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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1462

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1462.

Witness

Sergeant Seán Moroney,
Detective Branch,
Dublin Castle.

Identity.

Member of East Clare Brigade Active Service Unit.
Captain, Droomindora Company, 6th Battalion,
East Clare Brigade, June 1921-Truce.

Subject.

Activities of 6th Battalion, East Clare Brigade,
and of East Clare Brigade Active Service Unit,
1919-Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2764.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY DETECTIVE SERGEANT SEÁN MORONEY,

Detective Branch, Dublin Castle.

I was born on June 7th 1897 at Gurtavrulla, Feakle, Co. Clare. My people belonged to the middle farming class. Our home was situated at the foot of the Slieve Aughty Mountains in north east Clare. My father and uncles were active in the Land League days and my grandfather was in the Fenian movement. In my boyhood days I often heard stories told around the fireside on winter nights about the Bodyke evictions and the Fenian movement.

I joined the Redmond Volunteers in 1913. We drilled once a week. Our training officer was a British army reservist. When the war broke out in 1914 he was called up for active service and the Volunteer company fell through.

There was a blacksmith's forge near our home where on wet days we used to go to meet other boys. The blacksmith, Patrick Minogue, taught us how to use the sledge for hammering out sets of shoes for horses, ploughshares, etc. My reason for explaining the above shall be seen in my story later.

In 1915 I joined the local Irish Volunteer company. It was known as the Feakle Company. Tadhg Kelly was Captain, and Joe Tuohy Lieutenant. Although there was no activity in the area in 1916, the two officers were arrested shortly after Easter Week and deported to England.

In July, 1917, the historic East Clare election took place between Eamon de Valera and Paddy Lynch, K.C.

I did duty at most of the meetings during the election campaign and on election day.

In 1918, when the threat of conscription hung over Ireland, the Volunteers in my area were kept busy. We raided for and collected all the arms we could find. The local blacksmith's forge, which was situated about three miles from an R.I.C. barracks, became a hive of industry making pikes to resist conscription. The local Volunteers worked with the blacksmith, Patrick Minogue, hammering out the pikes, while other Volunteers kept watch for R.I.C. patrols, who were very active at that time. Minogue's three sons, Jack, Tom and Martin, were Volunteers.

About 1919 a Brigade was formed in East Clare. I was attached to 'C' Company (also known as Caher Company), 6th Battalion, with the rank of 1st Lieutenant. The Company Captain was Patrick Houlihan, afterwards T.D. for East Clare, and John Noonan was 2nd Lieutenant. The Battalion Commandant was Henry O'Mara, and the Brigade Comdt. Michael Brennan, afterwards Chief of Staff of the Free State Army. The companies forming the 6th Battalion were: Caher, Feakle, Killanena, Flagmount, Droomindoorra and Annaghneal.

During 1919 we were engaged chiefly in organisation, training, procuring arms, raising funds by dances etc.

My first active engagement took place in September, 1920, when Scariff R.I.C. Barracks was attacked. Scariff R.I.C. Barracks was a strong, two storied stone building situated on The Square. It was one of a terrace, with a publichouse on one side and a small private dwelling on the other. The door was in the centre, with a window on either side of it. There were three

windows upstairs. All the windows had steel shutters with loop-holes. The side wall over the small dwelling was also loopholed. The rere windows had steel loopholed shutters, and the wall was also loopholed. It was protected by barbed wire entanglements. It was estimated that the garrison consisted of two sergeants and twelve to fourteen men.

It was planned that a party of our men would scale the roof and break a hole in it, through which they would drop bombs and petrol into the barrack. A second party was to break a hole in the wall from the publichouse for the same purpose. Another party, of which I was a member, was to occupy houses on the side of The Square opposite the barrack, about one hundred yards distant. This party was between twenty to twenty-five strong. I was armed with a service rifle and fifty rounds of ammunition.

When the roof party, which was under the command of Joe Clancy, an ex British soldier, commenced to break the slates, the R.I.C. opened fire. They also threw out hand grenades and sent up Verey lights. We then opened fire on the barrack. The roof party did its job well, but the bombs which they dropped into the barrack failed to explode.

The attack started at 10 p.m. and continued until 4 a.m., when it was called off without achieving our objective, which was to capture and destroy the barrack. We knew the barrack could not be captured by rifle fire alone. We depended on the bombs and petrol to set it on fire and so force the garrison to surrender, and as the bombs failed to explode we had no option but to withdraw.

However, the barrack was so badly damaged that it was evacuated that afternoon and the garrison sent to Killaloe. There was no casualty on either side.

My next engagement, which was about two weeks later, was against an R.I.C. foot patrol about a mile outside the village of Feakle. This attack was made by the 6th Battalion A.S.U. under Henry O'Mara, who is now Chief Superintendent in charge of Phoenix Park Garda Depot. It was the custom for a party of R.I.C., a sergeant and five men armed with carbines, to proceed daily to the post office, which was about a mile outside the village on the Scariff road, to collect mails. It was decided to ambush them.

They travelled in pairs, with about 200 yards between each pair. When the first pair arrived at the post office they remained outside until the other four came up. Then one of them entered the post office and collected the mail. Having done so, the party returned to the barrack in the same order in which they had come. Paddy Houlihan, myself and two Volunteers were to take up positions at windows on the first floor of the post office. Four men were to occupy a house adjacent to the post office, and three men to position themselves behind the graveyard wall on the opposite side of the road. The Battalion Commandant, Henry O'Mara, with six or seven Volunteers, was to occupy a position about 200 yards on the Feakle side of the post office, for the purpose of cutting off the retreat of the R.I.C. if any of them should try to return to their barrack that way. The orders for the ambush were to allow the whole patrol to arrive at the post office without a shot being fired. Then Paddy Houlihan and I, who would be at windows in the same

room and who would be armed with double barrellled shotguns and buckshot, would open the attack, the other parties then joining in.

We were all in positions as arranged. The leading pair of the patrol reached the post office and remained outside. When the second pair were about forty yards from the post office, one of our men in the graveyard accidentally discharged a shot. This, of course, alerted the patrol and spoiled our plan. Houlihan said to me, "You get the man on the right, I will get the man on the left". We opened fire on them just as they were bringing their carbines to the firing position. Both of them were shot dead. One of them was the sergeant. The remainder of the patrol retreated as fast as they could to the village. One of them was badly wounded, but all four succeeded in reaching the barrack. We captured two carbines and about 150 rounds of ammunition. We suffered no casualty.

That night the Black and Tans and R.I.C. burned several houses in the locality, including those of some Volunteers who had taken part in the attack. They burned the post office and the house adjoining it which our men had occupied for the attack. They also wounded Thomas Maloney, the proprietor of the post office. The house of Tadhg Kelly, an elderly man and a strong supporter, was also burned.

Shortly after this, three members of the Scariff Battalion A.S.U., together with the man in whose house they were sleeping, were captured by Auxiliaries from Killaloe and taken to their H.Q., where they were tortured for hours and then taken to the middle of the bridge across

the Shannon and all four murdered. The three members of the A.S.U. who were murdered were also officers in the Scariff Battalion. They were: Alfred Rodgers, Michael (Brud) McMahon, both natives of Scariff, and Martin Kildea, a native of Galway, who was a shop assistant in Scariff. Patrick Egan, in whose house they were captured, was a Volunteer and a native of Tuamgraney.

At this time I was a member of the Brigade A.S.U. as well as the Battalion A.S.U. The Brigade Column at full strength was about sixty-five and was composed mainly of officers. The strength of the 6th Battalion A.S.U. was fourteen men. After each engagement the A.S.U. broke up into small groups and fended for ourselves as best we could. We usually got billets in the mountainy parts of the country as it was harder for the enemy to surprise us there. The country people were very good to us and provided us with the best food they had and watched for us while we slept. Almost every young man was a Volunteer.

About the middle of October, 1920, I was billeted near the village of Ballinruan, which was in the Mid Clare Brigade area. Mick Tuohy, who was a member of the East Clare Brigade A.S.U., was with me. The local Company Captain, Laurence McAllen, who was a member of the Mid Clare Brigade A.S.U., informed us that Ruan R.I.C. Barracks, which was in their Brigade area and about twelve miles away, was to be attacked next morning and invited us to go with him. Mick Tuohy, Tommy O'Grady, a Volunteer from our battalion, and I gladly accepted, as we were always anxious for a scrap. The barracks was held by fourteen R.I.C. and stood alone on an open

piece of ground some hundreds of yards from any other building. The village of Ruan is about eight miles from Corofin, where there was a military barracks as well as R.I.C., and in Ennis, about ten miles distant, was a strong military garrison and large numbers of Black and Tans and R.I.C.

The road leading to Corofin and Ennis was barricaded about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile outside Ruan and a strong detachment of about forty men placed there in case an enemy patrol might come along, and to prevent reinforcements coming from Ennis or Corofin. I was one of this group. There was another party of men specially picked from the Brigade A.S.U. to rush the barrack. I think Con O'Halloran was in charge of this party.

It was usual for one R.I.C. man to leave the barrack daily at 8.a.m. and walk to the village, about 200 yards away, to collect milk. He always locked the barrack door when leaving. It was arranged with Constable Carroll that on the morning when it would be his turn to collect the milk, that he would leave the barrack door open. Constable Carroll was on duty on this particular morning, and he left the door open as arranged. The specially picked party were behind a small grove of trees about 100 yards from the barrack. Having taken off their boots, the party moved noiselessly into the barrack and up the stairs. On both sides of the landing were two dormitories. Both were rushed simultaneously and the order "hands up" given. All were in bed; some were sitting up smoking, others were asleep. Some of them grabbed their guns and a fight ensued, in the course of which two R.I.C. men were shot dead. The remainder surrendered. We captured fourteen rifles, fourteen

bicycles, several revolvers, hand grenades and some thousands of rounds of ammunition. We suffered no casualties. Having cleared the R.I.C. out of the barrack, we burned it. Joe Barrett was in charge of this operation.

Carroll joined the Mid Clare Brigade A.S.U. and served with it until the truce.

Sometime in 1920, Captain Joe Nugent and I seized the rate books from the local rate collector. We collected all the rates in his division for that year and the following year. We handed over the monies to the Brigade O/C, Michael Brennan, who was also Chairman of the Clare County Council.

About the end of 1920 I was one of the Volunteer officers selected to act as judges on the local Sinn Féin Court. Prior to this the judges were older men and usually members of Sinn Féin. There was no fixed date for the court to meet. It was convened whenever a case required to be heard. The decisions of the court were always abided by, even by those who were not friendly towards us.

The A.S.U. suffered a good deal during the winter of 1920-21. We had to sleep in haybarns and often in the open when hard pressed by large raiding parties of military and R.I.C. The food was not too good as the people were poor, and our regular food was tea, bread, butter and eggs. We very seldom got vegetables, as we were usually in a hurry to move on again and could not wait for them to be cooked. When we got boiled bacon and cabbage for dinner we considered it a great treat. As a result of the food we usually had, we all got what we called the Republican itch, which was very disagreeable

and painful at times. About this time we constructed some very useful places for sleeping when hard pressed by the enemy. They were what we called dug-outs, which were underground and almost impossible to find if you had not been shown where they were.

In the early weeks of 1921, the Brigade A.S.U. took up positions on several occasions to ambush military or police, but we seemed to be very unlucky as we drew blanks on each occasion. At last the Brigade A.S.U. met with a bit of luck. It was at Glenwood, a few miles outside Limerick City. A police lorry with R.I.C. and Black and Tans was wiped out, with the exception of one man who escaped. As far as I can recollect, there were thirteen killed and all their arms captured and the lorry burned. We took up positions again on several occasions in likely places for ambushes, but without success, although the routes were very often used by patrols.

Shortly after this (I do not remember the date) the Brigade A.S.U. were in night billets in farmers' houses near Mountshannon when we were awakened early in the morning by scouts, who told us that the whole area was being surrounded by enemy forces. We proceeded, as soon as we got dressed, to a pre-arranged meeting place, where the Brigade O/C, Michael Brennan, took charge. We had a running fight with the enemy, who were much superior in numbers. We got away into the Slieve Aughty Mountains without any casualty. One R.I.C. man had his leg shot off.

About this time I became a member of the I.R.B. I was sworn in by the Brigade O/C, Michael Brennan.

About April, 1921, the Brigade A.S.U. was again mobilised near my home, which was used regularly for Battalion and Brigade Council meetings. We left there at about 9 p.m. that night and marched all night, mostly across country, to where the Shannon Airport is now situated - a distance of about thirty miles. Arrangements had been made by the local company there for billets for us, and we slept during the day. The unit was about sixty strong at this time. We left our billets at dark and got boats to take us across the Fergus, which is over a mile wide at this place, being tidal waters. We marched about twenty miles at the other side of the Fergus to a place called Coolmeen, where we arrived around daylight and billeted there for the day and had a good sleep. The next night we moved into the town of Kilrush, which had a strong garrison of military, police and marines. The intention was to draw the military out into a prepared ambush. The military barrack was situated outside the town. It was set back about 100 yards from the main road, from which an avenue led to the barrack gate..

The main ambush party occupied positions behind a wall on the main road facing the barrack entrance. I was with this party, which was under the command of Tom McGrath, Vice O/C of the Brigade and second in command of the A.S.U. From our position we had a clear view of the avenue and barrack gate. Other parties took up positions on the other sides of the barrack so as to prevent the military from coming out and surrounding us.

The Brigade O/C, Michael Brennan, took a few men and went into the centre of the town, where he shot dead an R.I.C. sergeant. They then fired a few shots at the R.I.C. barrack. The R.I.C. sent up Verrey lights, which

were seen by the military sentries, who sounded the alarm.

The military turned out in a few minutes. The large barrack door was not opened for them. They emerged singly through the small wicket gate and formed up on the avenue outside. We held our fire until they marched right into the ambush position, and then opened fire on them at close range. The military retreated immediately after firing a few shots, leaving their dead and wounded comrades where they fell. They had to enter the barrack through the small wicket gate, which caused crowding and confusion and left them an easy target for us. A fierce barrage was opened up on us from the barrack. This was so intense and continuous that we were unable to go on to the road to collect the arms of the dead and wounded. We had no casualty. I do not know how many casualties the enemy suffered. The R.I.C. sergeant/^{who} was shot dead in Kilrush was one of the R.I.C. patrol we ambushed at Feakle Post Office. He led the Black and Tans to the houses of Volunteers to carry out reprisals, and had been promoted to the rank of sergeant and transferred to Kilrush.

We left the town shortly afterwards and marched along the main Kilrush-Ennis road for about six miles, where we had refreshments. We returned to East Clare in easy stages during the next three days without any encounter with the enemy.

Shortly after this the Brigade A.S.U. marched into Co. Galway, where there was very little activity by the Volunteers. We billeted in a mansion owned by a Mr. Farrell about three miles outside the town of Loughrea. Mr. Farrell was in residence there at the time

and was highly indignant at the idea of the Volunteers taking forcible possession of his house. He belonged to the old British Loyalist Party. We rested there for the night and took up ambush positions early next morning on the Loughrea-Woodford road. Although that road had been used daily by military and police patrols for some weeks previously, they did not come that day. We heard afterwards that someone had tipped off the police that we were there in great strength. It could not have been done from Farrell's house, as we kept them all prisoners until we moved off next evening.

About this time three men (they were English and of the officer class) who claimed they were deserters from the British Army, were arrested by Volunteers in my battalion area. They were interrogated by Brigade and Battalion Officers and courtmartialled about a week later. During the trial it was proved that they tried to, and did, in fact, keep in touch with their own forces. The result was that they were found guilty of being spies and sentenced to death. The sentence was duly carried out. When the bodies, which were left lying on a public road, were discovered, the military carried out reprisals by burning houses and firing on civilians. When a man named Grogan saw them coming he ran away. They opened fire on him and shot him dead. He was not a Volunteer.

About May, 1921, the 6th Battalion A.S.U., in conjunction with the adjoining battalion from Tulla, prepared an ambush for a military foot patrol which patrolled the roads in the vicinity of Tulla where there was a strong military and police garrison. The spot where the ambush position was prepared was a little over a

mile from the military post. We were in two sections, about 500 yards apart. After waiting all night, when it was near daybreak the patrol came along. It was about two hundred strong and under the command of 1st Lieutenant Warren. They travelled in single file at intervals of about ten yards on each side of the road. We let them between both sections and opened fire on them. The officer in charge of the patrol was shot dead with the first shots, and an unknown number killed and wounded. When the officer was killed, the patrol jumped over walls and ran towards the military barracks. As our numbers were small and the military post being so near, we did not follow them up. Comdt. Mattie McGrath, who had been recently promoted to that rank, was in charge. This was known as the Four Roads ambush.

About two months before the Truce we were ordered to billet on the richer people. The majority of them, although not openly hostile, were not friendly disposed towards us. The food we got from this onwards was much better than we had been getting from the poorer people, who always welcomed us and were with us heart and soul, and I am sure they often went short themselves to feed us.

Members of the Brigade A.S.U. were not paid. We were supplied with the best quality clothes, such as trench coats, riding breeches, leggings and boots, and when on active service we were issued daily with a ration of cigarettes.

Early in June, 1921, accompanied by Capt. Paddy Houlihan, I visited my home late one evening for a change of clothes, etc. We found a section of the local company at my home preparing to go on a job. They told us that they had got instructions to burn down a large shooting lodge which was situated in the Slieve Aughty Mountains about three miles away. This shooting lodge was there for generations and was used every summer by English and Irish sportsmen for grouse and duck shooting. Recently it had been occupied by a party of Auxiliaries for a few days, and it was decided it was better to destroy it to prevent them from re-occupying it.

As Capt. Houlihan and I had slept during the day, we decided to go with the section in question. We were armed with service rifles and had about sixty rounds of ammunition each. Two Volunteers (my brother, Denis Moroney, and Volunteer Patrick O'Brien) went in front as scouts, on bicycles. Four other Volunteers accompanied us on foot, carrying tins of paraffin oil to burn the house. When about half a mile from the lodge, on an open mountain road, we heard in front of us several voices shouting to halt. This was followed by a volley of shots. Capt. Houlihan ordered the four Volunteers who were with us to get back as quickly as they could. He and I then lay down on the side of the road and could make out the forms of a large force of mounted soldiers (Lancers) coming over the top of a hill about three hundred yards away. They were on an old road that was impassable for horses except after a long period of dry weather. We opened fire on them and they dismounted and returned the fire. We knew after a very short time that it was a large force we had run into. They spread out to both sides as if to encircle us and kept up a very heavy rifle and rifle grenade fire. We changed our positions several times and kept them at bay for over half an hour. During a lull in the firing we slipped away into a ravine where a small river runs, and were out of their view. We found out afterwards that this military force was three hundred strong and was part of a force of about three thousand which was encircling a large area with the object of capturing the East Clare Brigade A.S.U. We took cover in a safe place about three miles away and watched their movements all day. It was nearly daylight when we got to our hide-out. This became known locally as the Curraghkyle ambush.

Immediately it became bright, a plane arrived on the scene. It was flying a few hundred feet above the ground. It searched all along the valley where we had travelled a little more than half an hour earlier,

and opened fire with a machine-gun wherever there was scrub or bushes. It circled the area for over an hour. We remained in hiding all that day, and when night came, with the aid of some local Volunteers who acted as scouts, we slipped through the enemy lines and got behind them. The military lost three killed, some wounded, and several horses killed and some wounded. Our losses were two bicycles. My brother's bicycle was shot from under him and he got some bruises when he hit the road. He escaped across the mountains under a hail of bullets but was not hit. The other Volunteer (O'Brien) crawled under a small bridge, which is known as a gullet in that part of the country, and remained hidden there until the following night, when he returned home.

Shortly after this I was promoted Captain and put in charge of Droomindoorra Company in the same battalion. I still remained with the A.S.U. On July 11th 1921 I was one of the Battalion A.S.U. who took up ambush positions about 1 mile outside Gort, Co. Galway, to ambush a military or police patrol. We remained in positions until the Angelus rang at noon without any patrol coming our way, and as the truce was then on we disbanded and returned to our homes.

There is one very important thing I have failed to mention in my story and that is how the Cumann na mBan helped us so much during the Black and Tan War. They raised funds to buy us cigarettes, got us good warm woollen pullovers and socks which, I am sure, often saved us from severe colds. The poor people amongst whom we lived

during that trying period were also very good to us and often gave us money to buy cigarettes and other little comforts.

Signed: Sean Moroney

Date: 20th July 1956

Witness: Dean Brennan Lieut. Col.
(Investigator)

