

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 342

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 342.....

Witness

Mr. Michael Newell,
Brierhill,
Castlegar,
Co. Galway.

Identity

Coy. Intelligence Officer, Castlegar (Co. Galway)
Coy. Irish Volunteers 1916;
O/C. Galway No. 1 Brigade 1920-1921.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1908-1916;
- (b) Making of pike heads for Irish Volunteers;
- (c) Easter Week 1916 - Carnmore Cross and
Athenry, Co. Galway.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 1326.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL NEWELL

Brierhill, Castlegar, Galway.

I joined the Athenry Circle of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1908. I was sworn in by Dick Murphy who was the Centre. Sometime later a Circle was started at Castlegar and I was transferred to it. Michael Mulroyan was elected Centre of the Castlegar Circle. There were about thirty members in the Circle. Meetings were held regularly every fortnight and sometimes oftener. Members subscribed twopence per week for the purchase of arms and to defray branch expenses. The principal matters discussed at the meetings were, the recruiting of new members and land division.

At this time there was a great deal of agitation for the division of land. The I.R.B. took a leading part in the agitation and carried out numerous cattle drives, also the breaking down of walls on the farms of landlords and land-grabbers, whose houses were also fired into.

About this time there was great agitation over the farm of Mr. Martin Cullinan at Kiltulla, which had been grabbed by Mr. Martin Conroy who lived at Ballintemple. In 1910 Conroy's house was fired into at about 9 o'clock at night and Mr. Conroy was wounded in the head. The day after the shooting I was arrested by the R.I.C. and brought to Galway Jail and charged with the attempted murder of Mr. Conroy.

I was remanded in custody to the Spring Assises and after three months was tried before Judge Doyle and a jury, and acquitted.

Following the shooting of Constable McGolderick at Craughwell, I was charged with the offence of shouting up Craughwell which I did not do. I was put under bail of £100 to be of good behaviour for twelve months. I was constantly harassed by the police and was advised by the I.R.B. to leave the district for a while. This was 1911, so I went to Dunboyne, Co. Meath.

I joined the Dunboyne Company of the Volunteers when it was formed early in 1914. Seán Boylan was the Company Captain. At the end of 1914 I went to Mullingar. Shortly before Christmas 1915 I met Brian Mollóy who was Captain of the Castlegar Company of the Volunteers. He told me that things were moving very rapidly and that he wanted me home to make pike heads. I came home immediately and was attached to the Castlegar Company of the Irish Volunteers. I was appointed Company Intelligence Officer. There were about seventy men in the Company. I made pike heads after normal working hours in my father's forge at Brierhill. As I was still being closely watched by the police, we put out sentries on all occasions to warn us of the approach of the police. I made between fifty and sixty pike heads altogether.

On Holy Thursday night, 1916, Brian Molloy, Tom Ruane and I met George Nichols by appointment at

Oranmore railway station. Nichols was travelling on the train from Dublin which arrived at Oranmore at 12 midnight. Nichols told us that the Rising was to start at 7 o'clock on Easter Sunday evening, and to convey that message immediately to Captain Alf Monahan, who at that time was "on the run" at Cashla, Athenry. We went straight to Cashla, walking all the way, a distance of about six Irish miles. We gave Monahan the message; he did not seem one bit surprised. He then gave us our instructions. He told us that the Castlegar and Claregalway Companies were to join together and attack and capture the police hut at Lydecan, which was occupied by about five policemen.

Having captured the hut and taken all arms, equipment, etc., we were to burn the hut, take the police prisoners and march to Loughgeorge, attack and capture the police Barracks there which was garrisoned by about nine policemen. We were then to proceed to Kilcon and capture the police Barracks there, which was also garrisoned by about nine men. Having made prisoners of the police in each Barracks we were to handcuff them together, and march them at the head of the Volunteers into Galway City where we would link up with units from other areas and receive further instructions.

On Good Friday night Captain Brian Molloy gave instructions for the Company to parade at 2 p.m. on Easter Sunday, bring all arms and equipment and two days' rations. He also advised us to go to confession and

to offer up Holy Communion on Easter Sunday for the freedom of Ireland.

On Holy Saturday morning I was making pike heads in my forge at Brierhill. I was finishing the last batch at about 12.30 when Fr. Feeney arrived. He gave us similar instructions as had been given to us by George Nichols. He also said that there was a possibility of arms being landed on the Connemara coast. While Fr. Feeney was in the forge a Sergeant and two R.I.C. men came along. When they saw the priest in the forge they did not come in but called me to go out to them. I said, "anything you have to say to me, say it here". The Sergeant said, "I have information that you are making pike heads and I warn you that if I catch you, you will be charged under the Defence of the Realm Act. They then departed and almost immediately Micheál Ó Droighean of Spiddal came along and asked me for some pike heads. I at first refused as I wanted them for my own Company. Fr. Feeney requested me to give them; I then gave him about two dozen.

I went to confession and received Holy Communion on Easter Sunday and offered it up for the freedom of Ireland. The Company mobilised as instructed and marched to Carmore cross roads, where we linked up with the Claregalway Company at about 6 p.m. Brian Molloy was in charge of the Castlegar Company and Nicholas Kyne was in charge of the Claregalway Company. The Castlegar Company was about sixty strong, between twenty and twenty-five were armed with shotguns, the remainder had the pikes I made. We were instructed to

'stand-to' for further orders. After a short time we were told that operations were cancelled. We marched back to Castlegar; the Claregalway Company went to its own area. We were told to hold ourselves in readiness for an immediate mobilisation. As there was a wake in Castlegar practically the whole Company went to it.

On Easter Monday morning we collected some shotguns from farmers in the district. At about 4 a.m. on Tuesday, Pat Calanan (the hare) and Joe Fleming arrived with instructions from Commandant Mellows that the Rising was on and to mobilise the Company and to proceed to Oranmore where we were to join forces with the Oranmore, Clarinbridge and Maree Companies. Brian Molloy went with Pat Calanan to mobilise the Moycullen Company and on his return at about 5 p.m. on Tuesday we marched to the Carnmore cross roads where we met the Claregalway Company. We continued in the direction of Oranmore, but on the way we were informed that the Companies ^{we} were to link up with there had gone to Athenry. Captain Molloy sent Lieutenant Tom Newell and a Volunteer from Claregalway Company to Commandant Mellows at Athenry for instructions. Both Companies marched back to Carnmore where the Claregalway Company billeted in farm houses and barns. The Castlegar Company billeted in Kiltullagh; sentries were placed on all roads.

At about 3 a.m. on Wednesday, Captain Brian Molloy instructed me to go to Kiltullagh and bring the Castlegar Company to Carnmore. The Castlegar Company proceeded in

the direction of Carnmore cross roads. Just as we reached the cross roads a dispatch was received from Commandant Mellows instructing Captain Molloy to proceed with both Companies to the Farmyard, Athenry, and to commandeer food and transport. The Company was halted and Captain Molloy was giving instructions as to where horses, etc. were to be got. It was then about 5 a.m. on Wednesday. I noticed a girl on a hill at Kiltullagh waving a white apron, apparently in order to attract our attention. She was Miss Sheila (Bina) King. I looked to see what was wrong and saw a number of motor cars about half a mile away coming in our direction from Galway City. We at first thought it was the Galway City Volunteers coming to join with us. Captain Molloy ordered us to take cover behind the walls. Just as we had taken cover, fire was opened on us. The cars proceeded to about one hundred yards from our position and then halted. The enemy advanced on foot on our position, firing all the time. Captain Molloy ordered us to open fire which we did, but the enemy fire was so intense and the bullets striking the top of the walls, we were compelled to keep down, and we were only able to take an occasional shot. The enemy advanced up to the cross roads and Constable Whelan was pushed by District Inspector Herd up to the wall which was about four feet high, the District Inspector standing behind Whelan and holding him by the collar of his tunic.

Constable Whelan shouted, "surrender, boys, I know ye all". Whelan was shot dead and the District Inspector fell also and lay motionless on the ground. The enemy then made an attempt to outflank our position but were beaten back. The enemy then retreated and

continued to fire until well out of range of our shotguns. They got back into the cars and went in the direction of Oramore. We had about sixty men at the cross roads, about thirty of them had shotguns and the remainder had pikes. I believe the enemy had thirteen cars with five or six men in each car. We suffered no casualties. The enemy had one killed and I believe five or six wounded. The Company then fell in and marched across country to the Farmyard, Athenry.

As we arrived near the Farmyard between 10 and 11 a.m. we had to take cover as the R.I.C. were firing on the Farmyard from the railway bridge. This attack was beaten off and we continued into the Farmyard. At about 4 o'clock that evening (Wednesday) the Brigade under Commandant Mellows marched by road to Moyode Castle where we billeted until Friday evening. Sentries were placed at various points. Commandant Mellows had the general alarm sounded often so as to keep us on the alert. At about 2 o'clock on Friday morning the alarm sounded and the whole Garrison assembled in the yard. Commandant Mellows instructed each Company to 'stand-to' attention on its own. Fr. Feaney told us to remove our caps and to say an Act of Contrition; he then gave us General Absolution. Various rumours were continually floating round the camp. One rumour was to the effect that strong British forces were advancing on our position from Loughrea and Galway City.

At about 3 or 4 o'clock on Friday evening we marched to Lime Park, travelling along the bye-roads.

It was near midnight when we reached Lime Park. I went to have a sleep as I had very little rest during the previous week. Sometime later I was awakened by Jim Feeney (brother of Fr. Feeney) who told me we were to disband. I went "on the run" with Brian Molloy. We stayed with friends in various parts of Galway, but at the end of a week we were captured. I was brought to Galway Jail and later transferred to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. After a few days I was sent to Wandsworth Prison. Having spent some time there I was sent to Woking Detention Barracks, Surrey. Later we were sent by train to Frongoch.

On the way to Frongoch, the train on which we were travelling was held up at, I think, Nottingham Station for about one and a half hours while troop trains were passing through. We were assembled on the station platform under a very strong escort of soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets. We were surrounded by a very hostile crowd of both men and women, who jeered us, called us nasty names; they also spat at us. One of the soldiers dropped his rifle to the trail position and struck three of the hostile crowd, knocking them out. He then shouted, "Up Carraroe, Up Connemara". He was John Keane, a native of Carraroe. I heard afterwards that he was tried for this assault and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, but instead was sent with a draft to the Bardenelles. He was not heard of again.

I was sent to Wormwood Scrubs Prison and appeared before the Sankey Commission. I was asked if

I was at the Carnmore cross roads when Constable Whelan was killed. I said, "I was". The same man said, "smoke was seen coming from your rifle there". I said, "no, I had not got a rifle, it was a shotgun I had". I was returned to Frongoch and was released on Christmas Eve, 1916.

SIGNED

Michael Jewell

DATE

25/1/1950

WITNESS

Sean Brennan. Comdt.

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