

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,696

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1696.

Witness

Patrick Quinn,
Ringlestown,
Kilmessan,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

O/C, 1st Battalion, No. 2 Brigade,
1st Eastern Div., I.R.A.

Subject.

Bective Coy., Trim Battalion,
Meath Brigade I.R.A., 1917-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 3013.

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK QUINN,

Ringlestown, Kilmessan, County Meath.

I was born in Ballinter, Navan, in the year 1900. I went to the local National School there for some years and later attended Trim Model School. When I left school I went into the building trade with my father and became a bricklayer.

At the latter end of 1917, Paddy Mooney and Seamus O'Higgins of Trim organised the first sections of Volunteers in Bective, Kiltale and Dunderry. I joined the Bective section at the start. During the conscription period in 1918, several new recruits joined up in each of those villages. When our strength reached about twenty members about the summer of 1918, officers were elected for the Bective Company. Up to then we were a section of the Trim Company. Frank Loughran was elected Captain; I became 1st Lieutenant, Christy Caffrey 2nd Lieutenant, my brother, James Quinn, became Adjutant and Jack O'Brien became Quartermaster. All this time our drill instructor was Paddy Mooney of Trim. We had no arms of any kind. Some short time after the formation of the Company, both Frank Loughran and a Volunteer named John Mangan were arrested by the R.I.C. They spent a period in Mountjoy jail and took part in a hunger strike there. When Frank Loughran was arrested I was appointed Captain in his place.

At the end of the year, with all the Volunteers in the area, I took an active part in the General Election campaign. All through the year 1919 we paraded and drilled at least once a week. In about the month of October I received an order from Paddy Mooney to collect all arms in civilian hands in my Company area. We collected about thirty shotguns and a few obsolete revolvers. We had no trouble of any kind as their owners surrendered them willingly.

In the month of November Paddy Loughran, Captain of Navan Company, attempted by a ruse to enter Dillons Bridge R.I.C. barracks to seize the arms of the garrison. He was unsuccessful. He and his men then opened fire on the windows with shotguns for a few minutes and then withdrew. The garrison within replied with rifle fire. One R.I.C. man was wounded in the attack. Previous to the attack, roads in the Bective, Kiltale and Dunderry Company areas were blocked. A short time later this barracks was evacuated.

Early in 1920, a gang of robbers began to operate in the area in the name of the I.R.A. Their depredations were widespread and farmers' families in remote districts were terrified. It came to a head at the latter end of April or early in May when the Duc de Stackpoole's house at Tubbertydwan was raided and several shots fired through the building. They beat up an old woman servant who got so terrified that her mind became unbalanced and she was taken to Mullingar asylum where she died. The gang, who numbered five, were arrested by Seán Boylan and some of his men from Dunboyne and were detained for some time in a disused house in our area pending their trial. They were tried by an I.R.A. Military Court. The Judges were Seán Boylan, Seamus O'Higgins and Pat Clinton. They admitted the offences and were sentenced to be shot. A priest was called to hear their Confessions and to administer the last rites of the Church. At the last moment someone interceded on their behalf with the result that they were reprieved and sentenced to deportation. They were deported from the North Wall to England. In England one of them named Byrne joined the Tans and was sent back to Trim R.I.C. barracks. From there he participated with the R.I.C. and Tans in every raid on the houses of I.R.A. men and was responsible for the arrest of several of our men including some of those who were on guard duty during his detention. Frank Loughran and John Mangan, who had been released a short time earlier, were re-arrested. Several

others, including a Volunteer named Horan of Bective Company, were among those arrested. During the trial of Horan, Byrne the Tan went into the witness box and told the Court that Horan had dressed himself in priest's clothes to hear his Confession. Of course Horan denied this and the priest who actually did hear Byrne's Confession went into the witness box and explained that it was he who was asked to attend to the five prisoners, and did so. The incident got great publicity in the newspapers at the time. All of our boys received various terms of imprisonment.

In the summer of the year, 1920, our area was formed into a battalion. It comprised Trim, Kiltale, Bective and Dunderry Companies. It became known as the Trim or 2nd Battalion of Meath Brigade. Michael Hynes became Battalion O/C, Paddy Mooney-Vice O/C., John O'Higgins-Adjutant and Pat Dignan Quartermaster, Eamon Cullen-Engineer and Pat Clinton - I.O. Activities this year included odd raids for arms and routine drilling.

In the month of September, Trim R.I.C. barracks was captured, all arms were seized and the barracks burned down. Its capture had been planned by the Brigade and Battalion staff and the operation was carried out on a Sunday morning while most of the garrison were at Mass. I was with a group of about twenty men in charge of Paddy Mooney and Mick Hynes who actually rushed the building after crossing a gate in one of the walls surrounding the building. Paddy Mooney and Mick Hynes were the first two to enter. As they did so a District Inspector of the R.I.C. attempted to reach a box of hand grenades but was shot dead in the attempt. All the rest of the R.I.C., who were either cooking or having their breakfast, put up their hands and surrendered. There were three or four civilians in the barracks with the R.I.C. that morning. They appeared to have slept there that night. In less time than it takes to relate, we had petrol and

paraffin brought in and sprinkled over the entire building. In the meantime the R.I.C. and their friends - they were all men - were bundled outside. Within a few minutes they were joined outside by the R.I.C. who had been to Mass. They had been rounded up by a party of I.R.A. in charge of Seán Boylan. By then the building was on fire. One of our men was badly scorched about the face and hands when he mistook a can of petrol for a can of paraffin. It exploded in his face as he put a match to the liquid. Seamus Finn, who had taken the cans of petrol and paraffin to the barracks in a van in the early hours of the morning, took the captured arms away in the same van. He was assisted by other Volunteers. Most of our men were armed with revolvers for the job.

All roads leading to Dunboyne had been extensively blocked for the operation and it was 2 or 3 o'clock before a number of enemy lorries reached the town. As they did so the Military opened fire on a group of young men playing football on the green and wounded two of them. The Brigade O/C. had arranged for an ambush party to come into the town of Trim that night to attack the enemy if they were carrying out reprisals. This party included a few of the men on the actual taking of the barracks, but for the most part they were all fresh men armed with shotguns and a rifle or two. Following the shooting of the two young men it appears that a local priest and a couple of prominent residents of the town approached the British officer in charge and requested that there should be no reprisals. He was an old military officer. He made a definite promise that there would be no reprisals. When word was conveyed to our officers of the promise of no reprisals, the order to our ambush party was cancelled. It was impossible to notify all of our men that the order had been cancelled and several of them were actually in the town before they received notification of it.

Everything was quiet enough until about 12 o'clock that night. At that late hour several lorry loads of Tans descended on the town. They made for the public houses first thing. Having drunk their fill of whiskey, wine and brandy, they appeared to have gone mad with the stuff - many of them drank a full bottle of whiskey. It was a night of loot and terror and most of the townspeople fled into the countryside. In this drunken orgy they plundered and robbed and set fire to many old established business premises, including the premises of J. & E. Smyth & Co., in Market Street, Grocery, Provision and Spirit Merchants; Seamus O'Higgins' public house and restaurant, Allen Brothers, Tailors and Drapers - prominent Sinn Feiners, and Mooney's - Delph and Hardware Merchants.

About a week later the R.I.C. and Tans took over a big house in Mill Street which they occupied as a barracks. After the capture of the Barracks, all or nearly all the members of Trim Company went 'on the run' and with others who had been active in the Battalion area they formed an Active Service Unit. They included Paddy Mooney, Seamus O'Higgins, Michael Hynes, John O'Higgins, the brothers Jim and John Sherry, Christy Caffrey, Christy Reid, "Foultice" Kelly and myself. We set up our headquarters at Ciarogue House, Kilmessan, which was unoccupied at the time.

About a fortnight or three weeks later, the ten men referred to above went into Trim once again to attack an R.I.C. and Tan patrol in the town. This patrol numbered about twelve men and they patrolled the town in extended formation each night when the public houses were about to close around 10 p.m. We carried rifles, shotguns and a couple of hand-grenades and took up positions behind old walls on a derelict site in the middle of Haggard Street on the way to the railway station. We were in extended formation. When the patrol were well inside the

ambush position, either Seamus O'Higgins or Paddy Mooney threw the hand-grenades. We opened fire at the same time. The patrol ran for cover and replied to our fire. A sharp battle ensued for fifteen minutes after which we withdrew across fields to the back of the derelict site. We got on to the railway line and got back safely to Ciarogue House.

Early next morning a stranger was observed in the vicinity. He was thought to be an enemy agent. We left the house that day. Mooney, O'Higgins and Hynes went to the Stonefield Company area; the rest of us to other areas. That night a strong force of Tans and military surrounded the house and made a thorough search. All they found was our bedding which we had left behind. After the ambush the authorities offered rewards of £1,000 each for O'Higgins, Mooney and Hynes. They were now badly wanted men. All of us in the local Company had to go 'on the run'. After the attack, a detachment of Auxiliaries occupied the Industrial School with another building attached in the town of Trim. Between R.I.C., Tans and Auxiliaries the enemy strength in the town was now approximately 150 men. It became their Headquarters for the area.

By this time several R.I.C. barracks in the Brigade area had been evacuated including two in our battalion area - Robinstown and Dillon's Bridge or Lismullen barracks. They were both burned down on the orders of the Brigade O/C. Paddy Mooney was in charge at the burning of Robinstown and Frank Loughran, who had been released once again, was in charge at the burning of Dillon's Bridge barracks.

Roads and bridges were now being trenched or broken regularly. They had been first trenched or blocked for the Dillon's Bridge and Trim barracks attacks and by Christmas of 1920 every road bridge in our

battalion area had been broken. They were broken the hard way with pick and crowbar. As elsewhere, the Tans and Military commandeered local residents to fill in the trenches. That night they were reopened by local Volunteers.

In early 1921, it was decided to attack an enemy patrol on the Navan to Trim road at Claddy. About seventy men in all had been mobilised - some from each of the four Companies in the Battalion. We had about six rifles, some rifle grenades, a number of shotguns, a few hand grenades and a land mine. The land mine was made by Eamon Cullen at Brigade Headquarters and was sent to us from there. It was made of cement, cased and bolted. A number of detonators, electric wire and battery were also supplied. Michael Kiernan of Dunderry Company, our Battalion Engineer, laid the mine. The Trim and Dunderry men were placed in extended positions on the right hand side of the road as one faced Trim. The Rective and Kiltale men on the Boyne Valley side, which afforded us a good retreat across a nearby railway line. After all our preparations our scouts informed us after a long wait that the enemy lorries we had been waiting for had reached Trim by The Commons/Robinstown Road, having to plank a broken bridge at Shambo.

A few weeks later, twelve of us mobilised again with small arms and the same land mine. This time the mine was laid at Kilcooley near Kilcooley graveyard. Michael Kiernan, who was to explode the mine, took the wire attached across the graveyard and stood with the battery behind a wall of the graveyard. We took up positions on the opposite side of the road. Once again we were out of luck - the enemy did not turn up.

At the latter end of March our Battalion, which was the Trim or No. 2. Battalion, and the Navan or 6th Battalion were ^{re-}organised into

a Brigade and became one of nine Brigades comprising the 1st Eastern Division. It was known as No. 2. Brigade. The various Companies in this Brigade area were divided into four Battalions instead of two as formerly. We became the 1st Battalion in the newly formed Brigade. The Brigade officers appointed were Patrick Kelly, O/C., William Booth, Vice O/C., Thomas Coyle, Adjutant, Michael Hynes, Quartermaster, Michael Hilliard, I/O., and Joseph Hughes, Engineer. The officers appointed to the 1st Battalion Staff were myself - Patrick Quinn, O/C.; Christy Caffrey, Vice O/C.; my brother - James Quinn, Adjutant; and John O'Brien, Quartermaster.

About the month of April or early in May, 1921, a Sinn Féin Court was established in the Battalion area. R. J. Murray was appointed President. Jack Horan and another man were appointed District Justices. Harry McGrane was appointed Battalion Chief of Police. The local I.R.A. carried out all Police duties. It was only a few weeks before the Truce was signed that the Court began to function.

In the month of June, the Brigade O/C., Patrick Kelly, was instructed to collect and forward to the Maynooth/Leixlip area all arms in our area. The order was issued by the Divisional O/C., Seán Boylan, in preparation for a large-scale attack on an enemy troop train at Stackcumney about three miles from Gormanstown. I collected all arms in the Battalion area and sent them in charge of Jack O'Brien and my brother James Quinn in a pony trap driven by a Miss Kiernan who was a sister of our Battalion Engineer, Michael Kiernan. The attack which was to have been carried out by members of the Fingall, Maynooth and Navan Brigades did not take place. It appears that the railway line at the spot had been mined and our men had taken up positions awaiting the arrival of the troop train when they were spotted by an

by an enemy plane which transmitted the information to the Gormanstown garrison. When the garrison at Gormanstown got the news they tried to surround our men but the latter managed to extricate themselves.

A couple of weeks prior to the Truce a Company of I.R.A. was reorganised in the town of Trim and a man named Michael McCarroll, known as the "Gale" McCarroll, an ex-British soldier, was appointed Captain. He managed to enlist about ten Volunteers including Walter and Billy Carter, two brothers named Smyth and a couple of men named Fay. The old Volunteers of this Company were all "on the run" until the Truce was signed. They included Paddy Mooney and his two brothers, the three brothers Giles, Pat O'Hagan in whose house the attack on Trim barracks was planned and Pat Dignam and his brother. A sister of the latter was also "on the run".

SIGNED:

Patrick Quinn

DATE:

27th November 1957

WITNESS:

John J. Doherty

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