

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS  
No. W.S. 1,616

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1616.

**Witness**

John McGill,  
Palatine,  
Co. Carlow.

**Identity.**

Vice Commandant, 3rd Battalion,  
Carlow Brigade.

**Subject.**

Rathvilly Company, Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Carlow, 1914 - Truce.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY JOHN MCGILL,  
Palatine, Co. Carlow.

I joined the Rathvilly Company of the Irish Volunteers at its formation in 1914. It was a fairly strong company and we were drilled by an ex British soldier named John Foley. We had no arms whatever, but we drilled with wooden guns which I made in my workshop.

About two months after the outbreak of the 1st World War, Mr. John Redmond delivered a speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, in which he appealed to the Volunteers and the young men of Ireland to join the British Army and fight for the freedom of small nations. Shortly after this, Mr. Redmond made a similar appeal at a meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin. Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister of England, also addressed this meeting and appealed for recruits for the British army.

As a result of Redmond's appeals to the Volunteers to join the British army, the Volunteer movement throughout the country was split. As Redmond had tremendous influence in the country at that time, the majority of the Volunteers in each company sided with him. Our company simply broke up, but a few members of it did join the British army.

National feeling in the country was at a very low ebb until the Rising of Easter Week, 1916. The heroism and self-sacrifice of the men who fought in it re-enkindled the spirit of freedom in the people, especially in the young men and women, and the whole countryside was stirred into action.

Early in 1917, companies of Volunteers were formed in every parish. A company was formed in Rathvilly and I joined it. There were about 30 men in the company, and John Donnelly was Company Captain. At this time we had no arms. Our training was mainly drilling, field exercises and lectures on military subjects.

Soon there was a company in almost every parish, and the following companies were formed into the 3rd Battalion, Carlow Brigade - Rathvilly, Clonmore, Killinure, Tullow, Ballon, Ardattin, Myshall, Kildavin and Clonegal. Michael Keating was appointed Battalion O/C.

Early in 1918, the British Government introduced an act in the House of Commons to conscript Irishmen into the British army. The Volunteers decided to resist conscription by every means in their power, and large numbers of young men came into the Volunteers. When the British Government decided not to enforce conscription, most of those who had joined during the crisis fell away.

During the 1918 general election, the Volunteers actively supported the Sinn Féin candidates. We organised public meetings, canvassed the voters, distributed literature, etc. The Sinn Féin candidate for our area was Seamus Lennon, and a man named Donovan from Dublin was the nominee of the Irish Party. The Volunteers had made arrangements to act as personation agents at the polling booths and to help to bring the voters to the poll. At the last minute the Irish Party candidate withdrew from the election and Seamus Lennon, the Sinn Féin candidate, was returned unopposed.

Sometime in 1919, John Nolan and I thought that we could form a company, or at least a section, in Ballyhacket, so we went to Tullow to see Michael Keating, the Battalion O/C, to have a chat with him about it and to get him to give us permission to go ahead with it. The O/C was very reluctant to give his consent, but after a good deal of arguing he agreed to let us go ahead. We contacted the boys whom we thought would be interested, and were surprised at the number who turned up on the first night. I am sure there were about twenty present. We told them what was expected of every Volunteer, and warned them to keep what they saw and heard to themselves, and impressed on them the necessity of coming in time for the parades. John Nolan put them through some foot drill and fixed the next parade night. Everything went well and it turned out to be a first-class section. It was attached to the Rathvilly Company.

Officers of other companies at this time, as far as I can remember, were: Willie O'Dea, O/C Tullow Company, Dan Byrne was also an officer in this company. John Donnelly was O/C Rathvilly. John Nolan, Ballyhacket, and James Nolan, Rathmore, were officers also. Tom Donohue was O/C Clonmore, John Brophy, O/C Ardattin. Andy O'Neill and Joe O'Neill were officers in Myshall Company. Laurence Donohue was O/C Killinure. J. Shortall was also an officer. James Maher and Michael Fitzpatrick were officers of Ballon Company. Owing to arrests, promotions, etc., there were numerous changes in the officer personnel of the Battalion Staff and the various companies in the battalion.

In 1919, when the Irish Volunteers came under the control of Dáil Éireann, they became the Irish Republican

Army, and all officers and men took an oath of allegiance to the government of the Irish Republic.

From the end of this year, things began to liven up, and when the order came for a general raid for arms in the area all the lads were delighted to have something to break the monotony of drilling and lectures. On the night appointed for the raid, we divided the company into sections, with four men in each section. The company area was divided into districts, and a section was allotted for each district. We started early so as to be finished before the people would be gone to bed, so as not to frighten the women of the houses we intended to raid. We only raided houses where we knew or thought there were guns. We collected a good number of single and double barrel shotguns. Most of the guns were handed over to us willingly. Only in a few cases had we to threaten the owners, and they then handed over the guns when they realised that we were in earnest.

The R.I.C. barracks at Rathvilly and Ballon were evacuated and the garrisons transferred to Tullow. A few nights afterwards, both barracks were burned to the ground.

About September, 1920, a patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans was ambushed a short distance from Tullow R.I.C. barrack. Two R.I.C. men were killed and two wounded. It was rumoured at the time that one of the constables who was killed had sent in his resignation and was coming out of the police the next week.

The morning after the attack, the R.I.C. carried out reprisals and burned two of the biggest shops in

Tullow. Extensive raids were carried out, and members of the I.R.A. who were arrested were stripped to see if they had wounds. In the course of the raids, the R.I.C. enquired about Michael Keating, the Battalion O/C, and Dan Byrne, an officer of the Tullow Company, and issued threats as to what would happen to them when they would be captured. Both Keating and Byrne had to go 'on the run', and William Donohue, who was Vice O/C of the battalion, was appointed O/C, and Matthew Cullen was appointed Vice O/C. A month or so later Cullen was arrested, and shortly afterwards the Battalion O/C, William Donohue, was also arrested. Patrick Kerrins (Kearns) was appointed Battalion O/C, and Andy O'Neill, Vice O/C.

From the autumn of 1920 onwards, activity in our area increased considerably by blocking roads etc. Enemy patrols travelled frequently throughout our area, but in spite of their activity we kept felling trees and knocking bridges. We did one or two every week. When we got information that the military lorries used other roads, we blocked them immediately. I don't think there is any need to go into details of these operations, as every one of them had the same preparation, the same labour and watchfulness. But the one that gave us the most pleasure was the destruction of the bridge over the Slaney at Rathmore. I must mention here our local blacksmith - John Coates of Rathmore. He was not a member of the I.R.A., but he kept our chisels, crowbars and picks in the best of trim, so when we went on a demolition job we could not find fault with our tools.

Coming back to the destruction of the bridge at Rathmore: It had been decided to do the job on a

particular night. The boys had been instructed to assemble at Rathmore national school and, as was usual, they were told not to proceed there in big numbers. The night previous to that on which we had arranged to destroy the bridge, all the boys were amusing themselves one way or the other at Ballyhackett Cross, which was commonly known as the Bullring. The next night, we assembled as arranged at Rathmore national school, which was about half a mile from the Bullring. At about 8.30 an enemy patrol came to the Bullring and made enquiries as to where all the lads were who were there the night before. It was obvious that someone must have given them this information.

When we decided that it was time to start at the bridge, we did not know that the patrol had just passed over it. We started on the job and it was a tough one, but we got a good gap in the bridge, more than halfway across. Next morning, when the Tans heard that the bridge had been destroyed, they were furious. They made a big round-up and our company captain, John Nolan, was arrested and interned. I was promoted company captain. I think it was about two months later that Pat Kerrins (Kearns), Battalion O/C, was arrested and Andy O'Neill appointed to replace him. I succeeded O'Neill as Vice O/C. We held these positions up to the Truce.

I remember one night I was cycling with James Nolan of Rathmore to a Battalion Council meeting at Ballon and we ran straight into an enemy cycle patrol between Moatabower and Killerig. It was after curfew hour. They halted us and asked where we were going. I said we were going to Killerig for a drink. They believed me and let us go, but they kept our bicycles. We borrowed

two bicycles at Killerig and continued to Ballon and had our meeting.

Routine work of knocking bridges, felling trees across the roads, road trenching, cutting communications and generally harassing the enemy was continued up to the Truce. A regiment of military was camped at Duckett's Grove a few nights before the Truce. One night at 11.30 they left the camp and carried out raids over a large area around Rathvilly. They made several arrests, and those arrested were sent to jails or internment camps.

The Truce came shortly afterwards. It was a great relief to all of us, as we were glad of a bit of a rest.

The members of the Battalion Staff at the Truce were:

Andy O'Neill	-	Battalion O/C
John McGill (myself)	-	Battalion Vice O/C.
Joseph O'Neill	-	" Adjutant.
John Byrne	-	" Quartermaster.

The Brigade Staff at the Truce was:

Eamon Malone	-	Brigade O/C
Thomas O'Connell	-	" Vice O/C
Patrick Keane	-	" Adjutant.
William Brennan	-	" Quartermaster.

The companies forming the 3rd Battalion were:

A. Coy.,	Clonmore	-	Denis Dolan, O/C.
B. "	Grangeford	-	William Mara "
C. "	Hacketstown	-	Thomas Kennedy "
D. "	Rathvilly	-	James Nolan "
E. "	Tulloh	-	James Roche "
F. "	Ballon	-	James Maher "
G. "	Killinure	-	Laur. Donohue "
H. "	Clonegal	-	David Hickey "
J. "	Myshall	-	Martin Kealy "
K. "	Kildavin	-	Thomas Curry "
L. "	Ardattin	-	John Brophy "

I cannot finish without saying a word of praise for the men of the Ballyhacket section. I cannot single



out one above the other, as each gave of his best.

The members of this section were John Nolan, Ballyhacket, Jim Nolan, Rathmore, W. Dowling, F. Dowling, Tom Nolan, E. and J. Doyle, all of Ballyhacket, J.M.A. and P. McGill and Maurice Loughlin of Straboe, Stephen Redmond and his brother Willie of Ballycook, Jimmy Teehan, Tom Fox and Paddy Coates. They were men any O/C could be proud of.

Signed: John M. Gill

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> May 1957

Witness: Dean Brennan Lieut. Col.  
(Investigator).

