

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1482

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1482.

Witness

Bernard McGinley,
Creeslough,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Vice O/C, 3rd Battalion, No. I Donegal Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Creeslough Company, 3rd Battalion,
Donegal I Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File NoS.2791...

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,482

STATEMENT BY BERNARD MCGINLEY,
Creeslough, Co. Donegal.

I was born in Creeslough, County Donegal, in 1894, where I received my early education and lived all my life.

In 1917 I was asked by James McNulty to join the Irish Volunteer organisation. McNulty had been in America prior to this time and was associated with an Irish national movement there and I understand he was asked to return to Ireland and organise units of the Irish Volunteers and also to get Sinn Féin Clubs going in the area.

After my conversation with McNulty, and having discussed the matter with some of my pals, a number of us decided to join the Irish Volunteers. I also became a member of the local Sinn Féin Club. Although I was aware of the existence of the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) organisation, I was not asked to join and consequently never became a member.

At this period and up to 1919 the Volunteers were organised on a Company or Parish basis. In 1918 I was appointed Lieutenant in the Creeslough Company.

Just about this time we were ordered to prepare for a General Election. The Sinn Féin organisation had selected Mr. Joseph Sweeney from Burtonport as their candidate for West Donegal. Although still a very young man, I don't think he was 21 years of age, Joseph Sweeney, who had been attending school in Dublin for some years before, had joined the Irish Volunteers there and fought in the G.P.O. during the Rebellion in Easter Week 1916. After the surrender he was interned in Frongoch for some time. As a result he was very well known and

held in high esteem by all the Volunteers and Sinn Féin organisations throughout the constituency.

At the same time we realised that it would be a very hard and close contest and would require all our energy and enthusiasm to ensure the election of Mr. Sweeney. We had as our opponents, the Unionist Party, strong supporters of the British Government and very bitterly opposed to our policy. We were also opposed by the A.O.H. (Ancient Order of Hibernians) or Nationalist Party, as they were sometimes termed. This party was quite as bitter against us as the Unionist Party and resented our entry into the political field. During the course of some election meetings, addressed by speakers on behalf of Sinn Féin, it was found necessary to mobilise a strong force of Volunteers to deal with attempted interference by supporters of the A.O.H. Party. All this kept us very busy until the election was over but we had the satisfaction of securing the election of our candidate, who was returned with a substantial majority.

Early in 1919 we received an order to carry out a raid for arms throughout the area. During the course of this raid, our Company Captain, James McNulty, was fired on and wounded at the home of Andrew Wilkinson, J.P. (Justice of the Peace). Wilkinson refused to admit the Volunteers or hand over his arms. He then fired from upstairs with a .32 revolver wounding McNulty. The doctor ordered his immediate removal to a Dublin hospital to have the bullet extracted. We got in touch with Joseph Sweeney who came along next day and arranged for his removal to the Dublin hospital. James McCaffrey accompanied McNulty to Dublin and got him safely to the Mater Hospital where he was operated upon and detained for a long period.

On the night after James McNulty was wounded, a party of Volunteers from Gweedore arrived at Creeslough railway station in a commandeered motor car. The intention was to take off the mail bags and, having censored them, to return the normal mail for delivery. I contacted the Gweedore men at Creeslough Station where we found a party of R.I.C. on duty, presumably for the purpose of protecting the mails at the station. We found it necessary to board the train and force the driver, at revolver point, to drive on past Falcarragh and Dunfanaghy road stations, where R.I.C. patrols were also posted, continue on to a quiet part of the line where we removed the mails and censored them. The ordinary mails were then taken back to the station by horse and car. William McGinley accompanied me on this expedition, at the end of which we found ourselves over twenty miles from home. After a long delay we succeeded in commandeering two bicycles and made our way back, returning the bicycles at a later date.

In the summer of 1919 the Volunteers were organised into Battalions and Brigades. Our area around Creeslough was re-organised and the 3rd Battalion No. 1. Brigade was formed. James McCaffrey from Massinass was appointed Battalion O/C. I was appointed Vice O/C., Patrick McGinley Adjutant and Charles McGinley Quartermaster. In 1921 James McCaffrey was arrested and I was appointed Battalion O/C, which appointment I held until the cessation of hostilities.

In 1919, I think, around Easter, we got instructions from the Brigade O/C, Joseph Sweeney, to burn the unoccupied R.I.C. Barracks at Creeslough, Glen and Kilmacrennan. I took part in these operations and we had no difficulty in carrying out the order.

In the year 1919 we were engaged in Local Government elections. Sinn Féin candidates were nominated for all the vacancies. At that time impersonation at elections was the order of the day. Get your candidate elected was all that counted. I worked outside the polling booth at Creeslough on the day of the Local Government Elections. The poll clerk inside was our Battalion O/C, James McCaffrey. We were depending on him to get all the votes possible registered in favour of our candidates. After some hours McCaffrey told me that the Presiding Officer was a very shrewd and conscientious man and that it would be necessary to get some intoxicating drink for him to make him relax so as we could do some impersonating. I procured some whiskey and stout but the Presiding Officer refused to partake of any. Finally a note was carried out to me by Miss McGinley, a sister of the Battalion Quartermaster. The note was written on an empty cigarette package and was : "Get Poteen". On receipt of the message I got my bicycle and cycled to a place called Termon, a district that was noted for poteen making. I cycled a distance of over fourteen miles and got a bottle of poteen. This we persuaded the Presiding Officer to sample. After a few glasses he had no further interest in the register and we voted and registered all the votes left in favour of our candidates.

Around Easter 1921, my Battalion O/C. sent for me and informed me that he had got information that a train carrying armed British forces was due to pass through Creeslough, in a short time, on its way to Derry to where the troops were returning after a big 'round up' in the Dungloe district.. After a hurried consultation we decided that we had no time to remove a rail on the line and the only hope to block the train was to put boulders of rock on the line. We got a few Volunteers together and proceeded to a part of the railway line where there was a sharp bend. We had just succeeded in rolling a few

large boulders on the line and getting clear from view when the train came along. It crashed into the obstruction and the engine and two carriages were turned over on their side; the line was completely blocked but so far as I am aware, none of the troops was injured. We had no time to collect firearms before we proceeded to block the line and we had no option but to clear out as quickly as possible. In any case, our armament at the time and through the whole period of hostilities against the British, was very limited. We had four service rifles and two revolvers. We had also a few shotguns which were collected from private owners in the district.

The British troops remained on the scene all the night until sometime next day. In the meantime they terrorised the inhabitants by making arrests and firing shots indiscriminately.

In March 1921, I got instructions to proceed to Falcarragh where an attack on the R.I.C. Barrack there was arranged. I left Creeslough on Saturday night at about 8 p.m. with some other Volunteers from Creeslough. We walked across the mountain, a distance of at least fifteen miles. On arrival at the rendezvous, near Falcarragh, we reported to Joseph Sweeney, who assigned us the task of guarding a road on the outskirts of the village. Our task was to prevent British reinforcements from entering the village while the attack was in progress. After some hours in the position we were instructed to get back to our base. It appears that the explosives used and on which reliance was placed to blow a breach in the barrack wall did not work according to plan and consequently the attack had to be abandoned. The fortifications were sufficiently good to resist an attack by rifle fire. Footsore, hungry, weary and disappointed we wended our way across the mountain to Creeslough and bed.

During the period of hostilities we endeavoured to enforce a strict boycott on the R.I.C. Traders were notified not to supply them with foodstuffs. We found it very hard to enforce this order and even the traders who, in many cases, were willing to comply with the order, found it difficult to carry it out. On one occasion it was found necessary to warn a man, who was supplying turf to the R.I.C., to discontinue the practice. He still refused to obey. We then proceeded to take out his cart on the roadside and sawed the shafts from it. The R.I.C., acting on information received, raided some of our homes looking for a saw, so as to obtain evidence. They were just wasting time, as the saw used was a new one. I had stolen it from a shop in the locality, cleaned it up and returned it without anyone being wiser.

Sometime later we found it necessary to burn a lorry the property of a merchant in Dunfanaghy. Our information was, that this lorry was being used to deliver goods to the R.I.C. It was also alleged that it was being used for the conveyance of mail for the R.I.C. It was necessary to provide an armed covering party while this operation was in progress as the R.I.C. were in occupation of the barracks in Dunfanaghy.

In May, 1921, I decided to carry out a sniping attack on Carrigart R.I.C. Barracks. This was by way of being a nuisance attack as we had no hope of capturing the barracks which, like all such places, was strongly fortified, but we hoped to draw off a strong party of British forces which, at this period, were concentrating on West Donegal in an intensive comb out against the Volunteers located in that area. The R.I.C. returned the fire

and sent up verey lights. Shortly after daylight reinforcements arrived from Dumfanaghy. By that time we had withdrawn across the mountains. The attack, such as it was, had the desired effect of a withdrawal of British troops from Dungloe and Burtonport and so eased the situation for our comrades who were badly hemmed in in that area.

The above narrative is an account of my experience from the time I became associated with the National Movement until the Truce on the 11th July, 1921. As I pointed out at some part of my story, we were badly hampered in this area by lack of arms and ammunition. I am not offering that as an excuse for lack of greater activity but just stating the circumstances that pertained.

Signed: Bernard Mc Givley

Date: 17th August 1956

Witness: James Conway

