

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
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NO. W.S. 1000

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,000

Witness

James Cronin,
Miltown,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Miltown Company Irish Vol's.
Co. Kerry, 1918 - ;
Battalion I.O. and later
Acting Battalion Q.M.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Miltown, Co. Kerry,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any. Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1611-21

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No. W.S. 1000

STATEMENT BY JAMES CRONIN,

Miltown, County Kerry.

I was born at Brackhill, Castlemaine, in March, 1896. In 1918 I joined Miltown Company of the Irish Volunteers. The Company was attached to the 6th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade. The officer in charge of Miltown Company in 1918 was Thomas O'Connor, now living in Killorglin. Thomas O'Connor later became Officer Commanding the 6th Battalion and was replaced by Timothy Brick.

About May or June, 1921, Miltown Company was amalgamated with the adjoining Company at Calinafercy and John Heffernan of Calinfercy was appointed Officer Commanding the combined Companies. Timothy Brick was appointed Second in Command. This change took place following a general reorganisation of the Kerry Brigades and at this stage our Battalion was transferred from Kerry No. 1. to Kerry No. 2. Brigade.

I held no rank in the Miltown Company but I was appointed Battalion Intelligence Officer while I was serving with the Active Service Unit and I was also appointed Acting Quartermaster.

When I joined the Volunteers we were engaged in drilling and training. I had as neighbours Jack Flynn (now T.D.) and Dan Mulvihill and we were constantly together.

Our whole talk was about the Volunteers and how we should set about getting arms. Early in 1919 I got a webley revolver from a cousin of mine. He was killed afterwards during the Truce while instructing some men in the making of mines.

At the end of 1919 we collected shotguns held by civilians in our Battalion area. Some were given up voluntarily but we were forced to raid some houses. I remember we raided Godfreys of Miltown (the big house) and Stevens who lived near Miltown Station.

The R.I.C. occupied a barracks at Miltown with a garrison of from five to ten men. The barracks was then situated at the corner as one turns into Miltown from the Castlemaine direction and the building is now known as ^{Lombards} ~~Lomboid's~~ Hotel. There was no R.I.C. garrison in Castlemaine and taking Miltown as the centre of the Battalion (6th Kerry No. 1) there was a garrison in Killorglin to the west (four miles), Tralee to the north (eleven miles) and Farranfore to the east (9 miles). The barrack at Miltown was evacuated by the R.I.C. early in 1920. The garrisons at Killorglin, Tralee and Farranfore remaining. There was, in addition, a British Military garrison in Tralee.

When the R.I.C. evacuated Miltown Barracks we wrecked the building. It was not possible to burn the barracks as it formed a part of a terrace of houses and there would have been a danger that the whole town might have been burned out.

The R.I.C. made very few arrests in the Miltown area. The R.I.C. Sergeant was a decent type. His name was Whinton. He was a protestant and he wanted no trouble in his district.

In January, 1920, things were very quiet in our Battalion area and in order to get things going some of us decided to go 'on the run'. I went with Dan Mulvihill and Jack Flynn (T.D.) of Miltown Company and we were joined by Batty Dwyer, Paddy (Rua) O'Sullivan, Seamus Mahony and Martin Wade of the Killorglin Company. Thomas O'Connor, who was Battalion O/C., came with us.

We made our Headquarters at Glencar which is about 18 miles back into the mountains to the south of the Killorglin-Caherciveen Road. We remained there a short time and we then received a message from P.J. Cahill, Officer Commanding Kerry No. 1. Brigade. He asked that myself, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn (T.D.) and Thomas O'Connor should join Kerry No. 1. Flying Column. The Kerry No. 1. Column had established a

Headquarters (which was also Brigade Headquarters) in a hut at Keel. Keel is a mountainy area on the north side of Castlemaine Bay between Castlemaine and Inch. The hut was built against a rock formation on the face of a hill and it was not visible from the road. It was never found by the British but in an emergency it would have been possible to retreat from the hut into the hills behind and across to the main Tralee to Dingle road at the village of Camp.

We reported to P. J. Cahill at the Hut. He was Column O.C. as well as Brigade O.C. Tadhg Brosnan (now in U.S.A.), who was O.C., Castlegregory Battalion, was Second in Command of the Column.

After a discussion with P.J. Cahill he allowed us to return to Glencar on the understanding that we would be called to the Column when any job was planned. We were more at home in the Glencar area as, although we were attached to Kerry No. 1. Brigade, we were badly placed in relation to Brigade Headquarters.

When we returned to Glencar we joined up with members of the Kerry No. 2. Brigade who were 'on the run' in the Glencar area and moved to Glenbeigh where we intended to intercept a British patrol but, after waiting for three nights, we called it off. Our whole idea at this period was to get things moving in our area.

About August, 1920, there was an attempt made to attack a British lorry at Beaufort on the main Killorglin-Killarney Road. I was not at the actual scene of the proposed ambush. I was on the Killarney side of the position as an outpost and I only saw the car passing through and then we were called away.

Shortly after the attempt at Beaufort I went into Killorglin with Thomas O'Connor, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn (T.D.), Denis Quirke, Paddy (Rua) O'Sullivan and I think two others. We were looking to shoot two R.I.C. men who were supposed to be visiting a public house

every night. On the night we went in we had got information that they were actually in the public house. We surrounded the house and waited for them to come out but after about three hours waiting there was no sign of their appearing and Paddy (Rua) O'Sullivan and myself went to the public house to look for them. We saw the publican who told us that the two R.I.C. men had left the premises three hours previously.

About three weeks later we decided on an attempt to kidnap an R.I.C. Sergeant named Blake who was stationed in Killorglin. It was our intention to force information from him regarding raids which the R.I.C. had carried out in the Glencar area.

I entered Killorglin along with Thomas O'Connor, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn (T.D.) and Denis Quirke.

The town of Killorglin is bounded on the east side by the River Laune and the land rises steeply from the river so that the town is built on the side of a steep hill. Entering the town from the Killarney road side one must cross a bridge spanning the Laune. The main street continues up from the bridge to the Square at the top of the town and the R.I.C. barrack was on the Square facing down the main street.

The Sergeant whom we intended to kidnap did not live in the barracks. He was married and lived in a private house by the side of the river near the bridge but our information regarding the location of his house was poor. There were three houses standing together and we knew he lived in one of them. We prepared the job by placing two scouts on the bridge and three of us were to go to the houses, one to each door to knock at the same time to avoid alarming the Sergeant.

I took the first house, Dan Mulvihill the second and Denis Quirke the third. I lifted the latch of the first house, the door being

unlocked, and a woman came to the door. I knew I was at the wrong house. Just as I was moving from the door I heard Dan Mulvihill give a shout. He had lifted the latch on the second house and seen the Sergeant's cap hanging on the stairs. We all rushed for the second house. The Sergeant was upstairs with his wife who had had a baby ~~and~~ a little boy came down on to the stairs as we entered. We called on the Sergeant to come down but Jack Flynn (T.D.) fired a shot. (I don't know for what reason) and Thomas O'Connor gave us the order to get out. The shot had given the alarm and we had to cross the bridge to get out of the town. The R.I.C. had a good field of fire from the barracks down the town to the bridge and we had just got across the bridge when the R.I.C. opened fire.

About two days after the attempt on the Sergeant a man named Malley was arrested and brought into the R.I.C. barracks. The little boy aged about 10 years who had seen me in the Sergeant's house identified Malley as one of the raiders. Malley did in fact resemble me. Malley had great difficulty in proving that he was not on the raid. He had to get witnesses who were with him on the night of the raid to save himself from being shot.

We went into Killorglin again in February, 1921, having got information that a patrol left the town each night and took different routes each night. Some of the members of the Glencar Company came with us. We waited on the Killorglin-Miltown road at Hillville about a quarter of a mile from the town. We sent a scout (a local man) into the town to find out the direction the patrol was moving. He came back and told us that the patrol was getting ready to move out and it appeared that they were coming out by where we were waiting. The scout was sent into the town again to get warning to us as to when the patrol was coming but we waited for an hour and a half and there was no sign of the patrol or our scout.

Dan Mulvihill and I went into the town and after going right up the town we could see no movement anywhere. We went looking for our scout and found him in his house. He did not know which direction the patrol had gone. It was decided to send our men away as there was a danger that we might be surrounded by the patrol that was out.

A man named Joe Taylor had come in with the men from Glencar and when he arrived home at Glencar he was resting at his own house. The R.I.C. rushed in, took him out and shot him dead. The R.I.C. who shot Taylor were the patrol we had been waiting for at Hillville.

It should be noted that the I.R.A. had few friends in the town of Killorglin. There was no local Company active in the town during the Tan war.

In March, 1921, the Brigade O.C., P. J. Cahill, decided to have a try for the British patrol which left Killorglin Barracks each night, but on this occasion it was planned to bring our men right into the town and get the patrol before they had a chance of getting into the country. On the 13th March, 1921, P. J. Cahill, Brigade O.C. and Column Commander with Paddy Brosnan of Castlegregory Battalion together with the men of the 1st Brigade Column, entered the town of Killorglin.

The Miltown and Killorglin members of the Column made arrangements to guide the Column. P. J. Cahill and the remaining members of the Column crossed Castlemaine Bay by boat from the Column Headquarters at Keel and landed at Calinafercy on the Miltown-Killorglin Road. We met them when they landed and marched with them into Killorglin.

The Column occupied houses round the town. I was in Daly's hotel with Tadhg Brosnan of Castlegregory and Seamus Mahony of Killorglin. We put a local man on each post to act as guide. We waited in position for some time and we saw the patrol commence to leave the barracks but before the last of them were out of the barracks door they all rushed

back. No shot had been fired and I don't know what alarmed them.

When the patrol would not come out we opened fire on the barracks and kept on for a short time. We made no attempt to capture the barracks. We had not planned that. It was reported that there were one or two R.I.C. men or Tans wounded during the firing but I cannot vouch for that.

About the 18th March, 1921, P.J. Cahill, Brigade O.C., sent word to Glencar asking that myself and Thomas O'Connor, Dan Mulvihill and Jack Flynn (T.D.) should report to him at the Brigade hut at Keel. We arrived in Keel on a Saturday and P.J. Cahill told us of his plan to attack a Black & Tan patrol on the Dingle to Tralee road at Lispole. We travelled to the Lispole area that night and rested outside Lispole.

On the Sunday morning we moved into position. The position was on the Tralee-Dingle road near the Roman Catholic Church where a small bridge crosses a stream. To the north of the road runs the Dingle to Tralee railway line. To the north-east a two-storey house overlooks the road and bridge. On the south of the road there was an old school-house standing back from the road. An old road leaves the main road about 200 yards on the Dingle side of the ambush position and goes up rising ground until it overlooks the back of the old school-house and the road and bridge at the ambush position. The stream which crosses the main road at the ambush position flows south to north in a deep cutting.

I was posted in the old school-house from the front windows of which there was a good field of fire onto the road and bridge. The men I can remember in the school-house were Dan Mulvihill, who was in charge, Jim O'Donnell (Inch), Michael O'Donnell (Inch), Denis Brosnan (Baker) Annascaul, and O'Connell. There were some others whom I cannot remember.

There was a punt gun at the side of the school-house to the west pointing to the main road and it was the intention to open the attack by firing the gun at the first lorry and put it out of action.

A party under P.J. Cahill were posted on the old road to the rear and overlooking the school-house and the main road and bridge. Another party under Paddy Paul Fitzgerald of Tralee were posted on the north side of the main road towards the railway. The two-storey house to the north-east of the position was occupied by another party.

We waited in our positions until Sunday night and then withdrew to the Kinard area about a mile south-west of our position. We resumed our position on Monday morning but as nothing came that day we retired as on Sunday night and went into position again on Tuesday morning.

About mid-day on Tuesday we got word that the Tans were coming. The scouts who were watching the road from Dingle reported that two lorries were approaching. The lorries came on and stopped about half a mile on the Dingle side of our position. They stopped at a dip in the road. We had no sight of the lorries from the school house. It appears that the Tans left their lorries at the dip and moved off on both sides of the main road. Our officers thought that the Tans were raiding houses just off the road and the scouts who had reported that the Tans were coming did not continue to keep watch.

Instead of leaving their lorries to raid houses the Tans were really getting out to surround our position.

The first I knew about anything being wrong was hearing a single shot and a bullet came through the roof of the school. About a minute afterwards a machine gun opened up and bullets started coming through the roof of the school. There was no sign of any lorries on the road and the machine-gun fire was coming at us from the north

of the main road near the railway and near the position which should have been held by Paddy Paul Fitzgerald and his party. We had sandbagged the windows of the school house and we just sat tight and made sure that none of our lads in the school showed themselves to give away our position.

After the firing had lasted some time I heard the explosion of a bomb above the sound of firing. The bomb had struck the gable of the school. It appeared to have been aimed at one of the windows.

The sound of the explosion was hardly over when we heard some of our own men at the back of the school shouting "Hands up" and calling on the Tans to surrender.

It was made known to me afterwards that the call on the Tans to surrender was a ruse on the part of some of our men who had taken cover in the bed of the sunken stream which crossed our position. The Tans fell for the ruse but instead of surrendering they just dropped their rifles and got away. Some of the Tans were wounded as they got away.

I was at a window of the school house and I saw one of our men who was occupying the house to the north-east beckoning to me and pointing to the east of the school. I rushed out with Dan Mulvihill and Michael O'Donnell (Inch) and we turned to the east side of the school where we found a wounded Tan. He had a revolver which we took from him. He had lost his rifle while crossing a fence and one of our lads got it. None of the men in the school had suffered any damage and when we got out of the school the Tans had retreated or were retreating to their lorries.

P. J. Cahill called me to where he was on the old road at the back of the school. There was one lone machine gun still firing from the north of the main road. P. J. Cahill sent myself and Dinny (Bawn) Griffin to high ground to the south of our position where we had a good view of the road from Lispole to Dingle. We were on the height about three quarters of an hour when we saw four lorries coming from Dingle. I came down and reported to P. J. Cahill. At this time two of our men who had been wounded had to be moved. P. J. Cahill had about twenty men with him when I came to report and we all moved off from the ambush position. We crossed over to Ballinahunt where we had tea and we then moved on to Annascaul.

Myself, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn (T.D.) and Thomas O'Connor left the Column at Annascaul and crossed to Keel via Inch. We got to Rea's public house at about 6 a.m. on the Wednesday and we heard there that Dan Allman had been killed at Headford ambush. When we heard of Dan Allman's death we continued on. He was being buried that day and we went to the funeral near Aglish Church over by Killarney.

After the Lispole fight I remained in the Glencar-Kilgobnet area until early in April, 1921 when I went to Keel to see P.J. Cahill at his request. He discussed the position in the Glenbeigh area where the British had a mixed garrison of troops and R.I.C. Glenbeigh is on the road between Killorglin and Caherciveen. It is mainly a holiday resort and it is on the railway which runs to Caherciveen.

I gave P.J. Cahill all the information I had about the movements of troops and R.I.C. round Glenbeigh. He sent me to Glenbeigh along with a young scout named O'Connor who had friends or relations at Glenbeigh. I left O'Connor in Glenbeigh and about a week later P.J. Cahill sent for me again. He instructed me to see Thomas O'Connor

(O.C., 6th Battalion) and explain that he (Cahill) proposed to carry out a job at Glenbeigh and he only wanted Thomas O'Connor, Jack Flynn (T.D.), Dan Mulvihill and myself along with some members of the Brigade Column he had at Keel on the job.

Myself and the other three had a discussion about P.J.Cahill's order. We thought it unfair to keep some of the lads out of it so we decided to bring about nine or ten, a few each from Glencar, Miltown and Killorglin. It was decided not to tell the additional men what was on.

On the 26th April, 1921, myself, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn (T.D.) and Thomas O'Connor along with the additional men we had picked crossed from Glencar to Dooks which is on the shore of Castlemaine Bay opposite Keel. P. J. Cahill and his party from Keel crossed the bay by boat and joined us at Dooks. The whole party moved along the shore and got out on the main road, Killorglin-Glenbeigh, side of Glenbeigh Station.

Two of our party (Thomas O'Sullivan and another) were sent on to Mountain Stage Railway Station which is between Glenbeigh and Caherciveen. They had orders to delay a train, which was due to pass through Mountain Stage, until our party was in position for the job.

The job which P.J. Cahill had decided upon was to disarm a party of British troops who were expected to leave their post in Glenbeigh to board the train.

I got orders from P. J. Cahill to hold a road leading from the barracks to the railway station in case of resistance by the party of British troops who were to be allowed to enter the station. I was accompanied by Dan Mulvihill, Denis Quirke and one other. We took cover at a spot which gave us a view of the road and the barracks.

A party of British troops left the barracks and entered the station as anticipated. Our men called on them to surrender. As they appeared to hesitate one of our men on the station fired a shot whereupon the British party dropped their arms and ran for the barracks. They left a Lewis gun and about twelve rifles on the station.

Our whole party under P. J. Cahill retreated towards Dooks and the train, which had been delayed while the job was on, passed us on the way. There were no shots fired from the barracks and as far as I know the British made no attempt to follow us.

I went to Keel with P. J. Cahill and his party and I wanted to get a couple of rifles as our share of the booty. I got two rifles and took them back to Castlemaine where I dumped them.

Shortly after Glenbeigh some trouble arose between P. J. Cahill and G.H.Q. I don't know what the trouble was about. P.J. Cahill was a good officer and although he kept things to himself a lot, he was doing his best to keep the fight moving all over the Brigade area.

While the trouble between P. J. Cahill and G.H.Q. was on, we carried on and about May we had been observing an R.I.C. cycle patrol which travelled between Killorglin and Tralee about every two weeks. We sent word to P. J. Cahill about having a crack at the patrol but he had either resigned or been suspended and he refused to take responsibility. In the end we decided to do the job ourselves and we told Tadhg Brosnan who appeared to be the nearest to P.J.Cahill and was a good active officer. In fact, he appeared to be one of the best officers in the Brigade. He was O/C. of the Castlegregory Battalion. Tadhg Brosnan said he would take responsibility and bring some of the Column over for the attack.

We examined the position and waited for the patrol to move out. On the 1st June, 1921, the patrol travelled from Killorglin to Tralee and we decided to attack them on their return. We selected a spot on the road between Castlemaine and Miltown between Flynn's house and Castlemaine Bridge. The road from Tralee passes through the village of Castlemaine and after crossing the River Maine and the railway meets the Firies to Miltown Road at a T. crossing; the right turn coming from Castlemaine village leading to Miltown; the left turn leading to Firies.

We took up positions on the south side of the road. Our party was strung out over a distance of about half a mile because it was usual for the patrol to travel in extended formation. As we lay in position we saw the patrol, which consisted of a party of about 15 Tans and R.I.C. mixed, stop on Castlemaine Bridge. They then moved towards our position but they had not become strung out before they reached us and they came into the position in a bunch.

It had been planned to allow the last of the patrol into the ambush position before our party opened fire but the way they came at us knocked out the plan.

I was posted in a vacant cottage on the Castlemaine end of the position along with Sonny Mason and we knew from the way they came in a bunch that things were not working out. We let the whole party pass and then came out on the road behind them.

Tadgh Brosnan was in a position on high ground behind the vacant cottage with two or three more and I called him down. He came down and joined me on the road and just as he reached the road the firing started. At this time the Tans and R.I.C. were about 300 yards from us. Tadgh Brosnan and I had rifles and we opened fire up the road from a kneeling position.

I thought I saw a Tan or two in a field on the north side of the road and I told Tadhg Brosnan. We went into the field on the side of the road and attempted to get along under cover but we were crossing the fire of our own men and we had to get out.

The fight was over just as we got back on the road. About seven Tans and six R.I.C. had been killed. One of those killed was a District Inspector of the R.I.C. I think a few of the Tans escaped.

Most of the men we had on the attack were armed with shot guns. About fifteen were armed with rifles but the way the job worked out a large number of our men got no chance to fire. One of our party - Jerry Myles - was wounded but we got him away for treatment.

I am not sure of the arms we captured in the ambush but I think we got about twelve rifles and some revolvers.

After the ambush Tadhg Brosnan took the members of the No. 1. Brigade Column, who had been there, back to Keel and I went with a group which took the wounded man to Kilgobnet and on to Glencar.

On the following day myself and Jack Flynn (T.D.) came back to Castlemaine and got a nurse named Mary O'Brien to travel to Cloon at the top of Glencar to attend the wounded man. She stayed with him until he was out of danger.

I remained 'on the run' and early in July 1921 preparations were made to attack the barracks in Killorglin. A land mine was prepared in the Kenmare area to breach the barrack wall and the job was fixed for the 10th July, 1921. We assembled about a mile from Killorglin and a discussion took place about the job. The mine was made with gun-cotton and it was said that it would cause a major explosion.

It would have been necessary to get the people living near the barracks out of their houses and it would have been necessary to do it without giving the alarm.

It was decided by the senior officers that the risk to civilians was too great and as the Truce was on next day the job was called off.

Signed: James Cronin
(James Cronin.)

Date: 2nd Sept. 1954
2nd Sept. 1954

Witness: James J. O'Connor
James J. O'Connor

