

ORIGINAL

W.S. 1194

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1194

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,194

Witness

Bernard Sweeney,
High Street,
Ballinamore,
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

Q.M. 2nd Battalion South Leitrim Brigade;
Member of South Leitrim Flying Column.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Ballinamore,
Co. Leitrim, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT BY BERNARD SWEENEY,

High Street, Ballinamore, County Leitrim.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in 1917 in Ballinamore. Jim Turbitt, who was a native of the Ballinamore area, was really instrumental in getting the organisation going. John William O'Beirne was the first Company Captain. Paddy Logan of Mohill also took a very active part in getting the Movement under way in Ballinamore. Our strength was somewhere between forty and fifty in a very short period. We had no arms of any sort. There was no Oath administered to us then. Weekly parades for training were held. The Company Captain did all the instruction. He had been in America for some years and had a very good knowledge of military training, although I don't think he was a member of any military force previously. All our parades were held in secret. We knew the most of the people in the area who owned shot guns which we could get in an emergency.

Early in 1918 the Conscription crisis came upon the country and our numbers increased considerably, but this influx fell away again after the crisis subsided and our strength was down to the original numbers. Except for training nothing outstanding was done to meet the threat of conscription. The anti-conscription pledge was signed, as in other areas, and the Volunteers were instrumental in having this done and the usual collection for monies for the fund to fight conscription. There were no "dug-outs" or anything of that nature constructed. The British Army, supported by certain loyalist citizens, held numerous recruiting meetings in an effort to obtain recruits for their forces and we, the Volunteers, had great fun breaking up those meetings and obstructing them in every way we could. The response to their appeals for recruits was practically nil and their efforts to get men this way was a failure.

In July, 1918, Arthur Griffith contested a bye-election in East Cavan on the Sinn Féin ticket. The great war was at its height at this time and there was still a very big number of supporters for the British cause in the country, in the way of soldiers' wives and families who were living on separation money drawn from the British Government while their husbands served in the British Army. "Separation Women" they were called. Such people would support the Redmond or Nationalist Party and, of course, there was the Redmond or Hibernian following itself, which was strong in this part of the country.

It was expected that such elements would be very hostile to the new Sinn Féin idea and would give trouble and, of course, the R.I.C. would openly support this element or, at least, turn the 'blind eye' to their doings. A call came to South Leitrim to send Volunteers to Cavan to assist in keeping order. A large number of Volunteers were dispatched to leave on cycles. I was a member of this party. We were carrying hurling sticks. At Bailieboro' a party of military attacked us and smashed up our cycles and took the hurleys we were carrying. Despite this interference, however, we succeeded in getting to our destination. There were about 200 Leitrim men on this job. We put up in a large building where Paul Galligan, who had fought in Wexford in 1916, was in charge. There were a lot of other men there as well. Paul made us parade in the yard of this building where we carried out drill movements by Companies. During voting we were on duty at the various polling stations throughout the area and indeed we did our share of personating as well. There were no serious incidents during the election and we all returned home safely after Griffith's victory.

In the end of 1918 (November) after the end of the first great war, a general election was held at which Sinn Féin candidates opposed

all nominees of the Redmond or National party. In this area the election went off very quietly. The Volunteers attended all election meetings as a protection for the Sinn Féin candidate. They were also busily engaged in canvassing voters on behalf of Sinn Féin and in making arrangements to get their supporters to the polls. On the day the voting took place, parties of Volunteers^{were} on duty at all polling stations and when voting closed they escorted the Ballot Boxes to Carrick-on-Shannon where they were deposited pending being counted. The Volunteers kept a continuous guard on the ballot boxes there. I did guard one night there.

Early in 1919 the first Dáil met and, having reaffirmed the declaration of the Republic, took over the Volunteers as the Army of the Republic. All officers and men were now required to take an Oath of Allegiance to the Dáil as the Government of the Republic. A few of our men refused to take this Oath and severed their connection with the Movement from that onward. Our strength was now about sixty Oath-bound members. I was now Company Captain of Ballinamore Company; Joseph Barnes was Company Adjutant; Michael Mulligan was 1st Lieutenant. I can't now remember who was 2nd Lieutenant. The Dáil now floated a Loan and although this was really the work of the Sinn Féin organisation the job of collecting monies for the Loan was, to a great extent, performed by the Volunteers. I forget now who acted as Agents for the Loan in this area. A fairly substantial sum of money was gathered in. The people subscribed generously, although referring to it as a Loan seemed a bit of a joke and I don't believe that any of them looked upon it other than as an ordinary subscription to a political fund.

In the latter end of 1919 a boycott of the R.I.C. was instituted by G.H.Q. Business houses were instructed not to supply them with foodstuffs or other materials and it was taboo to speak to the members

of this Force or associate with them. I think the idea behind this move was to compel them to resign from the Force, but as such it had very little effect. The police had now to commandeer their supplies for which, to be fair, they paid for as normally. Only one man resigned in this area, a Constable Healy, who came from Sligo. The boycott, although enforced to the best of their ability by the Volunteers, had not the big effect that was desired and probably in many cases had the opposite effect. It did, however, cause a wide gulf between the people and the R.I.C. and this was all to the good. It was well known by everyone that the R.I.C. were the principal tool used by the English Government to keep the country in subjugation and without their knowledge and work the Military Forces would be practically powerless.

Towards the end of 1919 and early 1920 a number of small R.I.C. barracks throughout the country had been attacked by the Volunteers and in some places captured with the consequent loss of arms and prestige. Their headquarters realised that they could not hope to hold those small stations against the growing strength of the I.R.A. and they decided to evacuate them and withdraw their men to larger and concentrated stations. This was their first loosening of their grip on the country, and their function of being the eyes and ears of the British Government was being contracted. In addition, it was a boon to the Volunteers as it gave them greater liberty of movement in the rural areas.

In this area Feenagh, Garadice and Easlin and Kesh and Ranthogue were evacuated. All those premises were burned down by us on Easter Saturday night 1920. The latter two posts had been evacuated at a much earlier date by the R.I.C. They held on to Ballinamore barracks the garrison of which was considerably strengthened and fortified by using steel shutters on the windows and sandbags and barbed wire.

About March, 1920, a local man named McCabe was going to join the R.I.C. who were then very anxious indeed to get recruits and were holding out inducements to young men to join the Force. It was the object of the Volunteers to prevent men from joining that Force. One night, as McCabe was going home, he was taken off his cycle by the Volunteers and questioned about his joining the R.I.C. One of our men who was armed fired a shot accidentally, hitting McCabe in the leg. As a result of this he had to have his leg amputated and that finished his attempt to join. The R.I.C. made every endeavour to trace the people engaged in this incident. It was a dark night and he (McCabe) did not identify anyone. The police made no arrests. Another man named McGloughlin was also going to join the R.I.C. but we warned him as to what would happen to him if he persisted and he did not go any further in the matter.

A Battalion organisation had now come into existence in the area and we were now the 2nd Battalion, South Leitrim Brigade. Packy Flynn was the first Battalion O/C; Michael Bohem was Vice-Commandant. The Companies making up the Battalion were - Ballinamore, Crimlin, Aughnasheelin, Aughwilliam, Fenagh and Corraleehan. Francis McGowan was the Battalion Adjutant. There was also a Brigade organisation in South Leitrim by now. David O'Brien of Mohill was the first Brigade O/C and he was subsequently replaced by Seán Mitchell. Joseph Beirne was Brigade Adjutant and Patrick Tiernan the Brigade Quartermaster. The Battalions comprising the Brigade were No. 1, Cloone, No. 2, Ballinamore, No. 3, Carrick-on-Shannon. Bernard McGowan was O/C of the 1st Battalion, which was our Battalion and Michael Baxter was Adjutant.

The armament position in our battalion was just as bad as ever at this time. There were a few odd pattern revolvers available with

very little ammunition to suit and a few shot guns. In June, 1920 we carried out some raiding for arms. We got a number of shot guns, both single and double barrel type in all about forty, and a good number of cartridges for same.

We did not get any rifles either Service or Sporting type. The guns collected were dumped in a boiler house in the Convent grounds in Ballinamore. This was a good dry place to store them. Later on they were taken from there and divided between the Companies who were then responsible for their care and safety.

We met with no resistance in the Ballinamore area during this collection of arms and in most cases it was only a matter of calling to the owners for them. In the Aughwilliam area a Loyalist or British supporter refused to give up his gun. There was an exchange of shots between him and the Volunteers and he gave in. One Volunteer received some slight flesh wounds from shot gun pellets. This was a pretty strong Protestant area.

About the middle of 1920 a celebration was being held in connection with something about De Valera. I can't remember what just now. A procession was organised to take place through the town accompanied by bands. We decided to avail of this distraction to burn the Masonic Hall. As the procession was passing the hall we crossed over the wall and set the place alight and it was completely burned out. The R.I.C. made no attempt to save the hall. This was really an I.R.B. job and I was one of the men detailed for it.

The evacuation of the smaller outlying posts by the R.I.C. now left the country, particularly the rural areas, without any Police Force and, although the R.I.C. could never have been said to be a Police Force in its proper form, it was essential that something had

to be done about policing the country. The Volunteers now had to take on this duty and, onerous though it was, to men inexperienced in such work and only able to devote their free time to it, they made a wonderful success of it. The R.I.C. never had the complete confidence or co-operation of the people, but the Volunteers attained this in a very brief time except, of course, for the loyalist element.

The people were generally law-abiding and peaceful but it was natural that a small element not so inclined would take advantage of the withdrawal of the R.I.C. to enrich themselves at other people's expense. And this had to be nipped in the bud. In addition, there were the ordinary cases of litigation to be dealt with. The Sinn Féin Courts were organised now and soon were operating with great success. The people quickly gained confidence in their administration and decisions which were based more on practical commonsense than on Law, and soon the British Courts were abandoned except, again for the loyalist element. In the early days the Courts were held openly and members of the R.I.C. often attended as spectators and made no attempt then to suppress them. Father Ryan usually acted as Judge at these Courts. Later Father Ryan had to go 'on the run' as he was keenly sought for by the British Forces. The Volunteers had to give effect to the decisions of the Courts and they also had to make some arrests - not very many. We had a place of detention in the area - an unknown destination where prisoners were detained. These were mostly from other areas as it was customary to do this and not keep prisoners in their own districts. The Volunteers had to maintain a permanent guard on this place and to feed themselves and the prisoners. In this task they were helped by the local people.

The R.I.C. and military now began to tighten up measures against the Volunteers and a raid became a frequent picture on the scene and here and there they picked up and detained individual Volunteers. From August, 1920 I was virtually 'on the run'. I was Battalion Quartermaster at this time. On the 25th October of that year the Crimlin Company staged an ambush on a patrol of R.I.C. at Comma. It was customary for a party of R.I.C. to patrol that area, travelling by circuitous route from and back to their barracks. Seven or eight of the Crimlin Company, armed with shot guns, took up a position on the side of the road at the back of the fence at Comma and when the patrol came along the party opened fire on them. The R.I.C., who were armed with rifles and revolvers, dismounted from their cycles and returned the fire. The Crimlin men, who had only shot guns and a few cartridges, had to retire. They got away safely. There were no casualties on either side. Packy McTeague, who was the O/C. of the Crimlin Company, was in charge of the Volunteers here.

That night we burned down the Courthouse in Ballinamore which, up to a short time previously, had been occupied by a party of military. The Courthouse was in full view of the R.I.C. barracks and a large party of the Lancer Regiment were camped a short distance outside the town. I was in charge of this operation and I had ten men under my command armed with shot guns and a few revolvers. I had posted some of my men in position to cover off the barracks and keep the garrison from getting away. We entered the Courthouse and, having given it a liberal sprinkling with petrol, set it alight. It was completely destroyed. The military and police carried out extensive raiding after this, but did not arrest any of our men.

In August, 1920, there was a Mr. Rogers, Superintendent of the Cavan and Leitrim railway, living in Ballinamore. I do not know what this man was guilty of but it had been decided by our headquarters that he would be expelled from the area and the night of the 28th August was decided

upon to do this. That night I was informed that there was a British officer of the Lancers drinking in a public house in the town and, knowing that Rogers was to be dealt with that night, this was a bit of a fly in the ointment. I decided this officer would have to be shifted.

I took a revolver I had and went to the public house and waited outside. When the officer came out I held him up and disarmed him. He was carrying a webley revolver and ammunition. I took him prisoner and handed him over to two of our men to guard. I only intended to hold him until Rogers was out of the way. The guards were inexperienced men and he broke away from them and succeeded in getting to the R.I.C. barracks where he took refuge. The police did not come out to investigate. Rogers was run out of town. I do not know his fate afterwards.

In October, 1920 - in the end of that month - Thomas Gilroy of Jamestown, and I went by car to Strokestown, County Roscommon, where we got two rifles and some ammunition from the Sharkey sisters. This had been arranged for us beforehand. We got them here safely and took them to the Crimlin Company area where we deposited them in safekeeping. It was our intention to attack the police barracks in Ballinamore. Previous to this we had received a few different type revolvers from G.H.Q., Dublin. The night that we planned to attack the barracks we found that it had been strongly reinforced and the garrison were masters of the town. They came out from the barracks and fired shots and beat up anyone they met on the streets and created a small reign of terror frightening everyone out of sight.

In view of this display of strength and aggressiveness we were compelled to call off our planned attack.

In the previous month two Black & Tans had arrived and took up their abode in the R.I.C. barracks. They were the advance details of a larger force which arrived later in the town. There were about ten

or twelve regular R.I.C. in the barracks previous to this. The Tans had established themselves in the Town Hall which they fortified with sandbags, barbed wire and steel shutters, thus establishing a second police barracks in the town. Military also arrived in large numbers and took over a big house at Aghoo, which they converted into a barracks while the Lancers - a Cavalry Regiment - were at Comma. The Lancers were subsequently withdrawn from there. Before the Tans took over the ~~Town~~ Hall a large force of the Auxiliaries arrived in the town one night and entered the Town Hall. They held up all the men who were on the premises. Usually there was always quite a few men in the Town Hall as they used to meet there to play cards, billiards and other games. The Auxies went wild through the town and engaged in what was usual now, terroristic and frightening tactics towards the inhabitants. That night the Auxies burned down the Aughwilliam Hall and also the house of a man named Lyons in Aghavas. Later the Town Hall was permanently occupied by the Tans. I was at this time on the enemies' 'wanted' list and was definitely 'on the run'.

In December, 1920, the Active Service Unit or Flying Column could be said to have come into existence. A number of the lads who were on the 'run' had come together for companionship and also for safety reasons and were staying in the one district. I suppose it was the herd instinct or that we felt safer in numbers that drove us together. In January, 1921, the Column began to take shape and about ten or eleven men were banded together. This party had a few rifles - four or five, and the rest had shot guns and a few odd revolvers. The rifles were the ones that had been captured at Drumreilly from a brokendown military lorry. Seán Mitchell, the Brigade O/C., was the first O/C of the Column also. We lived on the hospitality of the people and as long as they had any food we had it also. In fact, they would do without it themselves to give it to us. We moved around from district to district but spent most of our lives in the Aughnasheelin area.

Sean Connolly, formerly O/C. of the North Longford Brigade and now a high-ranking G.H.Q. Staff Officer, came into the area in February, 1921, and at once took up abode - if that word describes it - with the Column. Connolly set about reorganising the Column and we got additional men from other Battalion areas. These men were also 'on the run'. We also got some more rifles but never had more than ten or twelve at any time, and ammunition for the rifles was very limited. The ammunition supply for the rifles was very low at all times - about ten or twelve rounds per rifle. With this we could not afford to take any chances and it was really insufficient for our protection.

In January, 1921, we prepared to carry out an ambush at Edentenny. The idea was to carry out a feint attack on the barracks at Ballinamore to draw reinforcements from Mohill and to ambush those at Edentenny. Thirty men, including men from the Column, were mobilised for this affair. A small party of this force was detailed for the attack on the barracks at Ballinamore while the main body took up position behind the road fences at Edentenny. Shots were fired at the barracks but they did not send up any verey lights or apparently call for assistance, and no reinforcements came out from Mohill and so there was no ambush. Constable Carberry appeared outside the barracks in Ballinamore and was fired on but was not hit. I was glad of this because Carberry, apparently, was not a bad sort. He had sent me word that they were coming for me and to clear out before I went 'on the run'. After this the Column split up temporarily, taking their arms with them.

As previously stated, Connolly arrived in February and joined the Column. He had come across from Roscommon. An ambush was now planned to take place at Feenagh. A patrol of enemy forces were in the habit of coming out this way from Mohill on cycles. Sometimes they came on lorries and in different strengths. The Column complete

was detailed for this job with the help of some local Volunteers who were used for scouting. A mine of the concrete type was placed in the road and we took up positions along the hedges and banks on one side of the road but some short distance back from the road. This position gave us a good field of fire on to the road where we had placed the mine. We stayed in that position for five or six hours but no enemy force ever turned up.

The Column now moved intact from area to area, always well looked after by the people. Connolly now had a number of big road mines constructed. On several occasions Connolly and I and some other members of the Column came into Ballinamore to try and ambush a street patrol of the Tans and R.I.C. We put mines - a smaller portable type - on the streets but we never had any luck as the enemy never obliged us by turning up. The Tans were in the habit of congregating in Church Street when out on patrol and Connolly decided to attack them there. Connolly, McPartland, Baxter and I came into the town, each armed with a revolver. We also had a large cannister mine and some hand-grenades. We posted a man at the railway gates at the station to give us the signal when the patrol was congregated at Church Street.

As we were entering the town a patrol of the enemy came in behind our backs by a side road, thus putting us between them and the barracks. We were unaware of the presence of this patrol just as they were unaware of us. A girl named Miss Meehan warned us that the patrol were behind us and we were able to get away just in time without trouble, but only just.

Connolly now decided to carry out an ambush on the main road from Rooskey to Carrick-on-Shannon. This was the main artery from Dublin

to the North-West of Ireland and enemy forces were frequently travelling on it. A reconnaissance of the area was made and a position at Annaduff was chosen. The Column, complete, was taken for this operation which meant a considerable journey across country. A large mine was placed in the road but when this was being put in position it just disintegrated. This was a terrible disappointment to Connolly and us all. The materials - cement and gravel - used in the construction of the mine must have been of a very inferior quality. Connolly had no option but to call off the affair. Without the mine it would have been hopeless, with the ammunition supply available so bad, and we were sure to contact a large force on a wide main road. Even the surprise and shock from such a large mine going off would have given us an advantage over the enemy.

The Column now retired back towards the area it had come from. On reaching Eslin Bridge about four and a half miles west of Mohill Connolly split up the Column and detailed sections of it to proceed to different areas and to hit up anything they could find there. He told me to bring some of the men with me and that he would accompany us and move in on Ballinamore and attack the barracks there that night. As we proceeded towards Ballinamore Connolly selected a position at Gorravagh for an ambush on the enemy Forces. This would be about 5 a.m. on the morning of the 11th March, 1921. After this reconnaissance was completed Connolly and the others and I went to two houses in the district. We were made welcome by the owners of the houses and as we were all pretty well exhausted at this time we remained there until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. After having rested here it was intended to attack Ballinamore, Mohill and Drumshanbo Police barracks. At about 3.30 p.m. an alarm was given that the enemy were approaching. When Connolly heard this he ordered

all men there to the rear of the house. He divided them into two sections. The first intimation we received of the enemies' approach was when Master Charles Flynn was coming towards the house of which he was the owner. He made signs with his hands that they were approaching.

I looked through the shrubs where I had taken up position and could see the enemy with machine guns set in position. Enemy machine guns immediately opened up a barrage of fire on our position. Each of our sections concentrated on the direction from where the machine gun fire was coming from and opened fire in that direction. The enemy were well informed of the position of the place and they had a force of military on the south side of us also and they opened up with rifle fire and we had not a chance from the start. This section of the enemy was most destructive to us. Five of our men were killed almost immediately. Connolly was wounded and captured and died that night in Carrick-on-Shannon Military Barracks. As I tried to change my position I was hit by one bullet in the groin and another in the leg and toppled into a drain with my rifle beside me. The water covered my body and a bunch of rushes concealed my head. The cold water probably helped to stem the haemorrhage from my wounds. From my position in the drain I could see that all was over with my pals and awaited in pain and horror what I perceived was to be my end also. I could see the enemy as they swarmed over the place pounding our dead or dying men on the ground with the butts of their rifles. Although they searched the area extensively they did not find me. Certainly my Guardian Angel was with me then as every moment I thought was my end as they jumped across me in the drain.

Fortunately I did not become unconscious and maintained my reasoning powers. I knew that any moan or cry on my part would mean my death. After what seemed to be hours I eventually could hear the enemy lorries apparently departing. I still lay still for what may

have been a couple of further hours and then I called for help. I understand that my cries were heard by an old woman who informed some local Volunteers who took me from the drain and at this stage I became unconscious. I believe that they took me to Murphy's house on the hill beside the spot where our awful tragedy had occurred. There was a priest got for me. I was then taken to Fenagh in a pony and trap to the house of P.J. Dolan where Dr. Dolan who acted as Brigade M.O., having come out from the town at great risk to himself, fixed me up. The following night I was taken to the top of the mountain to Quill's house where I remained for a month. Two local girls who were Nurses and who were home on holidays spent their holidays nursing me. I was also kept for a long period in Red Rourke's house in the same area and remained there until I was fairly fit again. I rejoined the Column in the early days of May.

Connolly and his dead comrades were taken to Carrick-on-Shannon and after a few days their bodies were given back to their relatives and they were buried in their own family burying places. The names of the members of the Column who died in this encounter with the enemy were - Seán Connolly, Ballinalee, Co. Longford, Seamus Wrynn, Tarmon, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim, Joseph Beirne, Clerk, Ballinamore Railway Station, Michael Baxter, Clerk, Ballinamore Railway Station, John Joseph O'Reilly, Miskawn, Aughnasheelin, Co. Leitrim, and John Joseph O'Reilly, Derrinkeher, Aughnasheelin, Co. Leitrim. A very nice monument has been erected to their memory almost on the spot where they met their end.

It was very evident that someone had reported and pin-pointed our location to the enemy. Some short time after the affair a Mr. Lattimer - a protestant who lived in the neighbourhood - was shot dead by the Volunteers and a Dr. Pringle, who had a dispensary in the area, cleared out of the country. This Dr. Pringle was killed in London by being crushed against a wall by a lorry. Some people believe that this was done designedly, but it may have been just an accident. I believe both of these men were the principals concerned in giving us away.

The death of Connolly and the others was an awful blow to us in South Leitrim and for a time both the Brigade and the Column were badly disorganised and, in addition, we had lost a number of valuable rifles and other arms. Despite this they contrived to keep going and on a couple of occasions some of them went into Ballinamore and Drumshanbo to attack patrols but never contacted any.

About the 1st April a Black & Tan from the Ballinamore garrison fell to courting a girl whom he used to meet out on the Swanlinbar side of the town. Charles McGowan - later a Commandant in the National Army - went to the spot and, after an exchange of shots, killed the Tan and took his gun. The Tans were practically mad in the town of Ballinamore. They beat up every man they could lay their hands on. They nearly killed my brother and also Jack Quinn.

After Connolly's death G.H.Q. sent down another staff officer, Paddy Morrissey, to reorganise the Brigade and filled the vacancies caused by the deaths at Gorva. Morrissey visited every unit of the Brigade in turn, and soon the Brigade began to buck up again and to look forward to having a further crack at the enemy and to have their revenge for the deaths at Gorva.

During all this time the enemy kept hammering away without let-up. Raid after raid and round-up after round-up. Just prior to the Truce the enemy carried out a big round-up between the Cavan border and Mohill. They combed the mountains for us, even using aircraft extensively. We got to know about this round-up in time and succeeded in getting away into the County Cavan to a place called Glann which was outside the area of search.

The Truce found us in good form and our morale was high although it was becoming increasingly harder every day to stay alive. The summer of 1921 was exceptionally good and one could sleep anywhere out

in the open and the shelter of houses was not necessary. While this was an advantage it was also a disadvantage as there was practically no period of darkness and we longed for the dark nights to come again. Darkness meant concealment.

We could not understand the Truce and it took some time to realise the change it brought about - to be able to go home and walk about freely. None of us thought it would last long or come to anything and one lived in a mild state of tension in the fear that it would collapse suddenly and that we would be pounced upon and caught unawares. The armament position at the Truce was deplorable. We had lost a big portion of the rifles we had and while we lived in hope there did not seem to be any hope of replacing them. The days of surprising small parties of the enemy and disarming them had gone as they operated in much bigger formations now and with much greater strength. While there was a fairly good supply of shot guns and cartridges available, they were not of much value now owing to their extremely short range, and rifle ammunition was down to a few rounds per rifle, insufficient even to keep as a reserve supply for our own protection.

Apart from the construction of concrete mines and bombs from metal piping and cartwheel boxes and the filling of cartridges with buckshot or slugs there was no attempt to make munitions in the area and I don't see what could be done with the very limited resources at our disposal. Even the bombs made were of a very crude type, filled with gelignite and ignited by a fuze which had to be lighted before thrown. They were unreliable in action.

Communications were maintained through the area by dispatch runners on foot or on cycles and the Cumann na mBan rendered great service in this respect. They could get through where men could not even make the attempt.

The railway men handled the dispatches coming and going to G.H.Q. and other Brigade areas and they were an invaluable asset to us in this respect.

Intelligence Service was never highly organised in the area and did not get the evaluation that it deserved. We had Intelligence Officers in the different units and Brigade but they had no specialist training in their duties and had to depend on their own interpretation of what they were. In this respect I don't think we were any better or worse than other areas. We had one very good man in Ballinamore - John Mulligan was his name. He was a shopboy in the town and was not on the enemies' list of 'wanted' men. By intelligent observation he was able to pick up some useful information about the town. We had no agents that I knew of inside the enemy Forces themselves and the Post Offices were of no value to us as they were all manned by people who were not in sympathy with us. The only informer or spy that I know of was executed in the Aughwilliam area and I do not know any of the details that led to his being shot.

I was a member of the local Circle of the I.R.B. There were about ten members and myself, all of whom were Volunteers with one exception, and he was a member of Sinn Féin. We held meetings frequently while that was feasible and paid a small subscription weekly.

When things got hot and some of the members had to go 'on the run' the organisation became dormant more or less.

I do not know what really was the value of the organisation in view of the fact that we had an Oath-bound military force in the I.R.A. or Volunteers.

The business at the meetings generally got no further than a discussion on the situation and suggestions as to what could be done to intensify the war and offset the enemies' tactics. In fact, some of the jobs that were supposed to be carried out by the I.R.B. were actually done by the Volunteers when the I.R.B. had failed to do them. Probably the people at higher level who directed affairs had their own ideas in keeping the organisation going and enlarging it.

Signed: B. Sweeney
(B. Sweeney)
Date: 16 June 1935

Witness: Matthew Barry Commandant.
(Matthew Barry)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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