

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,363

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,363

Witness

Sean E. Walshe,
Coolenure,
Fethard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Commandant, Seventh Battalion,
Third Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Moyglass, Co. Tipperary, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN WALSH,

Cóolenure, Fethard, County Tipperary,

Commandant, 7th Battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade.

One evening during the late springtime or early summer of 1917 I attended a meeting which was held at Movarna for the purpose of forming an Irish Volunteer company in Moyglass and the surrounding districts. My political sympathies at the time, and for some time previously, were with Sinn Féin and with the men who had fought for Ireland in the Rising of 1916, so, naturally, I was anxious to become a member of the Irish Volunteer organisation. I was then about 18 years of age and was living with my parents on their farm at Curraghtarrsna not far from Cashel.

I would say that about 30 young men handed in their names that night to become members of the company. At the election of officers which followed, Seán Hayes, then of Moyglass and now of Thurles, was elected Company Captain and I was elected 1st Lieutenant. My late brother, Maurice, became Company Adjutant. Later the late Seán Treacy visited us and administered the Volunteer oath. There were very little arms available at that time but, as far as I can now recollect, we had one or two revolvers and a few shotguns.

It is now difficult to remember the various local incidents which occurred around the years 1917, 1918 and 1919. For some time we carried on on our own. There was the normal routine of Volunteer companies at the time - weekly parades, drill, mostly foot drill, and meetings. We got some new members into the company and we were constantly on the look-out for anything in the nature of guns or explosives

to supplement our small supply of arms. During the conscription crisis in 1918 our strength increased to about 50 and drilling and training were intensified at that time. It was, too, about that time that the companies were organised into battalions, and our first Battalion Commandant was the late Tommy Donovan of Drangan.

It was about this time, too, that I had my first experience of encountering and being held up by a patrol of British forces. About midnight on a summer's night in 1918, accompanied by a neighbour, I was cycling home from a meeting in Moyglass. My friend was not then a Volunteer. I had met him in Moyglass and he had agreed to wait until the meeting was over so that we could be home together. About $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from home we were halted unexpectedly by a British Army officer and an elderly R.I.C. man. There were about 30 British soldiers lined along the road. The R.I.C. man identified my friend as an employee of a farmer friend of his and I am sure he mistook me as being another employee of the same farmer.. He vouched for us to the officer and we were permitted to proceed without being searched. We thanked the officer and the R.I.C. man and continued on our way. I was certainly lucky to have that friend with me, for at the time I had in my pockets a revolver, some ammunition and some Volunteer literature.

Towards the end of 1918 our activities centered chiefly in assisting the Sinn Féin candidate - the late Pierce McCann - in the general election of that year. On polling day I acted as election agent for him at the polling booth at Mockler's Hill near Cashel.

It was not, however, until the summer of 1920 that what I might call real activities began. On the night of

June 4th, 1920, when Drangan R.I.C. barracks was attacked and captured, I was in charge of a party of 10 Volunteers who blocked the road between Ballinure and Drangan. Having felled trees across the road, we remained on guard on the road blocks throughout the night. We were armed with shotguns and revolvers.

A party of 5 or 6 R.I.C. from Ballinure barracks were in the habit of going on certain days to Cashel for the purpose, I believe, of collecting their pay. Tommy Donovan, the Battalion Commandant, Seán Hayes, the Company Captain, the late Michael Burke of Moyglass, Paul Mulcahy, then Captain of the Dualla Company, and myself decided after a consultation to attempt to hold them up and to seize their arms. To do this job we had to borrow arms from the Fethard Company, and a man named Joe Ormond - now in the U.S.A. - whom we trusted implicitly but who was not under suspicion by the R.I.C., brought out the arms - 3 revolvers, 2 or 3 shotguns and a Mauser rifle - to us. We gave Ormond a shotgun and prevailed on him to remain with us and give us a hand. He was not then a member of the Volunteers. All six of us, viz. Tommy Donovan, Seán Hayes, Michael Burke, Paul Mulcahy, Joe Ormond and myself then occupied a position behind a wall where there is a slight curve in the road at a place called Newtown.

We had not long to wait for the party of R.I.C. We were not more than three-quarters of an hour in position when six R.I.C. men cycling in twos came along. This was the way we expected them to come. As they entered the ambush position we shouted at them to halt and to put up their hands. They showed no intention of complying with our request but instead made an effort to draw their revolvers, which they carried strapped in holsters on their belts.

We then opened fire on them. We could not have fired many shots, for we had not more than five or six rounds of ammunition each, but in ~~the~~^{the} few rounds that were fired one of the R.I.C. men - a Sergeant Tobin - was shot dead and another - a Constable Brady - was wounded. The remaining four then shouted that they were willing to surrender and put up their hands. We searched them and took their revolvers and ammunition and also the revolvers and ammunition of the dead sergeant and the wounded constable. We also took their six bicycles and cycled away, leaving the four disarmed R.I.C. men unmolested and free to look after their two companions. This ambush took place on July 2nd, 1920, and has since been referred to locally as the Newtown ambush.

I slept at home that night and next morning I left very early to attend a fair in Limerick. That night on my return from Limerick, as I left the train in Cashel I saw four R.I.C. men on the station whom I strongly suspected were there to arrest me. I left the platform in the company of three or four other men, and this perhaps put the R.I.C. men off making the attempt to apprehend me at the station. They, however, followed me into the town, where I met my father. As was to be expected, there were many raids that day by British military and police following the shooting of the sergeant and constable on the previous day, and my father told me that our home had been raided twice in the course of the day, that the raiders were searching for me and that they had captured a dispatch which had come for me from Paddy Hogan in Cashel.

In an effort to shake off the attentions of the four R.I.C. men who were shadowing me, my father and I entered a publichouse in Cashel, but we were not long there when the four

policemen entered. Leaving my overcoat and stick on the counter, I walked past them in the bar, slipped out and went to E.D. Ryan's in Friary St., where I met Paddy Hogan and told him about the captured dispatch. After a meal in Ryan's, Hogan and I went to a house some distance from the town, where we remained for the night. From this until after the Truce in July, 1921, i.e. about 12 months later, except for an occasional visit for a change of underwear, I never went to my own home but remained "on the run", staying in various houses and places in the battalion area.

I regret that I cannot now remember all or much about the incidents that occurred between July, 1920, and say the end of October, 1920. There were a number of occasions on which I was a member of parties occupying ambush positions in various places to which the expected R.I.C. or military did not come. On one of these occasions when we occupied an ambush position at Doran's Cross near Drangan, an incident occurred which illustrates the spirit of the times. A man living nearby came to us and suggested that we take over his house and use it as a point from which to attack the patrol. He considered that his house was a better vantage point than the position which we held. When we declined his offer, he asked us to lend him a gun so that he could take part in the proposed ambush with us. Then there was an incident which occurred on the Cashel-Clerihan road. At the time there was a party of British troops encamped at Clerihan and I believe it was the intention to attack them there. My job was to take charge of the men blocking the road from Cashel to Clerihan. I had issued instructions to the scouts not to permit anyone to approach the part of the road where we were felling the trees after 10 p.m. About 10.30 p.m. a motor car going towards Clerihan arrived.

It had passed the scouts. I called on it to halt, and as it did so the first of the trees cut came crashing down. The trunk of the tree fell on top of the bonnet of the motor car. When I approached the car I recognised one of its two occupants as Tom Carew, the Brigade Intelligence Officer. Fortunately neither of them were hurt. As the car was badly damaged, Carew and his companion continued on foot towards Clerihan. The attack on the military there did not take place. I have an idea that they (the military) broke camp and left Clerihan that evening, but we had not got that information when we were blocking the roads.

On the day on which Tommy Donovan was killed. i.e. on 31st October, 1920, I attended a battalion council meeting which was held at Mrs. Kennedy's house at Mogordun near Moyglas. There was at the time a notorious British Army officer named Lieutenant Litchfield stationed in Killenaule, and it was decided at the meeting that Tommy Donovan (the Battalion Commandant) with a party of 5 or 6 men would go to Killenaule that night to attack Litchfield if, as was his custom, he left the barracks and went to his favourite publichouse for a few drinks. Donovan selected Denis Sadlier, Paddy Ryan, Paddy Clancy, two or three others and myself to accompany him to Killenaule, but as I had no bicycle he told me to go instead to Hayden's of Parson's Hill where some Volunteers were mobilised and to take them to Drangan where he and his party would rejoin me on their return from Killenaule. Donovan was of the impression that if Lieutenant Litchfield was shot in Killenaule the British military would carry out reprisals in his (Donovan's) native place of Drangan.

I was only a very short time at Hayden's when two Killenaule Volunteers arrived, bringing with them Paddy Ryan and Paddy Clancy, both of whom were wounded, and also the news

that Tommy Donovan was dead in the barracks in Killenaule, having been shot in the attack on Lieutenant Litchfield which had miscarried. For the moment Drangan was forgotten and I had to concentrate on getting a doctor for the two wounded men and to get them to a place of safety. The British military did not, however, make any attempt to carry out reprisals in Drangan that night.

Shortly after Tommy Donovan's death in Killenaule a battalion council meeting was held in Lismoyne at which I was elected to succeed him as Battalion Commandant. The other members of the battalion staff were:

Battalion Vice Commandant	-	Seán Hayes, Moyglass
" Adjutant	-	Tom Carroll, Drangan
" Quartermaster	-	Harry Bushe, Drangan.

The following seven companies comprised the battalion:

<u>Company</u>		<u>Company Captain</u>
"A"	- Drangan	Jack Brett, later Ml.St. John
"B"	- Ballingarry	Robt. Prout, later Jn. McGrath.
"C"	- Cloneen	Wm. Ahesey
"D"	- Killusty	Denis Meaney
"E"	- Moyglass	Jack Maher, later Dick Fleming
"F"	- Laffan's Bridge	Michael Corcoran
"G"	- Killenaule	William Murphy.

Raids by British forces on my home continued and on one occasion the raiders fired shots over my mother's head when she defied them and refused to give them any information about my whereabouts. The raiders invariably did considerable damage, such as tearing up flooring boards, breaking pictures and stealing any goods (including a gold watch) or eatables which took their fancy. I had a few narrow escapes. Once whilst chatting in a neighbour's cottage a youngster of tender years ran in from the door to his father, saying, "Daddy, who are those men coming in?".

They were British soldiers. I was armed with two revolvers at the time, but for fear of the consequences to my neighbour and his family I decided not to fire. There was no back door to the cottage, so I walked out the front door whistling nonchalantly, turned around the corner of the cottage and slipped quietly away. Why the soldiers did not try to stop me is a mystery, for as I left by the door I had a clear view of them as they must have had of me. Then again there was an occasion when I went home for a change of clothing and managed to get out of the house by a window at the back whilst a raiding party were coming in through the front door.

During my time as Commandant of the 7th Battalion three men were executed in my area as spies. They were George Stone of Killusty, Christopher Boyle of Drangan and George Lysaght of Kilburry, Cloneen. Stone was what we called an "emergency man", that is, he occupied and lived on a farm from which the lawful tenant had been evicted. He was constantly in the company of R.I.C. men and British military, and it was felt that he was giving them any information he could gather about Volunteer or column movements in his district. We did not arrest him, but in his absence he was tried by a court comprised of brigade and battalion officers and sentenced to death. The sentence was carried out a morning or two later. Either five or six of us kept his house under observation and when he left it early one morning we followed him along the road towards Fethard and shot him at the roadside. A label "Spies beware" was tied around his neck and his body was left at the spot where he was shot.

Like Stone, Boyle, too, was an "emergency man". He occupied a farm near Drangan and R.I.C. men and military

were in the habit of visiting him. At times they provided protection for him by remaining on or about his farm. We took Boyle into custody and held him a prisoner in various places for two or three days. He was tried by courtmartial but made no defence to the charge of spying for the enemy. He was executed by a firing party of three, who left the body with a label similar to that on Stone on the road at Claremore near Cloheen.

Lysaght's case was somewhat different. He was an extensive landowner - his estate has since been divided up into a number of farms by the Irish Land Commission. He was a very outspoken man, violently opposed to Sinn Féin and the I.R.A., and a friend of British Army officers and of the R.I.C. Like Stone, he was not taken a prisoner and I personally do not know what definite charge was against him or on what evidence the court of brigade and battalion officers who investigated his case ordered his execution. He was shot from long range on his lands at Kilburry.

Another incident which I recall as having taken place towards the end of 1920 was a raid for arms on the home of a Civil Bill officer named Hanley at Lanespark, Ballymonty. Hanley was anything but a civil customer and it was expected that he would shoot at sight. The local Volunteer company had orders to raid this house but they kept putting it off from time to time. Then one night after being present at a parade of this company I took four or five Volunteers with me and went to Hanley's house. Leaving two men on scout duty and taking another man with me, I knocked on the hall door and in reply to Hanley's question of "Who's there?" I answered "A friend". Opening the door he said: "Come in, friend", but he got a bad shock when he saw that I was armed.

I told him that I was an I.R.A. officer in search of arms, but he made no reply. A nephew of his named Sankey then came on the scene and asked me if I was going to shoot his uncle. I assured him that I had no intention of doing so, but that I wanted any arms and ammunition that were in the house. Sankey said "I will get them for you" and he produced about a dozen revolvers, shotguns and pistols of various types and several rounds of shotgun ammunition. Meanwhile, one of the men I had left outside fell into a sunken fence and broke his leg. We had to carry him as well as the booty with us, and that was no soft job.

I would like to record a peculiar incident which occurred one evening when a friend and myself spent some time in an unoccupied house about three miles from Cashel. The house was situated about 10 yards from the road and we were not very long there when six lorries of Black and Tans and an armoured car stopped at the gate entrance. I believe their halt was caused by the breakdown of one of the lorries, but during the hour, or hour and a half, they spent on the roadside they fired several hundred shots at and over the house. I was fully armed inside but did not reply to their fire. I had decided to try and escape by crawling out under cover of darkness, but when it got dark they turned the lights of a lorry straight on to the door of the house. I feared that my companion might become hysterical and cry out or make some sound. After about a further half-hour and having evidently completed the repairs to the lorry, the convoy again moved off. I believe the Black and Tans did intend to come into the house and made a few attempts to do so, but the gate, which was covered with barbed wire, was secured to its post by an unusual type of fastener and the knack of opening it did not occur to them.

Still in 1920, I received information that a party of military and R.I.C. from Ballingarry were in the habit of parading on Sunday evenings to Protestant service in a church at a place called "The Pallatines", otherwise known as "The War House". With a party of about 12 or 13 Volunteers I went there to ambush them. My idea was to attack them on their way back from the service on the road between the War House and Ballingarry. Our position was given away by some of the local people - most of the people of that area were pro-British in their ideas - and the military and R.I.C. returned to Ballingarry by a different route. When we discovered this I decided to have a crack at the barrack. It might, I thought, be possible to rush it by surprise. I was only about 50 yards from the barracks when two shots rang out and my hat was blown off my head. I knew that the shots were fired by some of my own men, so there was no alternative but to withdraw. After going some distance I stopped to investigate, but all of the men denied firing the shots. I then examined their guns and one man's shotgun smelled of smoke. On opening the breach I found it contained two empty cartridges. The man who owned the gun had lost his head so completely that he did not know he had fired the shots. We got away from that district without any further incident.

On Sunday evening, March 6th, 1921, I was present at a battalion council meeting which was held in an outhouse on a farm at Knockroe near Drangan. This outhouse was situated in an isolated spot on the brow of a hill, and at the back of the hill there was a deep ravine covered by gorse and shrubbery. The nearest road was about 200 yards away. As far as I can now recollect, there were twelve battalion and company officers present. I was armed with an automatic

revolver and I cannot say if any of the others were armed with short arms. I am sure none of the officers had rifles or shotguns.

The meeting lasted for about half an hour, and before it ended I sent out one man to scout around and he reported that all was clear. Five minutes later as we were breaking up I saw from the doorway some British soldiers who had arrived cross-country in extended order. At the time I saw them they were about to occupy a position behind a stone wall not more than 15 yards from the outhouse door. I fired one shot with my automatic and this had the effect of making the soldiers take cover for a few seconds at least. When I went to fire again I found that my automatic had jammed. Meanwhile, with one exception, those who were with me had got out of the outhouse, around to the back and headed for the cover of the furze and gorse in the ravine. The exception was Dick Fleming, Captain of the Moyglass Company. He seemed to hesitate and was killed almost beside me as I left the doorway by the first, or one of the first, volleys fired by the British soldiers. In addition to rifle and machine-gun fire, the British soldiers fired rifle grenades and two more of our men, Martin Clancy and Patrick Hackett, both of Drangan, were killed before they reached cover. A fourth man, Denis Croke of Laffan's Bridge, was wounded and captured, and my brother Maurice, who went to Croke's assistance when he fell wounded, was captured. Our casualties might have been higher still had I not seen two or three others going towards an open space which was under fire by the military. I attracted their attention by whistling and waved them back to the ravine. By using the cover provided in the ravine and later moving across country, we got away towards Cloneen and were given food and shelter at Smith's farmhouse at Carranville.

One of those who escaped with me from Knockroe was the late Denis Sadlier of Cloneen. Shortly afterwards he was appointed by the brigade as Commandant of the 5th (Clonmel) Battalion, and almost immediately after his appointment I was with him at Britton's farmhouse in Cloneen when he was accidentally killed. Denis Lacey's column had arrived in Cloneen that day and during Lacey's absence Sadlier and a member of the column engaged in "caffling" with rifles. The column man, unaware that there was a bullet in the breach of his rifle, pressed the trigger and Sadlier fell mortally wounded. The bullet entered his head just slightly above his mouth. He only survived for a few minutes, during which we said an Act of Contrition into his ear. An improvised coffin was made of any available boards or timber we could lay hands on, and we buried him at 2 a.m. next morning in the cemetery at Grange near Nine Mile House. After the truce his remains were disinterred and removed to his family's burial place in Drangan.

About June, 1921, when the Brigade Flying Columns were disbanded I attended a brigade council meeting which was held at Taloon between Rosegreen and New Inn. At this meeting it was decided to start active service units in battalions where they did not already exist. The personnel of the active service units were to be drawn from the disbanded members of the columns and from men "on the run". In my battalion area there were about 30 men "on the run", and from them I formed the Battalion Active Service Unit and appointed Joseph Farrell of Ballingarry to take charge of it. Farrell held no rank in the Volunteers but he was a steady sensible type of man whom I considered most suitable for the job. The truce on the 11th July, 1921, came before the

A.S.U. had an opportunity to prove its worth. During the brief period of its existence it was engaged in intensive training.

After the truce I took charge of the battalion training camp at Ballinard, and I also attended the divisional training camp at Galtee Castle near Mitchelstown.

I took no part in the Civil War.

Signed: Sean E. Walshe
(Sean E. Walshe)

Date: 6th March 1956

6th March, 1956.

Witness: J. Grace (J. Grace)
(Investigator).

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