

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,420

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT-NO. W.S. 1420.

Witness

Patrick Whelan,
Celtic Villa,
O'Connell Avenue,
Limerick.

Identity.

Brigade Engineer.

Subject.

Activities of Limerick Battalion, Irish
Volunteers, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2752.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK WHELAN,

Celtic Villa, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick.

I was born in the parish of St. Johns in Limerick City on the 1st February, 1890. I attended the local national school until I was 13 years of age.

My father, who was a Dublin man, was intimately associated with the Fenian and Invincible organisations in Dublin. For his activities in these organisations he was compelled to leave jobs in Dublin, England and Scotland, and eventually settled in Limerick City where he got a job as engine fitter with the then Great Southern and Western Railway Company. In Limerick he immediately entered public life by being elected a member of the County Borough Council of Limerick as a Labour representative. He was immediately disqualified from acting as a member, due to the fact that he was not a ratepayer. A short time later, however, when the Local Government Act was amended which enabled him and others in his position to have a say in local affairs, he was again elected and remained a member for 15 years. Around this time he became intimately associated with John Daly, a Fenian leader who had spent some time in Portland Prison for his activities in the cause of Irish freedom.

During this period I often heard my father speak of Ireland's freedom and the Republican movement. Visitors to our house, apart from John Daly, included John Crowe, Patrick Hynes and others, all of them Fenians. It was in 1911 that this group of Fenians opened the Wolfe Tone Club, which they controlled. Among the first members were Liam Forde, Liam Barton, Alphonsus Blake, Joe Halpin, Garry

Hanlon, Dan Burke, George Clancy, Seán Heuston, Michael Brennan of Co. Clare, and my father. Subscriptions were collected for the purchase of rifles, and at least six .22 rifles were bought from the proceeds to teach members the use and practice of handling arms. Our club retained one of these; the rest were distributed to I.R.B. centres in the city. In the summer of this year we had a visit from Countess Markievicz, who arrived to organise the first slough of the Fianna in Limerick. Among those at its formation were Seán Heuston, James McCarthy, Joe Dalton and myself. All the younger members of the Wolfe Tone Club became members of the Fianna.

We started off drilling and parading, and after a while my father, James Leddin and a few others organised a public subscription, with which we built a hall on a plot of ground which was given to us by John Daly and was situated at the back of his house in Barrington St. When completed it was officially opened with an inaugural lecture by Bulmer Hobson in the year 1912. At that time constant visitors to the hall were Seán McDermott, Tom Clarke and Seán Ó Murthuile. We kept up our drilling and parading and provided lectures for the boys. Our strength was between sixty and eighty members.

Around this time I was approached by Seán Heuston as to my attitude to a secret society. We discussed it at length and I agreed to join the I.R.B. An appointment was made for the Gaelic League hall, where I was sworn in a member by George Clancy, who was later murdered by Crown forces while Mayor of Limerick. Among the members of my circle were Alphonsus J. O'Halloran, Edward Fitzgibbon and Seán Heuston, as well as George Clancy. My father was head centre

of Limerick City area. At a subsequent meeting we happened to meet. It was the first time I knew that he was a member.

Soon after the opening of the hall, a local priest made an attack on the Fianna boys from the altar and accused their parents of allowing their children to imitate the Baden Powell Boy Scouts. I was secretary of the Fianna and, on the instructions of the committee, I wrote to the priest and asked for an interview, which was granted. I was not able to attend this interview, but a deputation which consisted of my father, James Leddin and Seán Heuston met the priest, who apologised and explained that he did not intend to make any attack on the Fianna but that the boys did not attend to serve Mass on Sunday mornings and requested the deputation to put that matter right. We kept up our parading, drilling and lectures all through 1912 and 1913.

In 1913, the Wolfe Tone Club, in conjunction with the Ancient Order of Hibernians, I.R.B., Fianna, and Trades and Labour Council, held a public meeting in the Town Hall, Limerick, and formed a provisional committee, of which I became a member, to organise a regiment of Volunteers in the city. Shortly after, a public meeting was held in the Athenaeum Hall, Upper Cecil St. The hall was packed for the occasion. I acted as steward at the meeting, which was attended by most of the prominent people of the city, including Michael O'Callaghan - who afterwards became Mayor and was (like George Clancy) murdered by Crown forces - prominent businessmen and members of the medical profession. The meeting was addressed by P.H. Pearse, who appealed to the men present to join the Volunteers. Later in the Haymarket most of the men who had been at the meeting assembled and

joined the Volunteers. When they had all lined up, they were divided into different groups corresponding to the different parishes in the city. Men with drill experience were asked to step out of the ranks, and a number of British ex soldiers stepped out and volunteered to drill the companies in the different parishes. Officers were elected for each company, which met during the week for drill. On Sundays, all companies joined together for route marches. Later at a meeting of all Volunteers in the city, an ex British service man named J.J. Holland was appointed O/C of the battalion and a man named Close became Adjutant. We continued to drill and parade up to the famous speech by John Redmond, M.P., at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow.

After Redmond's speech a special Volunteer parade was called to decide on the attitude of the Volunteers following Redmond's offer. Those of us in the I.R.B. received certain instructions from headquarters as to our attitude at this parade. When the parade was held, the officers and men were addressed by a Mr. O'Connor, who was known locally as Boston, Mass., O'Connor, an Irishman who had come home from Boston to organise the Hibernians. After the address by O'Connor the vast majority of the Volunteers took Redmond's side, being content to be led by him. About three hundred members, however, did not agree with Redmond's policy of joining the British army first and waiting for the freedom of this country until the war was over, so they came together and formed a separate battalion, or regiment as it was called. The three hundred worked out at an average of fifty Volunteers to each of the five parishes in the city. An election for new officers took place. James Leddin, because of his age, became Honorary Colonel of the Regiment; Michael Colivet, Colonel

or Battalion O/C; George Clancy, Adjutant; John Grant, Battalion Engineer. Officers in the five companies which were formed included Captains James McInerney, Alphonsus Kivlehan, Ned O'Toole and Patrick Walsh; Lieutenants Liam Forde, John Cashin, James Gubbins, Rafe Slattery, A.J. O'Halloran, Jim O'Donnell, Patrick Whelan, Stephen Dineen, James Connaughton, ~~James Fitzpatrick~~, Tom Piggott, Joseph McKeown. There were others whom I cannot remember.

We lost no time but continued to drill and parade as usual and purchased arms from British soldiers stationed in the different barracks around the city from time to time. We had recruiting parades to outside areas throughout the year. The Fianna Hall was used by the different companies during the week for drill. On Sundays a general mobilisation took place. Later, with the acquisition of some revolvers and rifles, each company in turn had practice in the use of the rifle and revolver in the hall. Engineering classes were started and conducted throughout the year 1915 by Captains Jim O'Donnell, John Grant and myself.

On Whit Sunday, 1915, a great parade of Volunteers was held in Limerick. Special excursion trains were run from Dublin and other centres which carried contingents from Dublin City, Counties Cork, Clare, Tipperary, Limerick and other centres. The Dublin men were under the command of P.H. Pearse; the Co. Cork men in charge of Terence MacSwiney and Thomas McCurtain; the Clare men in charge of Michael Brennan; the Limerick men in charge of Tadhg Crowley. Other prominent men in Limerick that day included Thomas McDonagh, Ned Daly, Paddy and Austin Brennan, brothers of Michael Brennan, Liam Mellows and Con Colbert. The Dublin

men carried rifles which had been landed at Howth some time previous. As the great parade proceeded through the city streets, down High St., through Mungret St., a man appeared at a window and shouted British slogans at us. As he did so, "separation" women opened fire on us with stones, bricks or anything they could lay their hands on. When the parade was over, the Volunteers were dismissed for lunch. Several groups on their way to lunch were violently attacked by the howling mob, many of them being severely handled and isolated. Later, armed Volunteers were sent out from the hall in Barrington St. to rescue those who were isolated, and it was with great difficulty the visiting Volunteers managed to reach their trains in the evening. As the visitors 'fell in' to march to their trains, the mob became more violent and several attempts were made to disarm them. A cordon of R.I.C. were lined up on each side of the approaches to the railway station. The situation was nearly out of hand when the Rev. Fr. Mangan, C.S.S.R., appealed to the mob to disperse and go home. It had the desired effect. The mob calmed down for a while, which enabled the visitors to reach their trains. As the local Volunteers were returning from the station after seeing the visitors off, they had to carry their rifles at the ready to protect themselves. We continued to drill to the end of the year. Monteith, who had been ordered to leave Dublin by the authorities, was residing in Hartstronge St.. He left for the United States during the year.

Routine drilling, lectures, rifle and revolver practice were kept up in the early part of 1916. On Thursday night of Holy Week the officers of the battalion were requested to remain behind after a general parade.

They were addressed by a man named Fitzgibbon who had arrived earlier from G.H.Q. In the course of his address he said the hour we were all waiting for had come, and informed us that a cargo of rifles and machine-guns was arriving from Germany with men to man the machine-guns. After the short address, arrangements were made and duties allocated to the battalion, which was known as the Limerick City Regiment. The duty of the City Regiment was to march to Newcastlewest to collect the rifles there from the Kerry Brigade, who were to take them off the arms ship from Germany. After collecting the rifles we were to work our way to Galway. All officers present were then dismissed, with instructions to be on parade on Easter Sunday morning.

I went to work as usual on Good Friday. When I was leaving my job at 6 p.m. I made arrangements for my tools to be collected by a fellow worker if I was not back on the following Monday. I left home on the following Saturday morning. As I was passing No. 1 Mount Pleasant Avenue, a Miss O'Sullivan, who had a boarding house there, called me and told me that a telegraphist who was staying with her had asked her to tell me that he had seen a message in the post office which stated that a party of Volunteers had been disarmed in Co. Kerry by the R.I.C. I proceeded at once to John Daly's house in Barrington St. John Daly, Seán Ó Murthuile, Michael Colivet and George Clancy were there. I gave them the information I had received. Seán Ó Murthuile handed me 30/- and ordered me to take the next train to Tralee and get in touch with Austin Stack or Con Collins, whom I had never met before.

I took the next train to Tralee. On the journey several people got on the train. The whole topic of

conversation was the arrest in Tralee. One woman remarked that one of the arrested men was a tall man with a beard. At some portion of the journey a member of my I.R.B. circle, Gearóid Leahy, and his brother-in-law, a Mr. Griffin, who was then editor of the "Kerry Sentinel", got on the train. We discussed the rumours of arrests but could come to no conclusion on the matter. Before I arrived at Tralee station I had heard that Austin Stack and Con Collins had been arrested. When I got off the train, Mr. Leahy and Mr. Griffin directed me to a Fr. Breen and piloted me to the church. Fr. Breen was hearing Confessions at the time. I knocked at the Confession box and asked him to come out as I wanted to speak to him. He came out immediately. I told him my mission. We stood outside the church door chatting. After a while a man came and called him. Fr. Breen introduced me to the man, who was Patrick Cahill, Vice O/C of the Kerry Brigade. Fr. Breen and Patrick Cahill had a conversation and after a while they directed me to Nicholas Stack's house. Nicholas was a brother of Austin. Fr. Breen or Patrick Cahill gave me no information. In Stack's I got some tea and was directed back to the station.

On the way back to Limerick I got into conversation with a gentleman who sat opposite me. He told me it was true that Roger Casement had been captured and that the arms ship had been sunk. When we arrived at Limerick Station he told me his name was James O'Keefe, clerk of the Limerick Steamship Company at Fenit, Co. Kerry, a short distance from Tralee. His brother was a member of my company. I proceeded to the Fianna Hall, met Ó Murthuile, Leddin, Colivet and Clancy and gave them all the information I had picked up. I pointed out that it was all gossip, that it was not official, and gave the source of my information.

Michael Colivet told me that Mr. Fitzgibbon had gone to Dublin and had promised to send word of what was happening there. He also told me that he had sent Liam Forde to Dublin to find out what was happening. He later sent Jim Gubbins. On the same Saturday evening Colivet instructed me to be on parade at John Daly's house in civvies after first Mass on Sunday morning. He had appointed James McInerney officer in charge of the Newcastlewest Volunteers. I was appointed Vice O/C of the same battalion in preparation for the fight, if there was to be one. Leddin, Colivet, Clancy, Ó Murthuile and I then proceeded to the Jesuit Church at the Crescent, Limerick, where the five of us went to Confession that Saturday night.

On Easter Sunday morning I attended first Mass at 7 a.m. at the same church. After my breakfast I went to Daly's house in Barrington St. A number of battalion officers were there, as well as the sisters Madge, Agnes, Carrie and Nora Daly, nieces of John Daly. As I rang the bell for admission, I noticed a taxi in the street outside the door. When I was inside, one of the Miss Dalys called me and introduced me to The O'Rahilly, who then handed me Eoin McNeill's countermanding order, with instructions to proceed to Tralee and hand it over to Patrick Cahill, Vice O/C of Kerry Brigade, and to instruct him to have several copies of it made there and distributed to all outlying districts of Co. Kerry. By this time the room was full of Volunteer officers. Among them were Ó Murthuile, Leddin, Colivet, Jim O'Donnell, John Grant and James McInerney, all in full uniform. A general discussion was in progress at the time. Colivet informed me before I left for Tralee that in spite of the countermanding he was going to carry out the parade to Killonan as arranged. James McInerney

and I left the room and proceeded to the railway station, I on my way to Tralee, and James McInerney to keep his appointment with the Newcastlewest Battalion.

When we arrived at the station we found that James McInerney's father and brother, Michael, were there and were going to Tralee also, in connection with the arrest of another brother, Lieutenant Thomas McInerney, who had escaped when the motor car he was driving went over the pier at Killorglin, Co. Kerry, drowning two of his comrades named Keating and Sheehan. The accident happened on Holy Thursday. They had been sent by G.H.Q. to contact the arms ship which was expected to arrive off the south coast of Co. Kerry. Neither the father nor brother, Michael, were sympathetic towards the movement. James McInerney said good-bye to me at Newcastlewest station and I proceeded to Tralee. When I arrived there I was directed to the Rink, the headquarters of Kerry Brigade, and was admitted. As I entered the hall I saw the man to whom Fr. Breen had introduced me previously. It was Paddy Cahill. As he approached me he said, "I have a great friend of yours here and I want you to meet him". I replied, "We have no time for that. Here is a countermanding order from Eoin McNeill. You must have it copied at once and sent to all outlying districts". I raised my eyes and saw Captain Monteith approaching with his arm in a sling. I shook hands with him and said, "Great God, Monty, what are you doing here?". He made some reply and Cahill showed him McNeill's countermanding order. Cahill then left us to carry out my instructions. Monty took me to a quiet corner of the room, where we discussed the situation. He gave me a rough outline of what had happened, stating that the Germans wanted cheap Irish blood and were interested only in so

far as the Irish caused some diversion or upset the English war machine at the time. He also said that the rifles which were aboard the sunken boat were not of much use and that they were rifles which had been captured off the Russians. There were no machine-guns or men to man such. He told me to tell Colivet when I got back to Limerick to bluff his way through as best he could. He also stated that the Germans had an extraordinary idea of the position in Ireland and were under the impression that if about a dozen machine-guns were placed in strategic positions in Ireland we would be able to sweep the British out of Ireland. At this stage on Easter Sunday evening there was great activity in the Rink. Volunteers were coming and going. It was decided to do something to get Monteith away. It was obvious that the R.I.C. were looking for him, although they did not know who he was. After a while a company of Volunteers were lined up in the hall. Monteith borrowed a Volunteer cap, and after a little practice in marching around the hall he left with the company and marched away with them.

There were no trains running that night, so it was decided that I should stay in the Rink for the night. Cahill brought me to the church to see Fr. Breen, who was giving Benediction at the time. I was shown into the sacristy to wait for him. When the service was over, he came to me and we had a long chat. He stated that the Volunteers had complete possession of the town of Tralee the previous night - Saturday - and that a number of them wanted to attack the R.I.C. barracks to rescue Stack and Collins. Wiser counsels prevailed and the attempt did not take place. After our chat I returned to the Rink. A number of Volunteers were still there, and as things had quietened down somewhat we bedded down for the night.

Next morning, Easter Monday, I went to the station and had just got into a carriage when a man approached me to know what was my name. I asked him who he was and he replied, "Detective Nazor of the R.I.C.", saying he had seen me coming off the train the day before and was wondering why I was going back so early in the morning. I replied that I was a solicitor from Limerick who had come to Tralee in connection with the McInerney case. He said that he saw me coming off the train with McInerney's father and brother. I replied that I wanted to have a game of golf in Limerick and that no other train would suit me. There was one other man in the carriage with me, a Mr. Coffey, a cinema proprietor in Limerick, who immediately vouched for me. The detective said good morning, so we proceeded on our way to Limerick. At the time I had a German automatic pistol in my pocket. When I arrived in Limerick I went to my home, had my breakfast and a brush up and proceeded alone on foot to Killonan. When I arrived there I was directed to the railway station, where I again met the officers, Ó Murthuile, Clancy, Leddin and Colivet, and told them of my experiences in Tralee and everything that had taken place. A discussion ensued as to what action we should take about Monteith, Colivet suggesting the forming up of the battalion to march to Tralee to find Monteith.

Before a final decision was reached on the matter, Miss Agnes Daly arrived on an outside car and handed Colivet a dispatch which had been opened and which read: "We started at noon to-day, carry out your orders. Signed P.H. Pearse". This changed the whole situation. A meeting of all officers present was called, at which a

decision was taken to march back to Limerick with bayonets fixed and in extended formation. We arrived in Limerick in the evening. The battalion, which numbered seventy or eighty men, were dismissed, with instructions to each man to hold himself ready for call if any definite instructions were received. I should point out here that our original orders to proceed to Newcastlewest had by this time no effect, as the rifles were by now at the bottom of the sea.

During that week there were numerous meetings of the Battalion Council, but no definite decision or action took place. In the following week, after the surrender in Dublin and following an ultimatum by Colonel Weldon, O/C British troops in Limerick, to hand over our rifles, it was finally decided to surrender our arms. After this decision the Volunteers went to the Town Hall in groups, where they handed over their rifles to the Mayor, Stephen Quinn. After this, things were in abeyance for a while. About a fortnight later, all officers of the battalion, except one, were arrested and detained for a week, after which we were all released. After this, we, the officers and men, met occasionally in the Fianna hall. About October, 1916, the battalion was reformed and parades took place in the respective company areas without uniform or equipment. The first general mobilisation and parade of the battalion after Easter Week took place on the occasion of the anniversary of the execution of the Manchester Martyrs on the last Sunday of November, 1916. As we were approaching Upper William St., we were halted by the R.I.C. and ordered to disband. We refused. A baton charge ensued and we dispersed. From then to the end of the year the companies continued to parade and drill in their own areas.

Early in 1917 , a second battalion was formed in Limerick City. Dissatisfied members of the existing battalion, on the inspiration of Ernest Blythe, Peadar McMahon, Seán Ó Murthuile and other Volunteer organisers, were responsible for the split. Among the members of the original battalion who joined the 2nd or newly formed Battalion were Michael Hartney, John McSweeney, Arthur Johnson, Peadar Dunne (who had fought in Dublin in 1916), Alphonsus O'Halloran and Martin Barry. Peadar Dunne became O/C of the 2nd Battalion; Peadar McMahon, Vice O/C; a Robert Byrne became Adjutant, and Martin Barry, Q/M. In each company area new company officers were appointed, but in the most of these areas the old Volunteers remained loyal to the original battalion and its officers.

We continued to work independently of one another and often met in the streets of Limerick on parades or route marches, passing the usual salute to one another, such as eyes right or left, as the case may be, as we passed. This situation continued up to about the month of March, 1918, when an effort was made locally to amalgamate the two battalions. We agreed on all points except the appointment of an Adjutant for the amalgamated battalion. The candidates proposed for this post were George Clancy of the 1st Battalion, later Mayor and murdered by Crown forces, and Joseph O'Brien of the 2nd Battalion. Each man obtained the same number of votes. The meeting ended in a deadlock. When a report of the proceedings was sent to G.H.Q., Dick Mulcahy was sent to Limerick, where he met and addressed each company of the original battalion in turn. Each was unanimous in its decision not to function under any Battalion Adjutant other than George Clancy. Mulcahy returned to Dublin and furnished his report to G.H.Q.

On receipt of Mulcahy's report, H.Q. immediately suspended each of the five companies, together with all battalion officers of the original battalion. At various periods in 1917, 1918 and 1919 several of these officers were arrested, but the battalion continued to function, carrying out routine parades and drilling as usual and ignoring the suspension order of G.H.Q. This state of affairs continued until January, 1920, when a number of the 1st and 2nd Battalion officers were arrested and sent to Wormwood Scrubbs. I was one of these officers, and was not released until May of the same year. I returned to Limerick and was re-employed by Michael O'Callaghan as engineer in his tannery in Limerick. He was Mayor of Limerick at the time. Shortly after, I was appointed a District Justice in the local Sinn Féin Court and acted in that capacity in several cases.

About this time Mayor O'Callaghan approached me with a view to having a reconciliation reached between the two battalions, stating that he had been informed that some of the officers of the 2nd Battalion were anxious to have matters fixed up. Before anything practical had been arranged, a number of officers of both battalions, including myself, were re-arrested. It was the month of October, 1920. I was taken to the County Jail, where I was detained for the remainder of that month, the month of November and up to the 26th December. On the 26th December I was taken from the County Jail and lodged in the detention cells of the new barracks (now Sarsfield Barracks). When I got there I was informed that I was No. 1 official hostage. From then to my release on the 23rd February I was taken around the city and country as hostage in the military and Black and Tan lorries. My release was on compassionate grounds,

due to the death of my father and mother-in-law in the same week.

About a month after the murder of Mayor O'Callaghan and ex Mayor George Clancy on the 7th March, 1921, a joint meeting of the two battalions took place in the Catholic Commercial Club in Barrington St., when the following battalion officers were agreed to by both battalions: David Dundon, Battalion O/C, P. Walsh, Vice O/C, John Quilligan, Adjutant, James Keane, Q/M, and Liam O'Sullivan, I/O.

Due to arrests and the fact that a number of the Brigade Staff were "on the run", a reshuffle of the Brigade Staff took place about the same time. Liam Forde became Brigade O/C; Owen O'Brien, Brigade Vice O/C; Patrick Barry, Adjutant; Seán Hurley, Q/M; Patrick Hegarty, I/O; Robert de Courcy, John Grant and myself engineers to the Brigade Staff, while Seán Carroll was appointed in charge of communications.

A short while after the unification of the city battalion, the Brigade Staff, at the request of Austin Brennan, O/C of a County Clare Column, ordered the destruction of Latoon Bridge over the Latoon river on the main road between Limerick and Ennis. With the help of the local company, Robert de Courcy and I blew up the bridge on the 5th May, 1921, under the protection of Austin Brennan and his column. We used gelignite for the job. On the following Saturday night John Grant and Robert de Courcy blew up Bunratty Bridge, a short distance outside Limerick on the Ennis road. They were assisted by Paddy Barry, Q/M, and members of the Mid Limerick Brigade. On the Saturday night following, de Courcy and I blew up

Annacotty Bridge on the main road to Dublin, assisted by the local company, while Seán Carroll and his column did outpost duty for us. In between those activities I continued to carry out my duties as District Justice in the court.

Robert de Courcy had by this time invented a big gun for the purpose of firing high explosive missiles at enemy barracks or military lorries. John Grant and I helped in the construction of the gun. When it was completed and ready for trial, it was taken to Killonan. Dick Mulcahy, Cathal Brugha, John Grant, Peadar Dunne, de Courcy and I were present when the gun was fired. It exploded, and a bit of metal struck Peadar Dunne in the jaw, breaking his teeth. He was lucky he was not killed. The gun was made here and there, some of the parts at Limerick Power Station by John Grant, and assembled in the Fianna hall, where Jim O'Donnell, John Grant, myself and others repaired small arms and equipment throughout the period.

Signed: Patrick WhelanDate: 18th May 1956Witness: John J. Daly

(Investigator)

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