

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1726

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,726.

Witness

Cornelius Cronin,
Gougane Barra Hotel,
Ballingeary,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Section Leader, Ballingeary Coy., Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork;
Member of Brigade Flying Column, Cork No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Ballingeary Company, 8th Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade,
I. R. A., 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S. 2924.

Form B.S.M. 2

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Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

STATEMENT BY

Cornelius Cronin,
.....

Address..... Gougane Barra Hotel,
.....

Ballingeary, Co. Cork.
.....

Date..... 15th January, 1958.

ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Volunteers

Irish Republican Army.

POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Section Leader.

Member of Brigade Flying Column.

PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

1913 - 1921.

COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

This witness is 54 years of age. He is the proprietor of the Gougane Barra Hotel. The Investigator, Mr. Daly, who took this statement, told me that Mr. Cronin appeared to have a very good memory and to have a vivid recollection of the events in his area. He, Mr. Daly, said that the witness was recommended to him by John Harrington, a battalion officer (who is now an invalid), as a man whose evidence as to events in the Ballingeary area should be on record. This statement was dictated to Mr. Daly at one interview.

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Signature of Investigating Officer.
(P. J. Brennan)

Date..... 16th January, 1958. Secretary, Bureau of Military History,
1913-1921.

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BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1726

STATEMENT OF CORNELIUS CRONIN,

Gugane Barra Hotel, Ballingeary, Co. Cork.

I was born in October, 1903, in Gugane Barra, Ballingeary, County Cork. I attended the local National School at Keimaneigh until I was about fifteen years of age after which I attended the Franciscan Monastery, Rochestown, for a short period.

A Company of the Irish National Volunteers was formed in Ballingeary about the latter end of 1913 or early in 1914. Following the split in the National Volunteers, sixteen members of this Company formed a section of the Irish Volunteers in the area. About the end of 1915, Company officers were elected. John Lynch became Captain; John Con. Cronin became 1st Lieutenant, and Jeremiah O'Sullivan became 2nd Lieutenant.

The sixteen Volunteers, on the instructions of Tomás McCurtain, were ordered to mobilise at Ballingeary on Easter Sunday morning, 1916, to participate in the Rebellion. When they had reached Kealkil, they were intercepted by a messenger from Headquarters in Cork, who informed them of Eoin McNeill's countermanding order, so they returned to Ballingeary.

After the Rebellion, Seán Hegarty, a Volunteer Officer of Cork City, due to his activities in the Volunteer Movement prior to the Rebellion, was ordered by the authorities to leave the city area. He came to live in Keimaneigh where he had to report to the local R.I.C. barracks once a week.

Following the reorganisation of the Volunteers in the City and County in September of 1917, after the general release of prisoners,

a parade of Volunteers was held in the town of Macroom on the anniversary of the deaths of the Manchester Martyrs in the month of November. As well as the local Company of Macroom, Companies were present from Ballyvourney, Kilnamartyra, Ballingeary and other areas. Mr. De Valera reviewed the Volunteers on the occasion. I joined the Ballingeary Company that day and was present at the review. John Lynch, our Company Captain, was in charge of the Company which numbered only seventeen men. By the end of the year our strength had increased to about twenty men.

We met and drilled once or twice a week and recruited several new members in the early months of 1918. At the peak of the Conscription scare our strength reached 130 men following which a few members dropped out, but with the influx of younger men from time to time we maintained a strength of about 125 men from then until the Truce. Other Companies had been reorganised or formed in surrounding areas by this time. They were Ballyvourney, Coolea, Kilnamartyra and Inchigeela. Several shotguns were collected during this period and pike-heads were made in the local forge in Ballingeary. The homes of the Loyalists in the area were raided by night and shotguns and a few revolvers seized.

In May, 1918, an order was received from G.H.Q., Dublin, for the Company to proceed to Silerdahan, Kilgarvin, across the County Cork border in County Kerry to raid a mansion, the property of a Mr. Lowe, which was known as 'Lowes Lodge'. It was unoccupied at the time except for a caretaker and his family. We had been informed before leaving that the Lodge was visited occasionally by a cycle patrol of military and that it was possible some military were on the premises. Our object was to seize twelve Snider rifles used by gamekeepers employed on the estate. Thirty members of the Company, some armed with shotguns, in

charge of Lieutenant John Con Cronin, took part. Having surrounded the house, Lieutenant Cronin sent three men to the main door to engage the caretaker in conversation on some local topic to ascertain if the military were present. When the three men discovered that the military were not there they returned and reported to Lieutenant Cronin. With two other Volunteers I was then sent to make a thorough search of the house. We found no arms of any kind.

In the month of July, five members of Ballingearry Company - John Con. Cronin, John Lynch, Jeremiah O'Shea, William and Timothy Twomey - with others held up two R.I.C. men at the Mouth of the Glen on their way from Inchigeela to Ballyvourney and disarmed them of two rifles and two revolvers. The side-car in which the R.I.C. were travelling was seized and thrown over a precipice.

Later this year, Tomás McCurtain, Patrick O'Higgins and Paddy Hyde, who were 'on the run', spent a considerable time in the area which meant a lot of dispatch work and guard duty for members of the Company. Routine drilling continued throughout the year.

In January of 1919, the Company was reorganised by Terence MacSwiney. Joe Lynch resigned and was replaced by John Con. Cronin as Captain. The 1st Lieutenant, Jeremiah O'Sullivan, had died and was replaced by Lieutenant James Cotter while Dan O'Leary became a 2nd Lieutenant.

I was appointed one of four Section Leaders. In about the month of February a British military post was established in Inchigeela and from then onwards Ballingearry was raided continuously. It was known to the military that Tomás McCurtain and other men 'on the run' were residing in the area. In one of those raids on the Gugane Barra Hotel, which was led by Sergeant Monsel, R.I.C., of

Inchigeela, and Sergeant Apoleby, R.I.C., of Ballingeary barracks, the search of the upper rooms was being carried out by Appleby and some of his men. When he entered one of the rooms he saw McCurtain, O'Higgins, Hyde and a Scottish Volunteer named Owen MacKinsey-Kennedy, seated within. He spoke for a few moments to McCurtain in Irish, then turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. He stood with his back to the door and directed the search from there, telling the military that he had already searched the room behind him.

Near the end of the year the Battalion was reorganised. Up to this time we were attached to the Macroom or 7th Battalion. A new Battalion known as the 8th Battalion was formed. Patrick O'Sullivan became Battalion O/C.; Paddy O'Sullivan, Vice O/C.; Cornelius Sheehan, Adjutant, and Daniel Harrington, Quartermaster. The Companies comprising the 8th Battalion were Kilnamartyr, Ballyvourney, Collea, Ballingeary and Inchigeela.

With John Con. Cronin (Captain), Lieutenant Dan O'Leary, William Twomey, Pat Murray, Jack Moynihan, Dan O'Sullivan, James Cotter (Lieutenant), John McSweeney and other members of Ballingeary Company, I participated in an attack on Inchigeela R.I.C. barracks in the month of January, 1920. About fifty men in charge of the Battalion O/C. took part in the actual attack. The arms the Ballingeary Company used in the attack consisted of one Lee Enfield rifle, one Carbine rifle, one Snider rifle, three revolvers and a number of shotguns. The barrack was surrounded and the garrison were called on to surrender. They refused, so the O/C. ordered "Open Fire". The attack lasted for about four hours without success. We withdrew at about 5 a.m. when all our ammunition was exhausted.

Some weeks later in the month of March, members of the Brigade Staff, with some of the City Volunteers, arrived in the area to carry out

a further attack on Inchigeela barracks. The attack was called off after an inspection of the building and its fortifications.

With other members of Ballingeary Company I attended the funeral parade in Cork of the murdered Lord Mayor - Tomás McCurtain - in March 1920.

Some short time later Ballingeary R.I.C. barracks was evacuated. On the instructions of the Battalion O/C., Patrick O'Sullivan, Captain Cronin in charge of the local Company, burned down the building in May, 1920. By July we were very short of ammunition and were lucky to receive from a local friend 100 shotgun cartridges. We raided Lowes Lodge once more and stripped a quantity of sheet lead off the roof and gutters. With this lead we made a quantity of buckshot which we used instead of the ordinary shot in the cartridges supplied by the friend.

In the month of July, Ballingeary Company, in charge of their Captain, John Con. Cronin, captured two military lorries carrying oil, paint and military equipment from Cork to Bantry. As the lorries proceeded through our area, the leading one ran into the grass margin on the side of the road. The second lorry proceeded for about a further mile where it also ran into the grass margin adjoining the road and bogged down. Two Volunteers living nearby informed the Captain who, in about an hour, had the entire Company mobilised. The arms for the attack consisted of fourteen shotguns, one Lee Enfield rifle, one Snider rifle, one Carbine and a few revolvers. By this time the military had placed a sentry on each lorry, while two soldiers, armed with rifles, patrolled the road behind each.

Having placed sentries at the Pass of Keimaneigh and the Ballingeary side of the second lorry, we approached the first lorry

at Keimaneigh to within a few yards, taking the sentry and other soldiers by surprise when we ordered "Hands Up!". They complied immediately. We then approached the two men on patrol and relieved them of their rifles. Stealing very quietly to the second lorry at Tooreedube, we again ordered "Hands Up!". They refused: we opened fire. They then surrendered: they were overawed at the number of Volunteers confronting them. We had now captured twelve men, nine Lee Enfield rifles, with 100 rounds of ammunition for each, as well as oils, paint, spirit lamps, trenching tools, carpenter's tools and various other items.

We marched our prisoners to a nearby outhouse where they were provided with a meal by members of the local Cumann na mBan. When the meal was over we marched them four miles to Ballingeary. From here they were ordered to proceed to Inchigeela military post. As a number of our men were returning from this operation they ran into two further lorry loads of military at Keimaneigh but managed to evade them.

Following the capture of the lorries, two of our men, Dan O'Sullivan of Keimaneigh, and Timothy O'Callaghan, as well as two students from the Irish College, Ballingeary - were arrested. O'Sullivan, O'Callaghan and one of the students spent a considerable time on hunger strike with the late Terence MacSwiney before it was called off by G.H.Q.

From the sale of the paints, oils and motor parts captured we realised a sum of £50 which was used in the purchase of arms through our Scottish friend Owen MacKinsey-Kennedy. The bodies of the lorries were burned.

On the evening of the 24th August, 1920, we received a dispatch from Brigade Headquarters, Cork, warning us of a large-scale round-up by the Military, R.I.C. and Black & Tans. A Company Council meeting was held immediately at which it was decided to mobilise the Company and collect all arms in the area. When mobilised the Company of about 100 men proceeded to the townland of Keimcoraboula, a mountain area. While having a meal that night in the local farmhouses, we received word that we were being surrounded. The round-up was in full swing but, knowing the locality, we managed to by-pass the enemy. From then we formed from the Company a Unit or Flying Column of twelve to fourteen men who were continuously armed and ready for any feasible action with the enemy. During this period several ambushes were planned but for one reason or another nothing came of them. An enemy convoy of seven or eight lorries, while passing through the area one day in November, shot dead Christy Lucey, a Cork City Volunteer who was 'on the run' and staying with friends at Tooreendube.

In January, 1921, a Brigade Flying Column was formed. It comprised about forty men from the 8th Battalion and about twenty men from Cork City Battalions; eleven of these men were from the Ballingeary Company, including the Captain, John Con. Cronin, Lieutenant James Cotter and myself. Captain Cronin subsequently became an officer in the Column under the command of Seán Hegarty, the Brigade O/C. With the other members of Ballingeary Company, I took part in all the activities of the Column including Coolnacarragh ambush and subsequent retreat and fight at Coolnacloha. I understand that a friend of mine, Daniel Harrington, of Coolavokig, Lissacresig, who was Battalion Quartermaster, has already furnished details of the activities of the Column, so I will confine my statement to the activities of Ballingeary Company.

Daniel T. O'Leary was appointed acting Company Captain in place of John Con. Cronin. From then to the Truce every member of the Company was, on the orders of the Brigade O/C., placed on active service with instructions to have all four roads leading into the area guarded day and night. The four roads were The Pass of Keimaneigh, Currahy on the road from Macroon to Ballingeary, Glen road, a back road leading from Ballyvourney to Ballingeary, and a mountain bye-road leading from the County Kerry.

After a period of ten to fourteen days training at Ullanes in in the Ballyvourney Company area, the Column arrived in the Ballingeary Company area via Reenaree. They billeted in the farmhouse of John Holland about a mile from the Gugane Barra Hotel, at a place named Coomroe, otherwise known as Vallydesmond - the source of the River Lee. Acting Captain Dan O'Leary and his Company now had a very busy time. Apart from guard duty, which was strictly enforced at the four points mentioned especially the guard at The Pass of Keimaneigh - which point had, on the instructions of the Brigade O/C., to be held at all costs - Captain O'Leary was responsible for the supply of blankets, mattresses and food which were collected from the local farmhouses and supplied in a most generous manner.

After a period of ten days, the Column moved out of the area and proceeded to Reenaree. During the period the officers were investigating the possibility of an ambush on enemy forces but, apparently, the chances of such an attack did not occur. I should, however, mention one incident that took place during this visit of the Column. One night during the period the Column was billeted in Vallydesmond. By appointment with a good priest - a great friend of the boys - we came to the little Church on the island opposite the Hotel at 3 a.m. where we got Confession, Communion and Heard Mass, prior to our departure from the Company area.

A couple of hours after the departure of our Column, Tom Barry and his Column moved into the area apparently unaware that No. 1 Brigade Column had just left. They remained for two or three days and again the local Company were kept busy providing guards and attending to their needs. Approximately 100 members were on full time duty, excluding those attached to the Column and other members who had been arrested.

Following the transfer of Cork No. 1. Brigade Headquarters to Ballyvourney Company area, in the month of April, and the setting up of the Divisional Headquarters in the Coolea Company area a short time later, members of both the Brigade and Divisional staffs spent a considerable time in the Ballingeary area. Later, Tom Barry and his Column, evading an encircling movement by General Percival and his troops, again reached the area. Percival had tried to trap Barry and his men in the Bantry Peninsula, but Barry outwitted him by reaching the Ballingeary area. With the presence of Liam Lynch and his staff, Seán O'Hegarty and his staff, Commandant Barry and his Column, the Ballingeary Company were on duty for twenty-four hours a day, scouting, on guard duty, dispatch carrying, as well as procuring supplies from the local farmers.

About the month of May, the Column leaders decided to attack a military patrol in the town of Macroom with the help of Macroom Battalion Column. Having reached the town, where we spent about an hour, the proposed attack was called off. In the following month the Column was disbanded, so the members of Ballingeary Company returned to their own area where they carried on their local duties right up to the Truce. It was in the month of June that General Percival carried out the largest round-up of the war, but, thanks to the excellent dispatch, scouting and guard system in operation in the area, no arrests were made.

During the Truce I was appointed Lieutenant in succession to Dan T. O'Leary. I was also appointed Company Training Officer and also Vice Battalion Training Officer. I attended training camps at Clohughboula, near Dunmanway, and at Ballyvoig, near Kilnamartyra. In the same period, with the Ballingeary Company, I was present at a review of troops by Mr. De Valera at Coolavokig, Coolnacaheragh. In the month of October, again with the Ballingeary Company, I was present in Cork City at a review by Liam Deasy. Later, I attended an other review by Tom Barry at Muiniflugh, Macroom.

SIGNED: *Bernie Brown*

DATE: *15th July 1958*

WITNESS:

William Sullivan R.C.

