

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1266

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,266

Witness

Hugh Brady,
High Street,
Ballinamore,
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

Brigade Ordnance Officer,
South Leitrim.

Subject.

Aughnasheelin Company Irish Volunteers,
South Leitrim, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT BY MR. HUGH BRADY,

High Street, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

I was born at Derinkahoor near Aughnasheelin and went to school at Drumbiba. I could not say that my school-days had any effect on my actions in after life, as the education we received there, while quite good, had nothing of a national flavour about it. The master of the school, however, must have had some flare for military training, for he used to teach us drill in the military style and we carried sticks which represented arms. One day, one of the younger members of the R.I.C. from the local barracks told us that our teacher was training us for the British army and that we should refuse to do it. The next time the master took us for drill, we refused to do it and that ended our military training there.

My father was in the Fenian movement and was always a separatist, and it was from him that I developed my rebel tendencies. In the Spring of 1917 a Company of Irish Volunteers was started in Aughnasheelin. The O'Reilly's, who were killed at Gorva in March, 1921, and I were instrumental in having the Company started there. We got no assistance from any organiser or outside individual. For the first twelve months of our existence, the strength of the Company was only nine Volunteers. J.J. O'Reilly (Francis) was appointed Company Captain, and another J.J. O'Reilly - no relation of the former - was appointed 1st Lieutenant. The Company Captain did the training. We took no oath on joining - not until 1919. We paid a few pence per week to a fund, to be devoted to the purchase of arms. We had no arms except a shotgun, my property, and

another shotgun which Captain O'Reilly got from a Mr. Parkes, a Protestant, who was very favourably disposed towards us. Mr. Parkes lived in the area and was of tremendous help to us in later years.

Our drill parades were held in public for the first six months or so, and we were a source of amusement and jibes for a lot of the locals who, I suppose, thought we were mad or fanatics. Paul Galligan from Cavan, who had taken part in the 1916 Rebellion, was looked upon with awe and as a national hero at this time. A meeting was held at which Paul Galligan spoke and, after this, we were flooded with recruits and our strength went up to about two hundred. Such was the effect of Paul Galligan's influence and the esteem he was held in, assisted by the threat of conscription. Captain O'Reilly, with the aid of some British army drill books, continued to do the training.

Early in 1918 the conscription crisis arose and the Company members were busily engaged in having the anti conscription pledge signed by everyone in the area and in the collecting of monies for the anti conscription fund. Apart from these activities and intensive drilling which now took place every night, little else was done to meet the threat. We still had no arms except a few shotguns. There were a number of such weapons in the area, the location of which was known to us and which we could get at, at short notice. After the conscription threat faded out, our numbers dwindled to about seventy-three or seventy-five. The remainder of our big Company became inactive and therefore ceased to be members.

In November of that year (1918) a general election

took place and this meant a very busy period for us. We were actively engaged in protecting speakers at the meetings held by Sinn Féin, in canvassing on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidate, and in collecting funds for the election chest. The Hibernians, or Redmondite Party, had a strong following in Aughnasheelin. The only serious incident that took place was on the evening of polling day, after the polling booths had closed. The Aughnawillian Company had a horse carriage, commonly called a brake at that time for bringing voters to the polling stations. When going home that evening, a number of them were on the brake and they were attacked by men from the Hibernian Hall at Aughnawillian. The attackers carried spades, and Joseph Maguire got a cut from one of them on his leg which penetrated to the bone. He is still alive but has suffered all his life from lameness.

There was a policeman in the barracks, named Healy, and he wanted to organise a party of men to go down to Aughnawillian and take out two men, named Flynn and O'Beirne, who were responsible for the wounding of Maguire. Healy being a policeman, we did not trust him and would not go with him. Inside a week, this policeman threw off his uniform in the barracks and left the force.

The first Dáil met in January 1919 in Dublin and established themselves as the Government of the Irish Republic. All officers and men of the Volunteer force were now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the Government of the Republic. Previous to this, the Dáil had assumed responsibility for the Volunteer organisation and took it over as the Army of the Republic. Hence the new name - the I.R.A. All the officers and men of our Company subscribed to this oath. The Dáil now floated a public loan and, while this was primarily a

a matter for the Sinn Féin organisation, the Volunteers did the main share of canvassing and collecting for it. A levy of two shillings per cow was put on all stock owners in the area. All paid up without demur, and a good sum was realised. This was forwarded to the Minister for Finance in the Dáil. Each person subscribing received a receipt or bond for the amount given. This money, with its accrued interest, was repaid to each subscriber when the Irish Free State came into being in 1922.

A Battalion was organised in the area by this time. Bernard McGowan was the O/C of the Battalion. The Adjutant was Michael Bohan, and the Quartermaster, Terence Boyle. I can't remember who, if anyone, was Vice O/C. The Battalion was called the 2nd Battalion, South Leitrim Brigade. The Companies of Volunteers making up the Battalion were:-

Aughnawillian	- Captain Thomas Smith.
Ballinamore	- Captain Seán McGarry.
Aughnasheelin	- Captain James Callaghan.
Fenagh	- Captain John Cafferty.
Crimlen	- Captain Denis Brady.
Drumshambo	- Captain Michael Mahon.
North Kiltubrid .	- Captain Patrick Mulvey
South Kiltubrid	- Captain Patrick Gannon.
Corraheelan	- Captain Patrick Galligan.

Our only arms were a few shotguns and a few .32 revolvers which we obtained from some returned Americans. We also got a .38 Bulldog revolver in a raid on a house, owned by a man who was prominent in the Hibernian organisation.

In the harvest time of 1919 a general raid for arms

was held in the area. Every house where it was known, or suspected, that there were arms of any sort, was visited by our men. In most cases, it was only a matter of calling for the arms. We collected quite an amount of shotguns of various types, including some old muzzle loaders which came in very useful afterwards for repair work. We got one Service rifle - Ulster Volunteer pattern - in a house owned by a man named George Johnson of Ballyduff. There was no ammunition for this rifle which had, "For God and Ulster", stamped on the butt. The rifle was in new condition. Johnson was a Protestant. In this house also we got about fifty rounds of .45 revolver ammunition. We got about forty shotguns, both double and single barrel types, and a good supply of shotgun cartridges also. A Mr. Kiernan, who was a solicitor in Ballinamore, was held up on the road while proceeding to the mountains to shoot game, and relieved of a nice gun and nine boxes of cartridges. The guns were kept concealed in cocks of hay and straw where they would keep in good condition.

A Brigade was formed in South Leitrim towards the end of 1919. Charles O'Brien of Mohill was appointed Brigade O/C. O'Brien's health was not too robust, and he later relinquished this post and was replaced by Sean Mitchell of Mohill. The Battalions comprising the Brigade were:-

- 1st Battalion - Carrigallen area.
- 2nd Battalion - Ballinamore area.
- 3rd Battalion - Mohill area.

The O/C of the 1st Battalion was John McGarry, and the O/C of the 2nd Battalion was Bernard McGowan. I can't remember who was in charge of the 3rd Battllion.

We received information that there was a quantity

of explosives - gelignite - in a shop or store in Ballinamore, owned by Newell's. Previous to this, all such explosive substances had been collected and taken into barracks by the R.I.C. but, for some reason, Newell had not handed in this lot. Newell was clerk to the local District Court and was also a Justice of the Peace. We received the information from a man who worked in Newell's, although he was not a Volunteer. A Volunteer, named Reilly, and I came into Ballinamore one evening and entered Newell's shop. Newell, who was hostile to the I.R.A., was alone in the shop and Reilly held him up with one of our old revolvers, and I secured the gelignite and also a lot of commercial detonators, which we took back to Aughnasheelin, travelling on foot. This stuff was kept in Mr. Parke's house. He was the Protestant friend of our/s, mentioned previously. He had some sort of double floor on the first landing where he concealed it.

The R.I.C. now began to evacuate their small outlying stations and put their men in larger garrisons in the towns. In the 2nd Battalion area, Feenagh, Garadice and Ranthogue were evacuated. All three barracks were burned down by us on Easter Saturday night, 1920. In Feenagh, the Sergeant's wife was still living in the married quarters of the barracks. We removed all her furniture and belongings to the Catholic Hall - even her supply of turf. Michael Gaughan was in charge of this operation. He was Captain of the Kiltubrid, North, Company at this time and was later replaced by Patrick Mulvey when the first mentioned had to go on the run. No one was injured during the burnings of the barracks. Ballinamore barracks continued to be garrisoned by the R.I.C. and the number of constables there was well increased. The

withdrawal of the R.I.C. was a great blessing, as we could now move around more freely and was a big loss to them, as everyone knew they were the sources which supplied the information for any enemy operations. The Volunteers now assumed responsibility for the effective policing of the country. The R.I.C., even where they remained in the towns, now took little interest in this duty and more or less left it to the Volunteers and became more of a military garrison. By this time, the R.I.C. had lost the co-operation which they had received from the people, and were non effective as a police force. The Volunteers carried out the duties very effectively and kept the peace wonderfully well, although they were only spare-time policemen. A place of detention for individuals whom it was necessary to arrest was established at Scotch Mill, in an unoccupied house. Such places were called "unknown destinations" as they were secret to the general public. The press, when reporting arrests, would say that so-and-so was arrested by the Republican army and taken to an unknown destination. Hence the name, "unknown destination".

Two soldiers of the British Army were held, or detained in this place for some time. Eventually, they were released and returned to their unit at Carrick-on-Shannon. We were suspicious that they were out on a bout of spying, but could prove nothing definite against them. I had charge of a special police section of the Volunteers which consisted of four other men. We had no serious trouble at any time.

The Sinn Féin courts were set up in the area and the people made extensive use of them; and the British courts were left almost idle. In an area like ours, disputes over land, such as, trespassing and rights of way, were

the most common, and the local courts were able to deal with such disputes very amicably, and many of them were settled satisfactorily without even going to the court, through the influence of the Volunteers. The magistrates, or judges of the Sinn Féin courts were appointed from the local residents. John Meehan and George Reilly acted as judges at our local court. The courts were held in a local disused granary on the mountain side and continued to function effectively well into 1921 when conditions then existing made it impossible for them to carry on. They resumed activity after the Truce.

Towards the end of 1920, the Tans and Auxies arrived and established themselves in the centres where the R.I.C. and military were. Strong garrisons were established in Ballinamore, Mohill and Carrick-on-Shannon. They took over private dwellings and such ^{like} premises and fortified them with steel shutters, sandbags and barbed wire, turning them into veritable forts; and it looked as if they were preparing for an extended stay and that we were in for a bad time. No sooner had they arrived than they started raiding houses and holding up people, in some cases beating them and threatening them with guns. In this way, I think, they planned to frighten the people and the I.R.A., but in this they totally failed. Their actions, in many cases turned people who, if not openly hostile to, had no sympathy with Sinn Féin, or who were lukewarm, into enthusiastic Sinn Féiners. They also burned houses and local halls to further this reign of terror.

I was working at this time in John McKeon's coachbuilding business at Drumbarton. While there, I started to make mines or bombs out of cart-wheel and trap-wheel boxes. A quarter-inch thick steel plate was placed at each end of the box, and these were held in position by

bolts on the outside. A five-sixteenth inch hole was drilled in the centre of one end plate, to take a length of fuse attached to a commercial detonator. When ready, the box was filled with gelignite and the detonator and fuze placed in position, and the holding bolts were screwed down tight. The length of fuse was at first about eight or nine inches, but later we shortened it to about four inches as the original length gave too much time between igniting the fuse and the explosion. The larger boxes were, in addition to gelignite, also filled with scrap pieces of iron, such as, nuts, to make extra missiles.

On the night that the raid was made on the rate collector's premises for the books, we tried out one of these mines on an old R.I.C. barracks at Kesh. This barracks had been evacuated but was not burned by our people. A rumour had gone round that the Tans were coming back to this place, and the Kesh Volunteers asked us to come over and destroy it. We went there and placed one of the large type box bombs against the gable end of the building on the outside, and lit the fuse. The fuse was about nine inches long, and we found that this would allow us to get nearly half a mile away if moving anyway quickly. The bomb went off all right. On returning, we found it had blown a large hole in the wall of the gable end and had split the wall right up to the top.

The police raided McKeon's premises, where I worked, twice in the one week looking for me. The owner, McKeon, was not sympathetic to us and was friendly with the police, and he told me that they were coming for me. I was now like a lot of others - on the run. I had now to transfer my scene of operations and secured an old house which was not inhabited at Deerenkar - McDonnell. This house

belonged to the local schoolmaster. There we kept most of the arms the Battalion had dumped in a hay barn. We continued to make our bombs here and also concrete road mines. Charles M'Goohan, Michael Martin and the two O'Reilly's were with me there. These men, who were all on the run, subsequently joined the Flying Column.

The road mines were made of concrete, eighteen inches square, with a hollow cavity, twelve inches by six inches, to take explosive, fuse and detonator. We went back occasionally to McKeon's premises and collected bolts and nuts there as we required them. When the explosive was filled in, the open end of the cavity was rammed with dry, hard clay. We made about twelve or fourteen road mines and they were distributed throughout the Brigade area.

I did quite an amount of repair work while in this place, on shotguns and small arms of all types. Revolvers were always giving trouble with broken hammer springs. While training with the revolver (Webley), men would engage in a lot of trigger snapping and, even when not in training, they had the same habit, which had a detrimental effect on the springs and they usually snapped. One day while dismantling an old muzzle loader gun, I discovered that the spring from this was ideal for replacing the small spring of the revolver. I was still at a loss for a substitute for the large spring, and again I was lucky. I found that the spring from an ordinary window sash fastener filled the bill admirably.

I was engaged on this type of work nearly whole-time until the Truce. I joined the Column several times, however, to assist them in ambushes that were planned, including Edentenny, Ballinamore and Fenagh. We never

had any luck in these attempts, as the enemy never turned up, and after waiting in position for hours and hours we had to withdraw, without any result. At Edentenny we tried to lure them out, by firing on the barracks at Ballinamore in the hope that the garrison there would call for assistance and use Verey lights, but they refused to be drawn and did not use any Verey lights.

There were nine service rifles in the Battalion area altogether. About five or so were got at the burning of a military lorry at Drumreilly. This lorry had broken down on Saturday night, or early Sunday morning, and, with its occupants, was stranded on the road. The Drumreilly Volunteers mixed with the people coming from Mass and surprised the soldiers, disarming them without a fight. Two further rifles were received from the Roscommon area, being brought to us by Tommy Gilroy of Carrick-on-Shannon. When Seán Connolly came to the area, he brought with him another couple of rifles. All these rifles went to the Flying Column when it was started, and the Battalions were left without any really effective armament.

In April, 1921, a Black and Tan was shot dead near the railway station in Ballinamore. This man was in the habit of going alone to the station to meet a girl, who was a Protestant, and so was easily got. I was with eight or nine members of the Edentenny Company, guarding the southern end of the town. We heard the shots from the railway station, but none of the garrison made any attempt to come out of barracks or to send up distress signals. It was hoped that, on hearing the shooting at the station which they must have heard, they would come out of the barracks and that we could have a crack at them as they emerged. But it was no good; they did not move or send up any

distress signals. Strange also was the fact that they did not carry out any reprisals for this shooting.

During the raid for arms in 1919, four of our men went to the house of a Protestant, named Johnston, of Ardurn. Johnston told them he had not the gun in the house but, if they called back in an hour's time, he would have it for them. They took his word for it and, coming back to the house after an hour had elapsed, they found four R.I.C. men, who were concealed in an outhouse, awaiting them. Our men were taken prisoners and brought to the barracks in Ballinamore. Fortunately, they had no arms on them when arrested. They were kept in the barracks for twenty-four hours, and the police then brought them to the railway station with the intention of taking them to Sligo jail. The driver of the train - John Gaffney - refused to move the train out of the station while the police and prisoners were on it. The police were obliged to take their prisoners back to the barracks. We had blocked all the roads out of Ballinamore the previous night, to prevent them moving them by road, as we had heard they were going to do so. As a result of this road blocking, the police tried to move them by rail and this resulted in Gaffney refused to drive it. Gaffney was arrested by the police soon afterwards. On the day following the incident at the railway station, the R.I.C. cleared the blocks from the roads and then moved their prisoners to Sligo jail. The prisoners were interned until after the Treaty was signed.

In October, 1919, a celebration of some kind was being held in Ballinamore. I can't remember what the celebration was for, but it was something political, and a

procession was held through the town. Usually at this time when such things took place, the R.I.C. remained indoors in their barracks. For some time previous to this, we had been considering burning the Masonic Hall, and we decided to do it on the night of the celebration when the police, we believed, would all be confined to barracks. While the procession was on, we got tins of petrol and broke into the Masonic Hall and gave it a liberal sprinkling. Hugh Turbid, a coach builder, used a heavy sledge hammer to smash in the door and gain entrance to the place. It was completely burned out. Frank Sweeney, Hugh Turbid, Mick Sweeney, J.J. O'Reilly, Captain of Aughnasheelin Company, John Dolan, Bernard Sweeney and I carried out the burning operation. Nearly all the Ballinamore Company were on duty, keeping watch and guarding the approaches to the place to prevent us being surprised.

Around February, 1920, a raid for the mails was made on the train at Dromod. The train was held up there and the mails removed from the van. We also held up the train from Dublin to Ballinamore at Lauderdale station and took the mails for Ballinamore. The British did not provide escorts for the mails at this time. When censored, the mails were returned - usually the following day. The R.I.C. at this time were still sending their reports by post and, in addition, an occasional raid on the mails helped to prevent persons evilly disposed towards the I.R.A. from using this channel to give information.

When the Tans arrived, they were supposed to be coming out to burn the hall at Aughnasheelin as they had

done in other places. Half of our Battalion was mobilised nightly to protect the hall, armed mostly with shotguns. This was a great strain on the men. The Tans did not turn up. At this time, there was a man, named Michael McPartland, engaged as a sorter and postman in the Post Office. He was friendly to us and used to pick out any letters he was suspicious of and pass them on to us. He picked out a letter to the Sergeant in charge of the barracks, warning him that there were at least three hundred Volunteers guarding the Hall each night. We re-sealed this letter and let it go through. After that, we had only nine men on guard at the hall each night. This went on for about two months, but the Tans never came and the matter died out by then. About three ^{MONTHS} ~~nights~~ before the Truce, the Tans came that way and threw some kind of a bomb into the hall. This only blew the plaster off the walls and the ridge tiles off the roof. I was watching the Tans from a hill close by at the time and saw the flash of the bomb.

In March, 1920, a man named McCabe from the Aughnawillian Company, who was not a Volunteer, was going to join the R.I.C. The local Volunteers tried to get him not to do so. At first, they pleaded with him and then threatened him, but all to no use - he still persisted in his intention. They then got a man from Ballinamore Company, who would be unknown to McCabe, to come out and interview him. This man was armed with a shotgun. McCabe still refused to be put off his intention, and the man from Ballinamore fired at McCabe's legs, severely wounding him. One leg was amputated in hospital. He lived, however, and got an award of three thousand, three hundred pounds from the British Government.

In April, 1920, during a raid for arms on Richard Taylor's house at North Kiltubrid, Taylor fired a shot at the Volunteers and they fired back at him with revolvers which a few of them were carrying. Thereupon Taylor surrendered the gun and ammunition which he had. No further action was taken against Taylor.

In August, 1920, a somewhat similar affair at the residence of John Richardson, another Protestant, living at Tully, occurred. When Captain Martin and a number of Volunteers approached the house, they were fired on by Richardson. The fire was returned by the Volunteers and, after a considerable amount of firing on both sides, Richardson surrendered and handed over a gun and a revolver, with some ammunition for each weapon. The Volunteers were armed with shotguns and a couple of old revolvers. Captain Martin and Volunteer Joseph Quinn received slight wounds during the engagement. No further action was taken against Richardson.

In September, 1920, the Crimlin Company decided to stage an ambush at Camagh near Swanlinbar. About eight Volunteers, under the command of Lieutenant McTigue, took up a position covering the road. All were armed with shotguns. When a patrol of R.I.C. came in sight, the Volunteers opened fire on them while they were still out of effective range for shotguns. The police dismounted from their cycles and, taking cover, fired a few shots in return. They then grabbed their cycles and made off in the direction from which they came. There were no casualties on either side.

During April, 1921, the Tans, in one of their many incursions into the countryside, arrested a boy named

James Shanley, who was a member of the I.R.A., and brought him to Aughnasheelin Hall which they had blown up. En route, Shanley received several beatings from the Tans. He jumped off the lorry and escaped. They fired on him and he received a bullet in the thumb. He made good his escape, however.

In the Crimlin Company area, a raid for arms was made on the house of James McLoughlin who had a gun and a revolver and some ammunition. He at first refused to hand over the weapons but, after some parleying, he agreed to do so. I can't recollect if any firing took place - I don't think so.

We came into the town of Ballinamore on several occasions to try and ambush a patrol, but luck was always with the enemy then as no patrols came out on the nights we were there. However, in April, 1921, Captain Martin, Bernard McGowan, Joe Sweeney, John Thomas Rourke, Thomas Prior and Michael Moran and I and some others repeated this operation. We were armed with four rifles; the remainder having shotguns and a few had revolvers. We came into the town from the north side and took up a position behind an embankment and a wall, where the Picture House now is. We were only a few minutes waiting when a patrol of Auxiliary police came from the direction of the police barracks. We opened fire on them at about forty yards range. The patrol turned and fled towards the police barracks. We afterwards learned that one of Auxies died from wounds a short while afterwards, in the barracks. One of the Auxiliary police, on seeing his wounded comrade, went mad, so to speak, with rage and endeavoured to get out of barracks to have revenge. In being restrained by his comrades, a scuffle took place

and a revolver went off, severely wounding him. He was taken to hospital and I can't say whether he lived or died. So our bag was one dead and one wounded. We had no casualties. Again, the enemy, to our surprise, carried out no reprisal for this attack.

In April of that year the Aughnawillian Company held up the train at Garadice station and took the mails from it. I don't know the details or what information was got from this raid; but it was confirmed, that a man named Harrison, who had been under suspicion for a long time, was an enemy agent or spy. Harrison was taken out one night and shot. He was a Protestant. This operation was carried out entirely by members of the Aughnawillian Company.

In addition to the bombs and mines, which we made, we also filled a large amount of shotgun cartridges with slugs, after having first removed the ordinary shot from them. We made our own slugs or buckshot from scrap lead which we melted down and ran through a mould.

I have no idea of how the Intelligence Service worked in the Battalion as I never had anything to do with it.

When the Truce came, which naturally we were all glad of; we set about putting our armourer's shop on a sound basis. We installed a lathe and purchased

several tools, and we would have been in a much better position to produce material and do repairs if the fighting had been resumed.

SIGNED: Hugh Brady
(Hugh Brady)

DATE: 4-10-55
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