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STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 1618

Witness

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Co. Kilkenny

Identity

Vice Comdt., 6th Battalion, Kilkenny Bde.

Subject

Glenmore Company, 6th Battalion,
Kilkenny Brigade, 1917 - 21

File No. S 2943

Statement by Mr. Michael Connolly,
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(Formerly Vice Commandant, 6th Battalion, Killkenny Brigade) WS 1618

It was, as far as I can now recollect, in the summer months of 1917 that I was asked by a neighbour named James Walsh to become a member of the Irish Volunteers. At the time, I was twenty-five years of age, and was residing with my parents and the other members of my family at Rochestown, near the village of Glenmore in the south-eastern portion of County Kilkenny.

I gladly accepted the invitation, and became one of about ten young men who formed what was at first known as the Glenmore Company. Walsh was looked upon as the local leader, or the Company Captain. The members were scattered over a fairly wide area, and it was perhaps on this account that we did not at first have regular parades for drill and training. Our usual procedure was to gather at Walsh's home in the evening time for talks or meetings, or on Sundays to cycle to hurling or football matches, displaying the Republican colours, or perhaps shouting slogans or playing pranks to annoy the local R.I.C. garrison.

The Company's strength was built up gradually until at one stage it numbered between seventy and eighty men. We each contributed a small sum weekly to an arms fund, and our first piece of arms came along when, for £6, we bought an automatic pistol from a man named McLoughlin.

The organisation of the Company improved as it grew in strength and, by 1919, parades were held once or twice weekly for drill and training. Sections were formed, and my first rank was that of a section commander. A County Clare man, named Joe McMahon, who was then resident in Kilkenny, assisted in the organisation and training. He was a good instructor, and helped considerably to place the Company on a proper footing. He was killed in Co. Cavan about March of 1921 when, I understand, he was demonstrating the use of hand grenades to a party of Volunteers.

In the autumn of 1919 a reorganisation of the battalions, which formed the Kilkenny brigade, took place, and some additional battalions were formed. Prior to that, all companies in South Co. Kilkenny were in one battalion. In the reorganisation scheme, six companies, those of Tullogher, Listerlin, Glenmore, Milebush, Mullinavat and Knockmoylan, were formed into the 6th Battalion, with Martin McGrath of Tullogher as Battalion Commandant.

While it is difficult to remember dates, I think it was towards the end of 1919 that Joe McMahon, already referred to, led a raid on the coastguard station at the Tower of Hook in Co. Waterford, where a large quantity of explosives was captured. Our connection with that incident was that about 6 cwt. of the explosives was brought to Glenmore for safe keeping until such time as arrangements for its distribution were made. When captured, it was packed in 56 lb. boxes, and when it came to our area, we hid it in various places, principally in ricks of hay. At intervals, McMahon arranged with Jimmy Walsh, the Company Captain, to have boxes of it transferred to other areas, and I believe most of it eventually reached the Tipperary brigades. One 56 lb. lot remained in our battalion area until the attack on Mullinavat barracks in January, 1921.

At the beginning of 1920, the R.I.C. garrison in Glenmore was still the normal one of one sergeant and three constables. As a rule, two constables went out on patrol together. Walsh and I were convinced that the barracks could easily be captured by ruse, while it was occupied by the sergeant and a single constable, and we made plans accordingly. There was, however, a strict order in force that operations should not be carried out without the prior sanction of the brigade headquarters. Whilst we were awaiting the sanction, the barracks was evacuated, and the garrison withdrawn to other stations.

On Easter Saturday night of 1920, in accordance with the general order to demolish evacuated R.I.C. barracks, the barracks at Glenmore was destroyed by the local company. There was very little difficulty in carrying out the job. A few tins of petrol and paraffin, with a liberal supply of inflammable material, were spread on the floors and woodwork and, within a few minutes of being set alight, the whole building was ablaze. The barracks at Tullogher was destroyed on the same night, and by the summer of 1920, only one enemy post, viz., the R.I.C. barracks at Mullinavat, remained in the battalion area.

Activities during the summer of 1920 were mainly of a minor character. There were the usual parades for drill and exercises, dispatch carrying and an occasional hold-up of a postman and a check on the mails. Looking back now on that particular period, I would say that the position was something like this. The police or military seldom troubled us. Except for convoys passing along the Waterford-New Ross road, we rarely saw a man in uniform, and on the other hand, we had no arms with which to go and seek them out to attack them.

About August of 1920, orders were received to collect any arms or shotguns held by farmers or others in the area. I would say that we collected about forty shotguns. In a country district like Glenmore, everyone knew who had, or was likely to have, a gun. Most of the owners were friendly and, in their case, it was only a question of calling and getting the gun. With others whom we thought might be hostile or whom we did not know so well, we took the precaution of masking ourselves when raiding the houses. The guns were kept in a dump where they were cleaned and oiled regularly.

A small supply of shotgun ammunition was got with the guns, and we made some more by filling cartridge cases with buckshot.

It was, I think, too about that time that a campaign of road blocking and road trenching became a feature of our activities. It was directed mainly to impede the Auxiliaries who had occupied Woodstock House, Inistiogue. In their fast Crossley tenders, they raided at most unexpected hours of the day or night. They arrested, amongst others, Jimmy Walsh, the Company Captain, and, following a raid on my own home, I took the precaution of never sleeping there at night. Following Walsh's arrest, I was elected to succeed him as O/C of the company.

We received orders through the Battalion O/C to have men and arms ready to proceed at short notice to Inistiogue for an attack on the Auxiliaries at Woodstock, but there were no further developments. That was at the time of Ernie O'Malley's visit to Kilkenny, and the proposed operation was probably abandoned following his arrest, which took place early in December, 1920.

As I have already mentioned, there was, after the evacuation of the smaller R.I.C. barracks, only one enemy post in our battalion area. That was the barracks at Mullinavat, which was garrisoned by about twenty men, composed of two R.I.C. sergeants, eight or nine R.I.C. constables and the remainder, Black and Tans. The Battalion Commandant, Martin McGrath, and the Vice Commandant, Denis McDonald, prepared plans to attack this post. I cannot give any details about the preliminary arrangements, for I was not in on them, nor did I hear the plans discussed at any prior battalion council meeting.

My recollection of the incident is that, on orders from either McGrath or McDonald, I took twenty men from the Glenmore company to Ballyquin Cross, about one mile from Mullinavat, on the night of January 17th, 1921. There we met about twenty others from the Tullogher Company and the members of the battalion staff. With the exception of the Commandant who had a rifle, all the men were armed with shotguns. In addition, there were four revolvers, one of which I carried myself, some grenades and two mines. The mines weighed about 1 cwt. each. They were made from lengths of 6" steel pipe, packed with explosives and securely bolted at the ends. They appeared to have been well constructed, and were fitted with lengths of fuse, ready for firing.

McGrath and McDonald then explained the plan of attack, and detailed the men off for their tasks and the positions they were to occupy when we got to Mullinavat. McGrath and a party of shotgun men would occupy a position at the rear of the barracks, while McDonald and his party would occupy houses at the front of the barracks. This latter party would have the grenades. Myself, Dick Duggan and Dick Murphy of the Glenmore company were given the task of carrying one of the mines. Our job, when we got to Mullinavat, was to prop the mine against the front wall of the barracks, at a point about three feet from the ground and between the door and a window, light the fuse, and then get back to cover. Three other men, with similar instructions, took charge of the second mine, to place it in a similar position at the other side of the door. We carried short stout sticks or poles with which to prop the mines. It was hoped the mines would demolish the wall of the barracks, and McDonald and his party would then continue the attack by flinging grenades into the barracks.

It was about 11 p.m. when we got to Mullinavat. The night was wet, and as we moved to our positions, every dog in the village started barking. This may have helped to alert the police. Duggan, Murphy and myself took the mine into the barrack wall. As I passed the dayroom window, I noticed that the steel shutter had not been closed, and I saw a policeman looking out at us in the dim light. He immediately slapped down the steel shutter, and fired six revolver shots at us through the port-hole. We dropped the mine, and lay flat on the ground. Almost immediately, police on the top floor started to drop grenades from the upper windows. I don't know how the other three men, who had followed us in with the second mine, escaped, but we got cover for a time, in a ball alley at the end of the barracks. McGrath eased the situation for us by opening fire on the rear of the barracks, and we were able to reach good cover between some houses on the opposite side. We remained there for about fifteen or twenty minutes, and discussed the question of trying to recover the mines, but decided it was not worth the risk. At that time, the police were firing from the barracks, and their Verey lights illuminated the sky.

We went to the railway bridge which had been pre-arranged, as the point of re-assembly. There, McGrath dismissed the men after telling them to get to their homes as quickly as possible, and to remove from their clothes and boots all traces of having been out that night. He warned us that, although the roads had been blocked by the 7th Battalion, British military from Waterford - which, by the way, was only seven miles away - could be expected in the area before morning.

The British military did move out from Waterford that night. Having to cut their way through the roadblocks made their progress very slow. On reaching Kilmacow, they stopped and barricaded the sides of their lorries with sacks of flour and meal, which they took from a store there. By the time they reached Mullinavat, I would say that we were all home and in bed.

About a month later, McGrath was arrested, and Denis McDonald succeeded him as Battalion O/C. It was then that I was appointed Battalion Vice Commandant, in succession to McDonald.

In April, there was an incident which was, described in the newspapers of the time as another attack on Mullinavat barracks. There was nothing organised about it. It was simply a case where Dick Kinealy, the Battalion Quartermaster, seized an opportunity to place a grenade on the sill of one of the barrack windows, and the explosion blew in the window.

From then until the Truce in July, 1921, the activities, as far as I can recall, were confined to road blocking and road-trenching. An organiser from G.H.Q., who went under the name of Doyle, but whose real name, I believe, was James McKenna, paid a visit to the Battalion and remained with us for a few days. He inspected the companies, inquired about what arms and ammunition were available, and advised us to persist in the work of obstructing the roads. As a reprisal for the blocking of the roads, the British authorities ordered the closing down of the creamery in Glenmore for a period of one month in May of 1921.

On one occasion, a tender of Auxiliaries crashed into a trench which members of the Knockmoylan company had opened in the road at Clashwilliam bridge, near Ballyhale. Two or three of the Auxiliaries were injured. After the usual performance of rounding up some local people and forcing them to fill in the trench, the Auxiliaries, when the local people had departed, set a booby trap (a small bomb or grenade) in the trench.

That night, when the trench was being re-opened, the bomb exploded, and a member of the Knockmoylan company, William Aylward, received injuries which resulted in the total loss of the sight of one of his eyes.

At the date of the Truce, the Battalion Staff were:-

Battalion Commandant - Denis McDonald, Tullogher.

Batt. Vice Commandant - Michael Connolly (Self), Glenmore.

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Battalion Adjutant - Thomas O'Neill, Ballykenna, Tullogher.

Batt. Quartermaster - Richard Kinealy, Ballynooney, Mullinavat.

The six companies which comprised the battalion and their Company O/C's were:-

A. Company - Tullogher - Richard Egan.

- B.** Company - Listerlin - -Martin Lannigan.
- C.** Company - Glenmore - James Walsh.
- D.** Company - Milebush - Thomas Flynn.
- E.** Company - Mullinavat - James Durney.
- F.** Company - Knockmoylan - Patrick Kearns.

Signed : Michael Connolly

Date: 22 May 1957