

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1515

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1515.

Witness

Patrick Lynch,
Carndonagh,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Lieutenant, Carndonagh Company.

Adjutant, 2nd Battalion, No. 2 Donegal Brigade.

Subject.

Sinn Féin and Irish Volunteers activities,
Carndonagh, Co. Donegal. 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2828.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK LYNCH

Carndonagh, Co. Donegal

I was born at Carndonagh in June 1892 and received my primary education there.

My father was connected with the Land League organisation here and my mother was associated with Fanny Parnell who visited this area on a few occasions for the purpose of organising a women's branch of the Land League.

My parents were both opposed to British rule in Ireland and I can still remember how closely they followed the fortunes of the Boers in South Africa and they often prayed for their success.

I joined the local Sinn Fein Club in 1917. Frank Lanigan was then Chairman and was, to a great extent, responsible for its organisation. In 1918, prior to the general elections, all members of the Club were kept busy working on behalf of our candidate, Joseph O'Doherty. Philip O'Doherty, a solicitor practising in Derry, and who had been elected a Member of Parliament as a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party for a number of years, was again going forward and, as he was popular and had the support of the (Ancient Order of Hibernians), our task of organising and canvassing voters kept us busy. The result of the election was very gratifying to us.

I joined the Irish Volunteers early in 1919. Leo Lafferty, Sycamore Road, Mount Merrion, was organiser and acting company captain of Carndonagh Company at that time. Lafferty was in the British Civil Service but refused to take the

oath of allegiance to the British Crown and was dismissed as a result. Michael Collins sent him down here to organise the Innishowen Peninsula area. He got companies organised at Clonmany, Culdaff, Merville, Malin and Malin Head. These companies together with Carndonagh were organised into a battalion, designated the 2nd Battalion. Leo Lafferty was appointed O/C. of the battalion; James Oliver was Vice O/C. I was appointed battalion adjutant and my brother, Dan, battalion quartermaster. Ernie O'Malley visited this area at the time and was here when the battalion was organised and the appointments made.

In 1919 and early 1920, numerous raids for arms were made in the battalion area and a number of shotguns collected. The mail car from Derry to Carndonagh was raided on several occasions. The mails were censored and normal mails returned to the post office for usual delivery. Mails were also taken off the train at Rashenev near Clonmany.

In May 1920, a general order was issued for the destruction of all evacuated R.I.C. barracks in the area. Culdaff and Malin Barracks were evacuated at the time and were burned. Merville Barracks was evacuated later and afterwards burned. Culdaff coastguard station was burned late in 1920.

Early in 1921 a sniping attack was carried out on the R.I.C. barrack in Carndonagh. No plans were made for its capture; the idea was to keep the R.I.C. confined to the barracks and prevent a patrol being sent out town. Fire was returned by the R.I.C. My house, being situated at the rear of the barrack, was selected as a special target; several rounds were fired through the windows, two bullets striking the bed where my mother was lying.

About 8th May 1921, a patrol of two R.I.C. were fired on near Clonmany; one was shot dead on the spot, the second man was wounded and attempted to escape. He was followed and shot dead. The bodies were thrown into the sea but were later washed up ~~by~~ the tide and were found on the strand. A few days after this incident, the flying column, then operating in the area, moved into Carndonagh and carried out another sniping attack on the R.I.C. Barracks. As before, no plans were made for its capture. The R.I.C. returned the fire and sent up Verey lights, but it was on the following day that reinforcements arrived. By that time, the column had withdrawn across the mountain. A short time afterwards a large force of British troops swooped on the area and combed it out, but, fortunately, the men of the column managed to evade capture.

When the British troops had left the area we decided to ambush an R.I.C. night patrol in the town of Carndonagh. We were particularly anxious to get one member of the R.I.C. who had made himself conspicuous by his activities against our organisation. We had only taken up our positions in various parts of the town when one of our men fired a shot, supposed to be accidental, though I still believe it was deliberate, so as to give him a chance to leave before a fight would start. The shot, of course, was a warning to the patrol and we had no use waiting there; so we were obliged to withdraw.

One R.I.C. man stationed in Carndonagh, named McLoughlin, was inclined to be helpful and friendly. On one occasion, during the time I was on the run, he sent word to a neighbour's house about an intended raid to try and effect my arrest. I did not get his message in time and the house I was staying in was raided. I had just time to escape out the back door, climb up on a high wall and lie flat there for 10 or 15 minutes while the British forces searched around beside me.

We decided to ambush a patrol of British forces that occasionally travelled by lorry on the Malin road. We destroyed the bridge at a blind bend on the road and took up covering positions. Eventually a patrol of British forces was observed coming in the direction of the bridge. Before they reached the ambush position, a young man of weak mentality came out on the road and put up his hand; when the patrol pulled up, he told them about the bridge being destroyed. They immediately deployed and commenced an encircling movement on our position. As we were only armed with shotguns and the element of surprise was gone, we were unable to engage them in the open and were compelled to retire as best we could.

Willie McKinney, O/C. Culdaff Company, with some men from his company, armed with shotguns, opened fire on two lorry loads of British forces on the Culdaff road. They kept up the fire for a short time but soon were obliged to retreat with considerable difficulty across the mountain.

The flying column again moved into Garndonagh for the purpose of removing the telephone from the post office. When all seemed to be quiet, late at night sentries and scouts were posted and some men went to the back door of the post office and knocked. Immediately a long whistle blast was sounded from inside. This seemed to be a pre-arranged signal between the postmaster and the R.I.C., because, scarcely had the sound of the whistle died away when fire was opened on our men from various parts of the town. Some grenades were thrown into the barrack yard where our men were at the back door. The R.I.C. were already in position and were, apparently, prepared for the raid. The column withdrew under cover of darkness and got safely out of the town.

There appears to have been a leakage of information in

the area as the British forces were in possession of an amount of information concerning the movement of Volunteers on the run. In June 1921, I received a dispatch from Michael Collins for delivery to James Diver. The information contained in the dispatch was to the effect that there was a man staying in the Ballyliffan district at that time and he had reason to believe that he was a spy. Collins gave instructions to have this man arrested and held prisoner. I told James Diver, who was then acting Brigade O/C., that I had seen the man referred to in Ballyliffan that day. Diver said he would look for him on the following day, but by that time he had disappeared and there was no further trace of him.

At the time of the Truce on 11th July 1921, I had been on the run for over six months. I was a motor mechanic by trade and, as my brother and myself kept a garage in Carndonagh, I found it necessary to slip home to the garage occasionally in the middle of the night to give him assistance when he required it.

In this area - the Innishowen Peninsula - it was not feasible for a column to operate on a large scale for the following reasons:- Strong detachments of British forces were stationed in Derry and Buncrana and could surround the area in a very short time, cutting off the escape route; secondly, due to the mountainous nature of the district, it would be hard to provide food for a large number of men for a lengthy period in the event of a round-up by British forces. As a result, the column operating here was confined to ten or twelve men armed with four rifles, the remainder being armed with shotguns and revolvers. Their orders were to harass the enemy continuously but not to attempt any attack on a large scale.

Signed: *Patrick Lynch*Date: *15th October 1956*Witness: *J. Howay*

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NO. W.S. 1,515