

W. S. 1, 164

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,164

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,164

Witness

Michael Manning,
Abbeycormican,
Kiltormer,
Ballinasloe,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Adjutant Mullagh Company
Irish Volunteers, Co. Galway, 1914 - .

Subject.

- (a) Mullagh Company Irish Volunteers
Co. Galway, 1914- ;
- (b) Arrival of Liam Mellows in Galway
Holy Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2466

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MICHAEL MANNING,
Abbeycormican, Kiltormer, Ballinasloe,
County Galway.

I was born at Abbeycormican in the Parish of Mullagh in the month of September, 1887, and was educated at Mullagh National School until I reached the age of 14 years.

Early in May, 1914, a Company of the Irish Volunteers was formed at Mullagh. The strength at first was between forty and fifty men. I cannot now recall who was Company Captain. The position of most importance at that time was, I think, that of Instructor, Mullagh Company had as Instructor a Reservist of the Connaught Rangers, who was called up for service at the outbreak of the war in 1914. By that time, however, the Captain had learned sufficient about simple drill to be able to carry on. I joined the Company at its formation. With a few exceptions the members of the Company had no previous connection with national politics other than through the time-honoured medium of The United Irish League. The appointment of officers was of an honorary nature and had nothing to do with their qualifications from a military point of view. After a programme of drilling and route marching had been gone through the Company started on target practice with a miniature rifle. A fund was opened for the purchase of arms to which the majority of the householders of the Parish subscribed. This would be the position of affairs about the beginning of World War I.

After John Redmond's appeal for recruits for the British Armed Forces had split the Volunteer ranks, the majority of Mullagh Company elected to follow Redmond's lead and joined the National Volunteers. The ~~majority~~ ^{minority} (about ten) resolved to carry on under the original leadership of the Irish Volunteers and sent a delegate to the Convention in Dublin in October 1914.

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The names of the minority, as far as I can remember them, are :-

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Michael Martin Hubert Hanrahan, Laurence Garvey, Michael Garvey, Thomas Daly,
Joseph Fahy, Patrick Fahy, Michael Broderick, Joseph Martin
 John Manning, John Kelly, Patrick Kelly and myself (Michael Manning).

We purchased four or five single-shot rifles out of the money subscribed before the split in the ranks. The rifles were nominally the property of the majority group but we intended to secure them. They eventually fell into the hands of the R.I.C. as a result of a raid shortly after Easter Week 1916.

In the year before 1916, the spark of nationality was kept alive in this area by Sinn Féin and later by Seán MacDiarmada's Paper "Irish Freedom". I was Secretary of a Sinn Féin Club in Mullagh in the year 1907. The Club ceased to function as an active organisation after about a year but a small group purchased and read Sinn Féin literature. I met Seán MacDiarmada in the village of Kilrickle in the year 1909. I was brought to see him by an old Land Leaguer and I.R.B. man named Patrick Rodgers. Only the three of us were present at the meeting. I cannot recall anything in particular that Seán MacDiarmada said. He was good-humoured and seemed to be enjoying the chat. What struck me most about him was his eyes. They seemed to me to have some kind of magnetic quality and they were set in a very handsome face. I remember he was reading a letter in the Connaught Champion written by James Haverly of Moylough and seemed to be enjoying it immensely. I cannot even recall the subject matter of the letter. MacDiarmada travelled on a push bicycle and, as far as I can now recall, he was making preparations for a Sinn Féin Convention in Galway City.

In the year 1915, Liam Mellows came to organise the Volunteers in County Galway. He arrived in Mullagh on a Sunday in May of that year. He was accompanied by the late Larry Lardner of Athenry who was then, I think, Commandant of the Volunteers in County Galway. Our Company

or Group, as it was sometimes called, was mobilised in a field near Mullagh Crossroads and was drilled by Liam for a few hours. He returned to Mullagh about a month later and spent four or five evenings training the Company in various forms of night attack. While in Mullagh he stayed in Mrs. Garvey's of Mullagh Road. He proposed returning again later in the summer but in the meantime he was deported to England under D.O.R.A. During the summer of 1915 our Company did very little training beyond some target practice with a .22 rifle.

On the afternoon of Wednesday the 19th April, 1916, the late Eamonn Corbett, afterwards a Member of Dáil Éireann and a Brigade Staff Officer in the I.R.A., arrived at our house on foot. He was on his way to Ballinasloe on a motor-bicycle belonging to Liam Mellows. The bicycle developed such serious engine trouble on the way that he was obliged to abandon it at a house on the roadside about a mile to the Loughrea side of Abbeycormican and come hither on foot. The purpose of his visit was to inform us that Liam Mellows would arrive at our house after nightfall and stay the night. Eamonn Corbett cancelled his visit to Ballinasloe and went home on a push bicycle lent to him by my brother. Liam Mellows arrived at nightfall pillion-riding on a motor-cycle driven by a Dublin man (a shopkeeper I think) named Lyons. The only thing I can now remember about Lyons is that he had a brother named George. Liam Mellows was dressed as a priest and, except for a light coating of grease paint on his face, was otherwise undisguised. Having come to journey's end with Liam, Mr. Lyons made no delay in returning home.

During the night, Liam gave our family an account of how his escape from England was effected and chuckled with delight at the thought of how easily the ordinary English policeman could be hoodwinked. I remember some of the details of the escape as recounted

by Liam. Headquarters of the Volunteers in Dublin sent his twin brother Barney and a daughter of James Connolly's (Nora as far as I can remember) to visit him in England. I cannot now remember the name of the town or locality. When they got across to where Liam was they met him. Liam and Barney exchanged clothes and Liam walked away with Miss Connolly, leaving Barney behind in his place. Miss Connolly and Liam travelled northwards to Glasgow and crossed over to Dublin via Belfast. Liam said he went into clerical garb in Glasgow. He got the priest's outfit from a Father Courtney, a native of Kerry, ministering in Glasgow at the time. The only incident on the journey home to Dublin occurred at Belfast after disembarking from the boat. A docker went on his knees and asked the "priest's" blessing. Liam was laughing when telling how he mumbled something resembling Latin in the course of giving his "blessing".

In reply to our anxious inquiries about the danger of being recognised by the R.I.C. in Galway he said that he had passed by several R.I.C. barracks on the way from Dublin and had been seen by members of the R.I.C. without, apparently, arousing any suspicion in their minds. Liam's baggage was of the lightest. It consisted merely of one green uniform shirt and one book, both done up together in a paper parcel. The book was by an English writer on military matters whose name I have forgotten. I cannot remember the title but the subject matter was a series of chapters dealing with the big battles fought on the Continent from about the beginning of the eighteenth century. As far as I can remember he said nothing about the purpose of his visit to the West. Before retiring for the night he placed a fully loaded automatic pistol under his pillow but when I volunteered to keep guard outside he said it was not necessary.

Next day he remained indoors and in the afternoon he sent me to Loughrea with a note to Mrs. O'Flaherty telling her of his arrival in Galway and of his intention of staying in Loughrea that night, preferably in her house. Mrs. O'Flaherty's husband Joseph, who carried on a drapery business in Main Street, was an old Fenian and well known to Liam. I delivered his note at O'Flahertys and both Mr. and Mrs. O'Flaherty said they were delighted at the opportunity of assisting him in his work and Mrs. O'Flaherty sent him back a note to that effect. After dark he changed his clerical costume for a suit of my brother's clothes and set off on his journey to Loughrea on a push bicycle which I borrowed from Laurence Garvey, afterwards Lieutenant of Mullagh Company. He arrived in Loughrea without incident and cycled on past O'Flaherty's to the house of Peter Sweeney in Galway Road where he left the bicycle. Before he left our house I arranged with him to take his shirt and book to Loughrea the next day (Good Friday). There was a fair in Loughrea that day to which I brought some cattle for sale, and having sold them I called to O'Flahertys with Liam's parcel. I was shown up to a room on the first floor where I found him in bed. He asked me if I knew "Hare" Callanan of Craughwell whom he said he very much wanted to see if he was in town. On my telling him that I did not know the "Hare" he said that Mrs. O'Flaherty would probably contact somebody from that area during the course of the day.

While Liam Mellows was at our house he disclosed to me and my brother some of the arrangements made for Easter Sunday by the Volunteer leaders. The "Review" advertised in the public press to be held in Gort on Easter Sunday was to be a general mobilisation of the Volunteers in Galway for the purpose of arming them with the rifles from the German vessel which was expected to land on the Kerry coast. The Galway Volunteers were to march from Gort to Portumna to where the

arms for the Galway men were to be forwarded by boat from Limerick up the Shannon. The distribution of the arms was to take place at Portumma on Easter Sunday evening. As Gort is nineteen miles from Mullagh while Portumma is only nine Liam said that it would not be necessary for the Mullagh Company to attend the "Review" in Gort as we could, by going direct to Portumma, effect the same purpose with less hardship.

I now remember that when Liam was leaving our house for Loughrea he took an ash stick under his arm as if he were going to the fair with the intention of buying cattle. Peter Sweeney of Loughrea, where he left his bicycle before going to the house of Joseph O'Flaherty, was well known in Sinn Féin circles at the time. I remember distinctly that the fair was held on Good Friday and that the banks were open for the business and that trains were running to take/cattle from the fair.

On Easter Sunday, as our Company was making arrangements for the journey to Portumma, we heard of Eoin MacNeill's order cancelling the mobilisation. I cannot remember from whom we heard it. We did not then get Sunday papers in Mullagh. The meeting place of our Company was a field by the roadside near Mullagh Cross and, as we were discussing the news, a motor car pulled up on the road outside. Eamonn Corbett came out of the car and confirmed the countermanding order. On the Tuesday of Easter Week three Volunteers from Athenry arrived at our house on bicycles in the early forenoon. They were James Barrett, John Cleary and Martin Walsh. Cleary and Walsh were armed with revolvers. They required two men to accompany them to Ballinasloe whither they were travelling on business connected with the Rising, the first news of which we heard from them.

Volunteer Joseph Martin of Mullagh Road (now in U.S.A.) and I undertook to go with them. Before setting out it was arranged to travel in two parties and go to Ballinasloe by different routes, Volunteer Martin to take two of the party via Aughrim and I to take the third member of the party by Kiltormer. Joseph Martin and party were to remain in Dooley's public house in Dunlo Street, Ballinasloe, while my friend Barrett and I went to the Diocesan College (The Pines) on the outskirts of the town towards Roscommon direction. On the way to Ballinasloe, Barrett told me that he was taking a small consignment of gelignite to a man with whom he expected to get in touch at the College. He said the gelignite was sewn into his overcoat between the cloth and lining. Barrett and I arrived at the College without incident and there met a Father Connolly and a Mr. Gaffney, Professor of Mathematics, with both of whom my friend Barrett was closeted for about half an hour. Barrett failed to contact the man (Jack O'Reilly), Technical Teacher, Ballinasloe) to whom he was to deliver the gelignite and was obliged, to the best of my recollection, to take it back again with him on the return journey.

Barrett and I found Volunteer Martin and his two companions in Dooley's public house as arranged, and we all set out for home by the same routes we had gone to Ballinasloe. Five or six R.I.C. men eyed us very suspiciously as we left Dooley's but did not interfere with us. We got back to Mullagh in the evening and after resting at our house the three Athenry Volunteers set out on their journey home. I remember that Cleary and Walsh loaded their revolvers before leaving our house for Ballinasloe and that Barrett jokingly said if he threw his overcoat it would be far more effective than the two revolvers of his companions.

That night (Tuesday) the members of Mullagh Company met at our house and agreed to turn out when some definite information came to hand regarding the whereabouts of the General Headquarters of the Volunteers. The Athenry men who had just gone home had no information to give us regarding the objective at which the Volunteers would strike first and we knew nothing of the capture of the German arms ship. We conjectured that it might have made a belated landing and that the arms would be distributed at Portumna according to the original plan. This and the fact that we had no ammunition for the arms we had - four rifles and two shot guns - prevented us from moving at first and when it appeared that our conjecture regarding the landing of the German arms was groundless we resolved to go on Thursday to Moyode where we heard the Volunteers were encamped.

On Thursday evening we were informed, through Volunteer sources, that the Volunteers were about to move out of Moyode and would probably disband before another day. This information proved to be correct and the disbandment took place next morning at Limepark. On Friday, 4th May, ten of the Company, including myself, were arrested by R.I.C. and marched to Loughrea where we were jailed in the Bridewell with fifteen or twenty others from Kilchreest and Derrybrien. We were all released after one day. About a week later, however, Laurence Garvey was re-arrested and sent to Frongoch.

Our Company was reorganised in the harvest of 1917. Ten or twelve members were in Loughrea doing duty at the Polling Booth at the General Election of 1918. During the year 1919 there was little activity of any kind. In the year 1920 members of the Company collected the National Loan and saw to the establishment of the Republican Parish Court. Two members of the Company were appointed to act as Republican policemen. The Loan was well supported in the

parish of Mullagh. The Justices of the Parish Court were :- Michael Hannon, Patrick Broderick and Thomas MacNamara. These three Justices were all members of the local Sinn Féin Club. I myself was Clerk of the Court. Only a few trivial cases came before the Court. I cannot remember for certain whether witnesses were sworn but I think they were.

In the year 1920 shotguns were collected throughout the Company area and dumped in suitable places. Members of the Company acted as guards over two prisoners at Ballydonnellan Castle. They were two R.I.C. men who were arrested by the I.R.A. while on annual holidays. The idea behind the arrest and detention of the two members of the R.I.C. was to try and induce them to sever their connection with that Force. They both promised to do so and were released. They did not honour their undertaking after their release. They were natives of Clontuskert. The R.I.C. barrack in Gurtymadden was evacuated in July 1920 and was destroyed by burning immediately after evacuation.

In January of 1921, the 1st Lieutenant of the Company - Laurence Carvey - was arrested. In February, 2nd Lieutenant Patrick J. Glennon and Volunteer T. Lowry were arrested and in March, Volunteers Hobbins, Manning and Reilly. The Company Officers, as well as I can recollect, were :- Captain Hubert Hanrahan, 1st. Lieutenant Laurence Carvey and 2nd Lieutenant Patrick J. Glennon.

I forgot to mention at the proper place that Lieutenant Laurence Carvey went to Athenry on the Wednesday of Easter Week and from there to Moyode. He returned to our Company area on Thursday.

Signed: Michael Manning

Date: 13th May 1955

(Michael Manning)

13th May 1955.

Witness: Con Moynihan

(Con Moynihan)

