

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 778

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 778

Witness

William J. McCarthy,
Main St.,
Cappoquin,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Battalion Adjutant, 2nd Battalion,
Waterford No. 2 Brigade,
1918-1921.

Subject.

2nd Battalion, Waterford No. 2 Brigade,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT

BY

WILLIAM J. McCARTHY, MAIN ST., CAPPOQUIN.

I was born in Cappoquin in 1902. I became a member of the Fianna in 1914 when we had about a dozen members.

The Volunteers had been organised in Cappoquin in 1914 or 1915 but had been allowed to lapse, and some time about the end of 1916 or early 1917 a meeting was held in Cappoquin for the purpose of reorganising the Company. The late George Plunkett was present at this meeting and was the principal figure in initiating this reorganisation. Pax Whelan, Dungarvan, was also present.

Although I was only about fifteen years of age I joined the Volunteers that night, together with a number of the other lads who were with me in the Fianna. As far as I can recollect I think about 25 or 30 all told joined up on this occasion.

1917-1918.

During the years 1917-1918 regular weekly drills were held mostly in a field near the town and occasionally in the Sinn Féin Hall. The training was carried out by Seán O'Brien, who was the Company O.C. Throughout this period we had regular route marches to adjoining parishes which were principally made for propaganda purposes in order to get the young men in the rural districts interested in the Movement.

In due course, nearly all the surrounding parishes had

Units of their own established, and in late 1918 the battalion organisation was introduced.

Our battalion was known as the 2nd Battalion, West Waterford Brigade, with Tim Duggan of Lismore as the first O.C. and I eventually became Battalion Adjutant and Tom Burke of Tallow as Battalion Quartermaster. Pax Whelan was the Brigade O.C.

After Tim Duggan's arrest in 1920 Frank Ryan became O.C. and when he joined the A.S.U. the late Liam Fitzgerald was appointed.

The Battalion at this period consisted of the following Companies: Lismore, Cappoquin, Tallow, Ballyduff, Kilwatermoy, Melleray, Knockanore and Ballysaggart.

The strength of the Companies would vary generally from 40 to 100. We had a big influx of members for the Conscription scare, but the majority of those quickly lost interest when the crisis had passed.

1919.

The weekly drills and other activities continued, and nearly all my spare time was devoted to the administrative side as there was a fairly constant flow of correspondence and returns, etc., between the Companies, Battalion Headquarters and Brigade Headquarters, and frequent visits had also to be made to the various Companies.

Battalion Council meetings were held from time to time

but these were only held at irregular intervals as the situation required, such as when some special instruction may arrive from Brigade Headquarters or when the Battalion O.C. considered it necessary to assemble the Battalion Staff and Company Commanders.

ARMS.

The arms position in the Battalion was not too good up to 1919; there were, however, some shot-guns in every Company and a few revolvers in some of the Companies. There were no service rifles as such in the Battalion but we had a few of the old type Redmond Volunteer rifles and one or two Martinis. I do not think there was any ammunition for these rifles.

Following widespread raids which we made in all Company areas, our stock of shot-guns was considerably augmented during 1919 and we got, in addition, some old game rifles and pistols in a few of the loyalist houses.

1920.

Our weekly parades continued and with increased enemy activity, and the spice of danger which was becoming evident brought about a great interest in the Volunteers and a consequent increase in strength, especially amongst the rural Companies. The R.I.C. in all the districts became very active and for all our drills, route marches and other activities we usually had a few of them knocking around, taking careful note of all our doings. On a few occasions we made it fairly hot for them by long treks across country over bogs, ditches, etc. In addition to keeping a close watch on unit activities, those of

us who were any way prominent in the movement were subjected to almost constant observation even in our normal occupations, which meant that any time we had to visit any of the outside Companies or Brigade Headquarters some ruse had to be devised to outwit them.

In the course of this year I participated in three raids on the mails which a small party of us carried out at the local railway station. On one of these raids seven bags of letters were taken and conveyed to Villierstown for censoring, after which they were returned through one of the rural post offices. I do not recollect if any important information resulted from these raids. We did, however, obtain the names and addresses of the relatives of the local Tans resident in the United Kingdom. This information was passed to Brigade Headquarters.

During this year also we carried out a raid on the local income tax offices and destroyed all the records, and also participated on numerous occasions in the trenching and blocking of roads and cutting of communications. On all such occasions we were armed mainly with revolvers and the covering parties with shot-guns. The police became very aggressive following all these activities and made the most detailed enquiries to try and find the names of those responsible. To give the people their due, however, especially those living in the rural districts, any Volunteer movements or activities which they observed were kept strictly to themselves and, on the other hand, any enemy movements in their localities were quickly notified to individual Volunteers or members of the Column, if they happened to be around. In most of the towns there was always

an element, such as the bad type of ex-soldier crowd, who were most unreliable and would not hesitate to acquaint the powers that be of anything which came under their notice. Some of those may have been sound enough in their own way, but we were in the position that we felt they could not be trusted. One ex-soldier in Cappelquin, whom we were watching carefully, was a very doubtful character and some of our lads were convinced he was in touch with the enemy; however, he survived, although a determined effort was made to get him on one occasion.

In October, 1920, the local R.I.C. garrison of about twelve was augmented by twenty Black and Tans, which brought about an increase of enemy activities in the town and the surrounding district. Another Volunteer in Cappelquin - Tom Kelleher - and myself, who were, of course, well known to the old R.I.C. as active Volunteers, later on received the special attention of the Tans and it was clearly evident that our records had been made known by the R.I.C. to the Tans because the same old procedure continued, for if anything occurred in the area they were down on us immediately and the threats of what they would or would not do became a common occurrence.

A short time following the arrival of the Tans in Cappelquin, it came to the knowledge of our local I.O. (Tom Lincoln) that some member or members of the enemy knew of the location of a small arms dump which we had at that time. This dump contained some revolvers and shot-guns, which were hidden in a disused house in the Main Street. A few of us discussed this information and we felt it was up to us to have these arms removed to a place of safety on that night. This looks an easy proposition enough now, but at that period the town was heavily

patrolled and our problem was to get into the house and out again in between the patrols and whilst we were in the house we dare not show any light and we had to be prepared to fight for our lives and for the arms under our charge. We removed them safely, however, and a few days later the disused house was searched, which was a good indication that the enemy had had some information concerning it.

During the latter months of 1920 I slept away from home every night, as the Tans had made no secret of what they were going to do to the "Shinners" and, in particular, to Tom Kelleher and myself.

In November, 1920, I was in charge of a road-blocking party on the main Cappoquin-Lismore road and we cut down a number of big trees and effectively blocked the road. This was the occasion when reprisals were to be carried out following the execution of Kevin Barry, but for some reason or another no shootings took place that night.

On the occasion of a Coursing fixture in Cappoquin in November, 1920, four Volunteers from Clashmore district who attended the Coursing, all of whom were armed with revolvers, indicated their intention of shooting up some of the R.I.C. in the town that evening. They asked me to act as scout for them, which I did. On making my reconnaissance I observed a Sergeant and Constable standing outside Russell's door on the Main Street. I conveyed this information back to the boys, who had a motor car in readiness. They got into the car and drove it slowly through the town and, when within firing distance of the R.I.C., they sent a volley of shots in their direction, fatally wounding

Constable Rea who died that night. This shooting led to heavy enemy activity and a large military patrol entered the town on the following day and most minute enquiries were made to try and ascertain who did the job. As I had been seen passing down the town shortly before the shooting, I became suspect not for doing the job but conniving at it, but, as they knew well the shooting had been done from a car, they had not sufficient evidence to take action against me. However, they left me in no doubt as to what their views were because, subsequently, any incident of any importance which happened in the locality my home was raided and myself interrogated. My parents, who were rather old, were terrorised by those frequent visits because they never came without threatening to burn our home or arrest or use violence towards me.

Sometime about Christmas, 1920, Tom Kelleher and I sought permission to join the Brigade Column but were refused as the Column had only sufficient rifles for the number of men in the Column. Other Volunteers had sought similar permission before us and there was a waiting list of applicants. Tom Kelleher and I then decided, in order to avoid being arrested, to leave the district altogether and go 'on the run' until such time as the Column would be in a position to take us. We kept constant touch with the Column during our absence from the area.

1921.

In March, 1921, both Tom Kelleher and myself were taken on in the Column and were given training in rifle and grenade by members of the Column.

In April, 1921, I was with the Column when it lay in ambush

at Dalagan Bridge on the main Dungarvan-Waterford road. The strength of the Column on this occasion was approximately twenty-five, and Mick Mansfield was in charge. Each member was armed with a rifle and I think each had about 25 rounds of ammunition - some of them may have had more. I can remember that some of the lads also had a few Mills bombs. We took up positions on both sides of the road for an expected enemy lorry patrol and, although we remained in the position for several hours, no enemy showed up. Other ambush positions were taken up around this period with somewhat similar results.

I replaced the late Mick Morrissey, T.D., as Column Adjutant. He had been the first Adjutant appointed.

In April, 1921, I was one of an armed escort for Liam Lynch when he moved from Knockanore, Co. Waterford, to Ballynoe, Co. Cork.

Some weeks later, myself and a few others were instructed by the Brigade O.C. to bring four rifles into the Battalion area and give instructions in their use to the various Companies. We did not fire rifle practices as the ammunition supply in the area was limited.

Owing to heavy enemy pressure and the big rounds-up which were then in operation, it was decided to temporarily disband the Column and it did not reform again until early June, when I was made personally responsible for the safe return of the four rifles which we had for instructional purposes in the Battalion area. The return of the rifles was satisfactorily carried out, although it meant an all-night march across country, for, due to enemy activity at the time, we could not use the roads. The

enemy had the practice at the time of lying in wait, without talking or smoking, at different points of the road, hoping to surprise members of the Column or road-blocking parties, which, I understand, they very nearly did on a few occasions.

About May or June, 1921, a reorganisation of our Battalion area took place and most of the Companies of our Battalion became part of Cork No. II Brigade. The reason for this was that the River Blackwater was considered a big obstacle from the point of view of control and communications, consequently all our Companies lying North and West of the Blackwater became known as the 4th Battalion, Cork No. II Brigade. This change was made, as far as I know, by the Divisional O.C. (Liam Lynch) following consultation with the Brigade Commanders concerned.

RANK AT THE TRUCE.

I was Adjutant of the 4th Battalion, Cork No. 2 Brigade and had my Headquarters in Knockanore Company area.

SIGNATURE: Wm. J. McCarthy

(Wm. J. McCarthy)

WITNESSED BY:

DATE: 22/12/52

22.12.52.

Thomas Malpin
(Thomas Malpin) LIEUT.-COLONEL.

