

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1486

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1486.

Witness

Sean Scott,  
Abbey Cottage,  
Templemore,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Commandant, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of 2nd Battalion, 2nd Tipperary  
Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1918-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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No. W.S. 1486

STATEMENT BY Mr. SEÁN SCOTT,

Abbey Cottage, Templemore, Co. Tipperary.

Commandant, 2nd Battalion, 2nd (Mid). Tipperary Brigade.

In the year of 1914 an Irish Volunteer Company, of which I was elected Captain, was formed in my native place of Castleiney, about two miles from Templemore, County Tipperary. At the time I was 22 years of age and I was also Captain of the local Gaelic Football team which then held a prominent place amongst the G.A.A. teams in the county.

The Volunteer Company was a small one and, as far as I can now recall, its strength in the years prior to 1916 was about 25. We did some drill and training and practiced musketry with wooden guns, our instructor being an ex-Sergeant-Major of the British Army. The split in the Volunteer Movement in 1914 did not affect us in any way. Nobody came to trouble us about the respective merits of either side, but we did not agree with John Redmond's recruiting campaign and we certainly were not keen on going to France to fight for England there. There was then no Brigade or Battalion organisation and, again speaking from memory, our only recognition as a Volunteer unit was the occasional receipt from Dublin of Irish Volunteer literature which was distributed amongst the members.

I had no prior knowledge that the Rising was to take place at Easter of 1916, nor did I receive any orders from anywhere of any special movement or manoeuvres by the Company for that Easter Sunday. From reading the Volunteer literature I expected, of course, that at some time or other the Volunteers would go into action, but when or where I had no idea. I remember, however, that during the time of

the Rising I pulled down a number of proclamation notices which were posted up by an R.I.C. man. I believe he made a remark at the time that he would have me arrested for it, but I knew him well, and the incident passed off more or less as a joke.

In June of that year of 1916, I captained the Tipperary senior football team which travelled to Cork to play Kerry in the Munster Football Final. After the game, which Kerry won by a single point, both teams had dinner together in a hotel in Cork. As the meal came to a close, a Corkman named Seán Nolan, addressed us. He spoke about the Rising of 1916 and said that it was not the end but the beginning of the Volunteer Movement and of the fight for freedom. He invited us to meet him later in another room in the hotel and, apparently, he was well briefed for his talk, as he singled me out as one he would like to meet again, saying that he understood I was already a Volunteer. I had never met him before. Six or seven members of each team, and some others - Corkmen - who were strangers to me, assembled in an ante-room where Nolan again addressed us. He suggested that when we returned to Kerry and Tipperary we should interest ourselves at once in the work of organising the Volunteers in every area.

With the aid of a few Volunteers and of some Sinn Féin sympathisers I organised during the following twelve months, Sinn Féin Clubs and Volunteer Companies in Templetoohy, Loughmore, Moyne, Clonmore, Drom, Templemore and Killea. These seven Companies with the Castleiney Company were, in the summer of 1918, organised into a Battalion which later became the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd or Mid. Tipperary Brigade. The meeting at which the Battalion was formed was held in a field at Gurteen on a Sunday afternoon and was

presided over by Edmond McGrath of Loughmore (later Brigade Vice Commandant) and he conducted the election of Battalion officers. All eight Companies were represented at this meeting and the Battalion officers elected were :-

Battalion Commandant	-	-	Sean Scott (myself)
Battalion Vice Commandant	-		Michael Egan, Kilkilahara
Battalion Adjutant	-		Michael Hynes, Ballyknock
Battalion Quartermaster	-		Joseph Ryan, Ballyknock.

Towards the end of 1920, James Russell of Adamstown, Templemore, was appointed Adjutant in succession to Michael Hynes who was promoted to Brigade Adjutant on the arrest of Michael Kennedy of Thurles.

The designations and Company Captains of the eight Companies were as follows :-

"A" Company	-	Castleiney	-	John Purcell, Captain		
"B"	"	-	Templetuoohy	-	Seán Hynes	"
"C"	"	-	Loughmore	-	Jerome Dunlea	"
"D"	"	-	Moyné	-	John Fanning	"
"E"	"	-	Clonmore	-	Martin Deegan	"
"F"	"	-	Drom	-	Michael Stepleton	"
"G"	"	-	Templemore	-	Thomas Hanley	"
"H"	"	-	Killea	-	James Fogarty	"

The next step in the organisation took place about two months later when a meeting of the officers of the 1st (Thurles), 2nd (Templemore) and 3rd (Upperchurch) Battalions was held at Brady's Mills, near Thurles. I was present at that meeting and I recall that it was presided over by the late Senator Michael Staines who travelled from Dublin for the occasion. The Brigade Staff elected that day were :-

- Brigade Commandant - James Leahy, then of Thurles,
- " Vice Commandant - Edmond McGrath, Lockmore,
- " Adjutant - Michael Kennedy, then of Thurles,
- " Quartermaster - John McCormack, Thurles (now in U.S.A.)

There is little to record for the remainder of the year of 1918. Our activities then, and during the year of 1919, centered on perfecting the organisation, training the Companies, and collecting arms wherever possible. Sometime after the ambush at Soloheadbeg in January 1919, Seamus Robinson and Sean Treacy came to Templemore and stayed for a brief period at the home of Misses Leahy's, dressmakers, Main Street. They sent word to me that they were there, and that they required assistance to get out of the town. Seamus Duggan of Gurteen and myself called at night-time to Misses Leahy's where we found that Robinson was suffering from a sprained ankle, and had difficulty in getting about. There was an R.I.C. patrol on duty in the Main Street that night and when it came to the time to leave, Robinson asked how we should proceed. With a twinkle in his eye, Sean Treacy replied, "Let the two Seamuses go first and if they are caught, the two Seans may have a chance to escape". We brought them to Duggan's of Gurteen where Robinson's ankle was attended to by a nurse - (then Miss Duggan, now Mrs. Scott, my wife). They remained in Duggan's that night and next day they departed on bicycles which we provided for them. On Treacy's suggestion, any curious people who enquired about the two strange men were told that they were two pig-buyers out looking for fat pigs.

About January of 1920 I had a narrow escape from capture when a party of R.I.C. raided my home looking for me. I was only a short distance away at the time and the raiders spotted me on their way back from the house. I was unarmed and I led them a merry-dance as they chased me for a distance of 1½ miles cross-country. The

chase brought me through Maher's gate at Larra, and through a wood before I eventually shook them off. They fired on me as I entered the wood, and fired a further five volleys after me as I crossed an open space behind the wood, but fortunately without effect. During the following twelve months my home was raided three times each day, sometimes by military, sometimes by Black and Tans and R.I.C., and sometimes by Auxiliaries while the latter were stationed in Templemore. Occasionally the raiders were accompanied by women searchers.

Mention of Maher's of Larra reminds me that the owner of that house, Willie Maher, was one of our best and most loyal supporters. Though not an active Volunteer, his house was always open to Volunteers on the run. When retiring at night-time either himself or his sisters left the lamp burning low and put a key of the front door in a special place outside. There was always a vacant bed ready in a spare room, and blankets were left lying handy in the sittingroom in case more than one or two men called. In addition to the local men, Ernie O'Malley and George Plunkett knew the run of the house and availed of his hospitality when they were in the vicinity. He managed to avoid the suspicions of the R.I.C. by some of the things he did as, for instance, when the British authorities called on the owners of shotguns to hand them in at the local R.I.C. stations, Maher publicly carried a gun to the barracks and handed it up. That, of course, was an unpopular thing to do, but the gun which he handed up to the R.I.C. was an old one and at the same time he gave me a new gun and fifty rounds of ammunition. Generally speaking, the people of the area willingly co-operated with us and even when the military authorities proclaimed it a capital offence to harbour rebels, I received letters from householders and farmers offering shelter to men on the run or to cater for members of a Column.

In addition to a garrison of 1,500 British infantry stationed in Templemore Military Barracks, there were, at the beginning of 1920, seven R.I.C. Barracks in my Battalion area. Later in that year a force of 150 Auxiliaries was drafted into Templemore and these occupied and fortified a large residence known as "The Abbey". The R.I.C. Barracks were situated at Templemore, Moyne, Clonmore, Barnane, Loughmore, Templetuohy and Killara. ~~Two~~<sup>Three</sup> of these barracks, those at Moyne, Loughmore and Killara were vacated by the R.I.C. in the early months of 1920, and I had the three evacuated barracks destroyed by burning on Easter Saturday night of 1920 in accordance with the general order from General Headquarters.

The barracks at Clonmore, Barnane and Templetuohy were situated  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles, 2 miles and 4 miles respectively from Templemore. This, coupled with the fact that they were located in level country interwoven with a network of roads, ruled out anything in the nature of launching major attacks on them. They were, however, frequently sniped at during the year of 1920 and up to the Truce in 1921.

The first operation which I contemplated was to attack a motor van commonly called the "Black Maria" which, with six R.I.C. men on board, constantly travelled at night time from Templemore to Templetuohy. Including scouts, about twenty men were mobilised for the operation and the point selected for the ambush was at Templeree Churchyard. We were, however, out of luck that night for the van and its occupants did not come our way and, peculiarly enough, it never travelled that way again.

On the night of 5th May, 1920, four members of the Templetuohy Company in charge of the Battalion Quartermaster, attacked a patrol of eight R.I.C. men on the outskirts of the village of Templetuohy.

The position was about fifty yards from the barracks on the Templetuohy-Ballyknock road. After a brief exchange of shots, another party of R.I.C. men turned out from the barracks and our party, who were armed with only three shotguns and two revolvers, were compelled to withdraw. I am unable to say if there were any casualties, but rumour had it at the time that one R.I.C. man was wounded.

Later on during those summer months of 1920 the supposed miracles of the bleeding statues took place in Templemore. The statues were exhibited in a yard in the Main Street by a man named James Walsh who was called "The Saint" and who, I would say, was suffering from a hallucination. It is impossible now to describe the scenes as people of simple faith from all parts of Ireland thronged to Templemore bringing with them, their sick and suffering. Why I don't know, but the R.I.C. and military were confined to barracks at the time, and I was ordered to bring Volunteers into Templemore to control the crowds and to maintain order.

The itinerary for the pilgrims included a visit to a holy well at Curragheen, about six miles away. Jarveys with their sidecars and hackney cars with their owners or drivers flocked to Templemore to reap the rich harvest which was to be earned by conveying the visitors to and from the holy well. We imposed a levy of two shillings and sixpence per day on all cars engaged on this traffic, and in less than two weeks the sum so collected amounted to at least £1,000 which was handed over to the Brigade arms fund.

Advised by their bishops and priests, people gradually grew sceptical of the genuineness of the bleeding statues and at the end of a couple of weeks the number of pilgrims coming to Templemore diminished considerably. The end of this episode was hastened when an ambush, in which two R.I.C. men were killed, was carried out by

members of the 3rd Battalion at Kileskane about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Templemore. The police and military were then let loose on the town and the crowds of visitors, or what was left of them, departed as quickly as they had come.

Activities such as sniping the R.I.C. barracks at Clonmore, Barnane and Templetuohy, blocking and trenching of roads, and seizing and censoring mails were constantly maintained. I recall one occasion on which Joseph Ryan, the Battalion Quartermaster, and myself took three bags of mails at the railway station in Templemore while a party of military were actually waiting on the platform to take them over from the Station postman. This postman, who knew both Ryan and myself intimately, made a statement when questioned by a military officer, to the effect that over two hundred armed men wearing beards and with blackened faces took part in the raid. His statement may, or may not, have been believed, but that afternoon the military assembled all their available forces and, accompanied by armoured cars and aeroplanes, commenced a round-up which lasted for two days in an effort to surround this imaginary force of I.R.A. men. Meanwhile, Ryan and myself were quietly censoring the mails in a dug-out about three miles away. They revealed no information which was of any importance to us and we later left them back at the railway station.

After a lapse of so many years it is now difficult to place in sequence the events of that period. It was, however, probably towards the end of the year of 1920 that I had to pay a visit to Dublin, bringing with me some papers which were required by Art O'Connor who was in charge of the Dáil Éireann Land Resettlement Department. The papers referred to the Carden estate and were given to me by a Templemore solicitor named Meagher. He was later

District Justice Meagher. I saw Art O'Connor in an upstairs office in a narrow street off Abbey Street. After I had given him the papers, we had a general conversation for a while and he asked me if I was armed. When I replied that I was, he told me that the streets all around had been cordoned off by British military since my arrival and he suggested that I leave my revolver with him. I was loathe to do that, for I feared I might never see it again and revolvers at the time were precious and hard to be got. I paid a few visits to the door and saw a barricade which the military had erected and manned at the end of the street. A uniformed Dublin policeman was standing on the sidewalk a few yards from the barricade and between it and the doorway. Art O'Connor accompanied me on my last visit to the door. The uniformed policeman approached us, spoke to us and in an undertone inquired to know if we were in trouble, saying that he knew by my accent that I was from Tipperary. I told him that I was anxious to get outside the military cordon as I wished to go to the Kingsbridge station. He said, "Come on, I will get you through"; and as we approached the barricade he laughed and talked as if he knew me intimately. I did not catch the conversation between the policeman and the British military officer who was in charge of the party at the barricade, but I am positive that I heard the policeman say, "Detective on duty". At any rate, I was permitted to pass without being searched. The policeman then took me through a public house which had a second entrance leading out into another street. There he parted from me telling me that I was quite safe then and to get away to the Kingsbridge as quickly as possible. He refused to have a drink, and I often regretted that I never met him again, and never learned his name.

A few months before the Truce, Ernie O'Maillie came to my Battalion area for a period of three weeks. At the time, I was rather worried as I felt that my Battalion was not active enough. We had not sufficient arms to operate in the manner I wished to, and the strength and location of the enemy forces gave us only very limited opportunities for anything more than skirmishing and occasional shots at the R.I.C. barracks. We were too, at that time, collecting a levy on all property owners according to their rateable valuation and sometimes we had to raid for it in places where it was not paid voluntarily. We never had to seize property in lieu of this levy for the defaulters always paid up when the raid took place. The monies so collected were sent to the Brigade Headquarters for transmission to General Headquarters.

O'Maillie and I visited the eight company areas and inspected the Companies on parade. He assured me that we were doing alright by harassing the enemy forces and by blocking and trenching the roads. He considered that due to the strength and location of the enemy forces my Battalion <sup>was</sup> was a most unsuitable one in which to attempt a major operation; in fact, the most unsuitable area which he had ever visited.. He told me that he was about to organise a flying column with a strength of 100 men, and, when I offered my services to him in this column, he refused point blank to accept them and in no uncertain language told me that I was to remain with the Battalion.

On a Thursday in May, 1921, I received a dispatch from Michael Collins saying that the Auxiliaries would evacuate "The Abbey", Templemore, on the following Saturday afternoon and that immediately it was evacuated it should be destroyed at all costs, even at the loss of men. "The Abbey" was a large residential building standing aloof in its own grounds. It was the former residence of

Sir John Carden and it was reputed to have a room for every week in the year and a window for every day in the year. For the prior nine or ten months it had been occupied by a force of 150 Auxiliaries who, equipped with Crossley Tenders, Armoured Cars and Machine Guns, had converted it into a formidable bastion. The information that it was to be evacuated came as a big surprise to me and I surmised that, as there was a lot of stabling available at the Abbey, the British Authorities may have contemplated replacing the Auxiliaries by cavalry. As a crow flies, it was situated about 400 yards from the military barracks.

I had a close watch kept on the Auxiliaries on that Thursday night, on the Friday and on the Saturday morning but the scouts saw no indication of the coming evacuation. Discreet inquiries at places frequented by them and in public-houses where they drank revealed nothing. Nobody had heard any mention that they were leaving and it is my opinion that the Auxiliaries themselves did not know until the last minute. By mid-day on Saturday, were it not for the implicit confidence I had in Collins, I would have concluded that his information was incorrect. Then, at 3 p.m. on that Saturday afternoon, with bag and baggage piled high on lorries and accompanied by their armoured cars, the Auxiliaries left "The Abbey".

Meanwhile I had selected fifteen men to do the job and had collected about thirty gallons of petrol - all we could lay hands on at the time. Seven men were detailed to guard the steward's and the caretaker's houses and with the other eight I entered "The Abbey" at about 1.30 a.m. on the Sunday morning. We closed and shuttered all the windows, sprinkled the rooms and the main hall with petrol and then started a fire in the main hall at the foot of the stairs. We fed the fire with bottles of petrol which we flung in through windows but for some reason or other the fire burned itself out without doing

any real damage. Daybreak was then fast approaching and as I have said we were within 400 yards of the military barracks. Some of the men had gone away when the fire started, and I was considering what our next move should be when, fortunately, four members of the Clonmore Company arrived bringing with them a further ten gallons of petrol which they had got in Rathdowney. James Russell, the Battalion Adjutant, Joseph Ryan, the Battalion Quartermaster, John Purcell, Captain of the Castleiney Company, the four men from the Clonmore Company, and myself returned to the house which Purcell and I re-entered. The place then reeked with petrol fumes, and we dare not use a naked light. I poured the ten gallons of petrol down the stairs and directed a small stream of it to the door of a room off the hall. I then set fire to the stream of petrol and raced through the room door which Purcell closed after me and we both got back out into the grounds through a window. I was fortunate to escape with singed hair and singed eyebrows. Later that morning I had to be treated by Doctor McCormack of Templemoyle as I became violently sick from inhaling the petrol fumes. I had, however, the satisfaction of knowing that the place burned to a cinder, for a scout reported to me at 7 a.m. that he had seen the roof cave in. The military had then thrown a cordon around it and were preventing sightseers from approaching the ruins.

I often received information about enemy movements and proposals from an English lady then residing in Templemore. She was a Mrs. Cramby, wife of the late Doctor Cramby. About June of 1921 she sent me word that the British Authorities intended to reinforce the R.I.C. garrison in Clonmore by placing a military party in Larra House, and that they (the British) also intended to occupy Lisheen Castle. As Mrs. Cramby's information was always accurate, I had both places

destroyed by burning. Larra House was the residence of a retired General of the British Army, General Rowe, and his uniform, which was on the premises, was taken away by some of our men before the house was set on fire.

Almost immediately afterwards a railway carter in Templemore tipped us off that a big consignment of material for the military was due to arrive by a certain train on the following day. It was decided to hold up the train about mid-way between Lisduff and Templemore, and with this object in view I sent three men to Lisduff railway station. Two of these men boarded the engine with the driver and fireman, and one entered the guard's van. On their instructions the train was brought to a halt at a point where I was in position with ten others.

There was no military guard on the train and we found that the military stores were packed in three wagons. They consisted of goods for the canteen. While we were busily engaged in unloading, examining and handing over these stores to some local Volunteers, a lorry load of military halted on a road about 200 yards away. Operations were suspended while a scout went to see what the military were doing. They were taking no notice of us, for the scout reported that some of them were having a drink in a nearby public-house while others were mending a punctured wheel, so we continued with the work. I should have mentioned that on that morning, for no reason in the world other than a bit of a lark, I was dressed in the British Army General's uniform which had been taken from General Rowe's house, wearing my own slouch hat over it.

Having completed our work of unloading the military stores from the train, I and the ten men who were with me withdrew towards Larra. There, at his house, I met Willie Maher who, after commenting

on my rig-out, told me that soldiers from Templemore were lying in ditches in the vicinity and that he feared the whole district was being surrounded. I decided to move off towards Crannagh Wood and, having given my rifle to one of the others to carry, I scouted along about 300 yards in front of the party, signalling to the others to come along as I saw that each field was clear of military. On reaching the edge of the wood I considered we were quite safe and took back my rifle.

Soon afterwards as we crossed the Templemore-Templetuohy road at Templeree graveyard we did not see, but were seen by a party of the Black and Tans who were at Stragge crossroads. As we continued our way cross-country, the Tans, still unobserved by us, got into a position behind a whitethorn hedge at the edge of another wood. Blissfully unaware of their presence there I moved diagonally through a field in their direction while the remainder of my party continued on through a breen. I was within about sixty yards of the hedge when I heard a shout "Halt!" and thinking it was a joke by some of our own men I shouted back, "Go to hell!" Then hearing the order "Fire!" I threw myself on the ground as a volley of shots rang out. I had absolutely no cover and for at least fifteen minutes I lay there under fire. Beyond some scratches to my face caused by flying gravel as the bullets hit the ground, I was unhurt, but my hat, which had fallen off, was pierced ten times by bullets. After about fifteen minutes I saw the caps of five of the Black and Tans appear at a gap in the whitethorn hedge and, assuming that they were going to rush me, I fired five shots rapidly in their direction. I then made a dash for the breen where I rejoined the others safely. After an exchange of shots the Black and Tans left their position at the wood and moved back to the road where they mingled with a number of people who were returning from turf-saving in a bog. Joseph Ryan

and myself who had rifles - (practically all of our party had shotguns)- pursued them, but before we got through the wood, the Tans had reached the road where, for fear of hitting the turf workers, Ryan and I refrained from firing on them.

Next morning an officer of the Black and Tans questioned Doctor McCormack in Templetuohy about his movements on the previous night and asked if he had been called out to attend to a wounded man. When Doctor McCormack denied all knowledge of any wounded man, the officer told him the story of how a man in the uniform of a British Officer and armed with a rifle had approached their position on the previous evening and added that he must have been hit, for all fourteen of them had fired ten rounds each at him at sixty yards range. That took place about the end of June or early July 1921 and concludes my story up to the time of the Truce, except perhaps to mention that on each of the nine days prior to the Truce I was fired on by enemy forces without being hit.

During the Truce period I objected to the recruiting of men - "Trucers" as we called them - into the I.R.A., and I got a ruling from General Headquarters in the matter. G.H.Q. ruled that recruiting, training and organising should go ahead, that the Truce should not be considered an end of the war with England and that it might well prove to be only a breathing space in the campaign.

After a short visit with some other Battalion Officers <sup>to Dublin</sup> I spent two or three months at the Divisional Training Camp at Galtee Castle. I then acted as Chief Instructor at the Brigade Training Camp at Fairy Hill near Templemore. In addition, I spent a couple of weeks instructing at my own Battalion's training camp at Castleiney Hall and spent some time training and organising in each Company area.

In February, 1922 with eighty men of my own Battalion I took over Templemore military barracks from the British Army and I might say that that was one of my last official acts with the I.R.A.

Later on in 1922 I added my efforts to those of others in an endeavour to avoid the Civil War. The military barracks in Templemore was then held by anti-Treaty forces and, when pro-Treaty forces made their appearance in the town, I intervened and prevented the commencement of hostilities which appeared imminent. I went to Thurles and prevailed on His Grace, Dr. Harty, then Archbishop of Cashel, to come to Templemore. Doctor Harty presided at a conference which was held in Hickey's Hotel and which was attended by the Commanding Officers of both forces. At it an agreement was reached by which the anti-Treaty side agreed to vacate the barracks, which they honoured, within a few days. It was then occupied by the pro-Treaty forces. I also attended a conference which was held in the Capitol Theatre, Dublin, at which proposals for Army unity were considered. At that conference I renewed my acquaintance with Seán Nolan of Cork, who was then pleading as eloquently for unity as he had pleaded to the Tipperary and Kerry football teams for help in the organising of the Irish Volunteers away back in June of 1916 and to which I have already referred.

I took no part in the Civil War.

SIGNED:

Sean P. O'M

DATE:

7<sup>th</sup> September 1956.

WITNESS:

J. Grace

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