

W. S. 1,380

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,380

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,380.....

Witness

Patrick Ryan,
Kerry Street,
Fethard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Captain 'B' Company 1st Battalion, 3rd
Tipperary Brigade, 1917-1921.

Subject.

Fethard Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Tipperary, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2712.....

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK RYAN,

Kerry St., Fethard, Co. Tipperary,

Captain 'B' Company, 1st Battn., 3rd Tipperary Brigade.

On a night in the early summer of 1917 I attended a meeting which was held in a place called Downey's Barn at Clamps Castle, Fethard. This meeting was called for the purpose of organising an Irish Volunteer company in Fethard and district, and, if I mistake not, the late Paddy Hogan of Cashel, afterwards Commandant of the 2nd Battalion, was one of those principally concerned in arranging the meeting. He was certainly present that night and was, as far as I can now remember, the principal speaker. The meeting itself was a small one, as for obvious reasons only a selected number of men were invited to attend. I should say, however, that there were about twenty men present, all of whom agreed to become members of the Volunteer organisation. In the election of officers which followed I was elected as Captain of the company, James Keating of Brookhill was elected ~~1st~~ Lieutenant, James Tierney of Fethard was elected Company Adjutant and Tommy Lee of Fethard was elected Company Quartermaster.

There was no activity of note at that time. After the company was formed weekly parades were held, generally at Downey's Barn, and training in foot drill was engaged in. This training was conducted by the company officers, but they themselves had then very little knowledge of it. Later the company officers attended training classes given by the late Seán Treacy at a farmer's place near Ballinure.

Towards the end of March, 1918, to be exact, on the night of the declaration of the poll in the famous Waterford by-election, Irish Party supporters in Fethard held a victory celebration and lit a tar barrel on the square. James Keating, a man named Casey, the late D.P. Walsh and myself interfered, took the tar barrel and rolled it away down the street. Two nights later my home was raided by the R.I.C. and I was taken into custody. That same night Keating, D.P. Walsh and Casey were also arrested. Next day we were tried at the local petty sessions court, being charged with illegal assembly. We refused to recognise the right of the court to try us, were found guilty and were sentenced to three months' imprisonment each.

We were taken to Waterford prison to serve our sentence. There were five or six other political prisoners in Waterford prison at the time of our arrival there, and with them we went on hunger-strike in support of a demand to be treated as political prisoners. After five days on hunger-strike we were transferred under an R.I.C. escort to Belfast prison to complete our sentence. There was no need to continue the hunger-strike, for in Belfast all political prisoners were being treated as such and a special wing of the prison had been set aside for their accommodation.

The conscription crisis was almost over when I returned to Fethard after my term in prison. During the absence of James Keating and myself Jerry Whelan and Tommy Lee kept the company together. Our biggest worry was to try and get some arms, for apart from a Webley revolver which had been given to me by the late D.P. Walsh the only arms available to the company were a few shotguns which were the private property of some of the members.

In 1919 D.P. Walsh was attached to the Quartermaster General's staff at G.H.Q. in Dublin. I paid a few visits to him there in an endeavour to secure some arms for the company. On one of these visits he gave me some carrier pigeons to bring back, saying that they could be used for carrying dispatches. On another occasion he invited me to go to Liverpool with him. On our first night in Liverpool we met in a licensed premises a sergeant of the British Army. D.P. appeared to know this sergeant well, and, I assume, had an appointment with him. The sergeant gave us two revolvers - a long Webley and a short Webley - for which D.P. paid him one pound each. The sergeant then made a further appointment to meet us again on the following night in another publichouse, the name of which was either Lennon's or Brennan's and, if I remember rightly, it was situated in Scotland Road. On this night the sergeant was accompanied by a fellow sergeant and between them they gave us four revolvers, and again D.P. paid for them at the rate of £1 each. We remained a week in Liverpool, but beyond the six revolvers we got no further arms on the trip. We packed the revolvers in a small box and experienced no difficulty in bringing them back to Dublin with us.

It was, I think, shortly after my return to Fethard following this trip to Liverpool that an incident occurred by which we secured four revolvers for the company and a motor car for the battalion headquarters. Our company was then 'B' Company of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade, and Jerome Davin of Rathsallagh was the Battalion Commandant. The late Senator William Quirke was then a member of my company. In a hotel in Fethard he overheard four strange R.I.C. men talking. They had a motor car outside and Quirke learned from their conversation that they were

going to Mullinahone. He came to me at once and suggested that we go to Downey's Cross and hold them up there. I was slow to consent as I thought we should consult the Battalion Commandant first. Quirke was impetuous and in his brisk manner said, "Come on, we will do it". So, having sent word to Tommy Lee to come to Downey's Cross as soon as possible, I went with him. We were both armed with revolvers. Downey's Cross was ideally situated for the job as there was a double sharp turn on the road and the car would naturally have to slow up there.

We had not long to wait for the arrival of the police. From behind two trees we called on them to halt and to put up their hands. To give them the impression that there was a large party of men present Quirke shouted in a loud voice "Right half company, present arms". The policemen made no attempt to resist but meekly put up their hands. At this point Tommy Lee arrived on the scene. On searching the policemen we got four revolvers, all of small calibre. We then marched the four R.I.C. across some fields and put them in a cowhouse and fastened the door by a bolt on the outside. Leaving Tommy Lee to remain on guard on them, Quirke and I drove the car to Rathsallagh House - the home of the Battalion Commandant - and left it there. Later that night Tommy Lee silently withdrew the bolt from the door of the cowhouse and came back to Fethard. Later still the four policemen returned to the town, and the military then came out in force and searched for the motor car but without success.

Early in 1920 the late Tommy Donovan of Drangan, then Commandant of the 7th Battalion, asked me to go on a stunt with himself and the late Michael Burke of Garrandine.

Burke was then an active Volunteer - later in that year he was one of those who took part in the famous prolonged hunger-strike in Cork prison - and both he and Donovan were then 'on the run'. Burke's family had been evicted from their place in Garrandine - it was then in the possession of an ex British officer named Captain Lindsey - and to protect the latter, two R.I.C. men patrolled the grounds at night. It was Donovan's idea that he, Burke and I should go to Garrandine and disarm the two R.I.C. men. We had no difficulty in doing this job. On the night we went there the police on duty were two elderly R.I.C. men and they handed over their Webley revolvers without any show of resistance. William Quirke (later Senator Quirke) was with us on this job.

Not long after this Donovan came to see me again and this time he asked me to bring a few men from the Fethard Company to Horan's Cross near Drangan, where he proposed to ambush a patrol of British military. William Quirke, Jack Myles, Dick Mackey and I from the Fethard Company went to Horan's Cross for this ambush, but we might as well have remained at home for although we waited all day no military patrol came that way on that particular day.

At this time (probably about the autumn of 1920) I was 'on the run' and spent practically all my time with Donovan and some others who were also 'on the run' in the 7th Battalion area. I remember Donovan telling us that he had orders from G.H.Q. to shoot a Lieutenant Litchfield of the British Army who was then stationed in Killenaule, and Donovan in turn gave us orders that if the opportunity ever came our way we were to shoot Litchfield at sight.

On a few occasions we went into Killenaule at night and patrolled the streets there but failed to see Lieutenant Litchfield.

Then on Sunday, 31st October, 1920, I was present at a meeting which was held at Kennedy's of Silverfort, about six miles from Killenaule, at which Donovan decided to take a party of us into Killenaule that night. His plan was to fire a few shots at the sentry who patrolled outside the barracks and in this way to lure Lieutenant Litchfield out of the barracks. Amongst those who cycled from Silverfort to Killenaule that night were Tommy Donovan (then, as I have said, Commandant of the 7th Battalion), Seán Hayes, Nicholas Moroney, the late Denis Sadlier, Harry Bushe, Patrick Clancy, Tommy Lee and myself. There were some others whose names I cannot now recall. We were all armed with revolvers. We halted at the creamery just outside Killenaule. Here some Killenaule Volunteers met us and reported that the sentry was on duty outside the barracks. Donovan then sent Patrick Clancy and I into the town to scout around and see if everything was quiet. While we were on this duty we saw two R.I.C. men leave the barracks and go down the street and into O'Connell's publichouse. The sentry was at that time still on duty outside the barracks. Donovan, who had followed us into the town, also ^{saw} the two R.I.C. men enter O'Connell's and he remarked to Clancy and I, "This makes it easier, we will capture the two policemen and hold them as hostages". He then sent Tommy Lee and another Volunteer to the rear of the premises with orders not to permit anyone to leave by the back door. Donovan, Clancy and I then went to the front door and knocked. There was some

delay about opening the door. In fact, we had to knock long and persistently before it was opened to us. There was no sign of the two policemen in the shop and a lady who was there said that they had left. We searched the office and tap-room but no sign of them. The lady in charge of the shop shouted and screamed that they had left, that they were not there. Donovan opened the back door and Tommy Lee, who was outside, assured him that no one had left by the back. We tried to calm the lady by telling her that we did not intend to shoot or harm the R.I.C. men, but to no avail. She became so violently hysterical that we abandoned our idea of searching the upstairs portion of the house for them. Returning to the street Donovan said, "We will carry out our original plan and fire at the sentry", but when we went towards the barracks we saw that the sentry had been withdrawn and the barrack door was then closed.

We moved down the street and when about 100 yards from the barracks stood for a few minutes while Donovan considered what our next move should be. What looked to us to be two very drunken British soldiers then came around a corner about 50 yards away from us. They had their arms around each other's shoulders and were singing "For he's a jolly good fellow". They staggered about the street and as they approached us Donovan remarked to me, "Will we hold them up?", and I replied, "What's the use? They are only two poor drunken soldiers". Donovan's remark were the last words he ever spoke, for when the two soldiers were about two yards from us they shed all signs of intoxication and fired point blank at us with revolvers which they had in their hands. They were, in fact, Lieutenant Litchfield himself and a sergeant of his unit.

Donovan was hit in the head by a shot, and as he fell he, too, fired and I saw the bullet from his gun break the surface of the road. I was hit by a bullet which entered my right leg just over the knee and emerged near the groin. Clancy was wounded in the arm and back. Both Clancy and I crawled to the opposite side of the street, where we were again fired at, but this time without effect. I next saw Litchfield and his companion catch Donovan by the legs and drag him to the barracks.

Harry Bushe and Nicholas Moroney came to the assistance of Clancy and myself. They put me up on a bicycle and, holding me on it - one at each side - they took me to a house some distance from the town. Clancy was able to walk; the wounds in his arm and back were not so serious as what was first feared. We were then taken in a pony and trap to Hayden's of Parson's Hill, near Drangan, where Dr. ~~Hayes~~^{Stokes} of Fethard attended to us both. It was dangerous to remain at Hayden's as this house was frequently raided, so, again in the pony and trap, we were brought to Tobin's of Knockkelly, where we remained for the night, and next day we were removed to Doran's of Slievenamon. After two or three days at Doran's it was learned that British military with bloodhounds were searching the countryside for wounded men and we were moved further afield to Cahill's of Grangemockler, where we remained for some nine or ten days. From Cahill's we were again taken by pony and trap to Donovan's of Castlejohn, near Callan. This latter house was situated in a nice quiet place, and a neighbouring nurse called each day to dress the wounds. Dr. Stokes of Fethard and Dr. Conlon of Mullinahone paid weekly visits to me while I was a patient at Donovan's.

It was some months before I was able to move about again and then the weakness of my leg prevented me from taking an active part with either the active service unit or with the flying column, so I returned to my own company area in Fethard. I was, of course, still on the run and could not return to my home.

One night in March, 1921, Tommy Lee, whom I have frequently referred to before, and I slept in the haybarn of Coffey's house near Fethard. About 11 a.m. next morning we went into the kitchen of the farmhouse for a meal and while we were there the house was surrounded by R.I.C. men and Black and Tans. The first intimation we had of their presence was when we saw some of them pass by the kitchen window. Lee was armed with a Lee Enfield rifle and a Webley revolver and I had two Webley revolvers. Lee fired through the window at the police, who then sought cover and fired a few shots back through the windows. An employee of the household, a Miss Nellie Walsh, directed us to a large window at the back, and after firing a few shots at the police, who were still under cover at the front, we left the house by this window. At the back of the house we saw one R.I.C. man who appeared to be busy righting his rifle which had jammed. We reached a field between the Rosegreen and Cashel roads and here we again came under fire from the police at the farmhouse. I could see that they were concentrating their fire on a gap in the field. I headed towards the Rosegreen road and reached it safely. For some reason known only to himself Tommy Lee went towards the Cashel road, and as he crossed a field he was shot dead by the fire of the police. I went on to the Battalion Commandant's (Jerome Davin's) house at Rathsallagh, near Rosegreen, and reported to him

what had happened. Of course, when I got to Rathsalagh I had no idea that Lee had been shot. That news arrived later in the afternoon.

With the exception of an attack on Lisronagh R.I.C. barracks which took place in June, 1921, I cannot recall any other incident with which I was connected and which is worthy of recording. This attack at Lisronagh was not a serious attempt to capture the barracks. It was hurriedly arranged, the idea being to draw British forces away from the Cloneen district where, it was thought, they were concentrating to attack Denis Lacey's flying column. Only seven men under the command of Jerome Davin, the Battalion Commandant, took part in it, and after sniping the barracks for half an hour or so we withdrew again to the Rosegreen district.

Signed:

Patrick Ryan
(Patrick Ryan)

Date:

23rd March 1956

23rd March 1956.

Witness:

J. Grace (J. Grace)
(Investigator).

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