

N. S. 952

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

No. W.S. 952

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 952

Witness

Maurice Horgan,
Killarney,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Killarney Company Irish Volunteers,
1914 - ;
Comd't. 4th Batt'n. Kerry No. 2 Brigade, later.

Subject.

National activities, West-Kerry,
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MAURICE HORGAN,

Killarney, County Kerry.

Activities in Killarney area from 1914 to 1921.

The Volunteers were started in 1913 but I did not join until September, 1914. I was recruited into the Killarney Company by the late Dick Fitzgerald. Officers were M. Spillane, W. O'Sullivan, N. O'Sullivan, S. Casey, J. Counihan and Dick Fitzgerald. This force was equipped with arms bought in Dublin and were being trained by two ex-service men, one of whom was named McGovern.

In May, 1915, we were addressed by M. J. O'Connor, Tralee, and Ernest Blythe. We were asked to decide whether we would stay with the National Volunteers or join the Irish Volunteers led by Eoin McNeill. Fifteen voted for Irish Volunteers. (At this time I was sworn into the I.R.B. by E. Blythe). The fifteen increased to twenty and by recruiting became a strong Company. The officers were M. Spillane, Captain; M.J. O'Sullivan, 1st Lieutenant; D. Fitzgerald, 2nd Lieutenant; William McCarthy, Sergeant. The Company paraded with the Volunteers of the County on the occasion of the presentation of the Colours by Eoin McNeill. The late Austin Stack was then O/C. of the Brigade, which meant the whole County. This parade took place in June, 1915. Recruiting meetings for the British Army started in the County about this time and the Volunteers prevented these from being effective by marching through them and breaking up the meetings.. This brought on us the wrath of "The Irish Times", and Sir Morgan O'Connell wired Mr. Birrell to send troops to protect their meetings. British recruiting failed here. At this time the Volunteers were four sections strong. I was leader of No. 2 section and with Volunteer P. McCarthy was dispatch rider to the Company. The Company, trained by Alf Cotton, was marched every Sunday to outlying districts with a view to recruiting for Volunteers.

In Ballyhar village we met Dan Alman and he was accompanied by six men from Listry. This six became the nucleus of another Company of Volunteers with Dan as Captain. We had about twenty-five single shot rifles and a few shotguns.

1916:

On Holy Thursday evening Captain M. Spillane handed me a large envelope to deliver to Bishop Mangan. I did not then know what the envelope contained. The Bishop did not approve of the contents and told me that I was a foolish young man to allow myself to be led into trouble. I told this to M. Spillane and he told me that the envelope contained the Proclamation. I did not see what was in the envelope but Michael Spillane should know. I was to report to him early next morning (Good Friday) with bicycle. I did so and was given a verbal dispatch for D. Dennehy, Captain, Rathmore Company, giving him orders for the Rising. On arriving back in Killarney I, with Pat Shea, then Adjutant, Killarney Company, was instructed to go to the International Hotel to meet the driver of a motor car and get him oil and petrol. The driver's name was McEnerney, conveying Con Keating and other to Cahirciveen. This car went over Pallykissane Pier and all the occupants except the driver were drowned. I afterwards learned that this car was on a special mission in connection with the German ship "Aud" which was conveying arms to Tralee Bay for the Rising.

On Saturday morning I was sent to Tralee to inform the Brigade O/C., Austin Stack, of the mishap to the car. In the Rink, which was then Kerry Headquarters, I met the late P. J. Cahill and another man whom he introduced as Captain Monteith. P.J.Cahill informed me that Austin Stack had been arrested and that he was Acting O/C. I enquired if there was any change in the orders owing to the accident to the car. He gave me verbal orders and I conveyed same to

Michael Spillane and he sent me on to Rathmore again with the orders I got from Cahill, which were that Rathmore Volunteers were to proceed to Killarney and join up with Killarney Company, but were first to break up railway lines and all lines of railway communication.

The Killarney Company 'Stood to' on Easter Sunday. Their orders were to proceed to Killarney Post Office and break and disconnect all lines of communication, then with Rathmore Company to march on to Castleisland where other orders would await them. Countermanding orders conveyed by the late Pierce McCann, riding on a motor bicycle, were received at Killarney at 3 p.m. that Sunday. I was again ordered to go to Tralee as Pierce McCann was anxious to return.

I cycled to Tralee and delivered the countermanding orders to P.J. Cahill. The officers in the Rink at both my visits were P. J. Cahill, William Mullins, Michael Fleming and Ned Barry.

I returned to Killarney and 'stood to' with the Company, fully armed and with rations, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday awaiting further orders. None came and the Company was dismissed. The British rounded up the officers of the Company on the following Monday, Michael Spillane, D. Fitzgerald, Pat Shea, N.J. O'Sullivan and W. Horgan. They were interned in Frongoch.

On the release of these prisoners it was quiet until it was decided to re-organise the Volunteers. I was appointed Acting Company Captain of Killarney and delegated from Killarney to attend a meeting in Dublin. This meeting was to take place in a house in Parnell Square and afterwards was held in, I think, Jones's Road (now Croke Park). With me were P. J. Cahill and William Mullins. We got orders for the reorganisation of the Volunteer in Kerry.

As already stated I was now Acting Captain and, as such, proceeded to reorganise Companies in Killarney and district, comprising Jissivigeen (Captain P.J. O'Sullivan), Ballyhar (Captain T. O'Leary), Listry (Captain Dan Alnan), Kilcurmin (Captain E. Moriarty), Black Valley (Captain P. Casey) and established lines of communication between Company areas.

About this time a test was made from Dublin timing a communication between Dublin and Tralee, each Company to sign time of receiving and dispatch to next area. When dispatch reached Killarney it was taken to Tralee by T. O'Meara and P. O'Riordan. They were well within the time for the mileage.

Early in 1918 supplies of meat were being sent to England and orders came to me from Austin Stack to prevent it leaving the town. All victuallers were notified of this and Volunteers organised to prevent the export from Killarney. The practice discontinued.

The county at this time was divided into No. 1 and No. 2 Brigades. Killarney and area was made No. 2 Brigade, with the late Dan O'Mahony of Castleisland as O/C. Killarney area was made into a Battalion known as the 4th Pattalion with Michael Spillane as O/C., I acting for him. With the threat of conscription the Companies throughout the Battalion strengthened and training became more intensive.

The election, 1918:

The Volunteers were ordered to take control and we were asked to proceed to Dublin to help in the election campaign of the late Seán McGarry. I was accompanied by Dick Fitzgerald, T. O'Shea (now D.J., Kilkenny), P. Devane and Seán Kerins. When we reached Dublin we found this campaign was overcrowded with helpers and we were

ordered to Donegal with Seán Ó Murthuile in charge of our party to help in the election of J Sweeney. We worked there and returned to Dublin after polling day.

The German plot came about this time and Michael Spillane was arrested. I took over duty and was subsequently elected O/C., 4th Battalion, by the Battalion Officers.

The British Military were stationed at the Great Southern Railway Hotel, Killarney, about 800 strong. An aeriocht billed for Killarney was proclaimed by the military. Large contingents of Volunteers came into the town, as also did R.I.C. from Cork and Limerick. A football match was also proclaimed, the teams taking part in the match being John Mitchells, Tralee, versus Dr. Croke's, Killarney. The members of the teams on their way to the playing field were attacked and batoned by the R.I.C., who were supported by the military with fixed bayonets. The aeriocht could not be held in the advertised place but was held at Allen's farm, Madam's Height. An oireachtas was held the same year in Killarney and was managed by the Volunteers. Special services were organised in the Volunteers - signalling, first-aid and intelligence. Special units comprising these were formed in each Company area and functioned. The Volunteers' activities became more intense and, as a result, Volunteers were being arrested and held in R.I.C. and military barracks. Killarney Cumann na mBan supplied all their meals, which were prepared and provided by the late Mrs. B. Twomey, Glebe Place, Killarney. All outside R.I.C. barracks had been burned and main Headquarters for R.I.C. and Military was Killarney, all their activities branching out from here. The Volunteers took over the Rural District Council and control of all monies used by them, directing the Manager of the National Bank that we wanted account changed to the names of Pat Mahony, Tim O'Sullivan and Dick Fitzgerald.

The making of grenades was now started in the various Company areas and sections of the Volunteers were instructed in making of same. These grenades were afterwards used in attacks on Scartaglin, Gortalea and Rathmore barracks. Encounters with R.I.C. and sections of military continued in the town, as on the occasion of the arrest of some of the Cumann na mBan. The arrested members were Peggy Cahill, Lottie Foley, Kate Breen, B. Gleeson and Etta Woods.. They were sentenced to two weeks. On release a reception was organised and was attended by R.I.C. and military who attacked the parade; the R.I.C. used batons and the military fixed bayonets to support the police. As a result several Volunteers suffered head injuries.

All Companies were now working at the collection of arms and ammunition. Some of the arms were damaged and minus essential parts. In Killarney Mental Hospital we had a man named Jim Healy working as an engineer. All damaged guns were given to him and he made them fit for use. At this time grenades were made in a simple way: nine inch length of galvanised pipe bored through at each end, a three inch length of gelignite detonated and fitted to fuse. At each end of the pipe washers were fitted and prevented from slipping out by bolts running through the holes. The space between the gelignite and washers was packed with clippings from a smith's forge. This made a hand-grenade easy to throw with accuracy. The type of fuse used was cut and timed so that there was no danger to the thrower. The gelignite was got from raids on a copper mine in Killarney and Donovan's, General Merchants, Killorglin.

We had a change of officers in 1921 due to having suffered some losses. Commandant Daniel Alman was killed at Headford ambush - where he was in charge. Here the British military suffered heavy casualties and it has been judged the biggest engagement with the enemy in Kerry.

Another man killed at this ambush was Jim Bailey of Ballymacelligott. Patrick McCarthy of Killarney was killed going to the ambush. He had his gun loaded and when getting into a pony trap the gun went off. John O'Leary was killed in Tipperary to which place he had been transferred as Rank Clerk. Pat Casey was killed while collecting rifles. He was Captain of the Black Valley Company. This man's death was caused by a sad mistake through wrong information. One of the gamekeepers working on the Kenmare estate used to visit the forest on the side of Mangerton Mountain. The information was to the effect that this keeper would hand over the rifle if he was met on the road and a mock struggle staged in order to cover him with his employer. I visited the Black Valley Company, whose area this was, accompanied by T. O'Mara, Battalion Signals Officer, and Charlie Corkerry, First Aid. I told Captain Pat Casey to collect the rifle. The gamekeeper was on the Kenmare road next day when Pat Casey and Jerome Griffin, who was armed with a shotgun, met him and asked him for the rifle. He refused to give it and Casey (unarmed) struggled with him for it, no doubt believing that the struggle was make-believe. The gamekeeper twisted the rifle against Casey's side and shot him through the heart. Griffin, taken by surprise, recovered and fired at the gamekeeper, wounding him severally in both thighs, at the same time as the gamekeeper fired at himself. Griffin had no more ammunition and retired. The gamekeeper was later collected by a game car and conveyed to hospital where he was protected by military. The head gamekeeper's house was randed by Volunteers and all ammunition taken. The rifles had been put in the custody of military after this incident.

The attacks on the barracks were intensified. Cortalea, Brosna, Rathmore barracks were attacked, and Killarney, being Military Headquarters, all roads leading out had to be blocked. This work

fell to Lissivigeen Company under P. J. O'Sullivan, and Kilcummin Company under E. Moriarty. The hand-grenades used in these attacks were made in Killarney, and in the case of Rathmore barracks a bomb was made of the box of a wheel. This was thrown through a window of the barracks by one of the Volunteers, killing one R.I.C. man and wounding another. The ammunition and grenades for Brosna were taken on a pony by David McCarthy of Brehig. All intelligence of military intentions had to be collected and sent to outlying Companies. This information was usually supplied by John Keogh, porter at the International Hotel. This man's information was responsible for the Clonbanin ambush where General Cummins and other officers were killed. The 8 o'clock train going out of Killarney was attacked at Ballybrack Station and two Tans killed. This type of accurate information had the enemy trying to find the source. They did not succeed.

This time ends my personal responsibility as I was arrested in the 'Bloody Sunday' round-up, conveyed to Cork jail and from there to Ballykinlar. I was one of the first 300 into the camp and on the way there we were treated to all the nice things the enemy could give us. We were handcuffed all the time and given no food from 2.30 a.m. on Thursday morning when we were put on board the "Helga" until 3 o'clock p.m. on Saturday when we reached camp. There we were received by an officer, Lieutenant Sangley, who admitted that he had no instructions about us and had neither bed nor food to give us. He and two soldiers and a prisoner named Robert Lynch of Bantry got together and by drawing on the canteen outside the wires were able to supply a meal of tea and biscuits. We lay on the bare floor of the huts for that night and in the morning were marched to a shed outside the wires where we got large bags and were shown some straw to fill them with. These were our beds until things were organised. We appointed a Volunteer named P. Colgan (now Major Colgan) as leader. On our first mornings the military

evidently decided that harsh treatment was the stuff to give us, and the first order we got was for so many men to empty the latrine buckets. This meant that you took a bucket of filth outside the camp and emptied it into a car which was used for this purpose. We were also detailed to draw coal to the stoves in the huts, handcuffed to the coalbuckets when outside the wires at the coal dump. The military filled the buckets and the men carried them into the camp. This treatment we resented, and as other prisoners came in daily we grew in strength and made up our minds to refuse to do these details. After our leaders had conveyed this decision to the military they grew more determined to make things rough for us. They refused coal unless we drew it ourselves and we promptly burned the bed boards/^{with} which they had by now supplied us. Our intention was, as new batches of prisoners were arriving every day, that we would compel them to treat us as prisoners of war with our own officers to control the camp. This fight was prolonged. The military were commencing to see that it was becoming more and more difficult to keep us subdued. The Commanding Officer at that time was Colonel Healy Hutchinson, who was apparently a decent man with a hard job. His Adjutant was Captain Newton, a sleek man-about-town. This man spent a lot of time coming into our camp, meeting our officers, smoothing things over etc., but we still refused to obey any order we disagreed with, i.e. refusing to answer roll call (we were known by number only). This fight between prisoners and military went on up to April, 1921.

About this time Joseph McCrath came into the No. 1 camp as a prisoner and was elected Commandant of the camp. He asked to see the British Commandant and put the demands of the prisoners before him, stating that we insisted on having full control inside the wires. All night patrols which were moving round the huts at night to be discontinued and military only to come inside the wires at opening up time in the morning and closing at night. One of these patrols was

responsible for the discovery of Volunteer Whelan who had taken part in an ambush of military in Dublin and who was going under an assumed name. They continued to make surprise raids at night accompanied by a detective. Prisoners were roused and had lamps flashed in their faces. They were still looking for suspects and we were made parade before a hut with muffed windows in which were spyholes, each prisoner passing single file facing the windows, through a stile on to the playing field. This we refused to do and the practice was discontinued. The camp was practically full by this time, about 800 strong, and resistance grew in strength until one night we in Hut 21 were roused about 1 a.m. and Commandant J. McGrath was taken outside the wires without being allowed to dress. The following morning the camp was in open rebellion. The prisoners refused to enter their huts even though the military arrived with fixed bayonets. The demand was made that until Commandant McGrath was returned the prisoners would refuse to obey any order. He was returned the following day and then the fight was over. We had complete control of the camp, our own officers, Commandant, Adjutant etc. being responsible for the running of the camp.

Some incidents took place, shooting of Volunteers by sentry etc. I was personally concerned in the shooting of Tormey and Sloane. I had been sent to interview a prisoner in No. 2 camp which was now filling up, and it was the practice of the British to send in spies to jails and camps. Each doubtful prisoner had to be identified by some other prisoner. This man claimed that he was Coffey from Killarney. Some prisoners from Killarney were in No. 2 camp but could not identify him. Commandant McGrath sent me to the corner of a hut which was used as a hospital. This hut was near the road and I was able to look into No. 2 Camp across the wire and speak to Coffey who was sheltered in No. 2 camp from the view of the sentry, who was

shouting at us to keep back and stop talking or he would fire. The angles of the huts protected us both and after questioning I was able to identify him as one Coffey from Aghadoe, Killarney. He was a gardener and worked in Parknasilla, Kenmare, for some years. I said 'O.K.' to Christopher Courtney, another Killarney prisoner who was with him. All this time the late Fred Crowley, T.D., Adjutant of our camp, and two prisoners were standing behind me. I looked out at the sentry and turned away. The two prisoners at my back stepped out in order to let me pass. In doing so they came in full view of the sentry and he fired, killing the two men with one bullet. I caught Sloane as he fell: he was shot through the neck. Fred ran for the Doctor. When he arrived they were both dead. This enraged the prisoners and Commandant McGrath demanded an inquiry. He was taken outside and the sentries paraded before him. The man who fired the shot was not one of them. The military held that we had broken the rules, that we were to keep away from the wires and not communicate with the prisoners in the other camp.

Barry

I was a witness to the shooting of Tadhg/of, Cork in Camp No. 2. One hut in our camp was the wash-house. Some prisoners were going on parole on that day including some from Killarney. I climbed on the wash-house roof to wave goodbye and could see Tadhg Barry standing on either a box or a bucket (in the other camp) waving to somebody in the lorry whom he knew. I heard the shot and saw Tadhg put his hand to his breast and fall from whatever he was standing on. At this time a tunnel was being made from a hut in D. line leading to a hill well outside the camp. This tunnel was being fitted in an elaborate way with electric light, a trolley running on lines to convey sand dug to the mouth of the tunnel. This sand was spread on the compound which was all sand and companies of Volunteers walked on this all day in order to spread it. The supports for the sides and dangerous parts of the roofs of the tunnel were the bedboards we slept on, each hut giving up a certain number of bedboards.

Every alternate Tuesday the leaders reported bedboards broken and demanded replacements. We had to show some parts of the broken boards and when asked by the Quartermaster Sergeant where the rest were some of the answers were most amusing. The tunnel was vented by stove-pipes taken also from the huts and pushed through the roof until just level with the ground outside. When nearly complete it was discovered by a mishap. A heavily laden lorry travelling on the road outside the wires sank and on investigation the tunnel was discovered underneath. We heard that the tunnel was preserved by the military and that companies of engineers were brought to inspect it. They were surprised that anything like it could have happened under their noses. This was followed by parties of military digging all round the camp looking for more tunnels which weren't there.

The camp went on until our release which was on the 10th December, 1921.

Our trains were attacked by holligans with stones. One train was fired on. The train on which I was travelling stopped at Thurles. An R.I.C. man named Enright threw a bomb at the carriage next to mine mortally wounding a Cork Volunteer. This R.I.C. man was shot down soon afterwards in Ballybunion.

This brings my statement to a finish. I have tried to make it as accurate and complete as my memory will allow.

Signed: Maurice Horgan
(Maurice Horgan)

Date: 3rd June 1954

3rd June 1954.

Witness: James J. O'Connor
James J. O'Connor.

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