

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1289

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,289

Witness

James Ormond,
West Street,
Lismore,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Captain Lismore Company I.R.A.;
Q.M. 5th Battalion Cork No. 2 Brigade I.R.A.

Subject.

National activities,
Lismore, Co. Waterford, 1913-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2595

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY JAMES ORMONDE

West Street, Lismore, Co. Waterford.

I was born in Lismore on 26th April, 1901, of parents who were shopkeepers and farmers. My father was Town Clerk of Lismore for many years and also a member of the Waterford County Council.

After leaving the Christian Brothers' School in Lismore, where I was educated, I went farming.

In my youth I was a member of the Gaelic Athletic Association.

When the National (Redmond's) Volunteers were started in Lismore, in 1913, a Boy Scout organisation attached to these Volunteers was also formed. I joined this Boy Scout Movement.

At the time of the split in the Volunteers (1915) we formed a unit of the Fianna in Lismore. There was no Volunteer or Fianna activity in this town during the 1916 Rising.

Early in the year 1917, the Fianna unit, which had split, was reorganised and known as the Sean Heuston Sluagh. We had upwards of twenty young lads in the Sluagh of which I was the O/C. A lad named Jimmy Heaphy was second in charge and Bernard O'Brien was the third officer.

We drilled in the open fields and occasionally, in conjunction with the local Volunteers, in the Sinn Fein hall in Lismore. We were encouraged and drilled by a man named Jim Madden. This man was a school teacher in Lismore Christian Brothers' School and Captain of the local Volunteer Company. We had no guns of any kind at that time.

In addition to the usual drilling, the year 1919 was mainly noted for raids for arms which we carried out on houses of the gentry. We usually got 'tipped off' by some of the servants in the particular house as to where the guns were kept. I remember one night raiding the house of the Honourable Claude Anson, which was about three miles from Lismore. About twelve other men of the Company were with me. So far as I am aware no guns were carried; indeed, I'm not at all sure we had any then.

On reaching the house one of the maids, who was expecting us, let us into the building through a back window. Searching the house, we came across two shotguns which we took away. While we were there we met the owner. We told him what we wanted. He offered no objection to us taking the arms.

On the 11th November, 1919, which was celebrated in Lismore as the anniversary of the signing of the armistice in the first world war, the town was liberally decorated with Union Jacks for the occasion. This was not altogether surprising, because Lismore was always a strong pro-British town, many of the men from the town being, either in the British Army, or, ex-soldiers.

At any rate, when the celebrations were well on, a few of us, Volunteers, proceeded to tear down Union Jacks from houses, brought the flags down to 'The Monument' which was opposite the Police Barracks and publicly burned them there.

Tim Duggan was O/C. that night, as Jim Madden, his predecessor, had to go 'on the run'.

A large and antagonistic crowd had gathered and were threatening to attack us when Paddy Morrissey, a Lieutenant in the Company, drew a revolver and fired over the heads of the crowd.

The police then charged us with batons and I was struck on the head and rendered unconscious. When I 'came to', I found myself in my own home in West Street, Lismore.

Early in the year 1920, the ~~Rates~~^{Laxes} Office in Villierstown, a village about seven miles south-east of Lismore, was raided at night by about twelve of us from the Lismore Company. Papers and records were taken out of the office and burned. The few local R.I.C. men did not interfere.

About two or three weeks later the Lismore ~~Rates~~^{Laxes} Office was raided at night. Duggan, the Company Captain, was in charge. There were about twelve of us taking part. As at Villierstown, all records relating to rate collection were taken away and burned.

These raids were carried out on the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Pax Whelan, Dungarvan, and were part of the policy which aimed at disrupting British Law administration in Ireland, as much as possible.

It was in or about the month of April, 1920, when I was appointed Captain of the Lismore Company. Johnny Keyes was my 1st Lieutenant and Eddie Landers my Second Lieutenant. I had, at the time, about forty men in the Company, but we were very poorly armed. I am sure that there were not more than fifteen shotguns in the Company with very little ammunition. We had no rifles, grenades or revolvers.

The shotguns were usually distributed in 'safe' houses out in the country. By 'safe' I mean in houses of persons known to be sympathetic to us and who, in addition, had a safe hiding place to keep them.

During the early months of 1920, there was a garrison of about twenty Black and Tans and R.I.C. in the local Police Barracks. We received information (I cannot now remember from what source) that a party of Military were coming to the town and were to be housed in the Courthouse, the basement cells of which were to be used as a prison. It was decided to burn the Courthouse before the military went into occupation.

One night, about midnight, I put about six shotgun men in position under cover of a small plantation facing the R.I.C. barracks whilst the remainder of the party of fifteen men proceeded to set fire to the Courthouse. I was in charge that night. We placed a ladder against the building and climbed in through a window. When inside, we sprinkled petrol all over the floors and woodwork and then set the place alight. The fire took hold so quickly that I very nearly caught in the blaze. As a matter of fact, some of my clothing took fire but, luckily for me, I was able to extinguish the burning cloth before any great harm was done. My father was in charge of the town fire extinguishing hose at the time but, before we went to burn the Courthouse, I had removed the hose from where it was usually kept, so that it couldn't be used that night.

Things went on much the same as usual - drilling, raiding for arms and mails - until the military moved into the town and took over the residence of Sean Goulding - a prominent Sinn Feiner and well known in the political side of the National Movement. He was, subsequently, a Senator in our own Parliament. His residence was occupied by British troops until they withdrew from the town in December, 1921.

It was well-known to the R.I.C. and Military that I was connected with the I.R.A.. As a result, numerous raids to capture me were made on my home, both by day and night but without result. However, I found it impossible to remain in my own house or in the town at all, so, about the month of May, 1920, I went 'on the run'.

I went out the country to the district of Ballysaggart, about four miles north-west of Lismore. I kept in touch with the Company all the time but, while I was 'on the run', Bill Power, a farmer of Shrough about a mile from Lismore, was appointed Company Captain in my place.

I remained about four months in the Ballysaggart district, until, in September, 1920, I came home to Lismore one night for a change of clothing. I had not been long in the house when the Military arrived and proceeded to search for me. I made a dash for the stairs to escape through a window by means of a rope, but I was caught before I reached the window.

The Military arrested my father, my uncle and myself and put the three of us in a cell in the local R.I.C. barracks. We were about two days in Lismore when we were transferred, handcuffed, in lorries, with a strong Military escort, to Kilworth Camp, County Cork. After about two months in Kilworth we were brought, with many other prisoners, to Cork Military Barracks.

The Barracks in Cork was swarming with Black and Tans and Auxiliaries who began to assault us with revolver butts. I firmly believe that were it not for the presence of a regiment of the Royal Field Artillery, who surrounded us with fixed bayonets, we would have been murdered by the 'Tans'. We were in Cork gaol for two or three days, when, about a hundred of us prisoners, were brought aboard a British Destroyer in Cork Harbour and eventually landed at Belfast.

As we left the Destroyer at Belfast we were pelted with nuts and bolts by the shipyard workers at Belfast. Many of our lads received very ugly cuts as a result of this blackguardism. We were then brought by train to Ballykinlar Camp, County Down, where I was interned until September, 1921, when I was released in the general release of internees. I then returned home to Lismore.

While I was away in Ballykinlar (in the month of May, 1921) our area was transferred to the Cork No. 2 Brigade.

During the Truce period, the Lismore Company took over Lismore Police Barracks on its evacuation by the police and Tans. I was then appointed Quartermaster of the Battalion - the 5th Battalion, Cork No. 2. Brigade. The Commandant was Bill Power of Shrough, Lismore, and the Vice-Commandant **Jack** Cody of Moorehill, Tallow.

A training camp for I.R.A. officers was set up in our area during the period of the Truce and I was kept busy providing billeting accommodation for the men from various districts coming along for training.

When the Civil War broke out in 1922 Jack Cody took over command of the Battalion and, with about sixteen men and myself, occupied Lismore Castle. We held it for two months until the order came to evacuate the Castle.

When the Free State troops arrived in Lismore we went 'on the run' but kept sniping at the Castle and attacking military outposts and from the latter we captured some rifles.

On 1st November, 1922, four of us were in a house sheltering when Free State troops raided the place and captured us. We were carrying arms when captured.

We were beaten up by the Free Staters and brought first to Lismore Barracks, then to Fermoy and finally to Cork gaol.

We were tried by Courtmartial in Cork and sentenced to death. The sentence was not carried out, for what reason I do not know.

I was kept a prisoner in Cork gaol until October, 1923 and then transferred to Mountjoy Gaol, Dublin, where, with the other prisoners, I went on hungerstrike.

I was then transferred with other men to the Curragh, County Kildare, where we remained on hungerstrike for eighteen days in all.

I was held a prisoner in Harepark Camp, The Curragh, until June, 1924, when the general release of prisoners took place. On being released I returned to my home in West Street, Lismore.

Signed:

James Ormond
(James Ormond)

Date:

16th November 1955
16th November, 1955.

Witness:

T. O'Gorman

(T. O'Gorman)

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