

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,645

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1645.

Witness

Patrick Lyons,  
Lisgorman,  
Ballyvarry,  
Co. Mayo.

Identity.

Capt., Ballyvarry Coy., Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Mayo.

Subject.

Ballyvarry Coy., Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Mayo, 1917-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2965.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK LYONS,

Lisgorman, Co. Mayo.

I was born in the townland of Lisgorman 68 years ago. My father had a farm on which I worked. There were eight of us altogether, four sisters and three brothers. My father was a Fenian and always told us about the history of our country. I think he had 'John Mitchell's History of Ireland' off by heart. A Father O'Hara used to come to our house and I remember them talking and debating different Irish Histories.

I went to school in Carrowgowan but the teacher had not much nationality and the Parish Priest, a Father O'Grady, was an extreme Redmonite; later on he refused to give me the school to hold a dance for the local Sinn Féin club. But we held the dance there all the same, as there was only an ordinary padlock with a chain holding the door.

In or about 1914 or 1915 I used to get a paper called "The Spark" through a friend of mine in Castlebar and, although we were not organised before 1917, I suspected something was happening, so we formed a kind of Company of Volunteers of our own. I was also Captain of the local G.A.A. team and always marched the team to the different matches we played. The R.I.C. always followed us, so I often marched the team back home across the country, which made things difficult for the police, over hedges and ditches.

In the early part of 1917, Seán Corcoran and Tommy Ruane of Kiltimagh came out to form the first Company of Volunteers. John Walsh was appointed Captain and I was appointed 1st Lieutenant, and Hugh Carey 2nd Lieutenant. The Adjutant was Jack O'Dwyer who

was shot during the Prohibition period in New York. His brother became a famous Mayor of New York.

We continued all our parades and drilling, also raids for arms preparing for Conscription. We collected about twenty shot guns - I was lucky to get two good shot guns and a .38 Webley revolver in one house, but no ammunition until later on.

In preparing for the General Election we wanted to raise funds, so we formed a Dramatic Club to learn a Play. We learned two Plays called "The Man in Possession" and "Paid in His Own Coin"; also a sketch called "The Tinker". As we had trouble with the Parish Priest over the school, we hired a marquee for £5. from Dublin and made over £87 on the concerts.

I was warned by a friendly R.I.C. man named O'Hanlon from the North who told Hugh Carey that I should not sleep at home as it was intended to block the Plays, if possible, by arresting me on any charge.

The day after I left home the Sergeant and one R.I.C. man called to my father's house enquiring for me. I kept away until the Plays were over and then went back home.

On the day of the General Election I was on duty at the Polling Stations when I saw the Parish Priest, Father Denis O'Hara, distributing Redmonite leaflets. He went into the Post Office for a stamp and left his bundle of literature on the counter. I slipped in without he seeing me and exchanged his bundle for a bundle of ours in support of De Valera who was opposing John Dillon. Father O'Hara never noticed the difference but came

out and went on distributing our leaflets until they were all gone when he went home. Although he was bitterly opposed to us he was a good priest and did a lot of good for the parish of Kiltimagh.

During this election we had several clashes with the A.O.H. who, on one occasion, put a stone through our Big Drum and injured a few of us. We could not fight back as all this stone-throwing took place from behind the English Military and R.I.C. who made no attempt to stop it. This took place in the birthplace of Michael Davitt in Straide, and on the return of the Military to Castlebar through Ballyvarry they made an attempt to snatch a Tricolour from a man named Murphy by driving close to the footpath. Murphy was struck by the lorry and killed. At an enquiry later the local Sergeant of the R.I.C. picked a Jury which exonerated the driver from all blame.

In 1919 there was a lot of land trouble near Kiltimagh at a place called Tooromeen owned by Colonel Jordan who was the landlord, and was constantly persecuting his tenants who refused to pay rent when he would not sell their small holdings to them. They were all summoned to the local Court in Kiltimagh. The Irish Volunteer Companies of Bohola and Kiltimagh were ordered to parade at the Courthouse and in case the decision went against the tenants we were to rush the Court, capture the Resident Magistrate named Bell from Westport and Colonel Jordan. However, Colonel Jordan consented to sell, so that everything went off alright. We were all carrying hurleys with which we used to drill.

In 1920 we were responsible for the destruction of Kiltimagh and Bohola R.I.C. barracks, from which the R.I.C. had been moved

to Foxford. Mooney and Corcoran of Kiltimagh were severely burned at Bohola.

At this time the R.I.C. used to patrol from Foxford to Bohola and Kiltimagh on bicycles, so it was decided to attack them at some time. So four of us, Eamon Corbett, Willie Moran, Tom Byrne and myself, selected a position midway between the old and new cemetery in Bohola and took up position about 2 o'clock in the day. Another Volunteer named Matty Ruane from Kiltimagh Company, who was not expecting anything to happen cycled up and we stopped him. He told us he was going to Foxford for Dr. Fearon for his mother who was sick and he decided to wait to give us a hand as his mother was not too bad. Round about 3 o'clock we saw two R.I.C. coming along, riding their bicycles. We were armed with shot guns and Corbett had a .32 revolver and plenty of ammunition. When they got opposite to where we were inside the fence we shouted on them to halt and put up their hands. They immediately dismounted and did what they were told. We found they were unarmed, so we took their bicycles, belts and batons and sent them off walking back to Foxford. They had no documents or notebooks.

A man named McMahon came down from Dublin and started a class for officers. He stayed with us about a month. We all liked him and picked up a lot from his instructions.

There were two or three other R.I.C. patrols held up. On one of these occasions an R.I.C. man from Foxford refused to give up his bicycle until a shot was sent off by his ear. Tom Moran, a brother-in-law of mine, was responsible for this hold-up and had only one Volunteer named Byrne with him.

In 1920 there was a man named William Kelly who was supposed to have shot a cow belonging to the Captain of the Straide Volunteer Company, John McDonnell. He knew he was under suspicion for the shooting of the cow and he went into the R.I.C. barracks in Foxford where he stayed with the Black and Tans. He came back now and again to see his stock on a farm of about fourteen acres. So Eamon Corbett and myself decided to contact him. He was pulling hay from a rick when we saw him first. Corbett went down and told him he wanted to take a statement from him. He went towards the house; Corbett went in first and Kelly and I stayed outside. I told him to go on in and he said "No, anything you have to say get on with it". I put my hand on his shoulder to use a bit of mild persuasion and as soon as I did he put his hand in his hip pocket and tried to draw a gun. I grabbed the hand in the pocket and prevented him from drawing it and also got my other hand around his neck. Corbett shouted out, "What are you doing out there; take it easy!" I shouted back, "It's alright about taking it easy when there's a man trying to shoot you". While we were still struggling for the gun Corbett came out and put his gun to Kelly's head, and I then took the gun off him - a .38 American type revolver. I was armed myself but did not get time to draw my gun. We then brought him into the house where he made a statement and admitted shooting the cow. We arrested him and held him for three or four days, when he consented to pay for the cow. He was afterwards released. And, strange to say, although well warned he went back to the R.I.C. I forgot to mention he was not "all there" (feeble-minded) He later brought the Tans to where he thought he was detained and was responsible for getting three well known loyalists arrested.

They were immediately released from Foxford Barracks on being identified by the old R.I.C. Kelly went back to America and we were reliably informed he threw himself over the rail from the liner on his way over.

All this took place not long before the Truce.

I would like to give full details of the attack on Ballyvarry R.I.C. barracks to the best of my recollection as follows:

The attack and capture of Ballyvarry Barracks  
and its sequel in August, 1920.

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There was a 'Pattern' in Loch Keiran where I met Eamon Corbett from Galway who was 'on the run'. We both had revolvers and were looking out for an R.I.C. man named Breen from County Clare, as we heard he had a brother with some of our Flying Columns in Clare. We met him and told him he would be alright himself if he would leave the back-door of the barracks unbolted at an arranged time and day. He agreed and it was fixed for the following Sunday during 11.30 Mass in Keelogue Chapel which was about a mile from the village.

Ballyvarry was in the parish of Keelogue and had no chapel nearer. The barracks was in the village but in an isolated position. It was garrisoned by from eight to ten R.I.C. men. These included two Black and Tans.

The Battalion Council held a meeting and everything was arranged for the following Sunday. In the actual attack there were eight men picked to rush the barracks and sixteen men to provide the necessary cover, together with the various parties out cutting telegraph lines and blocking roads, the most important of

which was overlooked as a British lorry came on this road.

On Sunday morning we all went to Communion (after Confession in various churches the previous evening) at 9 o'clock Mass.

We mobilised near my home and went to Ballyvarry through lanes and bye-ways on bicycles. On arriving in Ballyvarry, I took my party to the wall at the back of the barracks on the Straide side. We succeeded in getting up to the wall (which was about fifteen yards from the barrack door) unnoticed, and after a few minutes delay we marched forward and found the door unbolted, as arranged. Inside we found a Black and Tan washing himself. He said "Put down the revolvers; I'll give no trouble". The same happened with three other R.I.C. men and we locked them into a cell. The rest of the R.I.C. were at Mass.

We got eight rifles, six revolvers, a Verrey pistol, some bombs and a quantity of ammunition. While we were proceeding to get the stuff out the back-door, some of the others were taking the R.I.C. bicycles out the front door, and they saw a lorry of troops coming down the street. They immediately closed the door and watched the lorry pull up at Canning's public house, where some of the troops went in, the officer walking up and down the street.

We got tired waiting for them to come out, so we got the stuff out on the back-door and succeeded in bringing it into the Bohola district.

Breen, the R.I.C. man who helped, locked himself in a bedroom and did not come out. When the remainder of the R.I.C. returned from Mass they released their comrades but we were well away. In order to save Breen from suspicion we sent him threatening letters.

That night my father's house was raided for me and all they got was a half-bottle of Poteen, for having which my father was summoned to the Court at Swinford where he was prosecuted and fined £6. When I saw him later I told him to put the £6. in a registered envelope and send it to the D.I. of the R.I.C. at Swinford. (This he was instructed to do by the Court as well). He did so and posted it at Bohola Post Office, so with a few comrades we started for Kiltimagh where all the mails from the surrounding districts were brought to be put on the train. When we got to Kiltimagh the bags were already gone to the railway station and we followed them as quickly as we could.

We held up the Postmen, captured the Bohola bag, got the registered letter, took out the £6. and marked the envelope - "Censored by I.R.A." We also got another letter addressed to the D.I. which we held, as it gave information about the locality. Corbett kept the letter and the person who wrote the letter was warned and later left the district.

SIGNED:

Patrick Lyons

DATE:

July June 23/54

WITNESS:

J.P. [Signature]  
Call

