

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. **W.S. 1483**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 1483.**

Witness

Charles McGinley,
Creeslough,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Quartermaster, 3rd Battalion, No. I Brigade
West Donegal.

Subject.

Activities, Creeslough Company, 3rd Battalion,
No. I Brigade, West Donegal, Irish Volunteers,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S.2792.**

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY CHARLES MCGINLEY,

Creeslough, Co. Donegal.

I was born in Creeslough, County Donegal, in 1894, and received my early education in the National School there.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in 1917, at the request of James McNulty, a native of the parish, who had been in America prior to this period and, I was informed, sent home to organise Companies of the Irish Volunteers in the area. McNulty also organised Sinn Féin clubs throughout the district. In addition to joining the Irish Volunteer organisation I also became a member of the local Sinn Féin Club. In this capacity I was more actively engaged than in the Irish Volunteers where the only activity at that time was weekly training parades.

The first active work I participated in on behalf of Sinn Féin was to assist in the erection of a platform for the speakers on behalf of their candidate in the West Donegal constituency. Mr. De Valera was a speaker on this platform. At this time it was not possible to secure a lorry to use the body as a platform and the great difficulty was to get a supply of timber for the purpose. We finally succeeded in getting our requirements from a Mr. Wilkinson, a Justice of the Peace at that time. The same man fired on and wounded at a later period James McNulty our Company Captain, to which incident I will refer later on in this record.

The coming General Election in 1918 was responsible for great activity in this area, both in the Volunteer and Sinn Féin organisations. The Sinn Féin organisation, having nominated Joseph Sweeney (later Major General) as their candidate, made it important for us to ensure his election in the West Donegal constituency. Mr. Sweeney was a

very popular young man and had proven himself a soldier and patriot by his participation in the Rebellion in Dublin in Easter Week 1916, where he fought in the G.P.O. and was afterwards interned in Frongoch prison for his activities.

This was a hard and bitter contest. We were opposed by two parties, firstly the Unionist Party and secondly the Hibernian or Nationalist Party who were as bitterly opposed to Sinn Féin as the Unionist Party. We were kept busy canvassing and making arrangements for the staffing and protection of polling booths. It was also found necessary to provide strong protecting parties of Volunteers at election meetings sponsored by Sinn Féin in view of the very hostile attitude adopted by the opposition parties, especially the Hibernian Party. Eventually everything came to a satisfactory conclusion. Mr. Joe Sweeney was elected with a majority of about 3,000 votes.

After the election, Volunteer activity was confined to routine training. Parades were held on one or two nights per week and usually on a Sunday afternoon. Up to this time we were organised on a Company basis. In 1919 a Battalion was organised in this area. This was known as the 3rd Battalion and was comprised of the following Companies: A. Creeslough, B. Carrigart, C. Glen, D. Kilmacrennan, E. Loughkeel, F. Dunfanaghy. I was appointed Quartermaster of the Battalion. Battalion funds which were small at all times were made up from two main sources, i.e. a levy of 1d. per week on each Volunteer and a levy on traders in the area, the latter being difficult to collect where not given voluntarily. Our armament at this period was practically non-existent.

A raid for arms was carried out all over the area and in most cases they were handed over to us without any undue trouble. In one

particular case, to which I have referred earlier in this statement, when the party of Volunteers called at the home of a Mr. Wilkinson, a loyal supporter of the British Government and a Justice of the Peace, they were refused admission and Wilkinson opened fire on them with a revolver, wounding James McNulty, then Company Captain of Creeslough Company. McNulty was seriously wounded and was taken to Carrigart and examined by the doctor there who told us that he was unable to do anything for him and advised his removal to a Dublin hospital to have the bullet extracted. Our Battalion O/C, James McCaffrey, then got in touch with Joe Sweeney who was then our Brigade O/C. He came down immediately and made arrangements to have McNulty conveyed to the Mater Hospital, Dublin, accompanied by James McCaffrey. McNulty was operated on and detained for a considerable time but finally recovered from the effects of the wound.

Around Easter 1919, our Battalion O/C received instructions from Joe Sweeney to destroy the evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Creeslough, Glen and Kilmacrennan. We subsequently destroyed the three buildings by fire on Easter Saturday night and early Sunday morning 1919. A number of R.I.C. barracks all over the country were burned on that night.

Sometime in 1919 an order was issued to boycott the R.I.C. and instructions were issued to all traders in the Battalion area to refuse to supply goods to the R.I.C. The instruction was well adhered to by some traders but in at least two cases we were compelled to take drastic action to enforce the order. In one case, where a man was supplying turf and refused to discontinue the practice after caution, we cut the shafts from his cart and left him without transport. In another case we burned a lorry the property of a trader in Dunfanaghy who, although having been warned, continued to use the lorry for the conveyance of goods to the R.I.C. It was also reported that the

mail was also conveyed to the R.I.C. in this lorry. As we occasionally raided the mails for the purpose of censoring the police correspondence, this method of conveyance would completely upset our plans.

In 1919 we were again busily employed on Election work, this time, Local Government elections. It was considered that it was very important to have as many Sinn Fein representatives as possible elected on the Local Government Board. Again we were very successful in securing the election of our nominees.

In August 1920 I was one of a party of Volunteers from the Battalion who went on protection duty to Falcarragh for the purpose of removing wireless telegraphy equipment from the Post Office there. As there was a fairly strong R.I.C. garrison in the village it was deemed necessary to surround the barracks so as to prevent the R.I.C. from coming out or interfering with the men engaged in dismantling the equipment. We took up positions along the wall which surrounded the barracks. It was not the intention at any time to attack it. After about two hours we got an order to return to an assembly point outside the village. On our arrival there we were informed that the operation at the Post Office was complete and we could return to our homes. The Brigade O/C, Joe Sweeney, was in charge of this operation.

Early in 1921 my Battalion O/C. called a hurried conference. He informed us that he had just received information that a train load of British troops was due to pass through Creeslough, on the way to Derry, in a very short time. The troops had been operating around Dungloe and Burtonport for some days previous. They were employed in an intensive search of the area for our "Flying Column" operating there.. According to our information we had very little time to spare if we were to attempt any attack on the train. We hurriedly decided that the only thing possible was to block the line in the

hope of derailing the train. We had no time to collect the few rifles in the Battalion, which at times amounted to four. So collecting a few Volunteers that were at hand we made for a spot on the railway line where there was a sharp curve. Arriving at this point, we had only time to roll a few large boulders on to the track and take cover when the train came along. It crashed into the block. The engine and two carriages were turned over on their side and there was a scene of general confusion for a long time. Had we time to gather up a few rifles beforehand we could have inflicted some casualties. As we were, we considered it advisable to get far away from the scene in the shortest possible time.

The British troops remained around the scene of the crash all the night, firing volleys at intervals. They next invaded the village of Creeslough where they terrorised the inhabitants and arrested some men. None of our men was arrested as they had cleared out to the hills in the meantime. As far as I could learn, there were no casualties resulting from the crash.

Around the end of March, 1921, my Battalion O/C informed me that he had received instructions from the Brigade O/C to pick some men from the Battalion and report to him at a place near Falcarragh on a given date: I think it was on the 20th March. He also informed me that the mobilisation was in connection with an attempt to attack and capture the R.I.C. Barracks there. I was one of the party selected and we set out for Falcarragh, armed with rifles, at around 8 p.m. on one Saturday night. We crossed the mountains on foot and reported at the appointed place in time, having covered a distance of at least fifteen miles. We then received instructions from the Brigade O/C to take up a position on a road on the outskirts of the town. Our orders were to hold that position in the event of enemy

forces endeavouring to enter the town from our direction.

We got into position and it was a long and anxious wait there. Eventually we could hear the sound of rifle fire coming from the direction of the barracks. After what seemed to me to be several hours, during which time we were alert but inactive, we were informed from Brigade Headquarters that the attack was unsuccessful as the mine that was expected to breach the gable end of the barracks had failed to do so and any other method of attack was unsuccessful. We were instructed to disperse. We returned across the mountain hungry, thirsty, tired and above all bitterly disappointed. We got back home about 8 a.m. on Sunday morning.

Towards the end of May 1921, the Battalion O/C called his staff into conference. There we discussed the possibilities of an attack on British forces in some part of the Battalion area. We considered that an attack, no matter how small or unsuccessful, would relieve the pressure on our comrades further west in the Dungloe, Glenties and Burtonport areas where a large force of British troops was concentrated in an effort to capture our men there.

We, therefore, decided to carry out a sniping attack on Carrigart R.I.C. Barracks. This barracks was fortified in the usual manner of that period, barbed wire entanglements, sand bags, and we knew that rifle fire would have little or no effect. However, it was the only thing we could do. Accordingly, we proceeded to Carrigart and proceeded to fire intermittently at the barracks from selected positions for a period of one and a half to two hours. The R.I.C. returned the fire and sent up very lights. Shortly after daylight, reinforcements arrived from Dunfanaghy. By that time we had withdrawn

across the mountain in the direction of Creeslough.

No further incident worth recording occurred in the Battalion area. The attack described above was responsible for the withdrawal of some troops from the areas further west and a fairly extensive round-up of our own area ensued. However, we managed to evade arrest until the Truce on the 11th July, 1921, when we could relax.

Signed :

Charles McQuinley

Date :

18th August 1956

Witness:

James Bonney

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