

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1452

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1452.

Witness

Thomas Moynihan,
24, Clarke Avenue,
Janesboro',
Limerick.

Identity.

Volunteer.

Subject.

Activities of Ahane Company, 3rd Battalion,
Mid Limerick Brigade, 1917-1921, and of
Flying Column, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2785.

Form B.S.M. 2

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No. W.S. 1.452

STATEMENT BY THOMAS MOYNIHAN

24 Clarke Avenue, Janesboro', Limerick.

I was born in the parish of Ahane, townland of Clyduff, Lisnagry, Co. Limerick, in the year 1898. I went to Ahane National School until I was 15 years of age. I then went to the Christian Brothers Schools, Sexton St., Limerick, for a further two and a half years. After leaving school I worked on my father's farm with my brothers up to the age of 21 years when I got the position of Assistant Creamery Manager in Annacotty Co-Operative Creamery.

In 1915 I joined the Killonan Company of Volunteers as there was no company in Ahane at the time. The reason I became interested in the Volunteers was due to the fact that I often heard my mother (R.I.P.) saying that her parents were evicted from their farm in New Ross, Newport, Co. Tipperary. She told me of an uncle of mine who often attended Newport cattle fair where, after a few drinks, the first thing he would do was to beat up the R.I.C. I often ^{heard it} said it would take four R.I.C. to arrest him on those occasions, he was so strong.

From 1915 to 1917, while I was attached to Killonan Company we had drill and field exercises nearly every Sunday and, occasionally, on week evenings. The company was 40 or 50 strong. David Hennessy was company captain and William Fitzgerald was lieutenant. We drilled with dummy rifles of which we had about fifteen. We also had about six Martini rifles and about three .22 miniature rifles. Four or five weeks before Easter Week, 1916, we collected all the shotguns in the area. On Saturday night of Holy Week we had a general mobilisation of the company when we got orders from the company captain to mobilise again next morning - Easter Sunday - at 9 a.m. with rations for two days. When we mobilised next morning, we were told to proceed to Castleconnell for a general mobilisation of the battalion.

We proceeded to Castleconnell by bike or pony-trap and met the other companies attached to the battalion there. Patrick Ryan of Doon was officer commanding. Jack Keane of Gardenhill, Castleconnell, Sean Carroll, Castleconnell and Dave Hennessy, Killonan, were the other officers in charge that day. We drilled that day, Easter Sunday, while awaiting orders from H.Q. to attack the local R.I.C. barracks at O'Brien's Bridge, after which we were to proceed to Limerick City by way of Clonlara, Co. Clare; but no orders came during the day, so it was called off. Our company returned to Killonan that night. We were standing-to all that week awaiting orders which never came. Following the surrender in Dublin, most of the companies in the area surrendered their arms to the R.I.C., but Killonan surrendered no arms.

I continued a member of Killonan Company until a company was formed in Ahane in 1917. Our first company captain was John Kelly of Brook St., Lisnagry. Owen O'Brien became 1st Lieutenant and John Vaughan, 2nd Lieutenant. I then left Killonan Company and joined my own parish company - Ahane. From 1917 to 1919 we had field drill and miniature rifle practice nearly every Sunday and, occasionally, on week evenings. During the conscription period of early 1918 drilling was intensified. At the end of the same year, with other Volunteers, I took part in the General Election campaign in support of Sinn Fein candidate, Dr. Hayes, who opposed Thomas Lundon.

At the latter end of 1919 or early 1920, the battalion O/C., Sean Carroll, received orders from H.Q. to attack police barracks in our battalion area. We had two such in the area; one at Murroe and one at Castleconnell. Having regard to our small supply of arms and ammunition, it was decided to attack Murroe as it was regarded as the most vulnerable.

Plans for the attack were made at a meeting of the battalion staff presided over by Sean Carroll, after which the attack took place. It had been decided to use a home-made mine to blow in the gable end of the barracks. The mine was made at the Co-operative Dairy Society's premises at Annacotty by Owen O'Brien, John Kelly and myself from the wheel box of a cart packed with gelignite, with detonator attached to a length of electric wire. While we were on the job one day the R.I.C. called for butter, but did not see what we were doing.

When all was ready, selected men from each company in the battalion, to the number of 20, armed with a few rifles and shotguns, took up positions around the building. Bill Wall, whose job it was to explode the mine in the first place, with the help of other Volunteers placed the mine in position, took cover and pressed the plunger. The mine exploded, but did little or no damage to the wall. In the meantime, Sean Carroll, who was in charge, gave the order to open fire. We poured rifle and shotgun fire at the windows and doors for some time. The garrison returned our fire, at the same time sending up a number of Verey lights through the chimney. We called on them to surrender, but their reply was a burst of rifle fire. After some time we decided to withdraw. Apart from the men in the actual attack, a further ten men were on either outpost or signalling duty armed with shotguns. All roads in the area had been blocked prior to the attack.

Following the burning of Newport Creamery in Co. Tipperary and other industrial concerns throughout the country, the owners of the creamery at Annacotty became alarmed and asked for the help of the I.R.A. to protect it from destruction by the enemy. The battalion staff ordered a guard to be placed on the buildings during the night. For several weeks, with

other I.R.A. men, I took turns on this guard duty. By this time my position as an employee of the creamery became impossible, due to constant raids on my home by the R.I.C. to effect my arrest, so I had to give up my job and from then onwards devoted all my time to I.R.A. activities.

After leaving my job, one of the first attempts by Sean Carroll to ambush the R.I.C. was planned on two policemen who as a rule left their barracks at Murroe a couple of days a week and proceeded to Limerick City by way of Ballyvarra and returned by the same route. With Sean Carroll in charge, about six of us took up a position behind a fence one day and awaited their return from Limerick. After waiting some time for them to return, we withdrew. We heard later that they returned by Boher. A short time later, we received information that a van carrying Tans and R.I.C. usually travelled from Newport, Co. Tipperary, to Limerick about once a week. It was decided to ambush the party at Houley's Cross. Having taken up ambush positions, once again in charge of Sean Carroll, we waited for a considerable time, but no van turned up. Once more we were disappointed. Our next attempt at an ambush was at Ballinacourtney, near Castleconnell. In this case we had been informed that a District Inspector of the R.I.C. was to be entertained to dinner one day by Sir Stephen Quinn. On this particular day, we again waited in ambush. When the dinner was over, a motor car which had been observed to leave Quinn's residence was attacked by our party; one occupant in the car was wounded and the car put out of action. The wounded man turned out to be a man named Tidmarch. The D.I. was not in the car, but had returned to Limerick by a different route from that in which he came to dinner. The man Tidmarch had been mistaken for the D.I. Eight members of the I.R.A. took part in this attack.

Some time later, under the direction of Sean Carroll, we burned down Mount Shannon Mansion and a very big house, the property of Lord Massey, as well as three police barracks at Castleconnell, Ballysimon and Murroe, which had been vacated by them. We had heard that those buildings were about to be occupied by military as blockhouses. Shortly after, we held up the mail train to Dublin at Killonan and seized the mails and took them down the Mulcair river by boat to Annacotty, where they were censored and later returned to the Post Office. We found no evidence of a leakage of information to the enemy by the civil population.

In the month of August 1920, another ambush had been planned for Sheehan's Cross at Ballinagarde, Co. Limerick. The details had been worked out by the brigade and battalion staffs. About eight of us, under Sean Carroll, O/C. 3rd Battalion, met Commandant Dick O'Connell and his column at the site selected. With about five other I.R.A. men I was allocated a position in a field overlooking the road which was 10 to 15 feet over the road. We dug a trench about eight yards long, placing the excavated earth and grass sods in front of us. It made a grand position for an ambush. Dick O'Connell placed the rest of the men in extended formation to our right and left. He placed a further section on the other side of the road. Four men had been ordered by O'Connell to push a haycart with long poles attached from a nearby farmyard on to the road so as to block the passage of the expected enemy lorries at a given signal. We were armed with shotguns and rifles. After waiting for some time, we got the signal that one enemy lorry was approaching. The four men whose job it was to push the cart out on the road failed to do so due to the fact that a man and woman in a horse trap were allowed into the ambush position and our four men did not

want them to be caught in the cross fire. We had to let the lorry pass. It was heartbreaking, as we had them at our mercy. The military must have observed some of our men in position for the area was surrounded a couple of hours later, but we had then left for our own company areas where our scouts had been watching out for our return.

Around this time, General Lucas, who had been captured some time earlier in Co. Cork, was transferred to our battalion area from, I think, Commandant Michael Brennan's brigade area in Co. Clare. We had him a prisoner for about three weeks or so, in a very lonely place on the banks of the River Shannon, in the house of a man named Jack Hartigan. I acted as a member of his guard many times. He was very fond of fishing, so we took him out every day and night. He had a very nice time with us. He was later transferred to Abington under the charge of John Ryan, known as John Ryan "Thread". As well as I can remember, he was afterwards transferred to an area in Co. Tipperary where he escaped.

I think it was a month or so after our attempted ambush at Sheehan's Cross, Ballinagarde, that the North Tipperary Column decided to ambush an enemy patrol near Ballywillan, Co. Tipperary, and requested the assistance of members of the Mid Limerick Brigade for the occasion. Sean Carroll, George Lee and myself were staying at the farmhouse of a man named Purcell of Highpark, Caherconlish, at the time. Sean Carroll received a dispatch to meet Dick O'Connell and Liam Forde at Ballywillan the following night. We left Purcell's and the three of us proceeded to my home where we stayed the night. Next day, Sean Carroll left about 3 p.m. to meet the Battalion I.O., Tommy Herbert of Ballymount, and arranged to meet us that night at 8 p.m. at Tom Coffey's of Ballymount, Lisnagry,

when the three of us were to proceed to Ballywilliam for the ambush. As George Lee and I were on our way to Coffey's with Sean Carroll's rifle and kit in addition to our own, I jumped on a stone while crossing a ditch and sprained my ankle. Lee took me to a farmer's house owned by a man named Joe McGrath of Dromenboy, Lisnagry, who drove me home that night while it was dark. It was three or four weeks before I could walk. Sean Carroll and George Lee proceeded to meet Liam Forde and Dick O'Connell. I heard later that Liam Forde and Dick O'Connell were captured in a big military round-up in the area, but managed to escape before being taken into Limerick.

It was during this period, while suffering from my sprained ankle, that a Mr. Denis O'Donovan of the Shannon Hotel, Castleconnell, was shot dead by enemy forces. I was in Annacotty that evening when the military took in the dead body of Mr. O'Donovan. They remained in Annacotty for some time. I thought it was another round-up but was unable to run owing to my sprained ankle. However, with the help of a few of the local Volunteers, I got down to the bank of the Annacotty river near Ballyclough Mill which was about a mile away.

With the assistance of the East Limerick Column, Commandant Dick O'Connell of the 4th Battalion, Mid-Limerick Brigade, prepared an attack on an enemy patrol of two lorries at Drumkeen in his battalion area in the month of February 1921. I was one of a few men of the 3rd Battalion who was selected for the job. Sean Carroll, who was in charge of our section, and the others selected for the job travelled there by night and met the bulk of the attacking party there. With Carroll in charge of a section to which I was attached we were allocated a position behind a fence opposite an old

churchyard. We were all armed with rifles. At 3 p.m. the signal was given that the lorries were coming. In the fight which followed the arrival of the two lorries in the ambush positions eleven of the enemy were killed and two were captured. We learned later that a District Inspector of the R.I.C., who was in charge of the enemy party, escaped because he happened to be in civilian clothes. When the enemy's arms were being collected, I heard the two captured Tans pleading for mercy. One of them said: "I am the father of two kiddies, don't shoot me". In reply, Commandant Donnchadh Hannigan, who was in charge of the ambush party, said: "Dead men tell no tales". A firing party was picked from among the column men present who executed the two Tans on the spot.

Between the East and Mid Limerick Brigade men mobilised for this ambush, they numbered at least 80 men, 30 of whom were in the actual attack, while the others were on outpost duty watching for reinforcements on their way to assist the enemy. I had a narrow escape myself, as well as the man next to me. Whether it was from the crossfire of our own men or the fire of the Tans, I am not sure. A number of bullets struck the curb stone between this man and myself; several splinters of stone struck the man. He shouted to me: "I am shot". When the ambush was over I attended to him and discovered it was splinters of stone which hit him. His name was John Lynch of Caherconlish. After the Truce he became an officer in the National Army. We of the 3rd Battalion returned to our own company areas after the ambush, hungry and tired.

During the period 1920 to 1921, we had a number of active spies in the brigade area, especially in Limerick City. About the month of March 1921, two of those spies were arrested

and tried by the Limerick City Battalion staff and found guilty, after which they were transferred to our battalion area for execution. One of them, while being escorted from the city, tried to escape and was shot dead near Plassy. The other man was duly executed in our area. Sean Carroll was in charge of the execution, while I was one of the firing party. From time to time we held several suspected spies as prisoners in an old disused house in our area. In a couple of cases we had prisoners for four or five months, but the evidence against them was insufficient to warrant their execution. They were released on the day of the Truce.

On the morning of the Truce, with about 10 other men, I helped in mining Canter's Bridge near Killonan over the Mulcair River. We had heard that a troop train was on its way from Dublin to Limerick. Having excavated a quantity of sand and gravel from the bridge, we placed a quantity of gelignite, in which a detonator was inserted with a cable attached in the hole. When the train arrived, the mine was exploded by Robert de Courcy, but did no damage. The train stopped; we opened fire; the troops got out and returned our fire across the River Mulcair. We made good our escape as the main road to Dublin was less than a mile away from the scene of the action and the shooting could have attracted the attention of any further military travelling on the road; we were afraid of being surrounded.

After the Truce I attended a training camp near my home, in the house of a man named Michael Hourigan.

Signed: Thomas MoynehanDate: 7/7/56.Witness: John J. Daly

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