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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1705.

Witness

Nicholas Carroll,
Hugginstown,
Knocktopher,
Co. Kilkenny.

Identity.

Vice Comdt., 8th Battalion, Kilkenny Brigade.

Subject.

Hugginstown Company, 8th Battalion,
Kilkenny Brigade, I.R.A.,
1917 - 21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S.3004**

Statement by Mr. Nicholas Carroll,

Hugginstown, Knocktopher, County Kilkenny. WS 1705

In the late springtime or early summer of 1917, Sinn Fein Clubs and Irish Volunteer Companies were organised in some towns and villages in South County Kilkenny, including my native place of Hugginstown where I was born, reared, went to school and where I still reside. As far as I can now recollect, the late Father Delahunty, Father Heneberry, and the late Pat Walsh of Dunamaggin were the most prominent people associated with this organising work. All three were great enthusiasts and the two priests were exceptionally good platform speakers.

At that time I was a member of the local Gaelic football club and with most other members of the team and its officials I became a member of the Sinn Féin Club and the Volunteer Company in Hugginstown at the time of their formation. As a matter of fact, the Sinn Féin club which was formed first, had its origin in and was founded by the football club.

Both organisations, Sinn Féin and the Volunteers, worked hand in hand and the initial objects were to build up membership, organise other clubs and companies and to raise funds. When these objects were more or less attained, the Volunteer Company took on more of a military aspect. Training, drilling and instruction in matters of a military nature commenced. The first officers of the Company were :- William Farrell, Captain; Thomas Barron, 1st lieutenant; and Nicholas Carroll (myself), 2nd Lieutenant.

We were at first affiliated to what was known as the South County Kilkenny Battalion of which Martin Kealy, Blanchfield's Park, Gowran, was Commandant. In August 1918, a reorganisation of Battalion areas took place and at a meeting held at T. B. Cahill's house in Tullamaine on a Sunday evening, it was decided to form a new Battalion, to be known as the 7th (Callan) Battalion. Tom Treacy of Kilkenny, the Brigade O/C; Ned Comerford, the Brigade Quartermaster, and Father Delahunty were amongst those whom I remember as being present at that meeting. Our Company (Hugginstown) was allotted to this new Battalion and the late James Roughan of Ahenure was elected as the Battalion Commandant.

Meanwhile the Sinn Féin clubs had pushed ahead with their organisation. Representatives of the various Sinn Féin clubs formed the South County Kilkenny Executive of Sinn Féin and held regular meetings in Thomastown. Father Delahunty or Father Heneberry usually presided. The joint Hon. Secretaries of the Executives were James McKenna of Thomastown and Thomas Walsh of Templeorum, and Stephen Rice of Thomastown was the Hon. Treasurer. In the General Election of 1918 the Sinn Féin candidate for South Kilkenny was returned unopposed.

When towards the end of 1919 and early 1920, attacks on R.I.C. posts in other areas commenced, the Company officers often discussed the question of attacking the barracks in Hugginstown. It was garrisoned by an R.I.C. sergeant and five constables and situated, as it was, in a remote area, we decided that it could be attacked with a fair prospect of success. We, however, lacked the necessary arms to carry out the operation. About February 1920, we submitted our plans to the Brigade Council who then took the matter in hand and made the final arrangements for the attack.

The attack was carried out on Monday night, March 8th, 1920. A few nights beforehand, Thomas Nolan of Outrath brought a quantity of bombs and ammunition in a pony and trap from Kilkenny. When he arrived with them in Hugginstown we stored them in a rick of straw in O'Halloran's haggart which was within a stone-throw of the barracks.

On the night of the 3th, the units chosen for the attack, comprising approximately thirty-six men drawn from the various Companies in the Battalion and including five or six Volunteers from Kilkenny, assembled on the famous boreen of Carrickshock where the Tithe War was fought and won. Some others were detailed to cut the telegraph wires and to do outpost duty, and a few men from the local Company scouted the barracks to watch the movements of the police, and to ensure that the Sergeant and the five Constables were inside the barracks, before the attack commenced. With the exception of some officers who carried revolvers, the men were armed mainly with shotguns and buckshot ammunition. Tom Treacy, the Brigade O/C, was in charge and other senior officers present were James Lalor, the Brigade Vice O/C., Leo Dardis, the Brigade Adjutant, Jim Roughan, the Battalion Commandant and Pat Walsh of Dunamaggin. A County Clare man, the late Joe McMahon who was on the run in Kilkenny, was also present. He was in charge of the five or six Volunteers from Kilkenny who, with guides and helpers from the Hugginstown Company, comprised what we termed the bombing section.

From the assembly point we marched to Hugginstown and silently got into positions. I was with a party of twelve or fourteen men at the rear of the barracks. Another party of about similar size got into a position behind a wall on the side of the street opposite to the front of the barracks. The bombing section entered the yard of Clery's shop which adjoined the right-hand gable end of the barracks. Earlier in the evening we had placed a ladder and sledge hammers in this yard for the use of the bombing squad.

The attack commenced about 11.30 p.m. Joe McMahon opened the proceedings by flinging a few bombs on to the back roof of the barracks. After a few shots were exchanged, Treacy called on the police to surrender which they refused to do. They were given a few minutes to let out the Sergeant's wife and children. The fight then began again with the police replying to our fire with rifle fire and hand-grenades. It continued for about three quarters of an hour.

By that time the bombing section had blown away a portion of the roof of the barrack kitchen and were preparing to set the roof on fire, when the police shouted their intention to surrender. They were ordered to throw their arms out on to the street, which they did.

They then surrendered with their hands up. One of the R.I.C. garrison Constable Ryan, was seriously wounded and spiritual and medical aid were got for him but he died a few hours later. The Sergeant was also slightly wounded. We then entered the barracks which was badly damaged and removed some equipment including two boxes of ammunition. The captured arms and ammunition were taken away in a horse and cart by a party of Volunteers from Kilkenny. There were no casualties on our side.

Within a few days of the capture of the barracks, British military accompanied by R.I.C. men raided and searched many houses in the Hugginstown area. I was one of about twenty men whom they arrested. No charge was preferred against us and we were taken first to Cork Prison, then to Belfast Prison and finally to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, London. In Cork Prison I renewed acquaintance with my brother, Sean, who was an officer of Tipperary No. 3. Brigade and who had been arrested in Tipperary town. There were many other Irish political prisoners in Wormwood Scrubbs when we arrived there and after some serious discussions we decided to go on hunger strike to secure our release. The hunger strike was successful and the prisoners were released in batches after they had endured the strike from fifteen to twenty-one days. Personally, I spent seventeen days on hunger strike and was unconditionally released on May 10th, 1920. I was removed to hospital to recuperate and about a week later I returned home.

During *my* time in prison the R.I.C. had been withdrawn from a number of small stations in South County Kilkenny and amongst others, Hugginstown barracks had been evacuated and burned down by the Volunteers. For some time after my return there was an air of peace and independence in the district. The R.I.C. were confined to the larger centres and I.R.A. police and the Republican Courts commenced to function.

In October, 1920, in a further reorganisation of the Brigade area, the 8th Battalion of which I was elected Vice-Commandant, was formed. The other Battalion officers were William Farrell, Commandant; Pierce Barden, Adjutant, and John Carroll, Quartermaster. The Battalion was comprised of six Companies which, with their Company Captains, were as follows .

"A" Company	Hugginstown	James Walsh
"B" Company	Dunamaggin	John Hickey
"C" Company	Templeorum	Thomas Walsh
"D" Company	Tullahaught	Edward Maher
"E" Company	Wind gap	Michael Davis
"F" Company	Kilmoganny	- John Kirwan

In November, 1920, the Parish Priest's house in Hugginstown , was broken into and a sum of money — the November offering, was stolen. We traced the suspected culprit and arrested him in a public-house in Knocktopher. He was held as a prisoner for some time and on his release he went to Woodstock House, Inistiogue, which had been taken over some time previously by the Auxiliaries. He was apparently welcomed for he remained in Woodstock until after the Truce, and from the time of his arrival there the Auxiliaries made the Hugginstown area a target for frequent raids and searches. They were usually accompanied by this man (the suspected culprit) who pointed out people and places to them.

On one of these nightly raids in Hugginstown they took an elderly named Halloran and his son, Joseph, into custody. Some of the Auxiliaries placed the father against a wall and were threatening to shoot him when they accidentally shot one of their own men, a Lieutenant Skinner. Some others of the Auxiliaries were at the time escorting Joseph Halloran up the street as a prisoner. Hearing the shots and the groans of the wounded man, he thought it was his father who had been shot so he made a dash for it and broke away from his escort. The Auxiliaries fired on him and wounded him in the hip and shoulder but he succeeded in reaching the fields and made good his escape. The Auxiliaries were back the following morning searching high and low but without success, for the wounded man. He was nursed back to health in friendly houses and made a complete recovery.

Towards the end of 1920 we received orders from the Brigade Headquarters to demolish Kilmoganny Courthouse so as to prevent it's being occupied by British military and police. At the time there was no enemy post in our Battalion area and it was feared that the British Authorities would establish one, using the Courthouse in Kilmoganny as a barracks. Arrangements were made to bum it down but on the appointed night and when the men had assembled in Kilmoganny, counter orders were received not to go ahead with the job. It had, I understand, been learned that the Courthouse was private property, owned by a Miss Moore

who was a great supporter of the Movement in Dublin. As we were dispersing, British military arrived from Callan and fired on some local Volunteers who were crossing fields on their way home. Fortunately it was a very dark night and there were no casualties.

In April 1921, with about twenty selected Volunteers from the Hugginstown, Templeorum and Kilmoganny Companies, I accompanied the 7th Battalion Active Service Unit to Fiddown for a proposed attack on a police patrol on the road between Piltown and Fiddown. We assembled on the evening before and marched the ten odd miles through the hills and the fields to Fiddown and arrived there early the next morning. A position was occupied at "Beechfarm", scouts and outposts were put out, but the only enemy force that came along was one unarmed policeman whom we took prisoner.

In the afternoon it was decided to abandon the position and our full force withdrew into the nearby Bessborough Demesne. There it was decided to separate. We, the 8th Battalion Volunteers, were to return to our homes and my recollection is that the A.S.U. men intended to go to Bessborough House for a meal. As we were separating we were surprised by a party of British military who were lying in extended formation on the brow of a hill about 300 yards away. The first intimation we had of their presence was when someone noticed the soldiers' caps and shouted "Take cover". At the same time the military opened fire on us with rifles and a Lewis gun. There followed a brief engagement in which I understand the Lewis gunner was shot. None of our party was hit, but we had to retreat through a hilly field and across a stream and I believe the military also withdrew. My impression is that the military were waiting in position to ambush us, but when they saw us separating they probably assumed that we were aware of their presence and that we were attempting to surround them.

That, as far as I can recollect, was the last occasion prior to the Truce in which members of the 8th Battalion exchanged shots with the enemy forces. The main feature of our activities during the remainder of the period was blocking and trenching roads so as to impede the passage of police and army convoys and to slow up their movements.

Finally, I would like to mention that on May 14th, 1921, my friend Pat Walsh of Dunamaggin, whom I have previously mentioned, died from wounds received in an engagement with Auxiliaries at Tubrid, near Tullaroan. He was one of the first to spread the gospel of the Sinn Fein and Irish Volunteer movements in South County Kilkenny. A monument to his memory was raised by public subscription and was recently unveiled in his native village of Dunamaggin. Another companion, Seán Quinn, was killed with him on the same occasion.

Signed : Nicholas Carrol

5th December 1957