycling past came into the yard and told us that a large patrol of soldiers, Black & Tans and R.I.C. were at the crossroads about fifty yards away. Many of them were in the public house at the cross-roads and were getting mad drunk. Robert Walsh, the Battalion Quartermaster, who was then 'on the run' was with us and was giving us a hand with the milking. Walsh left immediately and went away by fields at the rear of the house. The other four of us continued at our work.

It was not long until the patrol came into the yard. I believe myself that what brought them out that evening from Carrick-on-Suir was that having found the ammunition on Shanahan they considered that there should be a gun also in the vicinity, and they had come to look for it. They entered the byre, upset the pails of milk, beat the cows with the butts of their rifles and then turned their attention to us. They beat up all four of us badly, using the butts of their guns as well as their fists. They then ordered us to kneel down in the yard and to prepare for death. All the time they kept asking us questions about my brother, Bob, where was he, etc.. Of course, we were not going to give them any information. Next they ordered us to 'fall in'. We stood up alright, but did not do it in any way which would give them the impression that we understood what was meant by the term "fall in". We were then taken inside the house where some of them continued to beat us up while others raided the house from top to bottom. They did quite a share of damage in the house smashing up pictures etc.

While this was going on in the house my father, who had been to the butter market in Kilmacthomas, arrived home. He was an old man at the time and the reception he received when he entered the gate was a kick of a soldier's boot followed by a blow of the butt of a rifle on the chest. Seeing my father so ill-treated, one of my sisters who wore spectacles, began to cry. An R.I.C. man named Naughton, who was a North of Ireland man and who was stationed in Carrick-on-Suir for some time previously, turned on her and shouted at her - "What are you bawling about four eyes." She replied - "Thanks for the compliment, but my name is Josie Sheehan, Mr. Naughton". Naughton was partly disguised, and it came as a bit of a shock to him to know that he had been recognised.

The questioning and the beating up continued for some further time before the raiding party took their departure. My father at that time always wore a hard bowler hat. The last act of the raiders before they went was to crush his hat down over his face.

About a week after this raid on my home by the British Forces I went from my own house to Clonea with a dispatch which had arrived for Pierce Tobin who was then in charge of the VIII. Battalion, Active Service Unit, which was then billeting in the Clonea Company area. Arriving in Clonea I handed over the dispatch to some of the local Volunteers whom I met at the ball-alley in that village, so that they could bring it to Tobin. Having parted with the dispatch I remained chatting for a few minutes with some of those who were at the ball-alley. Almost immediately a scout reported that a party of British Forces were approaching along the Ballyneale road. I had no desire to get another beating up so I started to get away as quickly as I could. I could hear the British party calling on those whom I had just parted with to halt and put their hands up.

I entered a field and crossed a stream and when I thought I had a good chance to get clear I was called upon to halt by a Black & Tan who, from his position on the road, had a clear view of the field and of me. I retraced my steps and had recrossed the stream when he opened fire on me. Two of his shots hit me, one over the left hip near the small of my back and one in my left arm below the elbow. I was seriously wounded but did not lose consciousness. Some of the other members of the British party arrived on the scene and having searched me and found nothing of an incriminating nature they rendered first-aid. They also sent for the priest and doctor and for my father. I was attended where I lay by Father Hackett, C.C. and by Dr. Halpin.

I was lucky in this respect that this party of British Forces were a party who had come out from Dungarvan, and that none of them knew anything about me or about my family's association with the Movement. The officer in charge offered to take me to either their own military hospital at Cappoquin or to the hospital in Carrick-on-Suir for treatment. My father decided that it should be the hospital in Carrick-on-Suir, which was much nearer home, and much more convenient for visiting me.

I was three months in hospital before I was able to return home. Meanwhile, the Truce had been signed and for the moment, at any rate, a more peaceful atmosphere reigned in the country.

Signed:

*Thomas Sheehan*

(Thomas Sheehan)

Date:

*7<sup>th</sup> June 1955.*

7th June 1955.

Witness:

*J. Grace*

(J. Grace)

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