

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 784

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 984

**Witness**

Seamus McMahon,  
Knockadrumonagh,  
Ennistymon,  
Co. Clare.

**Identity.**

Lieut. and Captain A/Coy. 4th Batt'n.  
Mid-Clare Brigade.

**Subject.**

Irish Volunteers, F<sub>e</sub>akle, Co. Clare,  
1913-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. S. 2300

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF SEAMUS McMAHON,  
Knockadrumonagh, Ennistymon, Co. Clare,  
formerly O/C, A Company, 4th Battalion,  
Mid-Clare Brigade.

I was born on 5th January, 1894, at Knockadrumonagh on a good sized holding. I went to the Ennistymon Christian Brothers' Schools until I reached 6th standard, when I left to assist my father on the farm. Though I was the seventh member of a family of twelve the older members had by that time nearly all emigrated to the U.S.A.

So far as I know my predecessors had no connection with the national movements of their time, except my father who was a member of the Land League.

I joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation at Ennistymon Town Hall in the end of 1913 and attended all parades and drilling up to the time of the Redmondite split in 1914. During that time we were drilled by three British Army reservists, and when the split occurred we were thoroughly familiar with all aspects of infantry drill. A number of men in the unit had also been specially trained as instructors.

Most of the Ennistymon Volunteers followed John Redmond. Out of a total of over 150 only a dozen or so took the side of the Irish Volunteer executive and I was

one of them; they were entirely from either the Cloonagh side or from the district between Cloonagh and Ennistymon. A separate company of Irish Volunteers was formed at Cloonagh in October, 1915, and we continued drilling on the lines of the Ennistymon unit. A Gaelic football team was formed in conjunction with the Cloonagh Irish Volunteers. This team took part in the Clare County Championships in 1915 and 1916. Due to our anti-Redmondite sympathies the team met with a very hostile reception in many parts of the county. In Cooraclare on one occasion where the Cloonagh team and their supporters cycled to play a match, nearly all their bikes were deliberately punctured by the local people who then were very loyal to the Irish Party.

Some months after forming the Cloonagh Company of the Irish Volunteers the unit got two .22 rifles and two .22 revolvers from Headquarters in Dublin. Ammunition for these weapons was cheap at the time and was easily obtained by three of the Cloonagh Volunteers who were employed in hardware shops in Ennistymon. The company had targets set up in Aranmore, a secluded part of the parish of Cloonagh, and throughout the latter part of 1915 and the spring of 1916 each member got a good deal of practice in firing with the .22 rifle and revolver.

At Easter 1916, I'm not sure whether it was Easter Monday or Tuesday, I got orders to mobilise at Whitemount. I reported there after nightfall and there were about 22 or 23 others also present. Orders were given to us to collect guns held by farmers in the locality and I took part in the collection of about 40 shotguns altogether.

We spent the best part of the night at this work and towards daybreak the various parties who were operating the different parts of the district re-assembled at Whitemount. There we were told that we should meet at the same place at 9 o'clock that night. The guns were divided round and I got a shotgun to take with me. The company met that night as arranged. Orders were expected to come from either Ennis or Galway but they had not arrived. We waited for a good part of the night, when it was decided that the company should disperse, but each man was requested to hold himself ready to report for action at a moment's notice should the expected orders to go into action be received. No such orders came.

In the months after the Rising the Cloonagh Company continued to drill, in secret, of course, and a number of recruits were enrolled. At the time the prisoners arrested after the Rising were released we had a much stronger company than we had before. I would say its membership was over 40 men.

About July 1917 a separate company of Irish Volunteers was formed in Ennistymon. As I had gone to live with a relative of mine who had a farm on the outskirts of that town I transferred from the Cloonagh to the Ennistymon Company and was elected 1st Lieutenant. The O/C was John Joe Neylon and the other officers were, I think, 2nd Lieutenant - Paddy Madigan, Adjutant - Willie McCarthy and Quartermaster - Michael Healy. The company strength reached about eighty which later, in 1919 or 1920, fell down to around sixty.

In the East Clare by-election in July 1917 and in the General Election in 1918 when I was in Mayo, I was one of about 50 Volunteers from Cloonagh and Ennistymon who helped the Sinn Féin candidates, giving protection to their meetings from attacks by supporters of the Redmondite party and also in canvassing work.

The town of Ennistymon was always a District Headquarters of the R.I.C. It was under the charge of a District Inspector and until about the end of 1919 had a total police force of roughly twenty. The R.I.C. barracks was in Parliament St., in the centre of the town, and adjacent to it was the Courthouse. When the smaller R.I.C. stations were evacuated early in 1920 the men in Kilfenora, Maurice's Mills and Lahinch were withdrawn to Ennistymon and by Easter of that year there were around thirty-five R.I.C. stationed in the town. In addition to this force, and from about July 1917, there was a military garrison of about 200 men in the Workhouse which was situated close on a mile from Ennistymon on the road to Lahinch. With the advent of the Black and Tans the enemy strength was further increased by about thirty-five. The Black and Tans took over the Courthouse. The total equipment of the Ennistymon Company of the Irish Volunteers at the commencement of 1919 consisted of about four revolvers, a dozen shotguns and six rifles. The revolvers were of the British bulldog variety and were old. The shotguns were obtained mostly from friendly sympathisers in the district or through raids on the houses of people who were loyalists or indifferent to the Sinn Féin

movement. To the best of my recollection three rifles were of the Martin Henry type and three were service rifles obtained from British soldiers home on leave from the first World War. The majority of the Volunteers in Ennistymon had received very little instruction in the use of fire-arms even up to the Truce, and it can be said that not more than twenty men from the company were ever asked to participate in any form of military activity other than foot and extended order drill, parades, scouting, road cutting and despatch carrying. This is not stated by way of any form of reflection on the big majority of the company; there was not sufficient arms available for all the men and naturally whenever an attack or raid was planned on the enemy the men who were considered best were selected.

The first military operation in which I was involved occurred on 21st December, 1917. Along with Seán Healy of the Ennistymon Company I went to the local railway station to witness the arrival of the evening train from Ennis about 8 o'clock. Tom Shalloo, a prominent Volunteer from Caraclogh got off the train and asked to help him disarm a British soldier carrying a rifle who also alighted from the same train. We followed the soldier until he got outside the station on to the main road when Shalloo pounced on him, seizing the rifle. Unfortunately in trying to secure possession of the gun Shalloo twisted the strap so tightly round the soldier's arm that it became impossible to wrench the gun free. The tussle began to excite the attention of people about the place and as there was a party of forty or fifty soldiers inside the station

unloading supplies we abandoned the attack and cleared away. Nobody was arrested over this incident.

As 1st Lieutenant of the Company I was mostly occupied throughout 1918 and 1919 with training and drilling. Generally during that time there were two parades a week, one on Sunday and the other on week nights. Often too, the sections and half companies met for drill on week nights.

The first time in which I was involved in an armed clash with British troops was in February 1920. I was one of a party of about 30 men from 4th and 5th Battalions, Mid-Clare Brigade who were sent into the Connolly district to quieten some people who were causing trouble over land. The Vice O/C of the Brigade, Martin Devitt, was in charge. We were returning home in horse carts and traps and were about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from the village of Connolly when we ran into a party of military travelling in a large van. Devitt ordered us off the carts and led us to the top of a piece of high ground overlooking the road from which he hoped to be able to attack the van. A couple of soldiers left the vehicle and began examining the cars and traps abandoned by us on the road and we opened fire on them. I had a rifle and fired three or four shots. The soldiers reversed the van and retreated towards Inagh. I think there were no casualties on either side. We sent back the carts and traps to the people who owned them and got back to our own district by going most of the way across country.

A short time after this incident the R.I.C. vacated Maurice's Mills Barracks and later on Holy Saturday night 1920 it was burned. I was in charge of about a dozen men who went from Ennistymon to take part in the destruction of this building.

On 19th July, 1920, I formed one of a party who had been given the job of shooting a Black and Tan named Hoynes who had been making himself very objectionable by his truculent behaviour in Ennistymon. The Company Captain, John Joe Neylon - "The Tosser" was his nickname - was in charge, and of the others, three all told, I can only remember one man, Patrick (Pake) Lehane of Lahinch, afterwards shot on the night of the Rineen ambush. The Tan in question failed to put in an appearance in the town and we decided to call off the operation between 7.30 and 8 o'clock in the evening. We separated but I remained about the street.

Not long after, maybe a quarter of an hour or so, Ned Hynes and Jack Madigan who belonged to our company, met me and told me that a military lorry containing a sergeant and six men had gone up to Mrs. O'Connor's house in Deerpark on the outskirts of the town. Mrs. O'Connor, who had two daughters then at the courting age, did the laundry for the soldiers, and local gossip had it that she provided other amenities for them as well. Anyway she was a light-hearted woman and, as subsequent events proved, her heart was, from the national point of view, in the right place.



On hearing of the news about the military going up to O'Connor's I tried to contact the Company Captain but failed. I was satisfied that here was a fine chance of getting six or seven rifles which I was determined not to miss. I sent word to as many Volunteers as I could rely on to mobilise at McCarthy's corner on the top of Church Street, where I went to wait. As soon as nine men had gathered I outlined my plan to them, which was that two men should go into O'Connor's and suggest to the daughters to start a dance; that if the suggestion were accepted the rest of the party should slip into the house gradually and take part in the amusement, taking care to spread themselves through the kitchen - which was the usual place for holding country dances in those days - and that three or four should remain at the door watching into the kitchen, as it was also the general thing then to see the men who were either too shy or who couldn't dance to hang round the door. The two men who went in to propose that a dance should be started succeeded in their mission. I cannot remember their names. Anyway the dance began and the soldiers participated. By degrees all the Volunteers to whom I had been speaking came into the house and edged their way around the kitchen; everyone was enjoying themselves. I should have mentioned, too, that I had arranged at McCarthy's corner that one of us should ask for the "Long Caledonians", a popular dance in Clare then, and that at a particular point in a figure everyone should be so positioned that one man should grab a soldier while the remainder would grab the rifles. Before the proceedings had

arrived at that point one of the soldiers who had kept his rifle strapped to his back while the others left them aside, appeared to "smell a rat". He had been standing at the fireplace and came to the door where he was instantly pounced upon by Michael Healy (Miko). This started a melee and in a matter of seconds all the soldiers were overpowered and the rifles in our possession. We got six rifles, all short Lee Enfields. The sergeant had a revolver which we had not seen, and as soon as we left the house he fired a few shots through one of the windows but nobody was hit.

Only one of the men who were involved in this job was armed and he was Pake Lehane of Lahinch. The others who took part in it with me were:

Michael Conway, Ennistymon (shot dead next day)  
 Michael Healy (Miko) "  
 Ned Hynes, Cloncoul, "  
 Jack Madigan, Callura, "  
 Paddy Madigan, " "  
 Peter Monaghan, Kilcorman, Ennistymon  
 Thomas Gallagher, Cahersheskin, Ennistymon  
 Seamus Murrhy, Cahersheskin, "

Despite widespread searches by the R.I.C. and military none of the rifles were recovered and not one of those who took part were arrested, although we were all well known to the O'Connor family. At different times later on during the fight against the British Mrs. O'Connor would remark to me when I met her about the town: "I can get you hanged". That poor woman and her daughters kept their secret well although they would have been well paid for it by the enemy.

On the following day troops poured into Ennistymon from all parts of Clare and they went all

through the countryside looking for the rifles. About 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening two young military officers and three soldiers, including one of the men who had been disarmed the night before - he had "a beauty of an eye" - came into Ennistymon from the military barracks and went up to O'Connor's. They were making enquiries about what had happened at the dance. The military officers returned by themselves. I was standing at Stack's corner talking to four other Volunteers, Michael Conway, Michael Morgan, Paddy Madigan and Austin Healy, when they passed. They had their hands in their trench-coat pockets and it was obvious they were carrying revolvers. Instantly it was agreed that we should try to disarm them and we followed them up the street. None of us were armed.

The officers continued their way towards the military barracks and crossed the bridge on the right-hand side, while we took the opposite side. This bridge is about 25 or 30 yards long and about 10 yards wide. As the officers were at the middle of the bridge a man came towards them leading a white horse. We decided to take advantage of the cover provided by the horse and to cross the bridge so that we would be at rushing distance of them before they would realise it. We were at the horse's flanks just as the officers passed them and about four or five feet from the footpath. I headed the rush and grappled with the bigger man of the two. He still had his hand in his pocket and though I had him firmly gripped round the arms he managed to bring his right forearm to the front of my body and through of his trench-coat fired a

number of shots from a revolver. One of the bullets passed between my second and third rib, pierced my stomach and emerged close to the spine. Other bullets went through my waistcoat and trousers. I felt the blood running down along my leg and decided to make one determined effort to overpower my opponent before loss of blood had weakened me. I flung him to the ground and made a desperate effort to pull the gun from him. I had not seen before this that the revolver was secured by a chain to his ~~waist~~<sup>wrist</sup> and this prevented me from securing the revolver. As soon as he was knocked down he began to shout to his comrade for help. By then my brother, Andrew, and John Curtin, Lavoregn, arrived and they, too, tried to drag away the gun but the chain prevented them. Looking round I saw the other officer approaching with his revolver pointed at us. I called to my brother and Curtin "Come on; we'll all be shot", and made for the railway station.

Until I got as far as the station I did not realise that my wound was so serious and I was trying to pretend that it was only a trivial thing. At the station I became weak and had to be assisted from the road to a field on top of the hill above the station where it was safer than the roadside. My brother went off for a priest and doctor. First came Father Conway whose brother was with me in the attack, and he heard my Confession. Later Father Ruane, C.C., and Dr. Curran, Ennistymon, arrived and I received the Last Sacraments and was given medical attention. They removed me into an outhouse near at hand where I remained for three or four hours until Tom Shalloo,

Carhunclogh, Vice O/C 5th Battalion, landed in an outside car driven by Andrew McDonagh. The door was removed from the outhouse and on it I was hoisted to the dickie of the outside car and then driven to Joe Maloney's, Ballagh, where I remained eight or nine days. I was taken from there to Lynch's, Ballybrien, where I was kept until I was restored to health. During my term in bed I was attended by three different doctors, who were all most concerned about my recovery - Dr. Curran, Ennistymon, Dr. Hillary, Miltown Malbay, and Dr. Pearson, Lisdoonvarna.

In September 1920 on medical advice I was brought to Dublin by Tom Shalloo, where I was examined by Dr. Kathleen Lynn who sent me home after a week. By the middle of the following October, though not fully restored health, I was back taking my place as 1st Lieutenant of the Ennistymon Company. A month later I was appointed Company Captain, a rank I held up to the Truce in July 1921.

In December 1920, about 18th of that month, I was in charge of a party detailed to place barricades on the road leading from Ennistymon to Monreal where a big ambush was arranged under the direction of Joe Barrett, Operations Officer, Mid-Clare Brigade. The men with me were: Michael Morgan, Caruclogh, Andrew McDonagh, Kilcorman, Paud <sup>Conneally</sup> ~~Conneally~~ ~~Conedy~~, Caruclogh, and my brothers Andrew and Joe. We carried out our instructions, which were:- to place barricades on the road between the railway crossing in Knockadrummagh and Curtin's garden in the same townland, a distance of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile.

The lorries passed about 10 a.m., and as soon as they had gone out of sight we began our work. Altogether we threw up three barricades built of stones and then cleared away.

Between the end of December 1920 and June 1921 I did not take part in any activity requiring the use of firearms. I devoted my time during this period to keeping the company in trim by drilling, seeing that despatches were promptly delivered, arranging for the blocking of roads and trenches and keeping intelligence work geared up. As I have already shown, the town of Ennistymon was very heavily garrisoned by the enemy, and in view of its size it was impossible to pull off any kind of a job there without taking risks against impossible odds. As well <sup>as</sup> the disarming of the military party in Connor's house and the ~~attempting~~ <sup>attack on</sup> of the two officers on Ennistymon Bridge, the enemy were very much on the alert ~~afterwards~~ and there was nothing soft to be got.

Approaching the end of June 1921 I was one of a party of about twenty men armed with rifles and accompanied by ten or twelve unarmed Volunteers acting as scouts, who, under the Battalion O/C, Seamus Hennessy, took up position behind a stone wall in Tom Connolly's land in Moynanagh to snipe lorries of military coming from Ennis to Ennistymon. This wall ran more or less parallel to the road and was about 250 yards from it. At 3 p.m. ten lorries came the way. The first three or four were allowed to pass before we opened fire. As soon as we did so the military got off the lorries

and engaged us, taking positions behind the road fence. We kept up the fire for 10 or 12 minutes, when the O/C ordered us to retire and we went off towards Mount Callan without being interfered with. We had no casualties and I am not able to say if the British had any or not.

Less than a week after another attack was arranged to take place at Inchiquin, a mile or so from Corofin. This time we were after a lorry of Auxiliaries which had started to come every day from Corofin, where they were stationed, to Patterson's mills in Inchiquin for water, either between 9 and 10 o'clock in the morning or late in the evening. The Brigade Operations Officer, Joe Barrett, was in charge, and he had about 60 men, drawn from all over the Brigade area, under his control. The majority were armed with rifles and the remainder had shotguns. I had a service rifle. The lorry did not arrive until around 8 o'clock in the evening and by that time we had given up hopes that it would turn up at all. Barrett had withdrawn us from our positions and the whole column were assembled on a piece of high ground 300 yards on the south side of Patterson's place. This ground was covered with a thick growth of blackthorn bushes.

The lorry drove into Patterson's yard. Without being observed by us the Auxiliaries dismounted from the lorry and took up positions along the wall of the avenue leading into the mill. At the same time the lorry had quietly reversed and containing only the driver returned back to Corofin. As soon as the lorry

had gone the Auxiliaries opened fire. They sprayed our positions very effectively and owing to the thickness of the blackthorn bushes it was only with great difficulty that we managed to get back into ground where we had protection from fire. Eventually after about 20 minutes the whole column managed to do so with only one casualty, Andy O'Donoghue, O/C of the 5th Battalion, who was slightly wounded in the heel. It was a matter of conjecture how and when the Auxiliaries learned of our presence in this position. The real truth was never established so far as I know. My own opinion is that it was some person employed around the mill who told them. This was the last operation against the British troops in which I was engaged.

Signed:

Seamus McMahon

(Seamus McMahon)

Date:

11.8.1954

Witness:

D. Griffin

(D. Griffin)

