

W.S. 1,134
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,134

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,134

Witness

Timothy J. Cronin,
Kiskeam,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C. Signals and Communications
Newmarket Battalion, 1921.

Subject.

Newmarket Battalion, Co. Cork,
1917-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2418

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY TIMOTHY J. CRONIN,

Kiskeam, Co. Cork.

I was born at Knockeenacurrig, Kiskeam, on September 16th, 1895. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Kiskeam National School, and after leaving school I went to work on my parents farm.

When the Irish Volunteers were started in Kiskeam in March 1917 I joined up. Other members of the unit were: Michael Riordan, Patrick J. Dennehy, Dan Kiely, Michael Cronin, Dan Guiney, Jerry Scannell, Con T. Murphy and Jim Riordan. The first officers of the company were:

O/C - Con T. Murphy
1st Lt. - Jerry Scannell
2nd Lt. - Dan Guiney.

These officers were elected by the members. The membership of the company at the time was in the neighbourhood of 40. The company was, I think, an independent unit of Cork Brigade when formed, but during the summer of 1917 it became a unit of the Newmarket Battalion which was organised about this time.

The companies in the Newmarket Battalion were: Kingwilliamstown (now Ballydesmond), Knocknagree, Umeraboy, Taur, Newmarket, Meelin, Rockchapel, Tullylease and Freemount. The first officers elected to the Battalion Staff were, I think:

O/C - Patk. Murphy, Tullylease
Vice O/C - cannot recollect
Adjt. - Wm. Barrett, Newmarket
Q/M. - Patk. McCarthy, Meelin.

Paddy Murphy was replaced as O/C at an early stage by Seán Moylan and then became Battalion Vice O/C.

Towards the end of 1917 the strength of the unit increased to about 80 but there was no change in the officers. During 1917 and 1918 we were mainly engaged in training in foot-drill and arms drill with wooden guns. This training was carried out in the open under the officers of the company.

When conscription was threatened by the British in the spring of 1918 there was a big influx of new recruits. Practically every able-bodied man in the parish joined the Volunteers and the strength of the company reached 200 or so. However, when the threat of conscription passed the vast majority of the newcomers retired and only the "old reliables" continued to serve.

I should have mentioned that during 1917 all Volunteers were actively engaged in the organisation of the political wing of the Republican movement - Sinn Féin. This organisation in the early stages was mainly composed of the Volunteers and the members of their families in this area.

During 1918 the usual drilling exercises and parades took place. All arms in the district not held by Volunteers were collected about this time. The arms mainly consisted of shotguns, and during the conscription period the Volunteers in the area were engaged in filling cartridges with buckshot to ensure that, in the event of a scrap, the maximum amount of damage was inflicted on the enemy.

There was no political activity in the district in connection with the general election of December 1918

as the Sinn Féin candidate - Seán Moylan - was returned unopposed.

In January 1919 it was decided to divide Cork Brigade, which was made up of, I think, twenty battalions, into three brigades. Newmarket Battalion, which was the 19th Battalion of Cork Brigade, now became the 6th Battalion of Cork 11 Brigade. This latter brigade extended from the Waterford border near Fermoy in the east to the Kerry border beyond Millstreet in the west, and took in the whole northern area of Cork County. The brigade was composed of the following battalions: Fermoy, Mallow, Castletownroche, Newmarket, Charleville, Kanturk, Millstreet. The officers elected for the new brigade were:

O/C	-	Liam Lynch, Fermoy.
Vice O/C	-	Dan Hegarty, Mallow.
Adjt.	-	Tom Barry, Glanworth.
Q/M	-	George Power, Fermoy.

I think that there was a change in the battalion officers at this time - Seán Nunan becoming O/C.

The usual training and drilling continued, while we were also engaged in collecting funds for arms as well as helping to further the organisation of the Dáil Loan which was floated in the summer of 1919.

The first real activity took place in connection with the general order for the destruction of evacuated R.I.C. posts at Easter 1920, when a large number of members from Kiskeam Company co-operated with the men from Taur unit in the destruction of Glashakinleen R.I.C. barracks (evacuated). Members of the company who took part in this operation were: Dan Guiney, Jim Riordan, Con T.

Murphy, Jim Cronin, Tim Cronin (witness), Charley Reilly and several others.

During the remainder of 1920 there was nothing outside the usual training, which at this time was becoming slightly more advanced. We were now being trained in scouting, the use of cover, signalling - morse and semaphore - while first-aid classes were also being held. However, although there was nothing very much doing in our own area the following members of Kiskeam Company took part in an attack on a party of British military at Ballydrochane on the Kanturk-Newmarket road on October 11th, 1920: Dan Guiney, Jim Riordan, Dan Flynn and Jim Cashman. This job was carried out by the Brigade Column under Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley, but a number of representatives from the Newmarket Battalion under Seán Moylan were also engaged.

When Newmarket Battalion Column was formed in January 1921 Kiskeam Company was represented on it by Jim Riordan, Jim Cashman and Dan Flynn. The company officers at this time were:

O/C - Dan Guiney
 1st Lt. - Dan Kelly
 2nd Lt. - Eugene Cronin.

On January 5th, 1921, the column, under Seán Moylan, attacked a party of British troops travelling in two lorries on the Meelin - Newmarket (commonly known as "The Line") road. One lorry got through to Newmarket, while the party in the second lorry came under heavy fire, to which they replied. The fight went on for about one hour, after which the I.R.A. party were forced to withdraw due to the

arrival of enemy reinforcements. Amongst the members of the Kiskeam Company who took part in this engagement were: Jim Cashman, Jim Riordan, Jerome O'Mahoney, Dan Flynn and Dan Guiney.

Until January 28th, 1921, the Battalion Column, assisted by representatives of various companies in the area, were continually seeking suitable opportunities to attack the enemy. On several occasions it was not found possible to attack for a variety of reasons, e.g. enemy strength too big for I.R.A. party or enemy carrying I.R.A. hostages.

On the morning of January 28th, 1921, the Column O/C (Seán Moylan), in company with Denis Galvin, Dan Vaughan, Bill Moylan, Dave McAuliffe, Con Morley, Seán Healy, Seán Kennedy (Tipperary) and a number of other column members, took up a position at Tureengarrive Glen, about 1½ miles west of Kingwilliamstown (now Ballydesmond), on the main Castleisland-Mallow road. It was then about 9.30 a.m. This party was supported by representatives from Kiskeam and Kingwilliamstown Companies as follows: Dan Guiney, John C. Murphy, John D. O'Connor, Tim J. Cronin (witness) Kiskeam; Thomas Herlihy, Dan Fitzgerald, Con Finucane, Martin Murphy, John Jones (Kingwilliamstown). All members of the local companies were armed with shotguns, while the column members had rifles and a Hotchkiss gun manned by Bill Moylan and Seán Healy. The attacking party was divided into three groups as follows:

- (1) North of the road and on high ground overlooking same was a party of seven shotgunmen under Dan Vaughan. This party was under cover of a sod fence about 20 yards from the road. They were extended over a distance of about 30 yards. I was with this party.
- (2) South of the road was a party of about 8 riflemen in position behind some rocks and stones. They

were extended over a distance of about 40 yards.

- (3) Bill Moylan and Seán Healy, with the Hotchkiss gun, were also south of the road but some 30 to 40 yards further east. The Column O/C, Seán Moylan, was with this party, which from its position could enfilade the road to the west.

I think it was about 12.30 p.m. when the scouts posted to the west of the ambush position signalled the approach of two Crossley touring cars. I should have mentioned that the road had been trenched at a bend just within the eastern boundary of the ambush position. The enemy party drove into the position and until the leading car reached the trench the enemy were not aware of the I.R.A. lying in wait. When the driver of the first car saw the trench he pulled up and the second car was also halted. At this stage the Column O/C called upon the enemy to surrender but they replied by immediately opening fire, at the same time leaving their cars and seeking the cover of the roadside fences. The I.R.A. party then replied to the fire and fighting continued for about 30 minutes. At this stage the enemy party were again called on to surrender and someone in their crowd shouted that they were prepared to do so. All the I.R.A. parties then left their positions and went on to the road, where we found that Divisional Commissioner Holmes, R.I.C., a member of the enemy party, was seriously wounded and, in fact, dying. One other man had been killed and the remainder of the party (six) had all been wounded. First-aid was rendered to the wounded and they were loaded on to the car of a national school inspector who happened to come the way. He was instructed to take the wounded to Castleisland for medical attention.

As a result of this engagement the I.R.A. captured 7 rifles, a repeating shotgun and one .45 Webley revolver.

We burned one car as it was damaged by rifle fire, and the other car was taken away by Bill Moylan and Seán Healy. The remainder of the party withdrew to Ballydesmond and north to Lighthouse.

We had just reached Lighthouse when we heard an outburst of shooting from the direction of the site of the ambush and from Ballydesmond area. This shooting was carried on by a party of military who had come out from Tralee when news of the ambush reached them. This party proceeded in the direction of Knocknagree - apparently under the impression that our party had moved that way whereas we had, in fact, gone in the opposite direction. Having had some refreshments the I.R.A. party then broke up, the members of the local companies returning to their home areas while the members of the column moved off to new billets.

Arising out of this ambush, I would like to record that when Seán Moylan, who was later arrested in May 1921 and charged with the murder of Divisional Commissioner Holmes, was being tried by courtmartial, two of the officers who survived this engagement gave evidence to the effect that were it not for the action of Moylan they would have been shot by his (Moylan's) followers. The President of the Courtmartial then remarked that in his experience this was "the first time that chivalry was shown by an Irish rebel leader".

Some days following the ambush a large party of British military arrived in Ballydesmond and destroyed three houses as a reprisal. The houses destroyed were:

The Post Office owned by Tim O'Sullivan,
 The drapery shop of Wm. McAuliffe,
 The grocery and provision shop of Tim Vaughan.

It was about this time that instructions were issued to set up Special Services (engineering, first-aid, signals and communications) in the battalion area. The work of organising the latter service was delegated to Patrick J. Dennehy, and when he was transferred to Brigade H.Q. in the spring of 1921 I was appointed Battalion O/C Signals, Communications and First-Aid. As a result I spent a considerable time visiting the various companies and organising these services. Signallers in each company were instructed in the semaphore and morse and in the use of electric torches for transmitting messages at night. Special men, who were always available at short notice, were selected in the various districts of each company area so that messages could be conveyed to Battalion and Brigade H.Q. with the minimum delay.

About the first week in July 1921 I proceeded to Rockchapel in company with Jim Cashman, Jim Riordan, John D. O'Connor, John Murphy, Jerome O'Mahoney. Here we joined some members of the Charleville and Millstreet Battalion Columns and proceeded to Templeglantine in West Limerick Brigade area. The party was in charge of Paddy O'Brien, Brigade Vice O/C.

On the morning of July 7th we moved into position on rising ground overlooking the road to Athea in the vicinity of Templeglantine. The party, to the number of about 80, were armed with rifles, while a land mine was laid in the road in front of our position. It was then about 9 a.m. About an hour later a party of Black and Tans in two

lorries and a touring car and preceded by a motor cycle scout, moved into the position from the east. The party was allowed to pass through the ambush position as it had been decided to attack them on the return journey.

However, although we remained in our position for some hours the enemy party did not put in an appearance, having apparently returned to their base by another road.

Our party remained in this area until 12 noon on July 11th, 1921, lying in ambush in various positions, but we failed to catch the enemy.

About 12 noon on July 11th the O/C (Paddy O'Brien) announced that a truce was on and he arranged for the collection of all ammunition from the members of the column. He then moved off with the members of the Charleville Column, while we of the Newmarket and Millstreet units awaited the arrival of some transport which had been arranged by the local I.R.A. Before the transport arrived our party was surrounded by a party of British military under the command of a Major Foster. One of his men took a rifle from a member of the Millstreet Column (Kelleher) and was examining it to find identifying particulars, presumably to find out where it was captured. Kelleher demanded the return of his rifle, stating that the truce was on and that he would report the soldier to his superior officer. The rifle was then handed back and Major Foster said "Ye are waiting here for the past week to ambush us and ye came all the way from County Cork, - I know by your Cork accents". There was no further development. The British party withdrew and we resumed our homeward journey when our transport arrived.

My rank at the Truce - Battalion O/C Signals and Communications, Newmarket Battalion, Cork IV Brigade.

The strength of the battalion at the Truce was approximately 800.

During the Truce I continued to operate whole-time on the organisation and training of the members of the Special Services sections, for which I was responsible throughout the battalion, and early in 1922 I was appointed Brigade O/C Signals and Communications, Cork IV Brigade.

When Mallow military barracks was taken over from the British in February 1922 I was instructed by the Brigade Adjutant to report there to take up duty on the Brigade Staff. In March 1922 I moved with the other members of the staff to Buttevant Military Barracks, where I carried on my duties as Brigade O/C Signals and Communications until the post was evacuated in August 1922 following the outbreak of the Civil War. I then joined the I.R.A. columns in "the field" and took part in several engagements against Free State forces throughout the brigade area. I was arrested on April 30th, 1923, and removed to Cork Gaol where I was detained until October 1923.

The strength of the Newmarket Battalion on 11th July, 1922 was about 800.

My rank on 11th July, 1922 - Brigade O/C Signals and Communications Cork IV Brigade.

Signed: Timothy Cronin
 (Timothy Cronin)
 Date: 18th March 1955.

Witness: P. O'Donnell
 (P. O'Donnell)
 (Investigator).

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