

W.S. 1,231

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1231

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,231

Witness

Patrick Joseph Whelan,
Moat,
Ring,
Dungarvan,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers,
Ring, Co. Waterford, 1917-1923.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Ring, Co. Waterford, 1917-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2541

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 231
BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1231

STATEMENT BY PATRICK JOSEPH WHELAN,

Moat, Ring, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

I was born in Ballinagoul, Ring, Co. Waterford, in 1899. My parents, who were native speakers of Irish, made their living through farming and fishing. I myself am also a fluent Irish speaker.

I was educated at the local National School and, when I left school, followed the occupation of my people.

My first real contact with things of national interest was early in 1917, when a man named P.C. O'Mahony, a Kerryman, came around the Ring district organising for Sinn Féin. I became a member of the local Cumann.

About the same period, Jim Mansfield of Old Parish (the neighbouring parish to Ring) came over to Ring to organise a company of Volunteers in the area. Jim was then commandant of the 3rd Battalion, West Waterford Brigade, and the battalion area included Ring and Helvick.

Officers were appointed to the company, the strength of which was about 20 men. Michael Curran was our company captain, and Nicholas Lenane, a lieutenant. We were drilled by Michael Kenneally, a teacher of Irish in Ring Irish College.

The Ring fishermen to a man were all sympathetic to the movement, but, owing to the nature of their work, were unable to attend parades.

When the company was formed, and for quite a good while afterwards, we had little or no arms. We may have had a few shotguns and a .22 rifle or two, but, of rifles or revolvers, we had none at that time, anyway.

Drilling was carried on at night in the fields, during which we were not interfered with by the local R. I. C. men because we always posted scouts to warn us of any danger from that quarter.

In September 1917, when the first World War was on, German submarines were operating against British shipping within a few miles of Helvick Head. I remember seeing two British merchant ships being sunk within two days of one another, one on the 13th and one on the 15th September 1917.

Some of the Ring fishermen reported to us that the German submarine crews were anxious to speak to them. We told Jim Mansfield, who instructed myself and another member of the company - Tommy Mooney of Ballinamona, Ring - to go out to sea and try and contact the Germans. We went out in a small boat several times trying to contact the German submarines, with a view to getting some arms and ammunition, but we were not successful in making contact.

During the year 1918, in addition to the usual drilling, we raided many houses of farmers for shotguns and ammunition and even got a few revolvers, one of which I kept. As a result of these raids, there were a dozen or so shotguns in the company, and about three revolvers.

A girl who worked in the house of the Sheriff at Helvick told me that he had a few guns and ammunition in his house and that any night we saw his yacht out in the harbour we would know the sheriff was on it, and could walk into the house, when she would show us where the arms were kept. One evening, in the summer, about 7 p.m., I saw the sheriff's yacht in the harbour. I contacted another Volunteer named Dan Terry and told him that the way appeared to be clear. As the time was early evening, we donned masks. I took my

revolver. He had one also. We were turning in to the door of the sheriff's house when the son and mother came out. I gave them "hands up" and told them to go back inside. I asked who was in the house and the son said that his father, a bank manager named Going and a military officer were there. When the son went inside with his hands up, the others laughed when they saw him - thinking he was joking. We followed, told them to put up their hands and face the wall. I said that the house was completely surrounded and, if they didn't obey orders, it would be just too bad for them. I told Dan Terry to keep them covered and to shoot if they took down their hands.

I next called Mr. Hudson (the sheriff's son) aside and asked where the arms were. He said they had all been sent to Dublin Castle for safety. There was a quantity of ammunition on a table which I took and then told him that if he was telling lies about the guns having been sent to Dublin Castle, we would be back again. He assured me he had told the truth.

I told the party not to leave the house for five minutes, but, as we left, I looked around and saw them at the door. I fired a shot over their heads, at which they hastily withdrew.

In the sheriff's house we got a number of empty cartridge cases; these and others which Jim Mansfield brought along to us were taken to a local sympathiser named Patrick Lenane, who filled them with home-made buckshot and powder.

Early in 1919, Commandant Jim Mansfield came to me at Helvick and said he had inspected a local boat called the "Flying Cloud" owned by a Captain Curran of Dungarvan. Jim said that this boat appeared to be suitable for landing arms. He told me he would send her with two sailors from Abbeyside,

Dungarvan, and that I was to go with her to sea, about three miles off Ballycotton, Co. Cork, to meet a boat on her way from Germany to us with arms, and to take the arms aboard the "Flying Cloud" into Helvick.

We did as instructed and remained at sea for days without sighting the arms ship. It later transpired that the British had been on the alert for her and captured her shortly after she left Germany.

Later in 1919, a man named Fitzgerald went to Italy to buy arms from the Italian Government. While he was away, on this mission, a few of us worked from dark to dawn, in bad weather, digging dugouts for the expected arms. One was in the cliffs at Ballinagoul, Ring; one under a bridge crossing a road and one in a "lios" where there was an underground chamber, said to have been constructed by the Normans. While this work was going on, all other company activities ceased on instructions from Jim Mansfield. The area was to be kept as quiet as possible so as not to draw any enemy forces into it in case the proposed arms landing came off.

In connection with Fitzgerald's mission to Italy, this was a failure, as, to the best of my recollection, all he was offered was a quantity of useless secondhand rifles and no ammunition.

During 1920, many months were spent on the lookout for expected landings of arms, none of which materialised. Although, as already stated, the company area was inactive (on instructions), we supplied outposts and scouts on various occasions in connection with the brigade activities in districts outside Ring and Helvick.

I remember being on armed outpost duty on at least two occasions when Ardmore R. I. C. Barracks was attacked and when Stradbally barracks was attacked.

Blocking of roads, demolition of bridges, cutting of telephone wires and suchlike was also carried out by men of the Ring Company outside their own district. A few of our men took part in the successful Piltown, Youghal, ambush of 1st November 1920. I, myself, with others from Ring acted as armed outposts and scouts on that particular night.

I would like to emphasise the fact that the inactivity of the Ring Company in their own district was entirely due to the orders we received to keep our area quiet, so that, in the event of a cargo of arms coming in to Helvick as expected, the British authorities would not be in force in Ring, when the arms ship came.

Except for occasional British patrols, which used come out from Dungarvan, the Ring district was comparatively free of enemy activity. The local R. I. C. had evacuated their barracks early in 1920. The barracks was then burned by us to prevent its re-occupation as was the coastguard station at Helvick. In Ardmore, ten miles to the west, British Marines had occupied the coastguard station there and were giving our lads in that area a lot of trouble. We had no such happening at Helvick.

It was, I think, in the month of February 1921, when I received orders one night from Michael Curran, my company captain, to go to Leigh Bridge on the Ring road and to bring my gun. So far as I can remember now, I think that the West Waterford flying column were in the vicinity and were laying an ambush for the British at Leigh Bridge and the

column wanted our help. I believe that a bogus message was sent in to Dungarvan barracks to the effect that Cathal Brugha was hiding out in Ring Irish College. It was hoped that this would draw out the British into the ambush trap.

Michael Curran, our captain, did not receive his orders to mobilise us until shortly after 8 p.m. that night, due to a delay in sending him the dispatch. The ambush was timed for 8 o'clock. About eight of us were hurriedly assembled and, with Michael Curran in charge, walked along the Ring road in the direction of Leigh Bridge, about two miles to the north west. On our way we met a man on horseback who told us that the military were coming out from Youghal. The boys didn't believe him, so we kept on going. When we were within half a mile or so from Roberts' Cross, which is about a mile and a half from Leigh Bridge, a pony and trap passed us on the road going in the direction of the Irish College, Ring.

There were about six men in the trap, all wearing civilian clothes. They wore caps with the peaks turned from front to back. One man seemed to be on his knees in the middle of the trap. When they passed us, I was a bit suspicious and looked back after them. The trap went on for about 30 yards and then pulled in to the ditch. As I watched, I saw the man on his knees raise a rifle, which was hit down by another man in the trap. The man with the rifle then got out on the road. I shouted to the boys to look out and made a jump for the fence. Most of our lads went for the fence on the left (sea) side of the road. I went to the opposite side and went to climb up a hill inside the fence.

Meanwhile, the military in the pony trap opened fire; shots flew all around me as I was a perfect target on the hillside. I stopped and held up my hands. A soldier shouted

at me to 'keep them up'. I did so. Bullets were flying in all directions when a crashing noise in the hedge beside me drew the enemy fire in that direction, the soldier who had me covered also turning, his rifle on the hedge. They probably thought from the noise that there was a party of Volunteers there. When I saw the 'Tommy' change the direction of his fire, I suddenly darted across the field and fell into a deep depression in the ground. I was unconscious from the fall, for a few minutes. When I came to, the bullets were still flying and I was spotted by what appeared to be a searchlight and fired on. I escaped to the shelter of a house nearby and made my way westwards on to the Old Parish road.

After about half an hour, I cautiously came back down on to the Ring road, crossed it and got down towards Ballinagoul village where I met a man named Reilly of Limerick, who was 'on the run' and staying there. I told him the military were coming, so we hid in the fields from where we saw the British stop at the door of my own home.

Shortly after, Reilly and I looked in through the windows of Dreaper's publichouse where we saw a few Black and Tans, together with Moriarty, a local R.I.C. man wearing a mask. The Tans searched the neighbourhood of Ballinagoul and then returned to Dungarvan by the Old Parish road, not by Leigh Bridge, as our column expected.

In the shooting at Roberts' Cross that night, one of our lads, Declan Regan, was badly wounded in the hand. None of our men was captured.

After the Roberts' Cross affair I took part as armed outpost in engagements with the British at Kiely's Cross and Durrow, Co. Waterford.

Extensive road-blocking and disruption of lines of

enemy communication was carried on between this and the Truce in July 1921. So thoroughly was the job done that the British could get no motor transport into the Ring district and had to rely on foot and cycle patrols.

When the Truce came, I went to a training camp at Clashmore, Youghal, and returned then to Ring to organise a signalling unit.

It would be, I think, in June or early July 1921 when we were informed that another attempt would be made to land arms at Helvick. Again the ship was to come from Germany and preparations were made to receive her. The roads were blocked for miles around Ring, and transport to take away the guns was got ready.

I was scheduled to pilot the ship named the "Hannah Bremen" on her arrival off Helvick Head. The captain's password was "Anita Ahoy" and ours was "O'Donnell Abu".

We waited several weeks for her, but the Truce was on before she arrived. A large quantity of arms and ammunition was taken off her and brought safely away to dumps in the Comeragh Mountains. These arms were later used by us in the civil war.

I was one of a party of I.R.A. who took over Dungarvan Barracks when the British marched out early in 1922. I was afterwards transferred to the Infantry Barracks, Waterford, where I was stationed when the civil war broke out in June 1922.

I fought on the republican side at the siege of Waterford along with Jim Mansfield, Mick Mansfield, Mick Shalloe and Paddy Joe Power, all of West Waterford. When the Free Staters, eventually, entered the city after shelling us with artillery, we were ordered to fight our way out

Six of us spent two days in Waterford working through walls of houses in active contact with the 'Staters'. Eventually, we fought our way out in to the country.

When we got out of the city, we learned that our comrade, Paddy Joe Power, was still holding out in the Infantry Barracks, so we decided to return and relieve him. This we succeeded in doing after a very tough struggle.

Our party then retired westwards to Curraghmore where we contacted the main body of our forces. A retreat to Dungarvan was then ordered and when I reached that town I decided to take no further part in the fighting; so I returned to my home at Ballinagoul, Ring.

Signed: Patrick Whelan
(Patrick Whelan)

Date: 26-8-55

26.8.55

Witness:

T. O'Gorman
(T. O'Gorman)

