

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913 21
No. W.S. 1205

W. S. 1,205

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,205

Witness

Patrick McKenna,
Killourane,
Ardfert,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Vice O/C. 2nd Battalion
Kerry No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Castlegregory Company Irish Volunteers,
2nd Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF MR. PATRICK McKENNA,
Killourane, Ardfert, Co. Kerry.

I was born on the 30th May, 1894, at Killourane, Ardfert. I was sent to the local National School for four years. When I was eight years of age, my parents died after which I went to live in Castlegregory where I went to school for one year. I then went to the National School in Aughacasla for a further five years. Aughacasla was in the parish of Castlegregory. In the meantime, an uncle of mine looked after my father's farm at Killourane on which is situated the fort, only two hundred yards from my front door, where Sir Roger Casement was arrested by the R.I.C. from Ardfert on Good Friday morning prior to Easter Sunday, 1916.

A Company of the Volunteers was formed in Castlegregory in November, 1913. I joined at the first meeting. The Volunteers at the time were controlled by a Committee, of which Tadhg Brosnan was President and a man named Dan Mahony was Organiser. A man named Michael Moriarty, an ex British soldier, was Drill Instructor. Our strength at first was about thirty men but, by the end of 1914, it had increased to a hundred.

After John Redmond's speech in the House of Commons, calling on the Irish Volunteers to join the British army, most of the members left the organisation. About forty, however, remained and continued to meet secretly. Tadhg Brosnan remained President, and a man named James Kennedy became Secretary. All through the year 1915, we continued to meet and drill and subscribed threepence per week each towards an arms fund. We held

dances to procure funds for the purchase of arms and, by the end of the year, had purchased twenty single-barrel shotguns. Our Drill Instructor was a man named Slattery from Tralee who came out to Castlegregory once a week to instruct the Company in the handling of arms. On the 29th June of this year, the Company assembled in Castlegregory and proceeded to Connor Hill, between Dingle and Castlegregory, for a picnic. Eleven horse or pony traps conveyed the members to Connor Hill. I had a pony trap that day. Members of the Cumann na mBan provided lunch. During the latter end of the year, Alfie Cotton and Paddy Barry of Tralee attended Volunteer meetings in the area. Ernest Blythe and D. Fitzgerald attended recruiting meetings to enrol new Volunteers into the Company.

Early in 1916, with other members of the Company, I made buckshot which we filled into cartridge cases, loaded with powder. In February Austin Stack addressed a large meeting in the village, appealing for young men to join the Volunteers. Early on Good Friday morning, I saw a big boat anchored off Carrahane strand, Ardfert. It subsequently turned out to be the "Aud", but we did not know it at the time. It was the biggest boat I ever saw coming into Fenit. I thought it strange for it to have anchored where it was, and presumed it was off its course. It was very high in the water. People around took it to be an English boat. Next day, Saturday, I met Tadhg Brosnan who informed me that Austin Stack and a man named Collins had been arrested in Tralee the day before. When the Company mobilised on Easter Sunday morning, I was appointed Lieutenant. A short time after, we received word that manoeuvres for that day had

been called off. We, however, remained mobilised until that evening when Paddy Barry, an officer of the Tralee Volunteers, arrived with a despatch confirming that manoeuvres were called off. After this, the Company was dismissed.

On Wednesday of Easter Week we received a report that military had landed on the Maharees, four miles away. Upon investigation, it was discovered that they had landed from a sloop on Leary's Island, a mile off the Maharees. The Company was mobilised by Tadhg Brosnan. Each man was armed with a shotgun and a number of buckshot cartridges. When we arrived at the Maharees, we found that the military had embarked on the sloop and were on their way to Fenit where they were stationed. A local Sergeant of the R.I.C., whose name was Ryan, and a Constable followed the Company to the Maharees. On the following Saturday, Sergeant Ryan approached Brosnan and warned him not to parade with arms on the following day, Sunday. It was our usual practice every Sunday morning to mobilise and parade with arms. Brosnan informed the Sergeant that we would parade as usual with our shotguns. When we were mobilised on Sunday, the Sergeant again warned Brosnan not to carry arms. He replied, "I told you what I was going to do". On the following day - Monday - Brosnan and six of our men, named James Kennedy, Dan O'Shea, Michael McKenna, Abel Mahony and Sean Brosnan, were arrested. They were taken into Tralee and from there to Dublin where they were tried. Tadhg Brosnan was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment which was later reduced to five years. The others were acquitted.

Immediately after the surrender in Easter Week, proclamations prohibiting the carrying of arms were

posted up in the village, with instructions to surrender all arms in the area. Most of the Volunteers in the Company went direct to the R.I.C. barracks and handed in their guns. They had been approached by the relatives of the arrested men, who pleaded with them to hand in their guns in the hope that their friends would be dealt with more leniently by the authorities. The local Catholic Curate, Fr. Alexander O'Sullivan, called on me personally and took my gun to the barracks.

Early in 1917, the Company was reorganised. I became acting Captain in Tadhg Brosnan's absence. Michael Duhig became 1st Lieutenant. Our strength was forty-five men. We met and paraded in the open. While Tadhg was in jail, we made a general collection and ran dances in the village to raise money to compensate him for his time in jail. About July, all of the interned and sentenced men, including T. Brosnan, were released. By this time, we had collected £300 which we presented to Tadhg. He refused to take it and insisted that the money be put into a Volunteer fund for the purchase of arms. Drilling and parading continued all the time.

On the 3rd August, a general mobilisation of Volunteers from Counties Kerry, Limerick and Cork was held in my field opposite the fort where Casement had been arrested. At least, five thousand Volunteers, some of whom came on horse-back, attended the mobilisation, as well as seven bands. The general public numbered ten thousand. The meeting was addressed by Thomas Ashe, Austin Stack, Con Collins and others. At the end of the

meeting, Eddie Barry of Tralee sang the "Soldiers' Song". The following week, as a result of this meeting, Thomas Ashe, Eddie Barry and Austin Stack were arrested after attending meetings elsewhere.

On the 1st January, 1918, I left Castlegregory and came home here to Killourane, Ardfert. The Volunteers had been reorganised here a couple of months earlier. A couple of days later, I met Paddy Cahill of Tralee who asked me to reorganise the Volunteers in the Battalion area. By the end of April, I had reorganised companies in Churchill, Kilmoyley, Ballyheigue, Kerryhead, Kilflynn, Abbeydorney and Causeway. The Battalion was known as the Ardfert or 2nd Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade. The strength of the Battalion at the time was six hundred. Paddy Sheehan, Company Captain of Ardfert, became Battalion Commandant, at the same time retaining his rank as Company Captain. After some time, Sheehan resigned as Captain. I became Captain in his place. James McCrohan became 1st Lieutenant, and John Carmody became 2nd Lieutenant of Ardfert Company. During the conscription scare of this year, our membership increased to one hundred and fifty. As soon as the scare was over, most of the new men left, which reduced the Company strength to eighty men.

About this time, Paddy Sheehan ceased to be Battalion O/C. Tom Clifford became Battalion O/C in his place. I became Vice O/C, James Carmody, Battalion Adjutant and Michael McEgan, Battalion Quartermaster. When I became Vice O/C, Paddy Sheehan reverted to the rank of Captain. Routine drilling continued throughout the year. Shotguns were collected in the Battalion area, especially from people who were sympathetic to the Volunteers

and Sinn Féin movement. About the end of the year, Paddy Cahill, Brigade O/C, asked me if I knew of anyone in the area who understood wireless telegraphy. It so happened that a man named John Joe Sullivan, a wireless operator on one of the British Merchant ships, was home on leave at the time. Cahill suggested that we should ask his assistance in erecting a wireless station in our area, out of wireless equipment at Ballymacquinn wireless station which was not being used at the time.

I contacted O'Sullivan and, with the help of the local Volunteers, dismantled and removed some of the equipment at Ballymacquinn. When it was examined and tested by the Brigade Engineer, it was found to be useless for our purpose. O'Sullivan later joined the Volunteers and did not rejoin his ship.

Drilling and route marching were our main activities in the year 1919. About October of this year, Ballyheigue R.I.C. barracks was evacuated. About a week previous, Michael Pierce, Company Captain of Ballyheigue, had mobilised about thirty men from Ballyheigue, Ardfert and Causeway for the purpose of attacking the barracks. He had told me of his intentions and I referred him to Paddy Cahill. Cahill agreed but, on the night selected for the attack, I received a despatch from Cahill instructing me to order Pierce not to attack as the barracks was to be evacuated in a few days. From then to the end of the year, each Company in the Battalion was engaged collecting all arms in civilian hands. Most of these were shotguns and were handed over without any trouble. In cases where people were hostile, we raided their houses and seized their shotguns. At the end of the year, Ardfert R.I.C. barracks was evacuated.

In the year 1920, the R.I.C. became very active in the Battalion area. R.I.C. cycle patrols were constantly on the roads from Tralee, Causeway or Abbeydorney. During an attack by the I.R.A. under James Sugrue, Battalion O/C, Listowel, on Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks in the month of March, Ardfert Company and other companies in the Battalion trenched the roads in their respective areas. Early in May, Cahill, at a ^{Bugade} ~~Battalion~~ Council meeting in Tralee, ordered the destruction of any large buildings in our area likely to afford shelter or accommodation to the military. He had received information that the military were to occupy areas evacuated by the R.I.C. When I returned to Ardfert, I issued an order to Michael Pierce to burn down the coastguard station at Ballyheigue. Pierce carried out the order on the morning of the 22nd May, 1920. Brandon coastguard station was burned down the same morning.

During the year, we had to meet and drill secretly by night. The strength of Ardfert Company at this time was eighty men. Their arms consisted of sixty shotguns, two sporting rifles and a few revolvers. Dan Jeffers, Company Captain of Strand Street Company, Tralee, and Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, Company Captain of Fenit, carried out an attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks on the night of the 2nd June, 1920. Paddy Sheehan, John Joe O'Sullivan and I, with twenty other men of Ardfert Company, were in Fenit on the occasion of the attack. We were armed with shotguns and were in a position covering the pier. Our instructions were to prevent a party of Marines, who were in a sloop at the other end, from going to the assistance of the R.I.C.

A short time after the attack had opened, a quantity of straw on the pier, which had been soaked in petrol, was set on fire so as to set fire to the pier which was a wooden structure. The straw made a great blaze but it did not set fire to the pier. We fired a shot or two each during the attack on the barracks, as a warning to the Marines. They remained in the sloop and did not appear until the attack was almost over. In the meantime, the sloop fired a number of shells. The attack lasted until 5 a.m. By then the barracks was in flames. I subsequently heard that three men, named Eugene Hogan, Paddy Barry and Denis Carmody, who had occupied a house next door to the barracks, had broken through the roof of the house and got on to the roof of the barracks where they made an opening into which they threw bottles of petrol and paraffin, followed by lighted waste. The remainder of the men of Ardfert Company trenched roads in the Company area that night. About the end of September, an order was received from the Brigade O/C, Paddy Cahill, to trench all roads in the Battalion area. This order was carried out in each Battalion area in the Brigade. The military and R.I.C. would come along and fill in the trenches. That night, the roads were cut again. This lasted for some months. About the end of September, a Black and Tan, called "Jaspar", who was involved in the death of an I.R.A. man, named Kennedy, was arrested by the Tralee I.R.A. and brought to Ardfert where we held him prisoner for about five weeks. On the 29th October he was taken to the sandhills at Carrahane and shot dead and buried there.

On Sunday morning, 31st October, Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C, with other members of the Battalion

Staff and every man in the Battalion who had a shotgun or arms of any kind, assembled in Ardferf and marched to Beenreigh which is about two miles from Abbeydorney. They took up positions on one side of the road in extended formation to attack two lorry loads of R.I.C. and Tans who travelled from Tralee to Abbeydorney twice a week. They arrived there at 10 a.m. and remained in position until 5 p.m. In the meantime, no lorries appeared. Clifford dismissed the men. Before he did so, he ordered half of them to proceed to Causeway to attack a Tan patrol there that night. The others were ordered to return to Abbeydorney for an attack on the same night.

The party which returned to Abbeydorney were met by Patrick Mahony and Richard Glavin of the local Company. The party divided into three sections and took up positions at the crossroads and other lanes in the village. Sometime after midnight, three uniformed men - one R.I.C. man and two Tans - left a public house. As they were going towards the barracks, they were fired on. Two of them were shot dead, one escaped. As I was engaged elsewhere, I did not take part in the attack. Next day, several lorry loads of R.I.C. and Tans arrived in the village and burned down a public house, the property of a Mrs. Lovatt, and some private houses.

On the morning of the 5th November, Tom Clifford ordered Paddy Sheehan, Company Captain, to mobilise the Company in Ardferf village. Clifford had earlier received word from the Tralee I.R.A. that a party of Black and Tans had gone to Spa village, three miles from Tralee. Clifford's intention was to attack the Tans in the vicinity. Most of the men of the Company were

hanging around the village, armed with shotguns, awaiting Clifford's orders who, in turn, was waiting for news of the position at Spa from scouts in the area. While they were waiting, five lorry loads of military arrived, pulled up and dismounted. As they did so, most of our men escaped. Two, however, John Cantillion and Michael Brosnan, were shot dead, escaping through the fields. Two others, James McCrohan and Philip Healy, were arrested. A civilian - a girl named Connell - was shot dead. Another civilian, named Michael McGuire, was arrested and, while handcuffed, was shot dead that night in Causeway. Before the military left Ardfert, they rounded up several civilians and compelled them to fill in trenches in the roads in the area.

During the year, the Volunteers in the Battalion area were engaged in collecting funds for the Dáil Eireann loan. Parish and district courts were set up. I became Chairman of the local Parish Court. Other officers of those courts were Timothy Lawlor and Patrick Carmody of Tubrid. A section of the Volunteers in each parish acted as policemen and carried out the decrees of the courts. A Battalion Column had been formed by this time. It was made up of about twenty-five men from the different Companies in the area. Michael Pierce, Company Captain of Ballyheigue, became O/C. They had three or four rifles and a number of shotguns. All of the men on the Column had been on the run for some time. They were constantly active and carried out several attacks on Causeway R.I.C. barracks or on patrols there. They also attacked Abbeydorney R.I.C. barracks on numerous occasions. During, or preparatory to these attacks, the local

Companies always trenched and blocked the roads.

My house was the usual meeting place for officers going to Brigade or Battalion meetings right up to the Truce. Jer. Lyons, Patrick Walsh and Paddy Dalton, who were shot dead at Gortaglanna by Crown forces, stayed at my house from time to time and were there the Monday night before they were shot. From my appointment as President of the Parish Court to the Truce, I was constantly engaged on Court cases. After the Truce, I was appointed Battalion O/C of Police.

SIGNED: Patrick McKenna

(Patrick McKenna)

DATE: 9th July 1955

9th July 1955

WITNESS: John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

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