

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1458

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1458.

Witness

John P. Haran,
1 Barrack Hill,
Limerick.

Identity.

1st Lieutenant, B. Company, 1st Battalion,
North Roscommon Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of B. Company, 1st Battalion, North
Roscommon Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2657.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JOHN P. HARAN,

1, Barrack Hill, Limerick.

"When the ould cock crows, the young cock learns". Surely, this applies in my experience in the cause of Irish Freedom.

Away back in the year 1904 - the first year I remember putting in the date of my copy book at school - the Land League movement was strongly and stoutly organised in my home town (Charlestown), County Mayo, fifteen miles from Davitt's birthplace. My father was an ardent worker in and member of the local committee. The meetings were held in his aunt's house, as there was no hall in those days. Members were admitted by a large green ticket. I attended those meetings with my father. It was at those meetings the seed was sown to free our country from foreign rule. Davitt in those days spent much of his time in our area, when on the run. He spent much of his time in hiding in the house of a man named Mr. John McDermott of Bushfield. On one occasion when he was trying a getaway to Ballaghadereen, my father drove him from Bushfield, accompanied by the Catholic Curate of Charlestown. The R.I.C. tried to hold up the horse and car in Charlestown, but my father beat them off the car with his whip, so also did the priest: the result was Davitt got away. Sometime later one of the R.I.C. died (his name was Doddy), not from the result of the beating, but some people believed that when the priest struck out it had ill effects on the R.I.C. man.

There was also another great influence in the making of me. It was hatred for the enemy of Ireland. Many of my school companions can tell a similar story.

Another great influence was our principal teacher, J.E.O'Doherty (R.I.P) He was constantly feeding us on the History of Ireland and

the wrongs that were done against our land by the foe. Well, that is common knowledge now and it is unnecessary to repeat it here. Irish was not then on the school programme, but he taught us Irish for an extra half hour daily. (He was later a Judge on the Sinn Féin Courts). He has one son a Lieutenant-Colonel, one a Commandant and a son-in-law in the Medical Service Defence Forces (1956).

After reaching the seventh standard at school (and by the way, when mentioning the school, the present Editor of Dáil reports, Mr. Paddy O'Donnell, recently appointed, was my school pal), I flapped my wings to start out in search of a living. I went to serve my apprenticeship with Mr. Michael Browne, Westport, in the Drapery Trade (father of Doctor Browne, Bishop of Galway). It was from the frying pan into the fire, as Mr. Browne was also an Irishman with great love of country and a hard worker in the Land League Cause.

In 1913 I joined the Irish Volunteers, and was trained under the command of Major Seán McBride. We had a large Company, which included the late General Joe Ring with whom I spent many happy days.

I also joined the G.A.A. club under Joe Ring. The club was known as Derry (on the Castlebar Road). The reason I mentioned the G.A.A. is that I have personal knowledge that most of our men came from the ranks and teams of the G.A.A., as I played Football in practically every county in Ireland from Cork to Armagh, and with many County Teams, including my own County.

However, so much for Westport. On finishing my apprenticeship, I went to Tubbercurry, County Sligo, then a hot-bed of the Sinn Féin movement, and, of course, I was eager to become a member, which I did: this was 1915. I was at a meeting of the club in the Town Hall one night. The speaker was Pat Dyer, a Manager of Messrs. Cooks. After

the meeting he was arrested by R.I.C. and taken to the barracks. I thought he was the first man to be arrested from Sinn Féin ranks. After that meeting Alex McCabe's house at Keash was searched: there were explosives and other items of military nature found and he was also arrested. But the Cause went on. (I might mention here that during the 1920s, Cooks' drapery shop, one of the largest in the West, was burned by the Tans as a reprisal, for the shooting of D.I. Kellegher.

During the 1916 period there was little we could do. We had no arms. And, though our sympathy was with our comrades, it was of little help as the I.R.A. in County Sligo was not then properly organised, though they made themselves felt in later years.

In March of 1917, I moved to a better position in the town of Carrickmacross, County Monaghan. Here I met about nine men after their release from Frongoch - two Reillys, two O'Briens, three Nolans and two more whose names I now forget. One, I think, was Willie Loughran, a butler at O'Neill's hotel. Loughran was a great man at this time; he organised the I.R.A. and Fianna which I joined. He trained us every night when he was free from work, and was a terrible disciplinarian; he didn't take 'no' for an answer.

During the East Cavan bye election contested by the late Arthur Griffith we attended, in Cycle Column order, all meetings of Sinn Féin at Kingscourt, Bailieborough, Shercock, Cootehill etc. We generally left on a Saturday night and we had also our Column escorted by R.I.C.

The speakers that now stand out in my memory were Father O'Flanagan, Seán Milroy, Mr. De Valera.

That election came as a winner like Roscommon and Longford.

At the General Election 1918, I got a day off from work to help in the interests of Mr. Seán McEntee, who had a runaway victory. This period was then rather quiet as regards I.R.A. activities, and in March 1919, I bade farewell to Carrickmacross where I still played Football with Carrick Emmets.

My next position was at Frenchpark, County Roscommon, where I got a good job as a charge hand: this I got through information and influence from a charge hand at Duff's, Ballaghaderreen (now Mr. ^{JAMES} ~~John~~ Dillon's, T.D.).

When I got my feet there and found my bearings, my first thoughts were to reorganise the Sinn Féin Club because previously, as I found out, they had a Club but it had become disorganised. So on one Sunday, after notifying those and their friends whom I had cause to believe were genuine, we held a meeting in an old disused shop which was very dilapidated, but the meeting was successful and we were able to start from then on with our I.R.A. Company ("B" Company, 1st Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade) organised by Commandant Seamus Feely, Boyle, and myself, with the help of Mick Higgins, Frenchpark, who was voted Captain of the Company, myself 1st Lieutenant, Jerry Dooley (a Kildare man) 2nd Lieutenant. In this Company we had a man named Malachy Doddy, shop assistant, and later a Sergeant in the C.I.D. This man, strange to say, was a son of the R.I.C. man who died after he tried to rescue Davitt from my father. He had also a younger brother murdered by the Tans at Templehouse, County Sligo.

There was during this period of activity in 1919 a Catholic Curate in Breedogue, about three miles from Frenchpark on the Boyle Road. He was appointed Treasurer for the Dáil Eireann Loan in that area. I was appointed sub-Treasurer in my Company area. Our Company were detailed in groups of three and four to collect in the

different parishes and townlands. The Company collected £200; we would not accept less than £1. per subscriber, and I gave temporary receipts for the amount to each person who paid until the official receipts were issued from Headquarters. Those I received in September 1920. Those receipts I received from the Treasurer with instructions that they were to be handed to each subscriber by hand.

On a Saturday night early in September 1920 I arranged that three of us (officers) would meet at Tully's public house at 9.30. This was the earliest hour we could meet after work. I arrived on time and when I got there the other two were there having a drink at the bar. I did not approach them immediately, but called a drink for myself, which I never drank because as it was left on the grocery counter the house was raided by a Sergeant and four R.I.C. men who ordered "Hands Up". They were armed with carbines. There was one policeman (McAuliffe) placed on guard over me. I still had my hands in the air when the Sergeant and other R.I.C. proceeded to search the other two lads at the end of the bar. I asked McAuliffe if I could take my drink; the answer was "No". I then asked could I smoke while they were with the other two; he said "Yes". That was what I wanted as I had special receipts for £200 in my hip pocket; one receipt at that time meant the penalty of twelve months in jail. Well I started by the way to search for the cigs and matches, but I got hold of the wad of receipts and quietly dropped them over the counter and then lit my fag. I was then searched by the Sergeant and, of course, nothing incriminating was found. We were turned out after our names were taken for being on licensed premises half hour after closing time.

But on the following Sunday morning I got a good telling off from Tully for throwing the package behind the counter. He found it after we left and handed it to me intact and we then carried on with the distribution, O.K.

The three of us were summoned to the local Court, on the charge of being on the premises after hours. I then got in touch with my Battalion O/C - Seamus Feely of Boyle, Co. Roscommon - and asked him if I could blow up the Court House the night before the date of the Court. He said "No, the reason is there is a family residing as caretakers there, but I will fix it up the day of the Court". However, the Court was never held as the R.I.C. were reinforced by a party from Ballaghaderreen to strengthen the local garrison in Frenchpark. They were ambushed at Ratra by the help of Feely. We lost one; the R.I.C. lost two.

I was taken out of my place of business and badly beaten up, but got away to fight another day.

There is one humorous - if you like to call it such - incident which occurred in that period. We had the R.I.C. bottled up as regards supplies, with the exception of one woman, who was supplying milk to the barracks in a tankard per pony and cart. She was warned but she still carried on.

Then there appeared in the 'Irish Independent' a paragraph to the effect that she had been molested - not that any of the I.R.A. in my area took a part. There was a U.C.D. student home on holidays and he put three pigs' rings in her posterior to stop her sitting on the cart. I got the tough end of the stick from Jim Feely to investigate the case. I went to her on his orders and asked her if what appeared in the press was correct. Well, she gave me some choice language, and said "You know all about it". I approached the Doctor who removed the rings: I still have one of them, but I had no sorrow for her.

Before I leave Frenchpark I would like to record there was an R.I.C. man there named McQuinn, a native of Curry, County Sligo. He used to carry me out .303 and .45 ammunition in his cap, which I

passed to Feely. McQuinn afterwards resigned during the Black and Tan period. I took him home by car and we had a big spread at his house in Curry - chicken and ham.

But, on leaving Frenchpark with McQuinn, the R.I.C. opened fire on the car as we were passing their barracks. I returned fire with revolver. None of us was hurt. From then on I was on the run, 20th September, 1920.

During my period of campaign on the run, I had with me some great lads - Sean Corcoran, Kiltimagh, Brigadier (R.I.P) killed by the Tans near Ballyhaunis, Peadar Deignan, ex-T.D. (R.I.P), Galway, Andy Walsh, Charlestown, and Jack Peyton, ditto; and I was with Corcoran the night before he was shot.

While on the run from 11th September, 1920, my home was searched by Black and Tans and a military officer looking for me, at about 8.30 p.m. some date in October, 1920. At that time there was no garrison of R.I.C. in the town: it was a surprise raid. I was in another house with a lady of the Cumann na mBan, Nell Stenson afterwards married to Commandant Jack Walker (R.I.P). I was tipped off by Peyton that the house was being searched. I told Peyton when he saw them leave to go to my house and get my two overcoats, and we would go for a walk out the country. We took a cross country route for about an hour and a half and decided to return. I suggested to take a bye-road. Peyton said he would go in by the main road and see what was happening. "O.K." said I. The R.I.C. and military had taken over the Town Hall in Charlestown. They arrested Peyton, kicked and beat him badly, and sent him to Ballykinlar until after the Truce, so also was Andy Walsh sent there. As I said previously, Peyton was not a member of the I.R.A. then.

I played draughts with the movements of the R.I.C., from Charlestown to Kiltimagh and Tubbercurry, County Sligo.

In Tubbercurry I got acquainted with one of the great girls in the Cause - Lizzie McGettrick (R.I.P). She used to get all my dispatches and others. On one occasion, about March, 1921, she asked me would I escort a lady to Charlestown who was carrying some stuff on a bike. I said ".O.K., she can cycle to Rue crossroads and I will pick her up there by car". As she was near the Auxiliary barracks the parcel fell off the bike. An Auxiliary on sentry duty left his post and safely put it back on the carrier. I picked her up as arranged and took her to Charlestown safely. I did not ask her for her name. Later I was told she was a sister of the late Rory O'Connor of Dublin.

To conclude this little story, I would like to mention that I hit and ran. Most of the lads were captured, but not me. Those of my best lads were Frank Shouldice of Ballaghadereen, Tom Flannery, do. (R.I.P.), Commandant Jim ^{HENRY} ~~Kenny~~ Swinford, Walsh's and Ruane's, Kiltimagh, including Sean T., and some I mentioned previously.

If you want to get information on the ambush by Frank Carty, outside Tubbercurry when D.I. Kelleher was killed, get in touch with Tom McCarrick, C.I.D., Ennis, as I was not there, but was there to see them burn down Cooks and sack the town. We could do nothing - no ammunition.

Signed :

John P. Haran

Date:

13th July 1956.

Witness:

John J. Saly

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