

W.S. 1.202

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1202

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,202

Witness

Martin O'Regan,
Moore Street,
Loughrea,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Chief of Scouts, Loughrea Battalion;
Adjutant do. later.

Subject.

National activities, Loughrea, Co. Galway,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MARTIN O'REGAN

Moore Street, Loughrea, Co. Galway

I was born on 26th July 1896, in Loughrea and was educated at St. Brendan's National Schools, Loughrea, until I attained the age of 16 years. I continued as Monitor in the same schools to Easter 1916, when I sat for the King's Scholarship Examination. During the week of the examination (Easter Week 1916) I was arrested by the R.I.C. in Galway City where the examination was held. I was brought to Eglinton R.I.C. barracks for interrogation. The R.I.C. in Galway city were evidently well briefed by their colleagues in Loughrea, for they questioned me at great length concerning my activities as captain of the Loughrea Boy Scouts, then known as "Na Curaidh Gaeilge". In addition to my arrest, the examination was also interrupted by the shelling of Oranmore by a British gunboat lying in Galway Bay. At any rate, out of 23 candidates who sat for the examination at the Galway City centre only one was successful and he was a son of a member of the R.I.C. That finished my schooldays.

My father was always active in the national movement, which was not popular in the town of Loughrea in my young days. The town population was almost 100% anti-national. During World War I, large numbers of the young men of the town, encouraged by the local M.P., the late Mr. William Duffy, and others imbued with the same ideas, joined the British army. I would say that up to the end of 1918, with the exception of Waterford city and Ballaghaderreen, Loughrea was the most anti-national town in the country.

My father encouraged the family to learn the Irish language and Irish dancing. My sister won the Connaught Senior Dancing Championship in 1915. She always danced in full Irish costume. I myself won second prize at Enniscorthy

Feis the same year in a competition for the best Irish costume at the Feis. I was also an Irish step-dancer and won many prizes and other functions throughout the Co. Galway. To help counteract the anti-national spirit I organised Feiseanna, Aeriochtanna and all-Irish concerts in Loughrea, Ballinakill and many other villages. I also organised Irish Classes and Irish dancing classes and helped with the teaching of them. I staged many plays including "Orange and Green", "The Manchester Martyrs" and "The Dawn of Freedom". In fact, I did everything in my power to revive the native culture and way of life which had almost died in my native town and district.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in the Summer of 1917. It was the occasion on which Eamon de Valera addressed a big meeting at Loughrea as a result of which some young men including myself joined the Loughrea Company. Charles Coughlan, now deceased, was the company captain. He had been arrested and interned after Easter Week 1916. As far as I can remember, the strength of the company was about 20 out of a population of some 3,000. Meetings of the company were held in Sweeney's Hall, Athenry Road, twice a week. Shortly after joining, I was appointed Battalion Chief of Scouts and I concentrated on organising lines of communication in the Loughrea battalion area which included the following companies: Loughrea, Kilchreest, Closetoken, Bullaun and New Inn, Kilnadeema, Leitrim, Kilrickle and Mullagh. At that time Bullaun and New Inn was one company. Later, they were two separate companies.

As Battalion Chief of Scouts I was responsible for the appointment of dispatch riders in all the companies of the battalion. I was also responsible for the safety of brigade and battalion officers in so far as ensuring that the routes taken by them when attending meetings in the battalion area were free from enemy forces. Most of the battalion council

meetings were held in a shed at the back of Closetoken Parish Church in order to shorten the journey for brigade officers coming from Galway city and Athenry. At that time Brigade Headquarters were in Galway city and Closetoken company was the nearest to Galway Brigade H.Q.

I went from company to company by night delivering lectures on scouting, dispatch riding, foot, arms and company drill. I also lectured generally on the aims and objects of the Volunteer Movement. I often spent whole nights until 8 o'clock in the morning at this work. During 1917 and 1918 I helped in every way to counteract recruiting for the British army by organising obstruction of recruiting meetings. I often came in for rough handling by the R.I.C. on these occasions. There were several collections of money for arms in which I took part with Company Captain Patrick Coy and Lieutenant Patrick O'Regan of Loughrea Company. Lieut. O'Regan was my brother. I remember that the money collected was sent to Brigade H.Q.

The principal event in the year 1918, as far as Loughrea Battalion was concerned, was the General Election, as a result of which Mr. Frank Fahy - afterwards Ceann Comhairle, Dáil Éireann - was elected as Sinn Fein ^{well} candidate for South Galway. We were ~~all~~ prepared for the election in so far as we had an active Sinn Fein Club in Loughrea with very enthusiastic members. The foundation members of Sinn Fein in the town of Loughrea were Mr. Joseph O'Flaherty and Mr. Peter Sweeney (now both deceased). Those two men were close friends of Arthur Griffith and were members of the Standing Committee in Dublin. Mr. Sweeney's name is mentioned in a "Life of Arthur Griffith" which I read recently. I cannot recall the title or the author's name.

Sinn Fein had many enemies in the town at that time. Almost all the better-off section of the community were ranged against it as well as the recently demobilised British soldiers and their friends. These people showed their hand long before Polling Day. They were allowed full scope for their anti-Sinn Fein activities by the R.I.C. Supporters of Sinn Fein were often badly beaten up by the ex-British army men and their friends. The doors and windows of the houses of Sinn Fein supporters were often smeared at night with anti-national slogans such as "To hell with Sinn Fein". About this time, too, the Loughrea Town Commissioners passed a resolution condemning the Rising of 1916. This resolution remained on the Minute Book for some years until I was elected a member of the Town Commissioners on the Sinn Fein ticket. I then succeeded, with the help of the Labour members of the Commission, in having the offending resolution expunged from the Minutes Book. That would be about 1924 or 1925.

I hope that the preceding paragraph will give some idea of the anti-national feeling in the town of Loughrea at this period. It will then be readily understood that it was necessary to take steps to protect members of the Sinn Fein Club, speakers, canvassers and voters. It was also necessary to take measures against attacks on the homes of citizens who were known to have leanings towards Sinn Fein. The necessary protection was afforded by the Loughrea Battalion of the Irish Volunteers. A Volunteer Headquarters was set up in the home of Mr. Joseph O'Flaherty, Loughrea, and it was found necessary, even a week before Polling Day, to call in Volunteer from all companies of the battalion to strengthen the local Loughrea Company. The majority of the Volunteers were armed with stout sticks. Some had revolvers, but did not use them in the pitched battles with the mob, which made use of stones, bottles and any other missiles they could lay their hands on.

I did most of the work of organising the protective parties of Volunteers as well as taking a very active part in the election campaign by co-operating with Sinn Fein in a rigid canvass of the town and surrounding districts. As Battalion Chief of Scouts I kept in close contact at all times with the various companies of Volunteers engaged in protective work

The town was so hostile and the situation so serious before polling day that a company of British forces was drafted in and quartered in the Temperance Hall. The R.I.C. were also reinforced. I have no hesitation in stating that the R.I.C. were not impartial. They openly took sides with the anti-Sinn Fein mob and allowed them to do as they pleased, taking no steps to check the stone and bottle throwing of those people at the Sinn Fein supporters both prior to and during Polling day. The British military officer in charge, noticing the blatant manner in which the R.I.C. allowed full scope to the mob, took over charge. He said publicly that while he was there he would do his duty in protecting all classes of the community. He certainly was impartial. He did not interfere with the Volunteers and appeared to regard them as a disciplined force endeavouring to keep law and order and to afford an opportunity to the people to exercise the franchise. When the ballot boxes were brought into the Courthouse from the Loughrea Electoral District the Volunteers stood guard over them all through the night. They were subjected to attacks by the mob for several hours, in spite of the efforts of the British military. Many of the Volunteers were wounded by bottles, stones and other missiles. Next day they escorted the ballot boxes to Galway city accompanied by an escort of R.I.C.

I took part in collecting the Dáil Éireann Loan in the town of Loughrea. The response was only fair. I was Clerk of the Loughrea Parish Court. The Justices were Messrs. Peter

Sweeney, Daniel Corry and Patrick Brogan, all members of the Loughrea Sinn Fein Club. The Court sat in the Temperance Hall and its decisions were implemented by the Volunteers where necessary. Cases before the Court were, for the most part, disputes between neighbours and were generally of a trivial nature. Generally, the decisions of the Court were accepted in good grace by the parties concerned. We did have a few cases of persons who were anti-national in their outlook and, in these cases, the decisions were not accepted. These parties were arrested and sent to an 'unknown destination' until such time as they made up their minds to recognise the Court and abide by its decisions. They were held prisoners by local companies of the Volunteers. At this time also the Volunteers acted as Republican police.

Some time in 1919 I was appointed adjutant of Loughrea Battalion. The Battalion O/C. then was Laurence Burke of Kilnadeema. Shortly after my appointment as battalion adjutant I made a general survey of the battalion area and found to my surprise that where companies were supposed to be in existence there were none. There were some individual Volunteers in each parish area, but no properly organised companies with properly established officers. My first duty, therefore, was directed to the reorganisation of the battalion with a view to establishing a company of Volunteers in each parish area at least.

The first area I visited on this mission was Kilrickle, where I enrolled about 9 or 10 Volunteers, administered the Oath of Allegiance and appointed officers. On my visit to Kilrickle, I was accompanied by Michael MacQuade, Battalion I.O. One of the Volunteers from the Kilrickle area whom I met on my visit there was Michael Hogan, later Colonel Hogan of the army and a brother of the late Patrick Hogan, afterwards Minister for Agriculture. In a short time I had properly

established companies operating in the following districts:- Kilrickle, Mullagh, Leitrim, Kilnadeema, Bullaun, New Inn, Closetoken, Duniry, Abbey, Ballinakill, Loughrea and Kilchreest.

Towards the middle of 1920, the whole battalion area was in a good state of organisation, and regular battalion meetings were held at different venues at which all the companies were represented. During this phase of organisation the importance of collecting money to purchase arms was impressed on all the company officers. Collections were made in most areas and the money handed over to battalion Q.M. Martin Nevin, by whom it was forwarded to Brigade H.Q. I visited the companies periodically and delivered lectures on various subjects including training and general organisation.

The main activities of the companies during the early part of 1920 consisted of drilling, dispatch riding, raids for arms, compiling of intelligence reports on the activities of Crown forces and visiting R.I.C. men home on leave with a view to persuading them to resign from that force. During this period also the Loughrea Company was responsible for the capture of Liam Mellows's motor cycle from the R.I.C. Auxiliary Barrack in Loughrea where it was stored after its capture by the R.I.C. The same company also captured 80 tins of petrol at the railway station, Loughrea. The petrol was consigned to the R.I.C. in the town.

In addition to these activities, companies were actively engaged in raids for arms and on two occasions selected men were massed from the various companies and engaged in extensive raids for arms in the Ballinasloe battalion area which, at that time, was in a very badly organised condition. A good supply of shotguns and ammunition was captured in these raids.

The big event of the period in the Loughrea Battalion area was the successful attack on and the burning of Bookeen R.I.C. Barracks. The following companies of the battalion played an important part in this attack:- Leitrim, Kilnadeema, Bullaun,

New Inn, Closetoken, Kilchreest and Loughrea. On that occasion I was selected to take charge of all road blockades, dislocation of telephonic and telegraphic services and the blocking of the railway line from Loughrea to Dunsandle. All this work was carried out successfully in the vicinity of Loughrea where there was a very strong garrison of R.I.C. All available arms were handed out to the men on this work and I issued instructions to them that no man was to be captured without a fight. No casualties were sustained by the I.R.A. on the attack on Bookeen R.I.C. barrack, which occurred in July 1920.

Immediately after the attack on Bookeen R.I.C. barrack, plans were submitted to Brigade H.Q. in Galway for attacks on Kilrickle and Kilchreest R.I.C. Barracks, but they were not sanctioned. Shortly after this, as well as I can remember, Co. Galway was reorganised and the Loughrea, Portumna and Woodford districts were formed into a brigade area known as the South East Galway Brigade, with Michael O'Keefe, B.E., of Portumna, as O/C. After a very short time the newly-appointed brigadier took up a position in another county and, as no new appointment was made for a long time, the whole organisation fell into a state of apathy.

To the best of my recollection, the brigadier, Michael O'Keefe, left the area without giving notification to any battalion officer. Nobody was appointed to succeed O'Keefe. I am not in a position to state who was responsible for this state of affairs, but I do say that at this crucial period the effect on the organisation in the area was disastrous. The effect on morale was particularly bad. This state of affairs lasted until well into the year 1921, when, a few months before the Truce, the area was reorganised and became part of General Michael Brennan's command, with a new brigadier in the person of Lawrence Kelly of Kilnadeema.

I remember that, about November 1920, I and my brother

Patrick O'Regan, Lieutenant, Loughrea Company, and Battalion Intelligence Officer Michael MacQuade, went to Dublin to try and join some active service unit there. We travelled by goods train and, on the journey to Dublin, we were concealed by the Guard of the train as we were on the run. I now forget the name of the I.R.A. officer in Dublin with whom we were put in touch by a friend in Dublin with whom we stayed. We were advised to return to our own area and do the best we could as our knowledge of Dublin was not sufficient to warrant our being taken into the A.S.U. there.

We returned home and had to remain on the run as our house in Loughrea was raided on 36 occasions between September 1920 and the Truce in July 1921. My father and brother, Michael, were taken out of the house to be shot on two occasions. They were let off, however, with very severe beatings.

At the time of the appointment of Lawrence Kelly of Kilnadeema as O/C. Galway South East Brigade, many prominent officers were on the run and many more had been made prisoners and were interned. A number of officers on the run came together in Cappatagle Company area, Ballinasloe Battalion, and formed a mobile flying column. Under instructions from General Brennan, this column under the command of Peter Howley, Vice Commandant of Ardrahan Battalion, and Laurence Smyth, Commandant, Loughrea Battalion, marched at night in the direction of Derrybrien mountain where it was arranged to link up with General Brennan's main column. After having travelled seven or eight miles across country, the column halted at Geoghegan's of Shangarry to rest. The column was met there by Seamus O'Reilly, Vice Brigadier, South East Galway Brigade, who produced a dispatch which he had just received from General Brennan.

The dispatch stated that enemy forces from Ennis, Gort

and other centres were just then combing the Derrybrien area to surround General Brennan and his flying column. The dispatch stated that our local mobile flying column was to disband pending further instructions. In the meantime, we were to carry on whatever activities lay within our power in our own battalion areas. This came as a terrible shock to the members of the flying column, all of whom then felt that at last ^{they were} to be afforded the opportunity of displaying some real activity in the fight.

The flying column was disbanded in accordance with the instructions of General Brennan. That was only a few weeks before the Truce and no further instructions were received in regard to the flying column. I was one of the officers in that short-lived flying column. The others, as far as I can remember, their names, were:-

Peter Howley, Vice Comdt. Ardrahan Battalion, in charge of unit.

Lawrence Smyth, Commandant, Loughrea Battalion, 2nd in charge.

Patrick O'Regan, Lieutenant, Loughrea Company.

William Howley, Volunteer, Ardrahan Company.

Thomas O'Mahony, Volunteer, Kilnadeema Coy. who had been wounded at Galway railway station in the fall of the previous year in the incident in which an R.I.C. man named Crumm was shot dead.

James Coen, Laurencetown Company, Volunteer

James Derwan, Volunteer, Ballinasloe Company

Owen Carty, Volunteer, Cappatagle Company, Ballinasloe Battalion.

Thomas Pender, Captain, Cappatagle Company.

Michael Hynes, Lieutenant, Cappatagle Company.

Emmet Larkin, Captain, Kiltormer Company, and

Myself, Martin O'Regan, Battalion Adjutant, Loughrea Battalion.

There were eight companies in the Loughrea Battalion from the reorganisation of 1921 to the Truce, viz:

Loughrea	Company Captain	Patrick Coy
Kilnadeema	do.	Patrick O'Mahoney
Bullaun	do.	Michael Healy
New Inn	do.	Martin Murray
Closetoken	do.	Patrick Connaughton
Kilchreest	do.	Michael Buckley
Kilrickle	do.	Martin Killilea
Mullagh	do.	Hubert Hanrahan

Prior to the reorganisation of 1921 there were twelve companies in the battalion, namely the eight companies named above and the following:-

Leitrim	Company Captain	Michael Keogh
Duniry	do.	William Lynch
Ballinakill	do.	Thomas Downey
Abbey	do.	Con Donnelly

The battalion officers from the reorganisation of 1921 were:-

Battn. Comdt.	Lawrence Smyth (deceased)
Battn. Adjutant	Martin O'Regan (myself)
Battn. <i>J.N. J/O</i>	Michael MacQuade
<i>Battn. Q.M.</i>	<i>Martin Norris (deceased)</i>

huk. Lawrence Burke was battalion commandant until his arrest towards the end of 1920, and James Flynn (now deceased) was my predecessor as battalion adjutant.

I stated at the outset that I was captain of the Loughrea Boy Scouts known as "Na Curaidh Gaeilge" and I would like to conclude this statement by giving a few details about them; in fact, all I now know or can remember concerning them. I joined them in 1913. I remember that they had their headquarters in Dublin in York St. - maybe No.46. The organisers who came to Loughrea from Dublin were ... MacFinlay and Tomas O'Donoghue from Drumcondra as far as I can remember. Tomas O'Donoghue is now a priest in the foreign missions. I remember he was a piper. I cannot remember what part of Dublin MacFinlay was from. He and Tomas O'Donoghue drilled our little company of scouts numbering about 20 boys between the ages of 14 to 16. I cannot remember how long the two Dublin men stayed with us, but Lieutenant John Horgan of Loughrea and I took over full charge of the scouts when they left. We were, or regarded ourselves as, a purely military unit and trained very hard in preparation for membership of the Volunteers later on when we became old enough. I think

that "Na Curaidh Gaeilge" were a branch or off-shoot of Fianna Éireann, but they fell out with Fianna Éireann as a result of a dispute about the shape of the cap. All I can now remember about it is that "Na Curaidh Gaeilge" favoured a Montinegrin shaped cap and wore it after the severance with Fianna Éireann.

Signed: Martin O'Regan

Date: 29th June 1955

Witness: Con Moynihan (Martin O'Regan)
(Con Moynihan)

