

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1329

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,329

Witness

Patrick Walsh,
Liskeavy,
Milltown,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Member of Bellmount
Company Irish Volunteers, Co. Galway, 1917 - .

Subject.

Bellmount Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Galway, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK WALSH

Liskeavy, Milltown, Co. Galway.

I was born on 12th July 1899, at Liskeavy in the parish of Milltown and attended Kilgevrin National School until I reached the age of fourteen years. I then went to work on my father's farm at Liskeavy.

I joined Bellmount Company of the Irish Volunteers in 1917. The company captain was Patrick McHugh and the lieutenants were Frank Ruane and Terence Godvin. The strength of the company was about 35 men. Parades were held once a week after working hours. Foot drill was taught and practised, but no arms drill.

There was a strong Sinn Fein Club in the parish of Milltown in 1917. The principal men in the Sinn Fein Club were Thomas Lyons of Knock, Milltown, and Matthew Concannon of Brusselstown. I was a member of the club and took an active part in its work. We did everything in our power to have the Sinn Fein candidates elected at the general election of 1918. We canvassed and organised transport, mainly side-cars. We were pleased that Dr. Brian Cusack, the Sinn Fein candidate, was elected with a good majority. There was nothing exciting about the election campaign in the Milltown area. There were no clashes with the R.I.C. and no arrests.

I helped in the collection of the Dáil Éireann Loan. The Volunteers were the driving force behind the collection in this area. A good many subscribers paid £5. The loan met with great success in this area. At this time we organised football matches to raise funds for Sinn Fein. Great use was made of the tricolour to keep up the spirit of the people. Flags were always very prominent at meetings, football matches and all national functions. They were flown high from

from telegraph poles, buildings and high trees. The R.I.C. were kept busy removing them.

Of the 35 men in the Bellmount Company, about 15 - all farmer's sons - had guns of their own. Raids for arms brought in about 15 more shotguns and a big supply of cartridges. Most people who owned guns handed them over willingly and only an odd one was sour about it. Nobody refused outright. That was late 1919 or early 1920. There was no rifle of any kind in the company.

I remember that about March or April 1920, Michael Moran, battalion commandant, visited Bellmount Company and gave instructions that plans should be made without delay for an attack on Milltown R.I.C. Barracks. At that time the garrison was very small in comparison with what it was in 1921 - two sergeants and 37 constables. There was very little done by way of carrying out the instructions of the battalion commandant, and, about the middle of 1920, Captain McHugh resigned. Patrick Brennan of Liskeavy then became captain. There was no change in the lieutenants.

Brennan resigned from captaincy in March 1921, and took no part in Volunteer activities after his resignation. Patrick McHugh likewise took no part in Volunteer activities after his resignation in the middle of 1920. McHugh stayed at home after his resignation, but Brennan left the district when he resigned. There had been little activity up to March 1921, except for two attempted attacks on R.I.C. at Milltown Barracks. On each of the two occasions a party of about six men including myself took up positions about 25 yards from the barracks and waited at night for three or four hours to attack any members of the garrison entering or leaving the barracks. We were armed

with shotguns and one of the party had a revolver as well. Captain Brennan was in charge on both occasions. No member of the garrison either entered or left the barrack on either occasion.

Immediately after the resignation of Captain Patrick Brennan, a special meeting of the company was held. It was called mainly to discuss the captain's resignation and to plan for undertaking some definite work, as some of the men were not satisfied with the activities of the company up to then. After the company had been fallen-in at the command of one of the lieutenants, I proposed that it should be reorganised; that an ambush of the R.I.C. at Milltown should be prepared; that arrangements should be made that same night for the ambush, and that the men who were prepared to take part in such an ambush should step forward. Only four men stepped forward. They were John Patrick McCormack, Dan McCormack (now deceased), Peter Brennan and myself - all from the village of Liskeavy. All four of us left Bellmount that night and transferred to Milltown Company immediately.

Milltown Company was then about 40 strong. Thomas Feerick was company captain and the lieutenants were Patrick Burke and John Thornton. Michael Quinn was company adjutant, and Thomas Donnellan was company Q.M. In less than a week after our leaving Bellmount, company Volunteers John Patrick McCormack, Dan McCormack, Peter Brennan and I attended a meeting of Milltown Company. It was decided at that meeting to collect all the information possible regarding the movements of R.I.C. patrols from Milltown Barracks and to attack a patrol at the first opportunity.

Milltown Company I.O. was a very reliable man. His name was Michael John O'Donnell and he owned a publichouse in the village of Milltown, about 20 yards from the R.I.C. Barracks.

A further meeting of the company was called and held in the first half of April (1921). There was almost 100% attendance. Captain Feerick informed us that he had got information from I.O. Michael O'Donnell regarding the timing of the patrols of the R.I.C. It was decided at the meeting to attack a patrol which was expected to be on duty between the barracks and the railway station at Milltown on Saturday night, 17th April. It was also decided to attack them on their return from the railway station to the barracks. I remember the date of the attack very well as I was at a market in Tuam that Saturday which was two days after the fair at Claremorris, then and now held on the 15th day of April.

Positions were taken up roughly 150 yards from the R.I.C. barracks at the first bend on the road at the northern or Ballindine side of the village of Milltown. Our position occupied a front of about 20 yards. There were 11 officers and men all of Milltown Company. They were all armed with shotguns, except that one member of the party had a revolver in addition to a shotgun. The usual number of R.I.C. on patrol between the village and the railway station was six. We were disappointed that only two came. It was then about 10.30 p.m. and dark. We opened fire and both R.I.C. men fell. They did not move after falling. We were on the point of taking their two carbines when rifle and machine gun fire was opened on our position from the barracks only about 150 yards away. We withdrew across the fields in the direction of Millbrook and from there to Irishtown and across into Co. Roscommon, about eight miles from Milltown. On the following Monday, we contacted the Tuam Battalion flying column at the village of Blacksick. We heard that the two R.I.C. who we thought at the time of the attack were dead, were seriously wounded. I never heard afterwards whether they lived or died of their

wounds. None of our party was hit by the rifle and machine gun fire from the barracks. The two wounded R.I.C. fell without firing a shot in the middle of the road.

The following is a list of the names of the officers and men of Milltown Company who took part in the attack:-

Captain - Thomas Feerick; 1st Lieut. - John Thornton; 2nd Lieut. - Patrick Burke; Company Q.M. - Thomas Donnellan, and Volunteers Martin Slattery, Peter Burke, John Patrick McCormack, Dan McCormack, Peter Brennan, Michael Donnellan and Patrick Walsh (myself).

A second attack on the R.I.C. stationed at Milltown took place on 27th June 1921. I am definite about the date because, on our way from the ambush, we met a young priest who had said his first Mass in the village of Milltown on 27th June 1921. I remember very well getting his blessing on our way from the attack. The attack came about in this way. The Milltown Company I.O. learned that a party of four R.I.C. had left the village and sent out two scouts to report their movements to the Tuam Battalion flying column which was at the time in Carrarea, less than a mile from Milltown.

The scouts did their work very well, with the result that the flying column was in position well before the patrol arrived at the junction of the Kilconly/Milltown and Tuam/Milltown roads. The I.R.A. position occupied a frontage of about 40 yards on the Milltown side of the junction and quite close to it, and would be about 300 yards from the R.I.C. Barracks in the centre of the village. The attacking party was at one side of the road only - the left-hand side as you go from Milltown in the direction of Tuam. They were placed just inside the fence of the road. The R.I.C. patrol came in two pairs from the Kilconly direction and when they rounded the bend at the junction of the roads all four were inside the ambush position, after having gone about 20 yards from the bend.

Fire was then opened on the patrol and all four fell. One crawled over the far fence of the road. Cease fire order was given and Battalion O/C. Thomas Dunleavy and Volunteer Dan McCormack stepped up on the fence to investigate the position. We thought that all four in the patrol were dead or very badly wounded. Immediately they stood on the fence, fire was opened on them by the R.I.C. man who had crossed the fence. It was then dark, and this man escaped to the barracks. Verrey lights were sent up from the barracks and machine-gun fire was opened on our position by the garrison.

There was no alternative but to withdraw due south out of range from this fire. We withdrew through Russellstown into Co. Roscommon. Thomas Dunleavy, O/C. Tuam Battalion, was in charge of the attack in which none of the Volunteers was hit. Two of the R.I.C. patrol were killed outright. They were the two nearest our position as they were passing. They acted as a sort of shield for the other two walking side by side with them. One of the other two was wounded. The two men killed were Sergeant Morrin and Constable Day.

The following officers and men took part in this second attack on R.I.C. beside Milltown:- Thomas Dunlway, O/C. Tuam Battalion; Thomas Ryan, Battalion Q.M. Tuam Battalion; Thomas Nohilly, Battalion Adjutant Tuam Battalion; Patrick McHugh, Captain, Sylane Company, Tuam Battalion; Timothy Dunleavy, Captain, Barnaderg Company, Tuam Battalion; Thomas Feerick, Captain, Milltown Company, Tuam Battalion, and Volunteers Martin Slattery, Dan McCormack, John Patrick McCormack, Peter Brennan, Peter Burke and Patrick Walsh (myself

I would like to pay a tribute to the two scouts - company Q.M. Thomas Donnellan and Volunteer Laurence Sullivan - who went across country, traced the movements of the patrol and reported in good time the route they were taking back to the

village. I would also like to mention that Volunteer Michael Donnellan of Carrarea, Milltown, rendered very great service to the Milltown Company in scouting and dispatch work.

We had some active enemies in the Milltown company area. In the year 1921 a letter was captured in a raid on the mails in Clarenbridge, Co. Galway, carried out by the I.R.A. This letter, written by a resident in the Milltown Company area, was addressed to the R.I.C. in Galway city and contained a list of the names of the most active members of the I.R.A. in the Milltown area. The man who wrote the letter is now dead and as no action was taken against him in 1921, I will not mention his name now. I will say, however, that if I had been an officer at the time I would have taken action against this man and others like him to preserve the lives of the men under my charge.

This completes my statement except to add that I continued my military activity against the Treaty and held the rank of battalion commandant in the republican forces.

Signed:

Patrick Walsh

(Patrick Walsh)

Date:

20th December, 1955

20th December, 1955.

Witness:

Con Moynihan

(Con Moynihan)

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