

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S.** 1,540

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**.....1540.....

Witness

Chief Superintendent T.S. McDonagh,
Gárda Síochána,
Thurles,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Transport Officer, 4th Battalion,
Mid-Clare Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Ennistymon Company, Irish
Volunteers, Co. Clare, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File NoS.2862.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT T.S. McDONAGH

Garda Síochána, Thurles, Co. Tipperary

I was born on Christmas Eve in the year 1897 at Killaspuglinane, Ennistymon, Co. Clare, and was educated at the Christian Brothers' School in Ennistymon. Irish was then the common language in my native district and my father and mother were both native Irish speakers.

In February 1917, I entered the motoring business at Roughan's Garage, Ennistymon, and, shortly afterwards, I joined the local company of the Irish Volunteers. This company later became A/Company, 4th Battalion, Mid-Clare Brigade. My recollection is that at the time I joined the Volunteers, and for some years afterwards, all Co. Clare was one brigade area and that the late Martin Devitt to whom I shall have occasion to refer again in the course of this statement was then the brigade commandant. I am unable to state at what stage of the organisation Co. Clare was divided into three - East, Mid and West Brigade areas.

In the years 1917 and 1918 our activities as a Volunteer company in Ennistymon were concerned mainly with parades for drill practice and manoeuvres. John Joe Neylon, popularly known as "Tosser" Neylon, was our company captain and the strength of the company was approximately 35 men. These parades generally took place in the evening or night time after work and were held in fields on the outskirts of the town. On one occasion Ernie O'Malley, who was then engaged on Volunteer organising work in Co. Clare, took charge of the manoeuvres. Generally speaking, at that time we did not receive much interference from the R.I.C. Occasionally they followed us around taking notes, but that was all. One man, however,

to whom they paid special attention was the late Sean O Muirthile, afterwards Quartermaster General of the army. He was then a Gaelic League teacher in Ennistymon and, no matter where he went, he was always followed by one or two R.I.C. men.

To secure arms of any description was one of our greatest difficulties. In Roughan's Garage we made pikes, fashioning the blades from used files and procuring the shafts from a man named Cullinane. There, too, we made buckshot ammunition. I remember being mildly surprised when an R.I.C. sergeant from the barracks, which was situated straight across the road from the garage, came in unexpectedly one day when I was busy making buckshot in a mould. He was right beside me before I noticed him, but possibly he did not recognise what I was doing, for I heard nothing from the R.I.C. about it, nor was the garage raided.

One day, as far as I can recollect in the autumn of 1918, a strange-looking, rather peculiarly dressed man came into the garage and told me he was anxious to get in touch with Irish Volunteer officers. As he was a complete stranger to me, I gave him no information. He hung around the vicinity of the garage for an hour or so, during which I learned that he had only just arrived in the town, having got a lift in a car from Lisdoonvarna. I went to the shop where Neylon, the company captain, was employed, and told him about the stranger and his inquiries. Neylon came with me but, before we got back to the man or had any chance to talk to him, R.I.C. men came out of the barracks and took him in with them. He was Joe Dowling, who had been landed from a German submarine on the Clare coast at Doolin.

During the General Election campaign at the end of 1918 I was frequently engaged driving cars for the Sinn Fein election speakers and supporters and I think it was about that

time that a decision was made that, for the future, my Volunteer activities would be solely transport and driving.

It would now be impossible, after a lapse of so many years, to recall the various trips made on Volunteer and Sinn Fein work with cars from the garage and with my own car. They included driving collectors for the Dáil Éireann Loan in 1919, driving officers to meeting places and, now and again, the removal of wounded Volunteers from place to place. A few, which come to mind, may be of interest. One of the first would have been when I drove ~~two~~ ex-R.I.C. constables to various R.I.C. stations in Co. Clare. Both these men had resigned from the R.I.C. for political reasons and they were then endeavouring to get other R.I.C. men to resign from the force. I cannot recall one of their names, but the other was a man named McCormack whose sister - Miss Kate McCormack - owned a hotel in Ennistymon and who, whilst a political prisoner, had taken part in one of the first hunger strikes in Ireland.

The attack on Kilmaley R.I.C. station took place in August 1919. It was, I believe, one of the first R.I.C. posts to be attacked by the Volunteers. I was told by Pake Lahan, then adjutant to the 4th Battalion, to be ready with a car in Ennistymon and to await orders. He gave me no hint about the proposed attack at Kilmaley, which was approximately 25 miles from Ennistymon. Whilst waiting, I was joined by a Volunteer named Jack O'Leary who was then an official of the local branch of the Munster and Leinster Bank and who was killed in Co. Tipperary in 1921. It was from O'Leary that I learned about the proposed operation and, after waiting a considerable time with no signs or indications of the expected instructions, we decided to go on to Kilmaley. About 12 miles from Ennistymon we met "Tosser" Neylon on his way back. He had fallen from his bicycle and was injured, so we took him to Michael

Vaughan's place in Lahinch. Vaughan was an ex-post office man and was then the battalion signals officer. It was then too late to go to Kilmaley as we learned from "Tosser" that the attack was over. From the point of view of capturing the post or of inflicting casualties on the R.I.C., the attack was a failure. It was carried out in a haphazard manner and without supplies of materials to set it on fire. Later however, it was evacuated by the R.I.C. and it was then destroyed by the Volunteers.

The next incident to which I will refer occurred at a place locally known as "81 Cross". It is situated on a byroad about four or five miles south west of Ennistymon. There, one day shortly after the attack on Kilmaley, Martin Devitt, "Tosser" Neylon and Seamus Connolly attacked Sergeant Riordan and Constable Murphy from the R.I.C. protection hut at Derrymore with a view to disarming them. In the ensuing struggle the sergeant and the constable were killed and Martin Devitt was wounded in his right side. That evening, Pake Lahan (the battalion adjutant) came for me and I drove with him to Dr. Pearson's house in Lisdoonvarna where Devitt was, and where his wound had been dressed by the doctor. How he got there from "81 Cross" I do not know. I drove him to a friendly house at Spencil Hill, near Ennis, and we (Lahan and myself) then went to the Clare Hotel in Ennis and reported what had happened to the brothers Frank and Joe Barrett, both of whom were brigade officers. Riordan and Murphy were the first members of the R.I.C. to be killed in Co. Clare during the War of Independence and I cannot recall any action of the enemy forces by way of reprisal following their deaths.

About two weeks later Pake Lahan and myself met Devitt at Lenanagh Castle. He appeared to be fully recovered from his wound. I drove him to Galway city where, at the entrance

to St. Mary's College, we met the late Fr. Michael Griffin. I knew the latter well as he had been a curate in Ennistymon for some years. Martin Devitt went into the college with Fr. Griffin and my last time to see either of them alive was as they walked up the college avenue together. Devitt was killed on 23rd February 1920 when he, Ignatius O'Neill and Pake Lahan attacked three R.I.C. men at Maurices' Mills near Inagh. On the same occasion Ignatius O'Neill was wounded in the leg and I brought Dr. Tom Curran to attend him in a house near Inagh. I was present at Devitt's funeral which took place a few nights later. To conceal the fact of his death from the R.I.C., he was buried in a bog at the front of his own home and a rick of turf was placed over his grave. Within a few days, however, three or four lorries of R.I.C. men and Black and Tans drove out there from Ennis, removed the turf, took possession of the body and brought it to the military barracks in Ennistymon where an inquest was held. The remains were then handed back to the relatives for burial. It was perfectly evident that the police had been tipped off about the place where the body was buried, but I have no idea who the informer may have been, nor do I know if his identity was ever established. Fr. Griffin's foul murder by enemy forces in Galway is now a wellknown chapter of the history of those years.

At the inquest on Devitt the jury returned the following verdict: "We find that Martin Devitt died from bullet wounds received while fighting for the freedom of his country".

Another incident in Ennistymon was that in which three unarmed Volunteers - Michael Conway, Seamus McMahon and another, whose name I cannot recall - attempted to disarm two British army officers. It took place on 22nd July 1920. One of the officers succeeded in drawing his gun, shot Conway dead and wounded McMahon. Though wounded, McMahon got away out of the town and was given shelter in a farmer's house near

Lickeen Lake. It happened that Dr. Curran and myself were fishing on the lake at the time and Dr. Curran attended to the wounded man. Each evening while McMahon remained in that house Dr. Curran and myself, under the pretext of going fishing, drove out to the lake, rowed across it in a boat and went to the house where the doctor dressed the wound.

One day in the autumn of 1920, a British army officer in civilian clothes came into the garage and ordered a car to meet him at a certain time. I recognised him at once as a Captain McLean who had been stationed in Lahinch with a detachment of Scottish Horse about a year previously. He did not, of course, give his name or say what business he was on. I was detailed to drive him. Before going out with him I consulted "Tosser" Neylon who said: "By all means go with him, keep an eye on what he is doing and report back". For three days I drove him to various parts of Co. Clare including Kilfenora, Ballyvaughan and Lisdoonvarna. On one day he was alone with me; on the other two he had a companion with him, also in civilian clothes, whose rank or name I do not know. I gathered that McLean was trying to give me the impression that he was a commercial traveller, for he made calls at shops and hotels. He asked me various questions such as the names of the places we drove through and the names of people living in certain houses. My answers were vague, either telling him I did not know or giving him incorrect information, but I noticed that the routes chosen by him brought us to the vicinity of the homes of active Volunteers including that of Sean McNamara, commandant of the 6th Battalion, and then a "much wanted" man by the British forces. Often on the tops of hills or on high ground he (McLean) would ask me to stop and he would get out and view the countryside.

Each night we returned to Ennistymon and each night I reported the day's proceedings to Neylon. During the time I was with McLean driving him a round, no action was taken against him, nor was I asked to set any trap for him, but I have a hazy recollection that when I was finished with him, himself and his pal were arrested by some Volunteers, that they were held prisoner for a short time in Ballinalacken Castle and released after an inquiry had been held. My reason for referring to this matter in detail is that Captain McLean was one of the British Intelligence officers shot dead in Dublin on Bloody Sunday, 21st November 1920.

It was some time during the year 1920 that I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Frank Molyneux, a Kerryman then working in a chemist's shop in Ennistymon. The swearing-in ceremony took place in Roughan's Branch garage in Lisdoonvarna and Molyneux was accompanied on that occasion by Mick Delahunty, a native of The Commons, Co. Tipperary, and then employed by the L.S.E. garage in Dublin. Beyond the fact that I was sworn in, I knew nothing about the activities of the I.R.B. nor was I invited to attend any I.R.B. meetings. I was then under the impression that membership of the I.R.B. was confined to Volunteer officers of battalion rank and upwards and I assumed that the reason for swearing me into that organisation was that my driving duties brought me into frequent and close association with senior officers.

The Rineen ambush took place on 22nd September 1920. The ambush position was situated about midway between Ennistymon and Miltown-Malbay and, on the night of 21st, I drove a party of Volunteers from Ennistymon to the assembly place which was at a point about one mile to the rear of the actual ambush position. I was then ordered to return to Ennistymon. Next morning, I was standing at the garage door and watched a

lorry of police move off from the barracks across the road. It was driven by a Black and Tan named Hardiman and manned by, I think, six R.I.C. men including Sergeant Hynes and Constables Kelly, Harte and Hodnett, all of whom I knew well. On its way to Miltown-Malbay the lorry was allowed to pass through the ambush position, but was attacked on the return journey with fatal results for every member of the police party. A force of British military which went out from Miltown-Malbay engaged the Volunteers who were retreating from the ambush position and a running fight ensued which lasted for the remainder of the day. In the fight with the military three or four Volunteers, including the battalion commandant, Ignatius O'Neill, were wounded.

Late that night, R.I.C. and Black and Tans, maddened with drink, sacked and plundered the three villages of Lahinch, Miltown-Malbay and Ennistymon. In Lahinch they burned several houses. Pake Lahan's father was an old and crippled man. The police set fire to the house, took the old man out and shot him at the gates of the railway level crossing. They arrested Pake's young brother, Jimmy, aged 14, and two R.I.C. men would have shot him but for the intervention of a British military officer. A man named Salmon, a visitor to the village, was shot dead by the police when he ran out of the house in which he was staying. My friend, Pake Lahan himself, had taken part in the ambush and was asleep in a secret room in the attic of Flanagan's house in Lahinch when the police let loose their drunken fury. R.I.C. men burst open the door of the house, the family fled, the police set fire to the house and Pake died in the flames. I found his charred remains in the debris next day. I spent that night with a few country Volunteers who stood-to expecting to be called on. We had a few shotguns and a few

cartridges, but beyond helping the terror-stricken people who were endeavouring to get out into the countryside there was little we could do. As a result of the fight with the military after the ambush, a certain amount of disorganisation had set in for the time being and practically all arms *and* ammunition were with the men who had taken part in the ambush.

I went into Lahinch and commandeered a motor car, the property of an ex-British army officer - Major Ross de Rose. He was inclined to offer opposition to my taking his car, a Studebaker, but when I told him I required it to convey old, sick and shocked people to their friends out in the country and that I would bring it back to him that evening, he calmed down. Before returning the car to the Major, I drove a few Volunteers in it to Liscannor where the column who had ambushed the police were then located. There I met "Tosser" Neylon who gave me an account of the ambush and showed me his shin which had been damaged, apparently by a bullet which had passed through the leg of his trousers.

I got back to Ennistymon that evening. Things were very bad there. The police had fired indiscriminately into the homes of the people; five or six shops and the Town Hall had been burned down. A young boy of 15 years named Linnane, who had been sent by his mother to bring an old lady, whose house was in danger, to their home was captured by the R.I.C. His dead body with three or four bullet wounds in it was found near the barracks. A man named Tom Connole, who was married and lived on the outskirts of the village had also been shot. The police had rushed into his house, took himself, his wife and his two small children out and, in the presence of the wife and children, shot Connole dead. They then set fire to the house and threw the body into the blazing building.

Another friend of mine, an oldish man named Micko Nestor, had a very narrow escape. Unobserved, he got out of his house just as the R.I.C. arrived and set it on fire.

Roughan's garage where I worked escaped all this destruction. Situated as it was so close to the R.I.C. barracks, it was presumably never suspected, for it was never raided. A Sergeant Larkin of the R.I.C. once spoke some warning words to me and remarked that I should be very careful, for my green car had been seen in what he called queer places.

During the following four or five months, my activities as transport officer were confined to transport and driving. Petrol was then very scarce and it was necessary to have a permit from the British authorities to purchase it. I remember on one occasion getting a dispatch to meet Peadar O'Loughlin, the brigade vice-commandant, with a car at Doolin, 12 miles away. I had no petrol and little prospects of getting any. I asked an ex-British soldier who kept a hackney car if he could loan me some. He had none either, but he went to the barracks and I don't know what plea he made there, but he returned to me with a full tin of petrol which the police had given him from their own supplies. When I met O'Loughlin, Molyneux, who had sworn me into the I.R.B., was with him. They considered it was an extra good joke being driven on their errand with petrol supplied by the R.I.C.

One other incident of interest that I can recall, and in which I was concerned, took place ~~until~~ⁱⁿ February 1921. Then on a Sunday night I met "Tosser" Neylon. He had been appointed battalion commandant on that day. He told me that an order had been issued by the Brigade H.Q. that the collection of rates was to be done in future by the Volunteers

that the rate-books and the amounts already collected by the Co. Council rate collector were to be taken over immediately and, in that connection, he wanted me to do a job with him on the following day. We slept together that night in my home at Killaspuglinane and my father acted as scout for us. Next day, "Tosser" and I called on Mr. James Hynes of Ballingaddy, who was the local rate-collector. Hynes was an old neighbour and friend of my family and I had often spent days in his house in my youthful years. He very willingly handed over the rate-books, but the amount which he had already collected, viz: £307.3.7., was lodged in a bank in Ennistymon. He sent his son with a cheque for this amount to Ennistymon and it was arranged that the boy, having drawn the money from the bank, would bring it to a house in Kilshanny where "Tosser" and I would collect it later. By the way, we were to bring the books and money to Kilfenora and there hand them over to someone else.

Taking the rate-books with us, we drove in a pony and trap towards Kilshanny which is situated on the main road about mid-way between Ennistymon and Lisdoonvarna. It chanced, without our knowing it, to be a day on which a convoy of police and Black and Tans passed between Ennistymon and Lisdoonvarna, and it was customary on such days, as a precaution against an ambush, for police to occupy a position on the high ground overlooking the road at Kilshanny. As we drove along I spotted the police in their position and, on my warning, "Tosser", who was a much-wanted man, vaulted over the side of the trap and slipped away through the fields. I drove on, hid the rate-books in an outhouse at the residence of Fr. McGauran, P.P., put the pony and trap into another house and remained there until the police party cleared away about two hours later. I then had to look for Neylon and, having found him, we went and got the rate-books, the pony and trap and the money in the house where young

Hynes had left it. At that stage we were joined by Joe Murphy, the local company captain. It was now evident that we would be late for the appointment at the rendezvous at Kilfenora and, to push on with all possible speed, we substituted the pony and trap for a horse and sidecar which Murphy provided.

As expected, we were late reaching Kilfenora but from inquiries made at the house "Tosser" learned that a man named O'Dea, who lived about a mile further on, would take over the books and money. Nearing O'Dea's place we stopped and Murphy got off the car to go make inquiries. He was not gone 20 yards when two lorries of R.I.C. and Black and Tans, in charge of D.I. Hilliard and Sergeant Larkin, arrived. We were unarmed at the time. "Tosser" slipped off the car and started to walk up a byroad where, before being captured, he threw the money into a drain. Murphy was also captured. Sergeant Larkin came over to me where I was seated on the sidecar and asked me what I was doing and I replied that I was just out for a drive. He then looked into the well of the car and saw the rate-books. This was the same Sergeant Larkin who had warned me in Ennistymon about my motor car having been "seen in queer places". The police had meantime found the money which Neylon had thrown into the drain. District Inspector Hilliard announced that he had no intention of bringing us in and he proposed to shoot us there and then. He placed the three of us standing at the grass margin on one side of the road and fell-in a firing party of six at the opposite side - two men aiming at each of us. Sergeant Larkin pleaded with him and, referring to Neylon, said he was no ordinary prisoner as his uncle was a General in the British army. That was quite true, for "Tosser" was a nephew of General Sir Daniel Neylon who had been knighted after the 1914-18 Great War. This, however, seemed to cut no ice

with Hilliard who said "little good that would do you if this so-and-so got you from behind a ditch". He pulled Larkin out of the way and ordered the party into the firing position, While we waited the order to fire, the thought entered my mind that I would not hear the shot that killed me. Then the unexpected happened. A woman cyclist who came along cycled between us and the firing party. Then she appeared suddenly to realise what was happening. She screamed, fell off the bicycle and became hysterical. That caused a diversion and we were ordered to get up into one of the lorries.

We were brought to the R.I.C. barracks in Ennistymon where we were interrogated and given a few kicks and bashes. We were then removed to the military post in Ennistymon where we were interrogated in a gentlemanly manner by a British officer. A few days later we were removed to Ennis military barracks. There we were savagely attacked by a party of military led by a provost-sergeant named David Finlay. Finlay was a native of Scotland and he had earned a notorious name for himself in Ennis for his cruelty and for the third degree methods he used on prisoners. When Finlay and his gang were finished with us, I would say that Neylon was the worst hurt. He was covered with cuts and bruises; he was bleeding from the scalp and his fingers were damaged when, with his hands, he tried to ward off kicks.

About a week later we were removed to Limerick Prison. In the New Barracks in Limerick we were tried by field general courtmartial. There were a number of charges brought against us under the Defence of the Realm Act and the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act. The principal one, however, was one of armed robbery in that, whilst armed, we robbed James Hynes of rate-books the property of the Clare Co. Council. We refused to recognise the Court. James Hynes gave evidence and

stated that he knew both Murphy and myself from our childhood days and that neither of us were present at the taking of the books. He also stated that he saw no guns and that he did not believe that Neylon was one of the men who removed the books from his house. Neylon was found guilty and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude. Murphy and I were acquitted and ordered to be released.

Outside the barrack gates Murphy and I were rearrested and a brother of mine, who was waiting for me outside, was also arrested and brought in. Fresh charges were preferred and this time we were tried by district courtmartial. This form of trial was a pure farce. One army officer read out the charges and another, on hearing the charges read, immediately pronounced sentence. In my case, I was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, and the other two (Murphy and my brother) got sentences of either two or three months each. We served those sentences in Limerick Prison. The prison authorities made an effort to force us to do hard labour; evidently they thought they could treat us as criminals. We went on hunger strike and after six days of the strike, the late Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, then Bishop of Limerick, intervened on our behalf and, as a result, we were granted ameliorated prisoner treatment. I was released during the Truce period, probably in August 1921, when I had my sentence completed.

With the exception of a further reference to Sergeant David Finlay who, as I have said, was notorious for ill-treating prisoners in Ennis military barracks, that concludes my narrative. A few months after my release from Limerick Prison I chanced to be in the Queen's Hotel in Ennis one day when Finlay came in. He was in civilian clothes and I am sure

that I would scarcely have recognised him were it not for the fact that he approached me and, wagging his finger at me, said: "I know you; you are so-and-so and you are one of the Shinners". I learned that he was then a regular visitor to the hotel bar. I passed this information on and that night, when Finlay left the hotel, he was met by some of our boys in Ennis who took him down a laneway and administered to him such a dose of his own medicine that he died from its effects the following day.

Signed: Thos. S. H. GoughDate: 10. 12. - 1956Witness: J. Grace