

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1564

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1564.

Witness

Michael Kelly,
Park Road,
Athenry,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Quartermaster, 3rd Battalion (Athenry),
South-West Galway Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Clarenbridge Company, Irish
Volunteers, Co. Galway, 1915 - Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2875.

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1,564

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL KELLY,

Park Road, Athenry - formerly of -
Colwood, Athenry, Co. Galway.

I was born in the year 1892 at Colwood, Athenry. I went to Colwood National School until I was fourteen years of age.

I joined the Rockfield Company of the Irish Volunteers during the first half of 1914. The first Captain of the Company was Morgan Healy. After a couple of months he was replaced by Gilbert Morrissey. Afterwards the strength of the Company was about fifty men. It was organised by Larry Lardner and Stephen Jordan. Thomas Kenny of Craughwell also was one of the organisers. Parades were held twice a week. Our training and drill instructor was Johnny Naughton, a British Army reservist. He was paid at the rate of 3d. per night for two nights of the week by every man in the Company. He was a good instructor. We had arms drill a little later with shotguns.

I joined the I.R.B. in 1913. As far as I remember I was sworn in by Archie Heron who was an organiser from the Supreme Council in Dublin. Pat Callanan, who was Centre of the Circle, was also present.

In the summer of 1914 Liam Mellows paid a visit to our Company. He addressed us and we were very impressed by him. Shortly after I remember he put us through exercises at night time. He divided us into two groups. The group I was in had the job of attacking the village of Rockfield. It was through very rough, scrubby country with numerous stone walls.

I changed from Rockfield Company to Clarenbridge Company in the early part of 1915, as it was nearer and more convenient. The Company Captain was Eamonn Corbett. Afterwards the strength was about seventy and parades were held twice a week. The instructor was an ex-British soldier whose name I now forget. I remember we got instructions to be arming ourselves as best we could.

Meetings of the I.R.B. were held monthly or oftener if the matters arose. Pat Callanan presided at the meetings. The business of the meetings concerned mainly tabulating people who had arms and where we could lay hands on them if required; keeping a close eye on the movements of R.I.C. and tabulating those who showed great friendship for them. The I.R.B. meetings were held all the time to the Truce. It was also the general policy of the I.R.B. to fill officerships in the Irish Volunteers by members of the I.R.B.

There was no change then up to 1916 except that Father Harry Feeney came as a curate to Clarenbridge about 1915. He was a native of Two-Mile Ditch, Castlegar, and he did everything he could to help our Company. He attended nearly all our training parades. He went whole-heartedly into the organisation of the Company. He wasn't long ordained at the time and was a very patriotic priest. He usually came at some time to our parades at night in the fields. All important meetings were held in his house.

I remember the big parade of Irish Volunteers held in Athenry in the autumn of 1914. Volunteers came there from all the Companies in Galway. Roughly about three thousand men were present. The Review was held in the back lawn where the Kenny Memorial Park now stands. The lawn was nearly filled. Colonel Moore gave

the words of command and many local landlords were represented at the review. This was, of course, before the split. There were many Volunteers present at the review who resented the presence of the landlord class. They doubted if these people came for the good of Ireland. I was one of those who figured that there was something wrong. We wondered what was coming or what we were expected to do. There was no split in either the Clarenbridge or Rockfield Companies, as these were Sinn Féin areas and both Companies were controlled by the I.R.B.

In the time between the spring of 1915 and 1916 there were special signalling, scouting and engineering classes formed in each Company. Instructors came but I cannot remember who they were or where they came from. We also had lessons in the use of the rifle.

There was a big parade of Volunteers in Galway City on St. Patrick's Day 1916. The following Companies, as well as I can remember, took part :- Clarenbridge, Oranmore, Maree, Athenry, Ardahan, Craughwell, Kilconirrin, Newcastle, Carnaun, Claregalway, Castlegar, Spiddal, Kinvara, Ballinderreen, Gort, Killimor, Daly and Ballycahalan. All marched through Galway City, approximately about a thousand men all armed with shotguns except for an odd rifle. There were also two or three members of the R.I.C. from each Company area and they noted each man who carried a rifle or shotgun. The object of the march or military parade through Galway was anti-recruiting for the British Army and perhaps a rehearsal for Easter Week. It must have been an order from Headquarters. Galway City had no Company of Irish Volunteers at the time.

About St. Patrick's Day, 1916, or a little later, Alfe Monaghan came to Galway. He was 'on the run', and spent his time organising the Volunteers. He stayed with a family in the parish of

Clarenbridge and visited and instructed the Company on several occasions. He gave no specialised instruction. He went from our Company area to Moorepark, Athenry, in the Derrydonnell Company area.

Our Company, Clarenbridge, got instructions to go to Confession on Easter Saturday, 1916, and to go to Holy Communion the following day. The whole Company had breakfast after Mass at Roveagh Church. The breakfast was prepared and served by Cumann na mBan in the Church grounds. We brought arms to Mass and the idea of having breakfast was that there was to be no returning home after Mass. On the Saturday night there was a big number of Volunteers from various Companies in Father Feeney's waiting for information about the landing of arms. As far as I remember, Pat Callanan, Martin Niland, Peter Howley, Eamonn Corbett and the "Hare" were present.

We remained a good while in the Chapel grounds after Mass on Easter Sunday and then dispersed. I have an idea that we were told to remain in readiness although I cannot remember who gave us the order. It must have been due to the notice in the Sunday Independent inserted over the name of Eoin McNeill. On Easter Monday evening at about 7 o'clock I was notified to mobilise at Killeeneen National School which was unused at the time, and to be fully armed and equipped. I and the members of the Company from Colwood went immediately to Killeeneen. Shortly after our arrival the full Clarenbridge Company had arrived there. Practically all the Company were armed with shotguns and about five had rifles, but I cannot remember the make. About sixty men of the Company mobilised. Shortly after my arrival at Killeeneen I remember that I was called to Walshe's house where Liam Mellows had his headquarters. As far as I remember, Eamonn Corbett, Liam Mellows,

Martin Niland, Padraig Fahy and Father Feeney were there. Liam Mellows asked me if I knew the country around Peterswell and I said "Yes". He then handed me a dispatch to take to Ballycahalan Company. Volunteer Patrick Kelly was sent with me and we were armed with two revolvers and instructed to fight if we contacted the R.I.C. and if they attempted to interfere with us. I delivered the dispatch to John Coen of Ballymaquive and he took it to Ballycahalan. That would be about midnight on Easter Monday night. Kelly and I waited at Coen's house until John Coen came back from Ballycahalan. He told me to tell Mellows that the "Ballycahalan Company was standing to". I then returned to Mellows' Headquarters at Kileeneen and arrived there at about 8 o'clock on Tuesday morning. There were no Volunteers there and Kelly and I followed them to Clarenbridge. When we arrived within a mile of Clarenbridge we saw members of the Company on sentry duty at the back gate of Lady Reddington's demesne at Lilcornan. They told us that the R.I.C. barracks at Clarenbridge was being attacked and we heard the shooting. We continued to Clarenbridge and I sought out Mellows and gave him Coen's message that the Ballycahalan Company had mobilised and was 'standing to'.

The attack was still going on when we arrived. The whole Company was there, all firing at the barracks at a range of about fifty yards. There was a barricade on the Oranmore Road made of Mineral water boxes, with Volunteers behind the barricades to prevent reinforcements from reaching the barracks. All the approaches to the village were barricaded and all traffic held up. About midday or 1 p.m. the attack was called off. Mellows was in full charge. No Volunteer was wounded. There was no R.I.C. man wounded inside Clarenbridge barracks during the attack.

Just as the attack was about to start an R.I.C. man who came on a bicycle from Kilcolgan to Clarenbridge got the order "Hands Up" from two Volunteers on outpost duty, Volunteers Michael Callanan and Ned Newell. The R.I.C. man did not comply and he was fired on and badly wounded.

I was at the barricade on the Oranmore Road when Liam Mellows arrived and ordered the barricade to be taken down. The whole Company marched to Oranmore, bringing the commandeered horses with us. On our arrival at Oranmore we heard that the Oranmore and Maree Companies had attacked the R.I.C. barracks at Oranmore at about the same time as we had attacked Clarenbridge but that the attack had failed.

Mellows decided to again attack the barracks with the three Companies. The local Sergeant had been in his own house when the first attack occurred. Mellows heard that a force of R.I.C. were on their way from Galway by train. He called me and Volunteer Michael Cummins. He sent Cummins to the railway station to find out if the force of R.I.C. had arrived at the station and what their strength was. He sent me to the forge near the Sergeant's house with a section of about six men with instructions not to allow the Sergeant to leave his house. The Sergeant made no attempt to leave his own house. Cummins went to the station on a bike and the R.I.C. - about forty of them - had arrived. They spotted Cummins and fired at him. He escaped and brought word to Mellows that they were there. Mellows ordered the three Companies to withdraw and all marched in the direction of Athenry. The Companies had left the town and Mellows, Cummins and myself and a few others whom I forget waited until the peelers marched from the station. We opened fire on them at a range of from forty to fifty

yards. They took cover at each side of the road in the shelter of the houses and did not return fire.

We arrived at the farmyard about a mile from Athenry at dark where Mellows made his Headquarters. Craughwell, Athenry and Newcastle, Derrydomell and Cussane Companies arrived at Headquarters that night. Castlegar and Claregalway Companies arrived at the farmyard about 11 a.m. on Wednesday morning, having travelled across country. Their scout, Volunteer Casserly, arrived before them having scouted the whole way before them. At this time I think that there were about 600 or 700 men from the ten Companies there.

On Wednesday morning early a party of R.I.C. from Athenry were seen approaching the Headquarters. They were engaged by a party of Volunteers. The R.I.C. retreated very quickly. They appeared to be a scouting party of about five to seven men. Eamonn Corbett was in charge of the party who engaged them and drove them off.

Shortly before midday the Volunteers marched out of the Farmyard, Company by Company, and proceeded to Moyode Castle by the Mulpit Road. The Farmyard was not a suitable Headquarters as it was occupied by students. Moyode was spacious and unoccupied. The Farmyard was very close to the railway line and there were about fifty R.I.C. in Athenry and about twenty in Craughwell.

We remained in Moyode Wednesday night, Thursday night and left it on Friday evening. The different Companies were allotted quarters for themselves. Sentries were posted in all directions: all doubled. No skirmish of any kind took place while we were in Moyode. We had four or five R.I.C. prisoners who had been taken by the various Companies.

Mellows was in complete control. The other senior officers were Larry Lardner of Athenry, Martin Niland of Clarenbridge, Eamonn Corbett of Killeeneen, Sean Broderick of Athenry, Alf Monaghan of Dublin, Nicholas Kyne of Claregalway and Frank Hynes from Athenry.

The seven hundred men were armed with ten rifles, about five hundred shotguns, and the remainder were armed with pikes made by the blacksmiths.

I remember Mellows coming into the room, which with others I occupied in Moyode, and speaking to a few of us. They asked him questions as to the situation. As far as I remember he said he could hold out for a month by moving south to the Clare hills. On Thursday night Alf Monaghan addressed all the Volunteers and said that any Volunteer who did not wish to carry on was at liberty to leave. About one-third left, but some returned the next day.

I remember that Mellows and some officers went out by car on Thursday night in the direction of Ballinasloe on reconnaissance as it was rumoured that British Military were advancing on Moyode. The rumours about the British advance and the uncertainty, along with the withdrawal of the two hundred men, had a disturbing effect on all the Volunteers at Moyode on the Thursday night. We got no sleep that night as we were called out a few times during the night and lined in our Companies for roll call. I was on sentry duty about five hundred yards south of the castle with two other Volunteers, John Grealish and Tommy Bendon both from Clarenbridge Company.. We came back to Headquarters about 8 o'clock after having done duty for about seven hours. There would have been forty sentries out in the woods surrounding the castle. Rations were brought out to us.

Friday morning: As far as I remember on Friday about noon I was ordered by Liam Mellows to go to Fahy's of Templemartin and to bring two cyclists, who were staying at Fahy's, to Headquarters. They were holiday makers on their way from Athlone to Galway. We brought them in and he questioned them as to whether they had seen any British Military in any part of their travels. They said they didn't and they were let go.

About 6 p.m. all the Companies got word to line up, to tackle the horses and get all baggage ready. We had a lot of potatoes and provisions of all kinds. We marched out of Moyode by Companies. I think it was Martin Niland who was in charge of our Company. As we were leaving Moyode I remember that Liam Mellows called me and Volunteer Michael Cummins who was from my own place - Colwood. Mellows told Cummins to scout the roads in advance with other scouts. He told me to take a section of eight to ten men to act as rearguard. I did not know then where our destination was. We went through bye roads by the east of Craughwell by Ballymana Church through Monksfield. When we arrived at Monksfield it was nightfall and dusk, and I saw two men dressed in black on bicycles following us. I ordered my section to take cover and I called on the two cyclists to halt. They were coming with such speed that they ran right into our position before they could stop. We found that they were two priests who wanted to see Mellows. I was suspicious and I questioned them closely. They gave their names and I think they passed some remark about the surrender of the Volunteers in Dublin. I brought them to Mellows when we were within a half a mile of Limepark.

When Mellows and the two priests and other officers reached Limepark they went into a room where they had a meeting. I happened to be sitting on the window sill of the room in which the

meeting was held. I heard one of the priests telling all the officers assembled about the surrender in Dublin. A discussion then arose mainly between the priest and Mellows. The priest was trying to convince the meeting that, as the Volunteers in Dublin had surrendered, the Galway Volunteers should disperse as the position was hopeless in the circumstances. The priests asked Mellows whether he would be agreeable to put it to the men whether they would disperse or carry on. Mellows said that he had already put it up to the men in Moyode and that every man in Limepark had agreed to carry on. The priest said that as Dublin had been dispersed, the British Forces could concentrate fully on Galway. Mellows still refused to go to the men for a decision as he maintained it had been already taken. The priests asked him then if he would allow them to put it to the men and after some hesitation he agreed. One of the priests then addressed the Volunteers who were assembled on the lawn. He said the Volunteers had surrendered in Dublin and that he had come to ask us to disperse. He said Galway had done well and that as Dublin had surrendered there was no point in carrying on and he asked us to disperse and return to our homes quietly. We then dispersed.

I was arrested on the 3rd May in my own home. I was brought to Moyvilla R.I.C. barracks and kept a day there and then brought to Galway Jail. I spent about ten days in Galway Jail, which was overcrowded. With about three hundred other prisoners I was brought by train to Dublin. On our way from Galway Jail to the Station on foot under a heavy escort we were booed and jeered at by the people of Galway. We were brought to Richmond barracks in Dublin. We were marched from Broadstone Station and brought through the back streets, and were made to double through some of them. We got a good reception from the Dublin people. On arrival

in Richmond Barracks we were accommodated in barrack rooms - twenty-four in each room.

After three or four days we were marched at night to the North Wall and put on a cattle boat.

We were a gay party singing and dancing. Some more serious-minded of the prisoners were of the opinion that the British were taking us out to sea to sink us, and others said we were put on the cattle boat so that the Germans, if they sank the boat, would take it for what it was and would not make any attempt to rescue us. We were brought to Glasgow and separated into two batches. My batch marched through Glasgow to whatever station was the terminus for Perth. We got a good reception in Glasgow. There were about two hundred in our batch including some Wexford men. We were lodged in Perth Jail. We got a bad reception at Perth railway station; the people thought we were deserters from the British army and booed us. We returned the boos with vengeance.

After about two months we were shifted to Frongoch Camp in North Wales. Later we were brought before the Advisory Commission in London. We spent two nights in Wormwood Scrubbs. The members of the Advisory Committee were very pleasant fellows. They knew every move I made for the twelve months previous to the Rising. They knew all about the dances I attended, the girls I was friendly with, and that I carried a gun in Galway on the St. Patrick's Day Parade 1916. They asked me did I know what I was going to do when I was called out in Easter Week. I answered that I did, and that I was looking for the freedom of my country as any decent man would do in an unfree country. I was released about the end of August, 1916.

The Irish Volunteers were reorganised in 1917 and I rejoined the Clarenbridge Company and remained with that Company until I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster of the 3rd Battalion (Athenry) South West Galway Brigade early in 1921. The other officers of the Battalion were O/C. Gilbert Morrissey, Vice O/C. my brother William Kelly, Adjutant Stephen Jordan. When Jordan was arrested he was replaced by John O'Dea, The Wier, Clarenbridge. Jim Barrett was Quartermaster until he was arrested and I succeeded him.

I took part in the general election work in 1918 and in the collection of the Dáil Éireann Loan. I acted as outpost in connection with the Bookeen Barrack attack. Although my duties were mainly of a routine nature I took part in some prepared ambushes, raids on mails, burning of evacuated barracks etc.

I was a marked man by the R.I.C. during the whole of the War of Independence and my brother William was the same. We were not able to remain in our own home for most of the time and suffered a good deal of hardship and loss. We always slept out from about the middle of 1920 to the Truce in camps in out-of-the-way places.

SIGNED: Michael Kelly

DATE: 22nd Jan. 1957

WITNESS: Deán Brennan Lieut: bel

