

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1268

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Patrick Joseph Hargaden,
Adoon,
Garvagh,
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

Vice-Comd't. 3rd Battalion South
Leitrim Brigade I.R.A.

Subject.

Garvagh Company Irish Volunteers,
South Leitrim, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT BY MR. PATRICK JOSEPH HARGADAN

Adoon, Garvagh, Co. Leitrim.

I was born and reared at Adoon, Co. Leitrim, and received my education at the local school there. I could not say that attendance at this school had any bearing on my actions in after life - in fact, if anything, it was quite the opposite, as we received nothing in the way of a patriotic education there and no thought was given by anyone at the time to separation or throwing off the English yoke. After the Rebellion in 1916 and the execution of the leaders, things in this way began to change and the people began to adopt a more advanced outlook and to think of independence. The events of Easter Week and afterwards brought back to the people's mind that they had a country which was held in subjection by a foreign power. It was realised that when a few men in Dublin City and other centres could stand up to the might of the British Empire and give their lives for their country, then surely if the whole country was united in one effort there was a bigger chance of succeeding. In this way, when the young men met in groups, they would discuss such matters.

In the summer of 1917 a company of Volunteers was started at Garvagh. I was in on the starting of the Volunteers there, but it was really Sean Murphy of Garvagh who was instrumental in getting it going. Murphy was a shopkeeper's son in Garvagh and he was appointed our first company captain. We had about 12 or 14 members initially. On joining we were not then required to take any oath or make any declaration whatsoever. We subscribed a few pence per week to a fund to meet expenses and towards the purchase of arms. We had no arms of any sort then. Drill parades were held weekly, mostly in Sundays. Sean Murphy, our captain, did the instruction. He had no

previous experience, but he had some British army drill books and from a study of these he was able to carry on very successfully. Later on, we got an ex Irish Guardsman and he was very useful.

By now, companies had been started in Mohill and other areas and the nucleus of a battalion organisation was in being in the area. A battalion mobilisation was held at Aghoo Bridge during the East Cavan election, The purpose of this mobilisation was to get Volunteers to go to Cavan for the election. The battalion was then known as the 1st Battalion, Leitrim Brigade, and covered a very extensive area. The officers of the battalion staff were mostly from the Carrigallen area. Jack Briody was the 1st Battalion O/C. I cannot remember what companies comprised the battalion, but I do know that Cloone, Mohill, Garvagh, Gortlettra, Carrigallen and Ballinamore were amongst them.

A big number of young men volunteered to go to Cavan for the elections and our whole company - Garvagh - volunteered. We set out for Cavan on cycles and travelled all night. On arrival in Cavan Town we were put up in a Hall in Bridge St. Paul Galligan, who had fought during the 1916 Rebellion in Wexford, was in charge of all the Volunteer force in the area, and Michael Mulligan of Ballinamore was in charge of our party. We were stopped on the road outside Cavan by a party of military with fixed bayonets, who took away from us the hurley sticks which we were carrying and broke up many of our cycles. Tom Carter, who was afterwards a T.D. for Leitrim, was with our party. Some of our men succeeded in getting as far as Cootehill, Co. Cavan. During our stay, we did duty at the polling stations in the area and, of course, a good share of personation. There was no trouble of any importance during the election and when polling was over and the result declared we returned home.

In the early part of 1918 the conscription Act for Ireland was passed in the British Parliament but was never given the Royal Assent to make it law. When this crisis threatened the country, our strength rose rapidly and soon increased to about 60. We were still in the position that we had no arms. A few of our members would have shotguns which were their own property or that of their parents and, of course, we knew the people in the area who had guns and how and where we could get them. Apart from more intensive training and the signing of the anti-conscription pledge and collecting monies to fight the menace, nothing was done otherwise to meet the crisis.

After the conscription crisis had eased off, the influx of members we had received during that period ceased their Volunteer activities and our strength dwindled to about 25. Our captain - Murphy - now left the area and went to live in Dublin and new company officers were now appointed. Matt Reynolds was now appointed company commander or captain. The 1st Lieutenant was Richard Ellis and 2nd Lieutenant James Stanley. Weekly or so parades for training were held as usual.

In the end of the year 1918, after the war came to an end a general election was held in the country. In this the Volunteers took an active part and there was plenty of work for everyone in canvassing, collecting election funds and organising transport to take the people to the polling stations. The Volunteers also did duty at the meetings prior to polling day. On polling day we were on duty in Mohill town while others of our company went to Carrick-on-Shannon. Personation was indulged in on a large scale and our men voted for absentee or dead voters. There was no trouble and the election went off quietly enough. After the polling was closed, some

of our men did guard on the voting boxes and accompanied them to Carrick-on-Shannon where counting took place. They were away for almost a week on this duty.

Early in 1919 the first Dail met in Dublin and established themselves as the Government of the Irish Republic declared on Easter Monday 1916. The Dail took over the volunteers as the army of the Republic and all members of the Volunteers were now required to take an oath of allegiance to the new government. This was a voluntary act on behalf of the Volunteers and any man who could not see his way to take this oath was free to do so and he ceased to be a Volunteer. Only two or three of our men refused to take this oath and ceased their activities as Volunteers.

The Dail now issued a Loan to finance its undertakings and issued bonds to subscribers. The Volunteers or I.R.A., as they now were, did an amount of canvassing for this Loan and collected a large sum of money in the area. William Murphy of Garvagh was treasurer of the monies collected for this purpose and took charge of all monies received for the Loan. William Murphy was the father of Captain Murphy. Every subscriber received an official receipt from the Finance Section of An Dail and, after the Treaty came into force, they had their money returned to them with interest. At the time I don't believe that any of the subscribers looked upon it as a loan that would be repaid, but just as another subscription which they would never see again.

In the Springtime of 1919 a general raid for arms was carried out in the area by the Volunteers. An amount of old shotguns, quite a few of which were unserviceable, were collected on this raid as well as a small amount of shotgun cartridges. We also collected a few revolvers of different calibres, mostly old weapons also. There was practically no ammunition for the revolvers received. We did not get any service arms of any nature.

A brigade had now been organised in the South Leitrim area and an adjustment of the battalion areas also. An additional battalion was formed. Our area now became the 3rd Battalion, South Leitrim Brigade. Our battalion commandant was Peter Murray (deceased). I was appointed vice-commandant. The adjutant was William Farrell and the quartermaster, Joseph Mitchell. The companies comprising the battalion were :- Garvagh - Captain, Matt Reynolds; Mohill - Captain, Patrick or 'Packie' Reynolds; Eslin - Captain, Paddy McGuinness; Bornacoola - Captain, Paddy Keville; Annaduff - Captain Tom Deignan; Drumsna - Captain, Pat McGuinness; Jamestown - I think McTiernan was company captain there; Leitrim Town - Captain, Joseph Leyland; Gowel - Captain, James Farrell.

The first battalion was the Carrigallen area. The 2nd Battalion - Ballinamore area, and the 3rd Battalion (ours) Mohill, Drumsna and Annaduff area.

Ned O'Brien was the brigade O/C. Sean Mitchell, vice-commandant of the brigade. Pat Tiernan was brigade quartermaster. The adjutant - I can't just now remember who held this appointment. Charles Pinkman of Keshcarrigan was the brigade intelligence officer. Drilling and training went on as usual and, of course, in secret. Each company in the battalion kept what arms it had collected during the raid. Regular Battalion Council meetings, which included the battalion staff and company commanders, were held, at which training troubles and organisation were discussed and directions issued to deal with the specific cases.

A boycott of the British Courts of Justice was now started and the people were requested not to make use of these offices. The Volunteer officers made every effort to settle local disputes and, in many cases, were very successful and were instrumental in having signed agreements entered into by both sides. I distinctly recall one case of this type

where two families had been in dispute for years over boundary fences and bog drains. The Volunteers got them to sign an agreement and they have lived in perfect harmony ever since.

As a result of incidents throughout the country the police - or R.I.C. - now began to evacuate their smaller outlying barracks and concentrate their forces in larger centres - mostly in the towns. The fact that there were numerous resignations from the police apart from the normal wastage and recruits in sufficient numbers were not forthcoming was also responsible for this situation. The R.I.C. barracks at Garvagh was evacuated. This building was then occupied by a party of military, but they did not stay very long. On Easter Saturday night 1920, on orders from the brigade, we burned this building. The military had treated it with some substance which almost made it fireproof. Although we saturated it with buckets of oil, we could not get it to burn and were forced to cut the roof to make the fire effective.

The policing of the country-side, and indeed the towns where the R.I.C. still were, was now taken over by the Volunteers. This duty threw a lot of work on the shoulders of the officers and Volunteers, but it was a novelty for them and they entered into the work with great spirit and made a great success of it. It must be remembered that the Volunteers had their own callings in life to look after in order to live and could only devote their spare time to the job, but the old saying: "Willing hands make light work" was very evident here. Indeed, in many cases, they were often out of pocket in paying small expenses incurred on this duty. Their reward then was that the confidence of the people in them flourished and they came with their troubles to the Volunteers instead of going to the R.I.C.

On the whole, the people were very law abiding and it

was not necessary to make any arrests. The Sinn Fein Courts were now organised and functioning and the people boycotted the British Courts and took their cases to the Sinn Fein Courts. Justice in the Sinn Fein Courts was administered more on the basis of common sense than on law, and the people abided loyally by the decisions of the Courts. The justices, or magistrates, operating the Sinn Fein Courts were men of standing in the locality, specially appointed for the purpose. The Sinn Fein Courts were at first held openly, but later, when the enemy began raiding for them, they had of necessity to be held in secret or go 'on the run', so to speak.

A boycott of the R.I.C. was now started in an effort to compel them to resign from the Force and to bring home to them that while acting as such they were the enemies of the people and were not wanted by them. Shopkeepers who supplied the R.I.C. with groceries and other goods were visited by the Volunteers and ordered not to supply them any longer. On the whole, the shopkeepers loyally carried out this order and the police were compelled to commandeer their requirements which, to give credit to them, they duly paid for at this stage. Later on, when things became more serious and with the advent of the Tans and Auxies it was unusual for them to pay for anything they took. It was laughable to see policemen entering publichouses and pulling pints of beer for themselves. One individual trader in Mohill continued to supply milk to the R.I.C. despite several warnings from us, so we took his cows and drove them to Aughavas where we kept them for a long time. We eventually gave the cows back when the owner satisfied us that he would not voluntarily supply the police with milk. The cows were well cared for during their sojourn and milked regularly.

There was a constable of the R.I.C. stationed in Longford who had cattle on grass land in our area to the number of 10 or 12. This man was called on to resign, but he did not

do so. We took the cattle off the land one night and drove them to the mountain and turned them loose there, where again they remained for a long time. He did not resign despite this and we eventually returned the cattle to him. The result of the boycott was that a good few of the younger men members of the R.I.C. did resign, but the vast majority remained on and, in this respect, the boycott had not the success that it was hoped for. One point, however, that it did achieve was to draw a distinct demarcation line between the people and the police. Heretofore, they fraternised with the people and, although I would say were never welcome by the majority, the people put up with them. Now they were treated as outcasts and everyone, or almost everyone shunned them. This was a good point from the security point of view for us, as everyone knew that the R.I.C. were the backbone of the English Intelligence Service in the country. The tragic side of it was that these men who were our own kith and kin, and 90% Catholic, continued to serve a Protestant alien government to the detriment of their own people and to be lauded by the Protestant element for doing so.

The enemy now began raiding and making arrests generally and rounding up individuals who were prominent or had made themselves so in the Sinn Fein and Volunteer movements. Our Brigade O/C. - O'Brien - was now in bad health at this time and resigned the brigade and this brought about a reorganisation of that headquarters. Sean Mitchell (deceased) was now appointed Brigade O/C.; Harry McKeon, vice brigade O/C. Joseph Beirne, who was later killed at Garvagh with Sean Connolly and others, was appointed brigade adjutant, and Pat Tiernan remained as brigade quartermaster.

A boycott of Belfast goods was now instituted by orders of headquarters. At this time Belfast was, commercially

speaking, the capital of Ireland, and travellers from business houses in Belfast were to be found all over the south and west of Ireland. From Belfast came the vast majority of the goods that were sold in the stores in these parts. Lists of Belfast firms who were on the black list were supplied to us and we raided the trains and vans for the goods of those firms. When we found such goods which was nearly always we destroyed them or commandeered them. Bread vans were turned upside down and their contents spilled on the roadside and, in a short while, we had driven Belfast goods from the area. Shopkeepers were warned not to deal in goods that were blacklisted under penalty if they did so which might mean the destruction of their shops. One woman in Mohill, who was really a supporter of Sinn Fein, continued to deal in Belfast bread despite being warned she was not to do so. We waylaid the van delivering the bread to her and, having released the horse from it, let it run down a ravine where it overturned and smashed. That finished that episode as the firm did not attempt to supply any further bread.

The Black and Tans arrived in the area about November 1920, and established a very strong post in Mohill, taking over three or four houses and converting them into a barracks and fortifying them with sandbags, barbed wire and steel shutters on the windows. Auxiliary police also arrived and took up station in Carrick-on-Shannon. There was also a large force of Tans stationed there, as there was also in Ballinamore and other places. Carrick-on-Shannon also had a large detachment of British soldiers. Prior to this advent the R.I.C. had become remarkably quiet and were practically doing no duty.

With the advent of the Tans and Auxies things took a different shape. Raids, arrests and beatings and general

searches and rough handling of individuals now became the order of the day. A general reign of terror tactics was started by the new forces and houses were burned by them. It was remarkable how a force new to the country could have such knowledge as they had of who was who and it was quite evident that again the R.I.C. were supplying the information on which they worked. In fact, many of the R.I.C. now became just as aggressive as the Tans or Auxies did. Every day the enemy were raiding and looking for individuals who were prominent in the movement heretofore, and soon most of these men were on the run, trying to keep alive. Men who were arrested and taken to the various police barracks could see lists of wanted men posted up on the walls inside the barracks. In most cases the ranks credited to these men in the I.R.A. were all wrong.

Shortly after the arrival of the Black and Tans they burned the local Halls at Drumsna, John's Bridge (Barnaculla) and Garvagh. There was no reason why they should have done this, except just to terrorise the people.

In June 1920, a consignment of steel shutters arrived at Mohill station for the police and were put in the Goods Store pending collection. Joe Mitchel, in charge of a party of Volunteers, went to get those shutters and remove them. When they got to the Goods Store they were fired on by a concealed guard of police and were lucky to escape with their lives. No guard had been on the place previous to this and they were very nearly caught in a neat trap.

In July of that year we raided the mails, holding up the train at Drumsna and removing the sacks of mails. There was no guard on the mails then. The contents of the mails were gone through and censored by us and they were returned to the Post Office inside a couple of days. As far as I can remember, nothing of any value was discovered in them.

The Sheemore ambush took place on 4th March 1921, and the day following I received a dispatch from Sean Connolly to go to Mohill and make arrangements to attack a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans which patrolled the town each night after curfew. Connolly had been Brigade O/C. North Longford and was sent by G.H.Q., Dublin, to Leitrim to ^{re-}organise the area and to get operations under way there. I went into Mohill and got in touch with James Fanning and he advised me to put off the attempt as there was intense enemy activity after the affair at Sheemore. Enemy forces were all over the place and were holding up people and questioning them as to where they were on the previous day. As a result of my conversation with Fanning, I came back to Adoon and got in touch with Connolly who was in that area. I gave an outline of the situation to him and he ordered me to go back to Mohill and collect some material that had been dumped there for the intended attack. The material consisted of small mines for leaving on the surface of footpaths or roads for use against foot patrols.

I proceeded back along the railway to Mohill on foot. I got in contact with some Volunteers near the town and assisted by them we secured the material. They knew where it was dumped. These men helped me to carry the stuff back to Adoon where I handed it over to Connolly and some of the column who were in that area. En route back from Mohill we barely escaped being caught by a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans. They visited several houses along the railway and questioned the occupants as to where they were on the previous day.

In May 1921, a party of Volunteers of the Garvagh Company were cutting a trench in the road from Mohill to Ballinamore. This trench had been cut before and had been filled in by the enemy. A protection party was placed on the road at either side to give warning of any enemy approach which was to be

signalled by means of a flag. This method, however, did not work, or the signal was not seen, and a party of military and Tans got through to where the road was being trenched. The D.I. of the Police was so impetuous that he raced on in front of the military and Tans on a motor cycle and sidecar on which was mounted a machine gun. A soldier was in the sidecar to operate the gun. The D.I. and soldier opened fire on the working party at the trench at very long range. This was the first indication they had of the enemy's approach. The working party of Volunteers, leaving behind them their coats and implements, scattered and made off across country. One young Volunteer took cover in a ditch near by. They, the Tans, found this man and a Tan shot him in the leg. His leg was amputated later. The enemy also captured four more of the working party after a chase across country and made them prisoners. The brigade were to hold an inquiry into this affair, but the matter just fizzled out.

I was 'on the run' from March 1921, shortly after the tragedy of Connolly's and other deaths at Selton Hill. Enemy forces came raiding my house for me, but, fortunately, I was not at home at the time and I did not sleep at home afterwards.

After Connolly's death, Captain Paddy Morrissey, a staff officer from G.H.Q., was sent down to Leitrim to reorganise the area and to make appointments to fill the vacancies in the brigade staff caused by the deaths at Selton. Captain Morrissey attended a meeting of our Battalion Council which was called at his request. He addressed the Council meetings and among other remarks made by him was that the South Leitrim Brigade was the worst brigade in Ireland and that the 3rd Battalion was the worst battalion in the brigade. Our Battn. O/C. was a gruff sort of individual and not amenable to rebukes of this nature and his reply to Captain Morrissey was that he

was resigning the command of the battalion straight away. Captain Morrissey said he would give him some minutes to consider the matter and withdrew from the meeting. When Captain Morrissey withdrew, a general discussion on the matter took place and the decision reached was that the whole battalion staff should resign. One of the company captains also said he would resign, but subsequently withdrew this decision.

When Captain Morrissey returned to the meeting, the battalion commandant informed him that the whole battalion staff were resigning and we verified this. Captain Morrissey seemed very taken aback at this but had no alternative but to accept the situation in the circumstances.

A new battalion staff was there and then appointed. The new O/C. was Frank Rourke. He was an ex-Irish Guardsman and had been formerly drill instructor to the Garvagh Company. Gerald Flynn was appointed adjutant and Maxwell from Drumsna was appointed quartermaster. The new vice-commandant I cannot remember. The company officers remained the same, there being no change.

The first operation carried out by the battalion after this was the road cutting operation on the Mohill-Ballinamore road already referred to and this was a dismal failure. Nothing further happened between that and the Truce. From the time of my resignation from the battalion staff, I was just an ordinary Volunteer. I did not serve on the column although I often acted as guide for them and this was none too safe a duty either. You did not know what you would run into in front and you did not know what you were going to get from behind either.

We were all glad when the Truce took place; glad to be able to go home and to knock around again and meet in a normal manner. Yet it was a mystery to us and we took a long time to get used to it. You were inclined either to go for a gun

or to run when the Tans came upon you suddenly and it seemed so strange that they were not raiding, holding up people or getting on with their usual antics as before the Truce.

Apart from the making and filling into cartridges of slugs, no attempt was made to make munitions in this area. The brigade had a place at Aughnasheelin where bombs and mines were made and arms repaired and the battalions could get their requirements there.

Jack Bohan was the battalion intelligence officer and he had an intelligence service organised within the battalion. What he was able to get in the way of information I do not know, or if the post offices in the area were of any use to him. I don't think they were. The only spy or informer that was executed in the area was a man called Latimer. It was he, through Dr. Pentland of Mohill, who had informed the British about Connolly and the others being ~~sent~~ at Seltan Hill, Garvagh. Latimer had openly convicted himself, and to confirm it, had barricaded himself into his house after the affair. The doctor was subsequently killed in London. He had left the country the day after our men were killed. There is a doubt still existing, and I expect never will be cleared up, as to whether his death was accidental or was a planned affair.

At no time during my period on the battalion staff had we any Service rifles or other weapons in the battalion. We had a loan of a Service rifle for a short period from the 2nd (or Ballinamore) Battalion for instructional purposes. I was never a member of the I.R.B.

Signed: Patrick J. Hargaden
(Patrick J. Hargaden)

Date: 6-10-55

6.10.55

Witness: Matthew Barry Commandant.

(Matthew Barry)

