

W. S. 962

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 962

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 962.....

Witness

James Dorr,
Grange,
Carrick-on-Shannon,
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Kilmore, Co. Roscommon,
1917 - ;
Captain same Company, 5th Batt'n. North Roscommon
Brigade, 1919 - .

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Kilmore, Co. Roscommon,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2274.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JAMES DORR,

"Grange",

Carrick-on-Shannon.

I joined the Redmondite or National Volunteers in 1914, but they ceased to exist sometime after the 1916 Rebellion when the R.I.C. began to take a particular interest in their movements. We had no arms of any sort in the National Volunteers and did our drills with wooden home-made rifles. I am a native of this part of County Roscommon.

About August, 1917 I joined the Irish Volunteers which were then being reorganised at Kilmore. There was only a very small section there at the time. Pat Dunleavy, who came from Mayo and who was working in Kilmore at the time, took me into the Volunteers. There was no Oath administered to us. We paid a small subscription towards the funds of the organisation - a few pence per week. We were not issued with membership cards either. There were about twelve men present the night I joined, with Dunleavy in charge. I had some experience of training with the National Volunteers and so I was given the task of drill instructor. In addition to what experience I had I also received some private tuition from an ex-British Army man who lived in the area. We had no arms of any sort at this time and all our drills were held at some secret meeting place in the Kilmore area.

The first big event to take place was the threat of conscription into the British Army. Our numbers now increased rapidly and we soon had a strength of thirty-five and, strange to relate, the most of the lads who had joined during the expansion period remained on the active list afterwards. To meet the conscription crisis we constructed "Dug Outs" to hold our men - collected a number of shotguns and a few revolvers and made a list of bridges for destroying. We also made a

list of where necessary foodstuffs could be had in the area. There were a few ladies in the area who set about making first-aid dressings such as bandages and so forth.

When the Conscription crisis died down things were very quiet until the General Election in November, 1918. By this time a Company of the Volunteers had been organised in Kilmore. They were a fine body of men - all were around six feet in height and physically fit likewise. Mick Feely was supposed to be the Company Captain but he never attended meetings and was a lukewarm Volunteer. I had now been appointed 1st Lieutenant and it was I who did his work. Patrick Healy was the 2nd Lieutenant.

When the First Dáil assembled in early 1919 I took over responsibility for the Volunteers who now began to be called the I.R.A. or Irish Republican Army. All members, including officers, were now required to take an Oath of Allegiance to the Dáil as the supreme authority of the people. All the members of our Company in Kilmore took this Oath. We had no objectors. I was still doing the drill instruction for the Company. We got a few more recruits for the Company but we did not go out of our way to look for recruits as we were not anxious for big numbers and were particular as to the type of man we took into the organisation. Quality rather than quantity was our objective and to keep what we had and keep them active.

Things just took a normal course during 1919 without anything very exciting happening. The R.I.C. had evacuated the barracks at Hill Street sometime in 1918 and the nearest Police Barracks to us was now in Kilmore which now had a reinforced garrison.

Early in 1920 Kilmore barracks was evacuated also and we burned it down a few days after they had left it. Hill Street Barracks was

burned on Easter Saturday night of 1920. A countrywide operation of destroying evacuated barracks was carried out that night and this gave us an insight into the extent of how the I.R.A. had spread its organisation when we read the reports in the daily Press. The nearest Police Station was now Carrick-on-Shannon which housed a large force of R.I.C. who were later in that year reinforced by Black & Tans and Auxies.

The withdrawal of the R.I.C. left the country wide open to persons who were disposed to violence, robberies and other crimes and the Volunteers had now to take over the policing of the country. As nearly all members of our organisation were men who had to engage in some form of work for their livelihood, this work imposed a certain strain on them. However, with the enthusiasm existing at the time the work was very successfully accomplished. In cases men often had to meet small expenses out of their own pockets, but there never was a complaint. The Sinn Fein Courts were now operating in the area but did not receive that one hundred per cent support here that they did in other parts of the country. They did, however, succeed in reducing the business done by the British Courts to a fraction of what it had been previously. The Volunteers had to set up places of detention for prisoners - generally referred to as "Unknown destinations" - and make arrests and carry out the warrants of the Sinn Fein Courts. We also had to handle a number of prisoners who would be passed through the area and they included one woman. The policy was to keep them moving as much as possible so that they could not get to know their whereabouts or the men who were dealing with them.

A boycott of the R.I.C. had been ordered and carried out. No one was allowed to speak or associate with them or supply them with their requirements. This was an effort to force them to resign from the

Force but was only partly effective. The R.I.C. had to commandeer their supplies. Persons who did not co-operate in this boycott were dealt with by the Volunteers. In one such case in our area the person in question was paraded to Mass on Sunday and through the village with a placard on his back which read, "I am a spy".

A Battalion organisation had now come into being - I think this took place in the end of 1919 - and was known as the 5th Battalion North Roscommon Brigade. The O.C. was Joseph McCormack who was a clerk on the Railway. I cannot remember who the other members of the Battalion staff were. The Companies comprising the Battalion were :- (a) Kilmore. I was Company Captain here and the strength was about forty: (b) Drumlion - Captain Luke Butler - strength about twenty-five: (c) Croghan - Captain Patrick McKeon, strength about thirty-five: (d) Cootehall, Captain William Cox, strength about thirty-five: (e) Drumboylan, Captain Luke Moran and strength about twelve.

The armament of the Battalion consisted of a few Service rifles which were passed around from Company to Company for instructional purposes, a few revolvers of different calibre mostly of an obsolete type and a number of shotguns. Ammunition, except for shotgun cartridges and a few rounds for the revolvers, did not exist. We also had a few home-made bombs made from the boxes of cart wheels which were filled with gelignite and had a fuse which had to be lighted before thrown. The bombs were cumbersome weapons and not very reliable as the fuse might not continue to burn and failures might occur in them. We had a very limited supply of gelignite which was obtained from the County Council quarries and this source soon dried up.

In the early part of the winter of 1920 a general raid for arms was carried out on the orders of Headquarters. This, like the

burning of the barracks, was a countrywide operation. In two or three cases in this area we had to use force to procure the weapons. We used shotguns but fortunately no one was injured on either side. The police were raiding for the same object but we were always a jump in front of them. We collected about a dozen shotguns in the Kilmore district and each Company area in the Battalion made a somewhat likewise collection. We did not get any weapons of a serviceable nature. We collected a fair amount of shotgun cartridges and we made "slugs" or buckshot with which we filled those. The arms we had were kept in various ways, some in cocks of hay. I had a large box built into a wall with the ends of the box so placed that you could put stuff into or take it out from either side of the wall.

Regular Battalion Council meetings were held at which all Company Commanders were required to attend. Such meetings were usually held in the Drumlion area. The enemy forces were now increasing their activities and raids and holds-up were a common feature and soon a number of our men were on the "run" evading arrest. One had to move around now very carefully and always on the alert to avoid being caught in a hold-up or raid.

Seán Connolly had now come from Longford to Roscommon. He had been sent down by G.H.Q. to reorganise the area and to get offensive operations going against the enemy. He visited the 5th Battalion and we became very friendly. In January, 1921 he organised an attack on Elphin R.I.C. Barracks. The Black & Tans had by now arrived in the country and had reinforced the garrison in Elphin which now held about twenty-five R.I.C. and Tans. There was also a large garrison of R.I.C., Tans, Military and Auxies in Strokestown. The task given to our Battalion in this attack was to block all the roads leading from Kilmore and Carrick-on-Shannon districts to Elphin to prevent

reinforcements reaching the garrison there during the attack. We accomplished this task successfully and the enemy made no attempt to go to the assistance of the Elphin garrison although the sky around Elphin was filled with very light signals which were quite visible to us on the roads and should also have been seen in Carrick-on-Shannon. The few rifles we had in the Battalion had been transferred to the Elphin area for this attack but we got them back however. The attack was a failure.

When the ambush at Scramogue was being planned a large amount of material which was being collected for this passed through this area and had to be forwarded on. I took some stuff on horseback including a concrete mine and some gelignite which I delivered in Kilglass. I can't remember now who I handed this over to, but I think it was to Gardners.

On the 7th January, 1921, a combined operation was planned between Captain M. Murphy of the Longford Brigade and ourselves. This was to attack the Police Barracks at Rooskey. Rooskey was an important post for the enemy as it safeguarded the crossing of the Shannon at that point which was the only one between Carrick-on-Shannon and Tarmonbarry. The Police barracks was situated on the Roscommon side of the bridge. The Longford men were to attack from across the river on their side. About ten of us with Sean Glancy in charge armed with shotguns and cartridges filled with buckshot proceeded to Rooskey and got into an attack position. When we got there we sent two men to scout the bridge and get in touch with the Longford men. The police captured the scouts and took them into the barracks where they were given a terrific interrogation. Luckily enough they had gone into a tailor's named Flanagan before proceeding to the bridge and given an order for new suits. They did this to cover their presence in Rooskey which was not normal. The police checked up with Flanagan and on finding their

explanation to be correct released them. As a result of this they did not get in touch with the Longford men. While our men the scouts were away from us and in the barracks as we learned afterwards a police patrol of four passed by our position but we decided not to fire on them as we believed we would be endangering the lives of our scouts and decided to await their return and report. The opportunity did not arise again that night so we had to retire from the scene bloodless. The Longford men had turned up alright and were in position awaiting to get in touch with us to start the attack.

About June, 1920, the military had established a post in Kilmore. A lorry or tender with a few men from this post was proceeding each day to Drumsna railway station presumably to collect rations. About six of our men including Hughes who worked in the station and a few others from Kilmore surprised them one day at the Station and disarmed the officer in charge - the only one who was armed - taking from him a .45 Webley Service Revolver and a few rounds of ammunition. Our men did not burn the tender but allowed them to proceed back to Kilmore on it. The military from there came out and in the course of their search arrested John Gill. Gill had taken part in the raid but was not masked. They kept Gill in arrest for about six weeks and then released him.

After the attack on Elphin Barracks the R.I.C., under Sergeant Hopkins, raided my house and caught me while I was working on top of a cock of Hay. If I had thought that they were coming for me I could have got away. I was taken to the military camp at Strokestown and handcuffed to another man in the guardroom there. While I was detained there they returned to my home place and questioned the local people about my movements on the night of the attack on Elphin.

They were told that I was working with horses until very late that night which was, of course, not true. I was kept in the guardroom in Strokestown for a night and a day and then released.

There were no further incidents in the area before the Truce on the 11th July. This area was purposely kept a quiet one as the Brigade Headquarters was located in it and was generally to be found around Millstreet where the Brigade staff put up. If large enemy forces had been attracted into the area it would have restricted the movements of the staff and communications severely. The only munitions which were made in this area were concrete mines, some bombs already described and buckshot for felling cartridges.

There were no spies or informers dealt with in the area and we had no reason to believe that anyone was assisting the enemy in this respect. Any information they had could have been supplied by the R.I.C. while they were stationed here. We had Intelligence Sections organised in the Battalions and Companies and they were able to keep tabs on all local happenings but were not in a position to give much information about the enemy as, with the exception of Kilmore which was established late in the affair, there were no police or military stationed in the area. We got no assistance from any of the local R.I.C. There were some local men members of the Dublin Police and stationed there and I understand some of them gave valuable assistance there and were in touch with Mick Collins. One of those men, Michael Burns, who was stationed in Dublin Castle, came home on leave and we treated him as one of ourselves and made no difference with him. Later on he came home for good, having resigned, and he mentioned to me the way we had treated him while he was still in the Force and said it got him thinking with the result that he decided to resign.

The Truce was received with mixed feelings by our men and the greater number distrusted it. However, it was a great relief even if it were only for the time being as no one expected it to last very long or that the British Forces would live up to it. The morale of our men was high and all that we needed was arms which were not forthcoming. In some cases the strength of the Companies had decreased somewhat by men becoming inactive and there was no way of keeping or forcing them to remain active at that stage.

(Signed) James Dorr
(James Dorr)

Date: 24-6-54

24.6.54

Witness: Matthew Barry
(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-01
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