

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 439

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 439.....

Witness

Commandant Bernard Garraghan (Retired),
Mosstown, Keenagh,
Co. Longford.

Identity

Commandant 3rd Battalion
Longford Brigade I R.A.
November 1920 - .

Subject

Military Engagements
Co. Longford 1920 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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No. W.S. 439

STATEMENT BY BERNARD GARRAGHAN, COMDT. (Retired).

Mosstown, Keenagh, County Longford.

I joined the Volunteers in 1914 and on the outbreak of World War 1 I joined the British Army. I was in the British Army until 1918. I was wounded in 1916, and was a prisoner of war from March, 1918, until November, 1918. I was demobilised from the British Army in December, 1918.

In 1920 I joined the I.R.A. at Keenagh. This was "B" Company, 3rd Battalion, Longford Brigade. Thomas Gibbons was the Battalion O.C. McGarry was Adjutant, and Pat Farrell was Quartermaster. Peter Scally was the Battalion Vice O.C. "A" Company was the Rathcline area, Peter Farrell O.C. "B" Company - Keenagh - James Hussey O.C. "C" Company - Newtown Cashel - Dan Connolly was O.C. "D" Company - Ballymahon area - Andrew Fox was O.C. "E" Company - Forgnay area - Tommy Eivers was O.C.

The other officers of "B" Company were Ned Kenny, 1st Lieutenant, and John Brennan, 2nd Lieutenant. "B" Company was about fifty or sixty strong. It was Hussey took me into the I.R.A. I took an oath of allegiance and paid a small subscription.

The only arms available at the time were shotguns. There were a few .22 rifles and some old type revolvers.

Pat Garrett, a Dublin man who had British Army experience, and who had been sent down by Collins, was doing the military instruction previous to my joining. I now took over the instruction and visited all the Battalion in turn. Parades were held once weekly per Company. These were held in the open at this time. When I had imparted an amount of instruction I took them on route marches. The

police (R.I.C.) were in Lanesboro and other districts, but they did not interfere with us. On one occasion we mobilized the whole Battalion and marched to a sports meeting in Derrydaragh. That was in the summer of 1920.

Our first operation of a serious nature was the attack and capture of Ballymahon R.I.C. barracks. Some of our Battalion were engaged on blocking the roads. "C" Company were on the Athlone Road for protection. The Ballymahon men had the duty of protection around that area, and some of them were engaged in the attack on the barracks. The Keenagh Company were engaged in road blocking in their own area.

This attack was a success and the barracks was captured. The material for the attack was procured from Ballinalee and was deposited in Campbell's house at Lislum. It was taken from there to *MOIGH B6* Cross Roads for the attack, camouflaged as a load of hay. We got some small arms, revolvers and .45 ammunition, from the attack. Connolly and McKeown, who were there with a party from Ballinalee, took the rifles to Ballinalee.

After this, training was continuous and more concentrated. We got a few rifles from the Brigade for training purposes and we used these also to snipe the R.I.C. barracks in Lanesboro. The local R.I.C. barracks had been evacuated before the attack on Ballymahon and we had burned it. The garrison in this place was only a small one - about five or six police - and it could have been easily captured had it been planned and executed in time. The police stayed on in Ballymahon for a short period after their surrender, and then evacuated it. They had military protection while they were there. The roof of the barracks was damaged, otherwise the building was intact.

Early in 1920 a general raid for arms was carried out and through this we collected an amount of stuff, nearly all of which were shotguns; there was one sporting rifle and a few revolvers. It was really a matter of asking the people for them, as they were sympathetic towards us. My father had a few revolvers deposited, which he gave to us. The ammunition collected for those weapons was only a small amount.

The police had at this time evacuated most of their outlying barracks and concentrated the garrisons in larger centres. All the evacuated barracks were burned on one particular night. The only occupied barracks left in South Longford was Lanesboro. This covered the crossing of the Shannon at that point, and was an important post as such.

There was not anything of great importance during the remainder of 1920.

I was appointed O.C. of the Battalion about November 1920, Tom Gibbons reverting to Quartermaster. Gibbons was not in good health, and, being advanced in years, did not feel that he could carry on in the appointment of O.C. Battalion. Otherwise there was no change in the organisation. The Battalion had increased in strength considerably by this time, particularly in the Newtowncashel and ~~Bally~~ ^{Ballymahon} areas. *B3L*

The next event of importance was the Terlicken ambush in January 1921. This was on a lorry patrol of Tans that were wont to travel regularly between Longford and Athlone via Ballymahon. It usually consisted of two lorries of Tans. The Column from North Longford under Seán McKeon came down for this, and were assisted by men from our Battalion. A mine was placed in the road, being dug in. When covered over with the road material, a cart was run over it several times to cover up the marks and made the surface look normal.

Two cottages on the side of the road were occupied by our men. A house named McCanns was also occupied. This house was also convenient to the scene, and it was arranged that a portion of the ambush party could rest there and when the mine went off could rush into position.

McKeon was in charge of the operation, and was assisted by Ned Cooney in charge of another party. Our force numbered about thirty all told, all armed with rifles.

The patrol turned up to time, but the mine failed to explode. Fire was opened on the enemy from the cottages with rifles. This was the only place that had a field of fire under the circumstances. The enemy pulled up, and, dismounting rapidly, took cover. The failure of the mine to go off allowed the enemy to get into a position unfavourable to us. A fight lasting about twenty or thirty minutes took place, but as there was no hope of dislodging them we had to break off the engagement and withdraw. We had no casualties. I believe the Tans had some men wounded. We lost our road mine of course, but succeeded in getting our exploder away with us. One of the North County Column lost his rifle. He had laid it out of his hand and could not get back to it. The "Bug" Callaghan cut the leads to the mine and saved the exploder from falling into the enemy's hands.

This was a disappointing affair for us. After this the North County Column returned to their own area. A Column was now organised in the South County. We had about twenty-five men approximately, all armed with rifles and about twenty-five rounds of .303 ammunition each. Amongst the members of the Column that I can remember were Ned Cooney in command, Seamus Conway, who had joined us from the North Column, Tommy Kelleher, Mick Ballesty, my brother Seán, Joe Cunningham, Tommy Mullen, Michael Robinson, Ned Ward

and Leo Baxter.

In June of that year the Column ambushed a patrol of Tans at Turlough, between Lanesboro and Newtowncashel. This was a cycle patrol which was operating from Lanesboro. The Column took up position on the high ground covering the road and also on the flanks of the road. No mines were placed in the road and no blocks were laid down. Contact with the enemy was made about 10 a.m. The patrol of about twelve or fourteen Tans came into the position and fire was opened on them. They immediately took cover under the shelter of a wall which bordered the road. The ensuing fight lasted for about half an hour, and then, as our ammunition was running out, we had to pull out and break off the action. We had one man slightly wounded by a bullet scratch on the scalp. One of the Tans was killed, and I believe quite a number of them were wounded. We captured one rifle.

After this, the Tans kept to their barracks in Lanesboro. Several times we went into the town, but they did not come out or give us the chance of a shot.

After the Turlough ambush the Column retired to Derrydaragh, to a house there. The Cumann na mBan had food prepared for us there. We rested there for a while, and then moved on to Ledwithstown, where we went into billets. The Tans and Auxiliaries were out in this area the following morning. Some of them actually came to the house where we were billeted looking for tools to remove a road block. We did not interfere with them, as this would have disclosed our location. The Column now broke up, the men generally returning to their own areas.

Early in June the British military carried out a huge

round-up of the area. The men of the Column, however, although scattered in small groups, succeeded in evading arrest. Harassing tactics against the garrison in Lanesboro were continued. There was a big garrison of Tans here, and the place was well fortified with sand-bags and barbed wire and machine gun emplacements. It was a pretty impregnable position.

Nothing of a notable nature took place until the Truce. At the advent of the Truce we were all in good fighting order, and looking for fight. Our ammunition supply was not too good, but we had at least twenty-five rounds per man, and there was always the chance of capturing more.

SIGNED

Blarston

DATE

12. 10. 50

WITNESS

Maude Barry Condit

DATE

12. 10. 50

