

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

DURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 710

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 710

Witness

Patrick Cronin,
Model Farm Road,
Carrigrohane,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Lieutenant, Aherla (Co. Cork) Company Irish Vol's.
1918 - .

Subject.

Activities of 'D' Company,
3rd Battalion Cork Brigade, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2008.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 710

STATEMENT BY PATRICK CRONIN, CARRIGROHANE,
CO. CORK.

'D' COMPANY, 3RD BATTALION, CORK I BRIGADE.

About 1915 the 'Molly Maguires', as we called the Redmondites, started a small Company of National Volunteers in Aherla but it only lived a short time.

The Irish Volunteers were formed in April, 1917, in Aherla. They were captained by Patrick Keefe from Cloughdub. He formed and organised the Company in the first instance. There were about forty men. They were known as Aherla Company. They continued for about six months and then there was a lacking in them. Some of them got tired of it and fell away. This was towards the end of 1917. They were reformed and joined the 3rd Battalion and there was a new election of Officers - James Foley, Captain; myself (P. Cronin), First Lieutenant; Charlie Cullinane, Second Lieutenant. There were only six men at the first meeting, which was early in 1918. From that on it went well; only sound men were invited into it. After a short while the Company strength grew to forty or fifty. Our Captain, James Foley, was arrested for collecting Sinn Féin funds at Cloughdub Chapel gate and got a month in Cork Gaol. During the period 1918 to 1919 we were mostly training and running despatches. During the period 1919 to 1920 and 1921 the Battalion had Headquarters and a prison in our Company area. Killbawn was the name of the prison; it was a house owned by Cullinanes. During that period our men spent most of their time minding prisoners, catering for them and so on and keeping it secret. We had important prisoners from the 3rd Brigade and from Cork City. There were at least six executed; three British soldiers were captured and executed in the prison yard, following the 'shoot at sight' order. Then there were three civilians shot.

One was Nagle from Waterfall. Another was named McCarthy and the other was Jimmy Devoy. They were all giving information to the British. It was Nagle who informed on Leo Murphy who was taken and shot by the British at Waterfall. Note - prisoners were blindfolded coming and going in case of leakage. If they were being taken away to be handed over to the Unit we were minding them for, we blindfolded them in case we were come on by the British and had to leave them. Then they would not know the way they had been brought. However, the authorities never found out the prison and they were often within sight of it. The guards had orders in case of raids to shoot the prisoners.

The Volunteers would never get on only the people all round the locality were genuine and used bring the food to them. There was a wounded man brought from the Upton ambush early in 1921 into 'D' Company area to get him to hospital and we got him there quite safely. It was to the Mercy Hospital in Cork he was brought but he died there. His name was Sullivan.

We took over a wounded man from the Skibbereen area (it was West Cork anyway) to get him through to hospital in Cork. We arranged for a pony and trap at Aherla (12 miles from the city) and chose the Inniscarra route (a roundabout way) where we would be met by a man from the city to give the girls instructions. There were two of them - Lizzie Cronin and Ellen Conroy - who travelled with the wounded man. When they came to Inniscarra there was a British raiding party and the girls made the wounded man act as the driver. The pony shied when they got as far as the party of troops and one of the girls asked the Officer if he would allow one of his men to lead the pony across the bridge. This he kindly agreed to do and a soldier led the pony through the cordon and left them safely on the other side. The man they were

to meet at this point was unable to be there, naturally, but they went on and got their patient into the South Infirmary and returned to 'D' Company area again.

Any time there was an ambush arranged by the Battalion six of the Company were picked to take part, though all were eager to go. There were three of our Company, with the Vice-Commandant, burned Farran R.I.C. Barracks and as they were burning it fourteen police arrived on the scene. When the petrol exploded to start the fire the police took cover on the opposite side of the road and the party, which included myself, James Foley, Company O.C., J. Daly and the Vice Commandant of the Battalion - O'Shea - got away safely by the back. This was in 1920 and the Barracks had been evacuated after it had been attacked and damaged earlier in the year, but police used to watch it in the day and military from Ballincollig at night.

We were not supposed to have much activity in 'D' Company area as it was used a lot by the 3rd Brigade for billeting and for prisoners. There were certain houses set aside as billets and the 3rd Brigade men knew exactly where to come to. They had only to knock at the door of the house allotted to them - they each knew their houses - and they were let in immediately. They would go to bed and would be gone in the morning and no one the wiser. There were none of them ever given away or ever captured in the Company area.

Percival's column on its way through the country to Bandon camped at Aherla once. They scoured the area and arrested several but only held two men. Major Percival had his Headquarters at Bandon and he used to travel a wide area trying to trap the I.R.A. and raiding and arresting everywhere.

The Company helped in the attack on Farran R.I.C. Barracks in 1920; the entire Company of forty men was on this, cutting trees and digging trenches and they drew all the sand in from a mile to cover the mine in a house next door. The mine blew the roof off this house and blew a hole in the Barrack wall. The police did not give in, however, and the ambush party withdrew about an hour after - that was before midnight.

The Viaduct ambush was sometime in 1920. The Viaduct is about five miles out from Cork. We went up three days and each day there were eight men from Aherla Company there and all the Company generally volunteered to go there. The two Foleys - Mick and Jim - Tom Horigan, James Corkery, Stephen Spillane, Charlie Cullinane, Jerh. Ahern and myself. We all had shot-guns. Troops from Cork to Bandon used pass along there in lorries. A lorry-load used travel to Bandon about half-past ten every morning and we wanted to capture their arms. We waited till about one o'clock on the third day and we were surrounded by military from Ballincollig and Cork. We all escaped, getting all our arms away, except Jerh. Herlihy who was shot and died afterwards in hospital. There were about forty of us on the job, including scouts and men for road blocking, drawn from all the Companies. Tim Herlihy, the Battalion O.C., was in charge. I got in between the military and the railway, threw off the coat and let on to be working on the line and when the train came along I stopped it at Curragheen, an auxiliary station near Waterfall, and I travelled right in to Cork. I had planked my gun and ammunition before I got up on the railway line and I was able to get them again. It was easy work for me to stop the train as I was a railway worker and all the drivers knew me.

We were invited into Farran Company area to help raid Warren's

house. Warren was the estate manager for Clarke of Clarke's Tobacco Company and was also his brother-in-law. His house was in Clarke's demesne. Shot-gun cartridges were got. The same night we raided Ashe's and Sullivan's and cartridges were got in each house. In our own area we collected all the guns without any trouble.

There were two of the Company - myself and James Foley - out cutting wires and ready to receive McNeilus who escaped from Cork Jail, but he did not come into our area.

During Terence McSwiney's hunger-strike in 1920, all the Company members were asked to take the pledge for a month and they took it and kept it.

All the Company were on parade at his funeral when he was buried in Cork.

The Cullinanes, the Foleys, the Walshes, the Cronins and the Cahalanes were very good families. All families in the area were good but these were exceptionally good and many men were put up in their houses.

We collected money for general purposes for the Volunteers and we taxed householders 1/6d in the pound according to the valuation. The Protestants' valuation was always higher but they never grumbled at having to pay the levy. There never had to be seizures. This collection was a levy authorised by Brigade.

About March, 1921, there was a Battalion Column formed, numbering about twenty men, and the Company supplied three or four men to it. Stephen Spillane was one. Our Company O.C., James Foley, was promoted to Battalion Vice O.C. and was on the Column.

He was shot and killed by accident before the Truce came. He was shouldered by all the Volunteers of the Battalion from Farran to Kilbonane graveyard for his burial and the flag was on his coffin. I was made Company O.C. after Foley.

As regards arms, up to the time of the Truce we had ten shot-guns, three rifles and three revolvers. We made our own buckshot for the shot-guns and the ammunition for the rifles was very scarce.

Our only casualty was James Foley, referred to above, and we had two members of the Company interned. They were Charles Cullinane and Jeremiah Ahern and they were the two taken up by Percival's column. One went to Spike Island and the other to Bere Island, and they were held until after the Truce.

None of our Company was in the I.R.B. and as far as I can recollect it was because they were all too young.

Signed

Patrick Cronin
(Patrick Cronin)

Witnessed

C. Saurin
(C. Saurin)

LT.-COLONEL.

Date 21st July 1952

