

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,599

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1599

Witness

Commdt. Joseph Connolly,
The Leap, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary

Identity.

O/C. A.S.U., No. 2 Offaly Bde. Feb. '21-Truce.
Vice O/C. 3rd Battn. No. 2 Offaly Bde. March '22-
Truce.

Subject.

Activities of Kinnitty Company,
3rd Battalion, Offaly No. 2 Bde.
I.R.A. and A.S.U. 1918-Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2927

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COMMANDANT JOSEPH CONNOLLY,

The Leap, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.

I joined the Clara Company of the Irish Volunteers early in 1918. Thomas Fleming was Company Captain. Willie Duignan and Paddy Morrissey were also officers. There were about thirty men in the company. The training consisted of foot drill, arms drill and field exercises.

At the conscription period, a large number joined the company, but when the danger had passed about half of them dropped out. The Volunteers played a major part in support of the Sinn Féin candidate in the 1918 general election. The Volunteers organised public meetings, canvassed the electors and distributed literature. On polling day they acted as personation agents in the polling booths and organised transport to bring the voters to the poll. During the campaign, I accompanied the Sinn Féin candidate, Mr. Larry Ginnell, to public meetings at Moate and Kilbeggan.

During 1918, Ernie O'Malley visited the brigade area and assisted at the training and reorganising of the area. At this time, the County of Offaly, a small portion of Westmeath and part of North Tipperary formed the area covered by the Offaly Brigade. Peadar Bracken, Tullamore, was Brigade O/C, and Ned Brennan, also of Tullamore, was Vice O/C. Eamon Morkan, later Colonel, who was a bank official in Birr, was the first O/C of the Birr Battalion and held this appointment until he was arrested.

In 1919, the brigade was divided and two separate brigades were formed. They were known as No. 1 and No. 2 Offaly Brigades. The western portion of Offaly and a small

part of North Tipperary were included in the No. 2 Brigade area. The brigade covered the area Banagher, Cloghan, Shannonbridge, Ballycumber, Clara, Kinnitty, Clarsen, Coolderry and Rathcabban in Co. Tipperary. There were four battalions in the brigade. Clara Company was in the 1st Battalion.

I took part in raids for arms in Clara area, and early in 1920 I had to go 'on the run'. I went to Kinnitty and took charge of the Kinnitty Company. It was known as 'C' Company, 3rd Battalion, Offaly No. 2 Brigade. There were about 75 men in the company. Jim Coughlan, Annamore, Kinnitty, was 1st Lieutenant, and Michael Corrigan, Kinnitty, 2nd Lieutenant. The other companies in the 3rd Battalion were: 'A' Company, Killoughey; 'B' Company, Kilcormac; and 'D' Company, Drumcullen, with approximately 100 men in each company. The 3rd Battalion Staff was:

Michael Kelly	-	O/C
Laur. Langton	-	Vice O/C
Jack Kelly	-	Adjutant
Michael Cordill	-	Quartermaster.
Joe Mahon	-	I/O.

The Brigade Staff was:

John Mahon	-	O/C
William White	-	Vice O/C
Joe Reddin	-	Adjutant
Seán Robbins	-	Quartermaster
Paddy Boland	-	Police Officer.

The only arms in the battalion were five service rifles and 200 shotguns, which were collected from those who were friendly to the organisation and commandeered from the hostile element. The only activities in this battalion up to 1920 were organisation, drilling and the collection of arms in each company area.

Operations started in June, 1920, with the blockading of roads for attacks on Clara R.I.C. barrack and Borrisokane R.I.C. barrack. The continuous blockading of roads prevented mobile movements of the enemy in the area and caused them much alarm. Consequently, the first major success was the evacuation of all R.I.C. barracks in the battalion area, which included Kinnitty, Rath, Kilcormac and Mountbolus. Thus, these areas within our battalion were free of all enemy movements. To prevent their re-occupation, all the barracks were burned down a few days after being evacuated.

In September, 1920, we took over civil control of the area, under the supervision of Patrick Boland, Brigade Police Officer, who was later T.D. for Laois-Offaly. Law and order were established within the area following the establishment of Sinn Féin courts and the formation of a police force from selected Volunteers. In March, 1921, we collected the monies for dog licences.

In February, 1921, two active service units were formed in the brigade, one in Clara under the command of Thomas Fleming, and the other in Kinnitty, ^{of} which I was appointed to take command. There were ten permanent men in my active service unit. This number was augmented as required from the local companies in whose area we were operating. Each of the ten permanent men was armed with a service rifle and revolver.

We dismantled a number of motor vehicles and seized a large number of magnetos which we required for exploding road mines. This caused much concern to the enemy, and they carried out raids over a large area. They made some arrests, but they were not successful, as all our key-men

had been warned not to sleep at home. In most cases the raids proved futile.

In March, 1921, Lar. Langton, Vice O/C of the battalion, was wounded and captured by the enemy. I was appointed in his place, as well as retaining command of the A.S.U. Jim Coughlan replaced me as O/C of "C" Company, and Mick Corrigan was promoted 1st Lieutenant.

Having organised the A.S.U., we spent some time doing special training, as well as arranging for billets in different parts of the area. We lay in ambush at different places, but the enemy did not come.

The second major success in the area was the ambushing of a composite patrol of nine R.I.C. men and Black and Tans at Kinnitty on 17th May, 1921. That morning I was lying in ambush with the A.S.U. in the Mountbolus area waiting for an enemy patrol which we expected to pass that way from Tullamore to Kilcormac. In fact, we had been in the position for two days. I got a dispatch at 10 a.m. on 17th May, 1921, informing me the approximate time that an enemy cycle patrol would leave their headquarters in Birr and proceed via Kinnitty to Cadamstown, a village about four miles further on, for the purpose of serving summonses on men to serve as jurymen. This information was obtained by Mary Coughlan from a Black and Tan named Fleming. She was employed by Messrs. D.E. Williams, Birr. She sent the information to Paddy Delahunt, O/C 4th Battalion, and he sent it by Mick Bergin, Clareen, to me.

I decided to go to the Kinnitty area with four men of the A.S.U. and attack the patrol, although we were ten miles distant from Kinnitty at the time and, according to the information I had received, we had only two hours to

travel that distance and find a good strategic position for the ambush.

I sent one of the men to Mr. Jack Keating of Kilcormac to ask him to get a motor car to drive me and four members of the A.S.U. to Kinnitty area. Jack Keating, on receipt of the message, made no delay, and when he arrived with the car, Michael Cordial, Joe Scully, Michael Carroll, Jim Gleeson and myself, with Keating at the wheel, drove at full speed to Kinnitty.

On arrival at the outskirts of Kinnitty, I was informed that a large party of R.I.C. and Black and Tans on bicycles had gone on to Cadamstown and were expected to return immediately. Fearing that I would not have time to select a suitable ambush position, I decided to have a crack at them in the village. I decided that Michael Carroll and I would occupy the old burned down R.I.C. barracks. I instructed Michael Cordial to take Joe Scully and Jim Gleeson to the chapel yard and take up positions there, and to attack the rear of the patrol. I gave definite instructions to the party that each man was to pick off his man according to the position he occupied, i.e. the right-hand man of the attacking party was to fire on the man on the right side of the patrol, the centre man of the attacking party to fire on the centre man of the patrol, and the man on the left to pick off the man on the left side of the patrol, so that with our first volley we would kill or wound five of the enemy.

The decision as to whether and when fire was to be opened rested with me. I gave Michael Cordial instructions that his party was not to fire until my comrade and I opened fire on the head of the patrol, and that would be the signal for them to come into action

and fire on the rear of the patrol.

We had just got into our positions when the patrol arrived. We let it come right into the ambush position and then Michael Carroll and I opened fire. Immediately, Cordial and his men came into action. The first volley fired was very successful - two of the enemy were shot dead and three heavily wounded. The four other members of the patrol dismounted and in a flash took up positions in a stream that runs through the village. Spasmodic firing continued for an hour or more, when word was received that a lorry load of military had cleared the Birr-Kinnitty road and was proceeding into the village. We had no alternative but to withdraw. There was no hope of capturing the arms of the dead and wounded. However, we were well pleased with the success of our attack on the first enemy patrol to come into our area.

Spies were sent into the area to obtain information concerning the movements and whereabouts of the column. The enemy was aware that we were operating in the Kilcormac-Kinnitty area, but they could not establish the exact location. They dropped a spy in Mountbolus. John Finn, the Company I/O, saw him being dropped by a party of R.I.C. Finn kept the spy under observation and sent word to me. The spy was arrested, tried by courtmartial and sentenced to death. The sentence was duly carried out.

Shortly before the Truce, I was Acting O/C of the battalion, and immediately after the Truce I was appointed O/C Battalion.

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Signed: Jackie Connolly

Date: 26/2/57

Witness: Dean Brennan Lieut. Col.
(Investigator).