

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BUNO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21

Re. W.S. 859

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 859.....

Witness

Laurence Condon,
Bellevue,
Fermoy,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Second Lieut. Fermoy Company,
Irish Volunteers, 1917 - .

Subject.

Fermoy Irish Volunteers,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2070.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT

BY

LAURENCE CONDON,

BELLEVUE, FERMOY.

O.C. 1ST BATTALION, CORK II BRIGADE.

I was twenty-three years of age when I joined the Volunteers. That was in 1917. This was in February and there were no Volunteers there before that, only Gaelic Leaguers. Fermoy was a garrison town and there was little in the way of National spirit among the people. Prior to the organisation of the Volunteers, Seán O'Brien was about the only man who represented the Irish Ireland attitude. He ran the Gaelic League there and the Branch numbered about twelve or fourteen. I was one of them.

We had some contact with the Kent family after Easter Week, 1916, and their example inspired us. David Kent was in Fermoy the night we formed the Company. A good crowd joined, between 80 and 100. Clondullane, an industrial village about three miles to the East of Fermoy, supplied the backbone of the Volunteer Company.

The Captain was William O'Denn, Liam Lynch was 1st Lieutenant and I was 2nd Lieutenant. We had a Company Adjutant and Quartermaster. There were four Sections in the Company. One of the Section Commanders was Mick Fitzgerald, who died on hunger strike in Cork Gaol in October, 1920.

The Company was started early in 1917 and we had

the usual training, drilling and public parades through the town. There were no arms. In November O'Denn was arrested and then I was charged with unlawful assembly but was never actually tried. However, in company with about 100 other prisoners drawn from all over Munster, we commenced a hunger strike and in about three days we were all released under the Cat and Mouse Act. We had then been about a month in Gaol.

We went on with our organising and training and about Christmas we secured a rifle, taking it off a soldier home on leave. We were able to use it for range practice as some of the Company worked inside the Barracks and used bring out ammunition. This was the first time most of us had used a rifle.

O'Denn didn't last long. He faded out during conscription time in 1918 and we got another Company O.C. from Clondullane, John Fanning. Liam Tobin was down from Dublin acting as instructor to the Company.

Sometime in the early Summer of 1918 the Battalion was formed. It was the 1st Battalion and Martin O'Keefe of the Ballinacorney Company became O.C. Battalion and Liam Lynch became Adjutant. I went on to the Battalion Staff as V/O.C. Later, some of these appointments were changed, Liam Lynch going to Brigade.

The first job organised by the Battalion was to try and get arms coming to Fermoy by train from Queenstown. Our information was got from Patrick Hackett, a civilian clerk working for the military in Queenstown. A number

of us, Liam Lynch, Liam Tobin, Mick Fitzgerald and myself, went out and stopped the train on the East side of Castle-townroche but there were no arms on it. To our disgust, the arms came into Fermoy the following morning by goods train, about 6 o'clock. This was in May, 1918. Our party on this job had revolvers, for we had contrived, principally by buying from soldiers of the garrison, to get about seven or eight and a limited amount of .45 stuff.

Charlie Paye, one of our Company, gave me my first .45 revolver. He was a painter working in the Barracks. He was a noted G.A.A. footballer. He managed to bring a rifle out of the Barracks too.

The Battalion was organised thoroughly by the middle of 1918. It had a full staff, as follows :-

O.C.	Mick Fitzgerald.
V/O.C.	Lar Condon.
Adjutant.	Tom Griffin.
Q.M.	Con Leddy.
I.O.	Patrick Aherne.

The Companies were :-

Fermoy.	Strength approximately	100.
Rathcormac.	" "	30.
Watergrasshill.	" "	25.
Glenville.	" "	100.
Castlelyons.	" "	30.
Ballinoe.	" "	30.
Kilworth.	" "	30.
Araglen.	" "	100.

These strengths increased through the years up to the Truce. There was no falling away. If an Officer was arrested, he was replaced instantly.

At Easter, 1918, we carried out a surprise raid on Araglen R.I.C. Barracks when all the garrison, save one Constable, were at Mass. He was going out for a bucket of water and he was held up and detained in a cellar in the Barracks while we got away with five rifles, two or three revolvers, ammunition, batons and handcuffs. The R.I.C. had their bicycles at Mass and some of our lads cut the tyres in case of the alarm being given them. These arms added to the number we had already, principally revolvers, 45s, 38s and 32s. A girl in the Royal Hotel in Fermoy got a couple of automatics for us out of British Officers' greatcoat pockets where they had hung them on the rack.

Mick Fitzgerald was again arrested - towards the end of 1918 and was kept in a long time. I was Acting O.C. Battalion while he was in gaol in Cork. I continued the usual training that was being carried out at the time, having parades and trying out the arms we had got, raiding the big houses for shotguns, of which we got 100 - some very valuable ones too. We had practically every shotgun that was in the Battalion area and thousands of rounds of ammunition for them. We got a whole dump of it out of Barrys, the hardware merchants in Fermoy. Their magazine was in the timber yard and we got every round out of it and miles of fuse.

The Volunteers gave every assistance at the General Election in December, 1918, and at Bye-Elections too. Early that year a number of us were down in Waterford and had some exciting encounters with the Ballybricken pig buyers. They were very, very bad and once when about six of us were hemmed in by them at a polling booth in Manor Street, we would have got a very rough handling from them only I had a revolver and fired a shot in the air. This cleared them back and we rushed through them. David Kent was with us that time.

Mick Fitzgerald was in gaol until August, 1919. He was out only about ten days when the Wesleyan raid took place. He was in bad form for he had had a hard time in prison, having had about six months' solitary confinement. However, he took part in it. Liam Lynch was Brigade O.C. at this time and took part in the raid also.

We decided to try and disarm the Church parade which used march down every Sunday morning from the Barracks to the Wesleyan Church at the end of the town. There used to be about eighteen in the party and they carried rifles, of which we duly got seventeen. Liam Lynch and I discussed the best way to carry out the raid and he was all for occupying a couple of houses on the line of march but I thought this would be sure to be noticed and he agreed to my plan, which was to have a few of us sauntering along and suddenly fall on the military when we would immediately be joined by a number of others who up to this point would, to all appearances, be just idling away the morning in town.

The scheme worked and a crowd from Clondullane and Araglen, with a few from Mallow, Owen Harold and a man called Hegarty and another O'Callaghan, came into the town in all sorts of conveyances. A car from Mallow had Liam Lynch and the others mentioned, Leo O'Callaghan was driving. It arrived just as we fell on the soldiers. Mick Fitz. had been warned to keep away but he fell in with us just as we got abreast of the Church Parade, only about ten yards from the Church door. We fought the soldiers with sticks and the Araglen and Clondullane men joined in. We, the first three, had revolvers and we produced these. The first file of soldiers handed over their rifles without any trouble but some of the others showed fight and one who refused to give up his was shot dead and about eight or nine were badly wounded.

The seventeen rifles were got away, some in the car from Ballynoe and some in a car we had. We overtook the Mallow car about four or five miles outside Fermoy towards Tallow and found Liam Lynch getting first aid from a wound in the shoulder, possibly a wild revolver shot from one of our own men. All the rifles were lodged in a dump prepared beforehand in a wood at Kilbarry to the North-East of Fermoy. They were shifted on Monday night over to Con Leddy at Araglen. Moss Twomey was in charge of the job of shifting the rifles.

Mick Fitz., Johnny Fanning and his brother, a lad called Swayne and myself were arrested in our homes early on Monday morning by the R.I.C., with a big crowd of military in support. We were brought to the R.I.C.

Barracks in Fermoy and formally charged after being up for identification. Mick Fitz. was identified by a soldier. Even though the remainder of us weren't identified, we were taken to Cork where we were kept for about seven weeks and were brought up for identification about four times. A couple of soldiers' wives who witnessed the job being carried out were in the last time and identified Hogan, a lad from Ballynoe, who was brought away. He was in gaol in England until after the Truce.

The D.I., in Fermoy, Lewis by name, was very decent and seemed convinced that Johnny Fanning, Swayne and myself were innocent. However, Fanning's brother, a dour looking specimen, even though a non-Volunteer, seemed to impress the D.I. by his looks that he was one of the guilty ones. However, he was released and so were the three of us. Mick Fitz., Hogan, two O'Keeffes and Mulvey were detained. Mick Fitz. was in till his death.

After the raid Liam Lynch was whole time on the run from this until the Truce. I was back at my work on the railway and, despite my Volunteer activities, was left alone up to near the end of 1920. Often, when I was supposed to be at my work, I wouldn't be there at all.

The next job we attempted was an attack on the R.I.C. Barracks at Ahern, about seven miles to the South-East of Fermoy. This was early in 1920. About 24 of us, drawn from Ballinoe, Clondullane and Fermoy Companies, were on the job, armed with rifles and having gelignite to blow a break in the Barrack walls. Two of our scouts,

contrary to orders, held up two R.I.C. on patrol from the Barracks and took their revolvers and then let them go. This finished the job for that night.

We actually did carry out the attack about three weeks after - February. There were both R.I.C. and Tans in the Barracks, about ten in all. They had a loophole in the gable wall, camouflaged with ivy, and when we got up under this, the bombs commenced falling out and we suffered some casualties, though none was killed. We got no chance to use our charge of gelignite. We kept up rifle fire for about three quarters of an hour, but Verey lights were going up from the Barracks and we withdrew for fear of enemy reinforcements coming. They did come in - in armoured cars, but we had cleared off across the fields. We heard afterwards that two of the police garrison were wounded. Shortly afterwards the Barracks was evacuated. Towards the Summer time we burnt this Barracks and also Ballinoe and Araglen.

I was concerned in the plan for the capture of Brigadier-General Lucas. Moss Twomey was sent by Liam Lynch to enquire about him but could get no information and was astonished when I told him I had been talking to him one morning on the road to Kilbarry, where I passed him pumping a bicycle on the side of the road and he was speaking to me. He was about 6 ft. 2 ins. and was certainly a fine looking man. Moss Twomey asked me to find out something about his movements as Lynch intended to try and capture him and hold him as a hostage against I.R.A. prisoners with the British.

That evening I went over to Liam Tobin at Neill's and heard that Lucas was going fishing with old Tom Neill the following Saturday and would be at the lodge along the Blackwater at such and such a time. Twomey brought the news to Lynch and when the day came Lynch, with Seán Moylan, Paddy Clancy and George Power, arrived in two cars and with Curtin as one driver and another driver on the second car. We supplied Curtin and one car.

When Lucas came to the lodge he had two other British Officers with him, Colonels Danford and Tyrrell, and this was not expected. They had to be taken, too, and, as everyone knows, when on the road after their capture they tried to overpower their captors, Tyrrell being wounded and Danford left behind to look after him, while Lucas was brought away to Co. Limerick.

After this venture, Fermoy town was sacked again by the British military, the first time having been after Private Jones was shot in the Wesleyan raid.

Later in 1920 Johnny Fanning and myself were with Lynch's Column and we operated in North Cork for about six or seven weeks. The Column was formed from men picked from the Battalions in the Brigade. There wasn't much doing during this time, except a proposed attack on the R.I.C. Barracks at Drumcollogher. There were about 40 men on the Column with rifles and two machine guns, a Lewis and a Hotchkiss. Ernie O'Malley was with the Column too. The Drumcollogher attack was stopped as we approached the town on the plea put forward by the O.C. East Limerick

Brigade that we were not authorised to operate in another Brigade area.

Paddy McCarthy and myself, acting as unarmed scouts, went into Drumcollogher one night and were caught by the R.I.C. We broke away from them and got clear away. There were three of them, one R.I.C. man and two in civvies and they opened fire on us but without results. We rejoined the Column and reported. We had been scouting out positions for the intended attack which didn't come off. Paddy McCarthy was afterwards killed in an open fight in the streets of Kanturk.

Fanning and myself were sent back into our own Battalion area again. I was at home then. We were going to bring off a big ambush at Blackstone Bridge, South of Watergrasshill, on the main Cork road. I had sent a despatch by a lad to Bartlemy to a Company Captain named Paddy Egan. The despatch was brought back to me as the lad couldn't find Egan. I shoved it in my inside coat pocket and forgot all about it.

On the 10th December, the ambush party was in position as arranged and about ten lorries came along, too big a convoy to be attacked. But about four or five of the lads on their way back saw a solitary lorry and they attacked. The first shot killed the driver and some of the occupants were wounded. The lorry was ditched and the enemy surrendered. Ten rifles were captured.

In the meantime, on the 3rd December, hundreds of troops surrounded the station at Clondullane where I was

working on the permanent way and our whole gang was held up. I gave a false name but when the despatch in my pocket was discovered I was taken away. I was brought into Fermoy on horseback, my hands handcuffed behind my back and my feet tied underneath. Colonel Dobbs, in charge of the troops, said he would rather be hunting foxes than us fellows. He was a gentleman, however, and when at my courtmartial he was asked would he connect me with the ambush that had come off in the meantime on 10th December near Blackstone Bridge, he said 'No.' Apparently it was thought that the contents of the despatch were part of the preparations, as it said to collect all the shotguns, etc., in the neighbourhood of Bartlemy. Luckily, my name wasn't on it.

I got two years, but for what I don't know, except maybe for not recognising the Court. I was sent to Cork Gaol and then to Kilkenny along with about 50 more. We were there until November, 1921, and, of course, broke our cell doors and caused as much trouble as we could within the confines of the prison.

Then we made a tunnel out of the gaol into the street. We worked down through the floor of a big cell occupied by E. Delahunty, Jimmy Hanrahan and a Dublin man. From very old cells in the basement we started the tunnel and made it right out into Rock Street. I was out second and had hardly got on my feet when a warder came up. I levelled my pipe at him and, thinking in the dark that it was a revolver, he put his hands up and we drove him into a house

at the far side of the street. He was put under guard there while all the prisoners came out.

The two warders on duty inside had been tied up. About 60 of us got out but, in the meantime, one of the warders had released himself and given the alarm. We could hear whistles blowing away as we cleared off. The prison authorities got into communication with the military in the Barracks who arrived and located the tunnel and stopped any further escapes.

Another lad and myself got away from the streets and into the fields. Coming to a wide, deep stream we went along the bank and in the darkness found ourselves near the Gaol again, so we turned back and further away succeeded in jumping the stream. We went across fields through stiff high whitethorn hedges till we got to a farmhouse and two lads there guided us to where about 30 more escaped prisoners were.

We were now at Cuffesgrange and got a big meal there and Jerry Ryan, who was with us, having escaped also, got busy organising our passage away from the danger area. We got horses and traps and got off through Ballingarry and into County Tipperary and not one of us was caught.

Signed: Laurence Condon
(Laurence Condon)

Witnessed: C. Saurin LT.-COL.
(C. Saurin)

Date: 5th June 1953

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