

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉITIA 1913-21

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,212

Witness

William McCabe (Liam)

"St. Veronica's",
Doon Road,
Ballybunion,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Company Captain, Fianna Eireann,
Ballybunion, Co. Kerry.

Subject.

National activities, Ballybunion, Co. Kerry,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913 21
No. W.S. 1212

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM McCABE,

"St. Veronica's", Doon Road, Ballybunion,

Co. Kerry.

I was born in Ballybunion, Co. Kerry, on the 9th September, 1899. I was sent to the local National School until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I served my time to the bakery and confectionery trade and subsequently set up as a baker and confectioner on my own.

An Engineer by the name of Elwell, employed in the construction of a wireless station which was being built in Ballybunion in the year 1913, was instrumental in forming a Company of the Baden Powell Boy Scouts in Ballybunion in the same year. A special meeting was called for the purpose in the village. Every loyalist in the area attended and supported Mr. Elwell in his endeavour to form the Company. That morning, with two other boys, I had served Mass for a priest named Father Power. After Mass we were in a hurry to get away and the priest asked us, "What is the hurry?" We told him we were going to the meeting to join the Boy Scouts. He replied, "If Parnell were alive it is not the Baden Powell Scouts you would be joining". We told him that we could fly our own flag. He said, "That flag is the Union Jack and it is not our flag".

The meeting was addressed by Mr. Elwell and other speakers supporting the formation of the Scouts. Near the close of the meeting a man by the name of Ned Leahy, who was employed in Listowel but resided in Ballybunion, addressed Mr. Elwell and the meeting generally. He said that we had in Ireland an organisation known as the Fianna which all Irish boys should join. He appealed to the boys present to join the Fianna and advised them that as the Baden Powell

Boy Scouts were an offshoot of the British Army they were to be trained to become British soldiers later. After Leahy's speech a Solicitor from Listowel suggested that it should be left to the boys themselves to decide what organisation they would join. The result was that out of 28 boys present, twelve joined the Baden Powell Scouts and eighteen joined the Fianna. Ned Leahy and a man from Tralee who had been sent specially by Austin Stack to the meeting, took the names of the eighteen boys who wished to join the Fianna. Within the next week we received a dozen complete uniforms from Tralee and a fortnight later a bell-tent. The Baden Powell Scouts also received uniforms and a bell-tent at the same time. Leahy had appointed me O.C. of the Fianna on the day of the meeting.

We met every evening after school and paraded and drilled as did the Baden Powell Scouts who had the use of the lawn attached to the Castle Hotel for their bell-tent. We had to erect our tent in different fields around the village. On the anniversary of the deaths of the Manchester Martyrs in November, 1914, we had a parade in the village. Our strength had increased to 22. During the parade a scuffle took place between ourselves and the Baden Powell Scouts who had just been dismissed after a parade. We got the best of the scrap and warned the Baden Powell scouts not to appear in uniform again. From then they ceased to exist as a scout unit. From this to Easter Week of 1916 we paraded and drilled regularly each week. James Sugrue, who was in charge of the Volunteers in Listowel, kept us supplied with Fianna literature such as "The Fianna" and other publications of the time.

On the Sunday after the surrender in Dublin a man named Joe Mahony - a Solicitor - with the help of the Fianna organised a meeting in the village at which I recited the Rosary for the men who had taken part in the Rebellion. After this we did not meet or drill in the

open, but we kept in touch with one another in a loose formation until after the general release in 1917, when we put on our uniforms once again and marched to a Feis in Listowel in about the month of August. The Volunteers in North Kerry had been reorganised by this time and several Companies attended the Feis that day. The Ballybunior Volunteers were among those Companies present. I had become a member of the local Company but I remained O.C. of the Fianna at the same time. The Feis was addressed by Count Plunkett and other prominent speakers.

A day or two after Mr. De Valera's election victory in County Clare a victory celebration was held in the village at the Castle Green. The local Company of Volunteers and Fianna paraded through the village to the Green. As they were returning from the meeting, the R.I.C. in the barracks opened fire with carbines and shot a Volunteer by the name of Daniel Scanlon. The Volunteers and Fianna then attacked the barracks with stones. The Police remained inside. Scanlon died at 4.45 next morning. I heard afterwards that an ex-British soldier named Downey, who had joined the Volunteers, threw a stone through one of the barrack windows in the first instance.

At a subsequent inquiry into the death of Scanlon a girl by the name of Mary Mason swore that she actually saw the policeman - whose name was Lyons - fire the shot that killed Scanlon. Lyons was charged by the Crown with the death of Scanlon. The trial took place first in Listowel, then in Tralee and finally at Cork Assizes. Mary Mason, in the course of her evidence, said that when she saw Lyons fire the shot she shouted "Lyons! Lyons!". He, however, was found "Not Guilty". A day or two after the shooting of Scanlon about six of the local Volunteers were arrested and charged with attacking the barracks. Among those arrested were Bob Breen and

Moss Beazley. As the R.I.C. had no evidence that they were implicated the six men were acquitted.

Routine drilling and parading by the Fianna continued throughout the year 1919. Early in 1920 they were reorganised all over the County Kerry by Mike O'Leary, of Tralee, who became Brigade O/C. Thomas Pelican of Listowel became our Battalion O/C. I became Battalion I.O., retaining my rank of Captain of the Ballybunion Sluagh which now numbered 26.

The Battalion Staff I.R.A. under James Sugrue carried out an attack on the R.I.C. barracks, Ballybunion, on the 13th March, 1920. I was with the local Company I.R.A. on the occasion. We all assembled in Horgan's field outside the village. The attacking party numbered 60 men and were armed with shot guns and about four rifles. I had a revolver. Sugrue divided the I.R.A. into five sections. One section occupied a public house owned by James Clarke which was directly opposite the barracks. A second section occupied a house owned by a man named Beazley to the north of the barracks. A third section was located behind a low wall running westwards from the corner of Beazley's house. The fourth section had a position at the rear of the barracks and the fifth section occupied a house adjoining the barracks at the rear. Previous to the attack Ted Houlihan, Company Captain, Ballybunion, ordered some members of the local Company, including myself and another member of the Fianna, to barricade the windows of Clarke's public house on the inside with sandbags. When this was carried out, with other members of the Fianna, I was ordered to carry two ladders lying in the yard of the public house and place them at the gable end of the barracks. After this I joined Thomas O'Donohoe, Patrick Burns and others in the section at the back of the barracks. In the meantime the section which had occupied the house adjoining the barracks removed a family

living there to safety. This section had a home-made bomb with which it was intended to open the attack by blowing the dividing wall between the house and the barracks. I don't know what the mine was made from but it failed to explode.

It had been arranged by Sugrue that as soon as the mine exploded he would give a signal to open the attack with the shot guns and rifles. The arrangement was one blast of a whistle to attack, two blasts cease fire and three blasts retire. It appears Sugrue was informed that the bomb failed to explode after which he gave the signal to open fire. As he did so the attack started. The attack had lasted a few minutes when we observed very lights being sent up from Liselton R.I.C. hut about three miles away on the way to Listowel. The attack continued for about an hour when Sugrue gave the signal to retire as it seems all the ammunition was exhausted.

From April, 1920 to the end of October of the same year with other members of the local Company I.R.A. I was on guard duty every night protecting a Priest by the name of Father Curtayne who had received a threatening notice worded: "Prepare for your death, Black hand gang". This gang, an off-shoot of the R.I.C., was responsible for sending similar notes to other prominent supporters of Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. in County Kerry, including a Father Ferris of St. John's, Tralee, and now Parish Priest of Ballylongford. The guard consisted of twelve men armed with three rifles, some shot guns and a couple of revolvers. In the early stages the twelve of us were on night duty for three weeks without a break. The presbytery was our guard room. The arms were kept during the day behind a trap-door in the attic and with the help of a step-ladder were handed down each night. We were on duty around the Church and presbytery. A ladder had been placed against Father Curtayne's window to enable him to escape if necessary. I happened to live next door to the presbytery and was responsible to

see that the guard was on duty each night. In fact Father Curtayne would never go to bed until I assured him that the guard was on duty.

About this time Listowel Battalion was divided into two Battalions which were known as the 3rd and 5th Battalions or Lixnaw and Listowel Battalions respectively. Tom Connolly became Battalion O/C. Lixnaw, and Bob McElligott became Battalion O/C. Listowel. Ballybunion Companies (I.R.A. and Fianna) now formed part of the Lixnaw Battalion. Ted Houlihan remained Company Captain of Ballybunion I.R.A. I remained Company Captain of the Fianna.

Shortly after his appointment as Battalion O.C. Tom Connolly, with the assistance of members of the Lixnaw, Ballyduff and Ballybunion Companies, raided a Coast Guard station at Cashin near Ballybunion, for arms. He expected the guards to put up a fight and went prepared and fully armed. As it happened, the Guards surrendered after which their station was burned down by Connolly and his men. On the night of the raid, with other members of the local Company, I took up an ambush position on the Ballybunion side of the Cashin River to prevent the Ballybunion R.I.C. from giving assistance to the Guards. The R.I.C. apparently were unaware of what was taking place at Cashin Coast Guard Station and did not appear that night. I was armed with a revolver on the occasion; the men with me were armed with shot guns.

On the 31st October, 1920, Tom Connolly mobilized about fifty men from the different Companies in the Battalion for an attack on an R.I.C. and Tan patrol in the village. We had been mobilised at 4 p.m. in a lime kiln on the Golf Links where we were informed of the proposed attack that night. Our men took up positions around 8 p.m.

on either side of the Main Street in four sections while a fifth section took up a position near the village station which was thirty yards off the Main Street near a passage which ran parallel with the Main Street. I was with this section having previously, with another member of the Fianna named Frank Allen, shown our men their allotted positions. The majority of our men were armed with shot-guns. Tom Connolly and three or four others had rifles. I had a revolver. Some distance outside the village on the road to Listowel a barricade had been erected which was guarded by a number of I.R.A. from the locality.

As we were moving into our positions a motor car was driven from the village towards Listowel. At the barricade the car was halted. The driver seeing the barricade and armed men apparently turned his car and was allowed to return to the village. The patrol of sixteen R.I.C. and Tans left the barracks soon after the return of the motor car. They proceeded to the Green in extended formation, returned to the barracks and ~~was~~^{WERE} about to return to the Green when one of our men further down the street accidentally discharged a shot-gun. The patrol immediately opened fire in the direction of the shot and were about to enter the passage running parallel to the Main Street, to surround the section in position on that side of the street when one of the sections almost opposite the barracks opened fire on the barracks. When the patrol heard the fire they dashed for the barracks and opened fire from there. In the meantime we retreated. There seems to be no doubt but that the patrol was prepared for us that night and had been informed of our intentions either by the driver of the motor car or through the carelessness of our own men after being informed at 4 p.m. of the proposed attack. It is thought that some of them warned their friends to keep off the street that night.

With Bob Stack and Jack Scanlon I had to go 'on the run' after this. The Police and Black & Tans were searching for us everywhere. One evening, a few days later, while Stack and I were having tea, a party of Tans started a search in the area. We managed to escape and went to Kilconly area where I fell several feet over a cliff into a river. Stack took me out. I was very badly bruised and one of my legs was severely torn. Stack bandaged me as well as he could and carried me for a couple of miles on his back to a friendly house. Seven days later I got blood poisoning and was removed to a coach-house attached to the Presbytery in Ballybunion. From there I was moved to a private house owned by people by the name of McGrath. A Dr. O'Connor made several attempts to visit me but as he was under observation himself he could not do so. In the meantime a nurse by the name of Miss Eily O'Flaherty attended me. Eventually a Dr. Costello, who was a Justice of the Peace, attended me after being sworn to secrecy by an officer of the I.R.A. I was afterwards removed to Ballybunion railway station and went by train to Listowel where I was met by Denis Quille and other members of the Listowel Company who conveyed me to Listowel Hospital where I was under treatment for three months. In the hospital I was treated by a Doctor Dillon. Two other I.R.A. men were in the hospital around the same time: they were James Sugrue, Battalion O/C., Listowel, who had been badly beaten by the Tans, and Walter Kearns of Ballyduff Company who had received a bullet wound in a skirmish with the R.I.C. and Tans.

At the end of three months the R.I.C. discovered I was in the hospital and one morning the hospital was surrounded by thirty R.I.C. and Tans and over eighty Military. While the raid was in progress an attendant named Scanlon and two of the Sisters whose

names were Sisters Winifred and Stanaslus helped me from my bed to a part of the hospital already searched and from there to the back of the Altar in another part of the hospital. After about an hour the search was suspended while the raiders went for a drink to the nearest pub. The local I.R.A. and Cumann na mBan were on the alert and with their help I got safely out of the hospital before the raid was resumed. During my stay there I had kept in touch with Thomas Pelican, Battalion O/C., Fianna.

I remained around Listowel for about ten days and then reported back for duty in Ballybunion area to Patrick Kennelly who had become Company Captain in my absence in place of Ted Houlihan who had become a member of the Flying Column formed some time in January, 1921. It was now the middle of March, 1921. With about six or seven men who were also 'on the run' we remained in a group and took part in the routine duties of the time, such as holding up trains and seizing mails, which we censored and returned to a convenient spot for collection by the local postmen. Road trenching was carried out regularly around this time. Our group, carrying arms, always guarded the I.R.A. engaged in this work. I still had my revolver. In April, on the instructions of the Company O/C I.R.A., Patrick Kennelly, I became Company I/O I.R.A.

Some time early in June documents were captured in one of the raids on the trains which disclosed that a party of Auxiliaries were about to occupy one of the largest hotels in the village - the Castle Hotel. The Company Captain, Patrick Kennelly, received an order from the Battalion O/C, Tom Kennelly, to have it burned down.

With the help of twelve armed men, all of whom were 'on the run', the local company burned down the building, using petrol and paraffin. I had collected five gallons of paraffin oil for the job and was armed with a shotgun on the occasion. The operation lasted less than an hour, during which time the R.I.C. remained in the barracks. When it was well on fire we left the village.

From then to the Truce our duties were routine. Mails were seized and censored twice a week.

Early in the Truce period I attended a course of lectures on intelligence work at Lixnaw. These lectures were presided over by Seán Hyde. I later attended Tubrid House, Ardfert, for a fortnight, for a course of instruction on the Thompson sub-machine-gun. During this period Lixnaw Battalion was divided and reorganised, as well as another battalion (I think it was the Castlegregory Battalion), with the result that we now had eight battalions in Kerry No. 1 Brigade. Ballybunion Company, as well as Ardee, Ballydonohoe, Ballylongford, Tarbert, Beale and Knockanure, formed the 8th Battalion. Commandant Con Dee became O/C of the 8th Battalion. Previous to the reorganisation Comdt. Tom Kennelly had appointed me Battalion I/O of Lixnaw Battalion. I retained this rank under Con Dee in the 8th Battalion.

Signed:

Liam McCabe

(Liam McCabe)

Date:

25th July 1955.

25th July 1955.

Witness:

John J. Daly (John J. Daly)

(Investigator)

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