

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 681

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 681

Witness

Garda Thomas Carragher,
Blackrock,
Dundalk,
Co. Louth.

Identity.

Member of Annyalla (Co. Monaghan) Company
Irish Volunteers, 1918 - .

Subject.

National activities, Cos. Armagh and Monaghan,
1918-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1977

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Garda Tom Carragher,

Blackrock, Dundalk, County Louth.

I joined the Annyalla Company, Irish Volunteers in the year 1918 when I was about 18 years of age. Ned McNally was then Company Captain.

During the year 1918 we carried out the usual Volunteer training, drills, route marches, etc.

At the General Election in December, 1918, the Volunteers took an active part in election work in the interests of the Sinn Fein candidate. I canvassed the voters and I did transport work on election day. I did not, however, join a Sinn Fein club.

In the year 1919 I carried dispatches on numerous occasions. I was part of the chain in a dispatch route. I generally carried those dispatches a distance of four miles. I also took part in various other Volunteer activities such as collection of funds, the holding of dances and concerts for both Sinn Fein and the Volunteers. I also took part in the collection of the Volunteer levy for the arms fund and we got subscriptions in most nationalist houses. We did not, however, call for subscriptions at Unionist houses. In all I only remember getting two refusals from nationalists on whom we called.

Before the year 1918, Annyalla district was a hot-bed of Hibernianism. The A.O.H. was then the only nationalist organisation that mattered. When Sinn Fein got started in the district the Hibernian organisation dropped asunder and a large percentage of the Hibernians joined Sinn Fein clubs.

Ballytrain R.I.C. barracks was attacked in February 1920. I was detailed to block roads for this operation.

In the late summer of 1920, we raided our Company area for arms. I took part in about nine raids on houses in all. These houses

belonged to Unionists as the Nationalists handed up their guns to the Volunteers willingly. There was no shooting in any of those raids.

Ned McNally, our Company Captain, went away on one occasion for about a week. When he returned he had fourteen rifles with him. I have no clear idea as to where he got the rifles but I understood that he purchased them.

I was mobilised on two occasions for attacks on Castleblaney R.I.C. barracks. On both these occasions we took up a position on a hill overlooking and opposite the front of the barrack and used our rifles in the windows and roof of the barrack for about half an hour each time.

I took part in an ambush of Auxiliaries at Annyalla. We had previously blocked the roads and we took up a position on a hill overlooking the blockade. Two lorries of Auxiliaries came along and stopped at the road block. We opened fire on them from our position and the enemy replied. I cannot state definitely if any of the Auxiliaries were hit. They broke off the engagement and retraced the road they came to Castleblaney. The Auxiliaries later returned with reinforcements to the scene of the ambush but did not get into contact with us. We had no casualties on our side. The district around Annyalla was raided by Crown Forces after this engagement. No arrests were made.

Belfast Boycott Work:

We got orders to prevent the sale of all consumer goods produced in Belfast in our Company area about the autumn months of 1920. We called on each shop in our area and warned the owners against stocking or selling Belfast goods. We later had to raid about six country shops where our warnings had been ignored, and we removed the Belfast goods. We raided and destroyed the bread in about four Belfast bread-carts which we found distributing bread in the countryside.

I was mobilised to block the roads for the Roslea burnings near the County Fermanagh border. Commandant Mat Fitzpatrick was severely wounded at the Roslea burnings. He was being hid and cared for at various places. He was, however, traced to his billet by the British and was raided for and captured. He was placed in the County Infirmary in Monaghan town and a guard of British soldiers placed on the hospital.

Some time after the capture of Commandant Fitzpatrick I got orders to mobilise for duty in connection with his rescue. On the night of the rescue I was with some others on duty, as ordered, in Annyalla area. Commandant Fitzpatrick was taken into the area immediately after his rescue to a place named Tassan and he was kept there at a house belonging to a family named Brennan for about two months. I was acting as a guard on this house twice a week on an average until the Truce came.

About March, 1921, I saw two R.I.C. men cycling on the Blaney-Monaghan road. Both these men were armed with rifles and revolvers. I had a rifle at the time I saw those men and I proceeded armed to a hill overlooking the road where I intercepted those men and opened fire on them at a range of about 400 yards. The police dismounted from their bikes and took cover and replied to my fire. After a short exchange of fire I withdrew and the police resumed their journey.

The Carna Fight - June 1921:

About 9 p.m. on the 29th June I was informed of the plans to carry out an ambush on Crown Forces at Carna. I was then asked to report for duty at Brennan's, Cremartin. I reported there at 10 p.m. and met Peter Woods, Ned McNally, Sonny Sherry and about seventeen others. We started off when all those mobilised had arrived. We started off into County Armagh and we billeted in a hay-loft belonging to two old bachelors about the length of 2 fields from a position which had been previously selected for the ambush by officers Woods, McNally, Sherry and perhaps Phil Marron who was then Battalion O/C.

We moved into the ambush position about 6 a.m. on the 30th June and we took up our positions along a railway embankment which at that place ran parallel to the Keady-Castleblaney road. The position should have enabled us to maintain an effective fire on any enemy forces travelling along the road. About 100 yards on the Castleblaney side of our position a road branched off the Keady-Castleblaney road and a bridge crossed the railway line on this road which was only 75 yards from our position overlooking and enfilading it. When we went into the position we sent a scout out in the Keady direction to return to us and report when the enemy were approaching.

As far as I can remember the scout returned to us about between 10 and 11 a.m. and informed us that Crown Forces were approaching from the Keady direction on our left. We got alerted and got ready to open fire as soon as the enemy should appear. The next thing I remember was some person saying, "The Tans are on the railway bridge". I was at this time near the bridge behind a small embankment watching the road in front of me. When I heard the cry that the Tans were on the bridge I looked around in the bridge direction and I saw Tans behind the bridge parapet and a machine mounted on the bridge and its muzzle pointing in our direction. There was no sign of Tans on the road in front of us at this time.

The Crown Forces on the bridge immediately opened fire on our position and our men scattered seeking cover from the fire which enfiladed our position. The majority of our men went across the railway line towards our rear in the direction of Annyalla and I and three others (Woods and two McEnnaneys) went in the opposite direction towards the Carnagh road fronting our position. I crept along the railway embankment for some time, passing out the two McEnnaneys who were also creeping along. I glanced at both the McEnnaneys when passing them and it struck me later that something had happened to them as they were both in a sitting or half lying position with their rifles in their hands. I went to assist them and then I noticed that half of

my jacket was flapping around to the front of my body and that my boots were filling with my blood. I then realised that I had been seriously wounded. I proceeded on for a short distance when I heard footsteps and on looking round I saw that a member of the Auxiliary force had me covered with his rifle. He was only about $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards from me and he fired point blank at my head. The bullet entered my right jaw and my tongue and made an exit on my left jaw, shattering all my teeth on both sides. I fell and feigned that I was dead. The Auxiliary stood over me for a while and then an officer in charge of the Auxiliaries came along and told the man that he was not authorised to shoot wounded men. The Auxiliary replied that the wounded man might have shot him had he got the chance. The man who was in charge of the machine-gun then came along and stated that his gun had jammed and only for that he would have got most of us.

I was then put on a lorry with the two McEnnaneys, who were now dead, and conveyed to Lord Hope's castle in Castleblaney which was then used as a headquarters by the Auxiliaries. Dr. Irwin was called in to attend me and he inserted ten stitches in my back. He did this without using any anaesthetic. He bandaged my back and face and I was then taken to the Louth County Infirmary in Dundalk where an armed guard was placed over me for four days. Dr. O'Hagan attended me in Dundalk. I was transferred on the fourth day after my wounding to King George V. Hospital (now St. Bricin's), Dublin. I remained in this hospital for four months and was then removed to Dundalk military barracks.

When in Dundalk barracks the military took a summary of evidence from members of the Auxiliary force who took part in the ambush at Carnagh. This evidence was taken in my presence and I had permission to cross-examine each witness giving evidence at the taking of the summary. I did not avail of this facility and I felt it was of little use to me. The Truce was on at this time and after the taking of the summary of evidence no further action was taken by the military.

I had been transferred from Dundalk to Arbour Hill in October, 1921. From Arbour Hill I was taken to Mountjoy Prison where I was kept a prisoner until about February, 1922, when I was released. I was about the last of the Tan war prisoners released as I heard at the time that all the sentenced men had then been released from English and Irish jails.

Signed: Thomas Carragher
(Thomas Carragher)

Date: 20th May 1952
20th May, 1952.

Witness: John McCoy
(John McCoy)
20/5/52

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