

W. S. 975
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 975

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 975

Witness

Matthew Finucane,
Gortnaskehy,
Ballybunion,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Irish Vol's., Duagh, Co. Kerry,
1914 - ;

Q.M. same Company, 1919 - .

Subject.

Duagh Company Irish Volunteers, Co. Kerry,
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S. 2279

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW FINUCANE,

Portmasherry, Ballylunnard
, CO. KERRYBUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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I was born in Duagh, Co. Kerry, in the year 1893. I attended the local National School until I was 15 years of age. In April 1914, I joined the Volunteers when they were first formed in Duagh. Two brothers, ex-British soldiers, named Jerry and Thomas Keane, were appointed drill instructors. We paraded and drilled for a time until John Redmond's call on the Volunteers to defend the coasts of Ireland, after which there was a split in the company which soon after ceased to exist.

Early in 1916 the company was reorganised by Ernest Blythe, who was reorganising the Volunteers in Co. Kerry at this time. A man named Tom Kelly was appointed company captain. There were about 20 members at first and they included a brother of mine, Patrick Finucane, Michael Galvin and Michael Morgan Sheehy

About a week before Easter Week 1916, we received instructions to prepare for large scale manoeuvres for the following Easter Sunday and Monday. In the company at the time we had at least two rifles, about twenty revolvers and a number of shotguns.

In Easter Week we were mobilised several times awaiting and orders which never came, as far as I am aware, no member of the company took any part in the rebellion.

from the Battalion O C Paddy Landers
After the Rising the order came to surrender all arms in the company; this order was never carried out, as the R.I.C. were not aware that there were any arms in the possession of the Volunteers here in Duagh.

There was very little doing in the company after the Rising until early in 1917 when the Volunteers were reorganised for the 2nd time. Tom Kelly was *again* appointed company

captain and Paddy McMahon was appointed 1st Lieutenant. The company strength was about forty men. Up to the end of 1917 and all through 1918 we held meetings, received drill instruction and paraded from time to time. Our drill instructor was Gerry Keane, the ex-British soldier who had been our instructor in 1914. Parades continued in 1919 and about the summer of this year I was appointed Q.M. of the company and was responsible later in the year for the collection of all shot-guns and arms in the area. I attended to the guns and had a dump prepared for the purpose.

After the Republican Courts were set up I was appointed officer in charge of police for the battalion area and was responsible for keeping law and order. I used an unoccupied house away in the fields at the back of my mother's house as a prison. In this house I often had to imprison men sentenced in the Court. It was a Father Harrington who acted as judge of the local Court.

On the 2nd June 1920, the company officers decided to attack Brosna R.I.C. barracks about six miles from Duagh. Seven men - James Costello, Bob Stack, Pat McMahon, Michael Lenihan, Jack Mulcare, Thomas Fitzgerald and Jimmy Joy, armed with revolvers and shotguns, preceded, in a motor car, the main body of the company of about fifty men, which followed behind on foot. I was armed with a shotgun and was with the men on foot; most of these men had either shotguns or revolvers. The roads around the barracks had been trenched.

When the motor car reached Feale's Bridge, about two miles from the barracks, it ran into a military patrol which had already taken up positions in a Protestant Church convenient to the bridge and at different points in the vicinity. The seven men in the car were captured, but one of them - Jim

Costello - escaped almost immediately and ran back along the road and warned the men following to get back to Duagh at once. I, with the other men - including Jack Sheehy, Michael Sheehy and Jack Larkin - returned to Duagh.

About a fortnight after this setback, the company - led by H. Murphy - turned out again and marched in formation towards Brosna for another attempt on the R.I.C. Barracks. When we got to Feale's Bridge the company was halted. A number of men were placed in positions at the Protestant Church and in the neighbourhood of the bridge, the main body of the company being located between the bridge and Brosna Village at various points. I was armed with a revolver and shotgun and was on duty at the bridge; the other men between the bridge and the village had either revolvers or shotguns. The attacking party, about twenty men armed with rifles, shotguns and revolvers, then proceeded towards the barracks.

Feale's Bridge is the centre of a number of crossroads leading to Castleisland and Tralee, to Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale and to Listowel. The purpose of placing most of the men between this bridge and the village was to keep open a line of retreat for the attacking party. As before, all roads in the area had been blocked or trenched.

As I was not in the actual attack on the barracks I cannot give any details of the attack itself; it started at about 11 p.m. and lasted for about four hours when it was called off. I, with the rest of the company, returned to Duagh. The attack had not been a success.

After the attack on the barracks at Brosna, I was on the run for several months, but, in the meantime, had charge of the dump and looked after all rifles, shotguns and revolvers for the company. I also carried out my duties as Police

Officer for the area. In the autumn of this year I decided to return home. I took with me Jim Costello, Jerry Lyons, Christy Broderick and a number of other men. I turned my home into a barracks. The company captain saw to it that a sentry was posted near the house for the twenty-four hours of the day.

Early in 1921 the flying column for North Kerry was formed. My house immediately became their H.Q. and provided most of their needs in the shape of food and shelter, as well as the provision of shotguns, rifles and revolvers when required. It was also used for the receipt of dispatches from Brigade H.Q. and elsewhere. Among the men of the column who stayed at my house at the time were P.J. McElligott, Johnny Linane and Denis Quille.

Shortly after the formation of the column, I took part with other members of the Duagh Company in the trenching of roads, cutting of telegraph wires and trees on the occasion of the I.R.A. attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. Barracks in February of this year. During the actual attack on Ballybunion Barracks I, with other members of the I.R.A. while armed with revolvers and shotguns, took up positions near Listowel R.I.C. Barracks to prevent the Tans from there being sent to reinforce the Ballybunion R.I.C.
. The Tans were under the impression that it was they that were being attacked. They opened fire and sent up Verey lights for a couple of hours.

Early in May, the company captain and myself were informed by Jack Sheehan and Paddy Ahern of the column that an ex-British officer - Sir Arthur Vickers of Kilmorna House (known locally as the Great House) - had been sentenced to death. The company captain - Jim Costello - was told to have

the man executed and to have the "Great House" burned down. Some time earlier Sir Arthur had invited a number of British officers to his home for a fishing holiday on his estate. Soon after their arrival these officers were attacked by the column. The captain instructed me to procure a quantity of paraffin oil and to take it down and leave it as near the house as possible; this I did with the help of Jim Costello, Tom Kelly and Tommy Sheehy. A number of men from the company were instructed to report at 8 o'clock at a certain spot near the house on the following morning.

The next morning all the men reported for duty; Jim Costello, being in charge, ordered that ^{at} a certain signal the men were to advance on the house. Some of the men were armed with either revolvers or shotguns. I was armed with a revolver. A number of the men were detailed to carry the paraffin oil. We had been told that if we did not receive the signal by 4 p.m. that day the company was to return to Duagh. As we did not receive the agreed signal by the time stated, we dispersed and went back to Duagh.

Early that night a company meeting was held. Sheehan and Ahern were present. A discussion took place as to whether we should go back that same night to carry out the execution and fire the "Great House". It was decided not to go back that night but to return the following morning at approximately the same time as originally agreed.

On the following morning the company assembled as before. I, on this occasion, was ordered to patrol the hill overlooking the "Great House". This was to give warning of any approach of the enemy forces. Early on this day the execution took place and the "Great House" was burned down. The company afterwards dispersed and returned to Duagh. Two of the men with me on this occasion, as well as the company captain, were Jerh. Halpin and Christy Broderick.

On several occasions from January to the Truce I took part in raids on the mails and trenching of roads. In all of these operations I was usually on guard duty armed with a revolver and later with a rifle. All this time my house was used by the column and remained at their disposal while the sentry remained on duty right up to the end.

After the Truce I, with a man named Tim Finucane from the Duagh Company, were selected with men from other companies to take over the barracks of the Tans at Listowel.

Signed: Matthew Finucane

Date: 14/7/54

Witness: John J. Daly (Matthew Finucane)
14.7.54
John J. Daly

