

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1534

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1534.

Witness

Michael Foley,  
St. Michael's St.,  
Tipperary.

Identity.

Battn. Vice-Commandant.

Subject.

Activities of Aherla Company,  
No. 3 Battn., 1st Cork Brigade,  
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No ..2870A .....

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913 21  
No. W.S. 1,534

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL FOLEY,  
St. Michael's St., Tipperary.

I was born at Aherla, Co. Cork, on 4th April, 1899, the sixth son of James and Emily Foley. There were eleven children in all, of whom five boys and four girls are at present alive. My brother John was drowned at sea in January, 1921, and my brother James, column leader, was shot at Farran on the 1st March, 1921, while on active service.

After finishing at Kilbonane National School I did the secondary course at North Monastery C.B.S., Cork, and passed the Junior, Middle and Senior Grades in 1914, 1915 and 1916 respectively. I was then offered a teaching post by the Christian Brothers and taught at Sullivan's Quay C.B.S. for almost one year. I did not like the profession and secured a clerical post with the firm of Eustace & Co., extensive wholesale hardware, timber, iron, paint and oil merchants of Watercourse Road, Cork. I was with this firm over three years and enjoyed the work until pressure of I.R.A. work forced me to resign in March, 1921. My brother, James, had been Vice Commandant, 3rd Battalion, and whilst leading the Flying Column was accidentally shot at Farran on 1st March, 1921. I was appointed in his stead and became a full time Battalion Officer.

The Rising in Easter Week, 1916, was a complete shock, not alone in our village but generally throughout the county. Apart from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, very few knew of any militant national organisation

existing. During my summer holidays of 1916, I started organising and drilling the local boys into a squad or company, as I had done physical training and drill as part of the curriculum at North Monastery. We had, however, no outside contacts and it dissolved when I went to teach in September, 1916. It was, however, reformed early in 1917 and became a recognised company, with the adjoining parish of Cloughduv, as 'D' Company in a newly established battalion.

Our first Company Captain was Patrick O'Keefe of Cloughduv, and the other ranks were divided about equally between that village and Aherla. Although teaching in Cork City, I was home for every week-end and acted as liaison between the city and county. The company drilled about three nights a week and took part in route marches and other national enterprises such as Irish language classes, feiseanna and the boycotting of British made goods. We had no arms and did not seem able to make any progress.

The year 1917 might be considered the start and awakening of any organised military movement in mid Cork. Like ourselves, Ovens, Killumney, Ballinora and Farnanes villages had formed companies, and we had organised meetings and combined drillings. Eventually Cork City was contacted and we were formed into a battalion of the 1st Cork Brigade, under the leadership of Seán Hegarty as Brigade O/C. Our own company was reorganised under the captaincy of my brother, James, and the order of companies in the battalion was as follows: 'A' Company, Srelane; 'B' Company, Killumney; 'C' Company, Ballinora; 'D' Company, Aherla; 'E' Company,

Farnanes; and later 'F' Company, Farran. Tim Herlihy, Srelane, was the first Battalion O/C, with Jerh. O'Shea as Vice O/C. The formal taking of the oath of allegiance took place late in 1917, and the battalion became an active integral part of the 1st Cork Brigade. as No. 3, Battalion from that date. Terence MacSwiney, later Lord Mayor of Cork, was the principal organiser from Brigade H.Q. in our area, and Florrie O'Donoghue, later Divisional Adjutant, was the principal military adviser.

Enthusiasm was poor enough at this stage. The older people and the wealthier farmers and traders were inclined to ridicule the whole thing, and our membership was low and mostly comprised of the labouring or working classes. The total strength of the battalion at that stage would not be more than one hundred men, roughly twenty from each of the five companies. The taking of the oath had frightened quite a few away. Soon after this, however, the threat of conscription caused a big influx of all types into the ranks, and from this on enthusiasm became more fervent and the strength of the battalion swelled to about three hundred and remained at that until the Truce.

The activities of the battalion during 1918 were mostly confined to drilling, organising and national work. Each company was responsible for arming itself, and all shotguns in the area were taken up before the R.I.C. had decided to collect them. Where arms were not voluntarily handed over, night raids were carried out and guns collected without any resistance or violence. Funds were collected for the purchase of arms.

Not much military activity took place during 1919. Principal work was the obstruction of all work by R.I.C. Courts were set up and, as the Crown laws ceased to function, the duties of civil administration were taken up by the companies in each area. Licensing laws were enforced, criminals were dealt with and punished. Civil courts were functioning. Funds were collected also for the Dáil Éireann loan and receipts issued for same. Unfortunately most of these receipts were destroyed later when raiding by the R.I.C. commenced. A few bridges were blown up on brigade instructions, and generally good discipline was maintained both in military personnel and in civilian life. Trains were stopped and the mails seized for any evidence of spies' letters. One such raid, late in 1919, on the Cork and Macroom railway at Kilmumney disclosed a few such letters. The offenders were quickly notified and banished from the country.

In 1920 the tension in national affairs was rising and although military activities in this battalion area were still small, the battalion was kept very much on its toes by co-operating in activities of the 1st Cork Brigade and with the very active adjoining 3rd West Cork Brigade. Scouting, despatch running and intelligence formed quite a part of its employment. Tim Herlihy had been succeeded as Battalion O/C by Leo Murphy, with my brother, James, as Vice O/C.

A Flying Column was formed, with the two aforementioned acting as leaders in turn. It acted as rearguard to 3rd Brigade's big ambush at Upton and brought the fighting column into our own area to

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 ? arrange<sup>D</sup> billets after the encounter. Our own two engagements were the attack on Farran police barracks, which, although not completely successful, was responsible for the closing of that station. This left the battalion area free of all British forces, with the exception of the big cavalry barracks at Ballincollig which housed over two thousand soldiers, together with Ballincollig police barracks which was within the environs of the military barracks. Those two posts held out intact until after the Truce, when they were taken over by I.R.A. personnel under Michael Regan, then Battalion O/C, and myself as Vice Battalion O/C.

Our other big engagement was the viaduct bridge ambush on the road between Cork and Bandon, about four miles from Cork. This was entirely a 3rd Battalion operation. It was planned to blow up and destroy a military convoy which conveyed supplies weekly to Bandon from Cork Headquarters. We had information that the convoy would pass at 8 a.m. on a certain morning. Our force of roughly thirty men took up positions at 6 a.m. having marched from the separate company areas at 12 midnight. We were armed with about 15 rifles, 15 shotguns loaded with buckshot and about 20 hand grenades. At a given signal the road was to be blocked and the attack was to take place immediately. We expected about four lorries in convoy. It did not turn up that day, even though we waited until 12 noon, when we dispersed. We arranged to attack about a week later, but this time, unfortunately, the boot was on the other foot and we found ourselves surrounded by a large force of military who opened fire on us from the rear. Miraculously, all escaped, except one Volunteer named Hurley, who died later of wounds.

We had established an ammunition base in our area and with the help of an expert from Brigade H.Q. made all our own bombs and hand grenades, as well as ammunition for shotguns. We had about twenty rifles and the same amount of revolvers, most of them issued from Brigade H.Q.

Late in 1920 our Commandant, Leo Murphy, was shot dead in an affray with military at Waterfall, and Michael Regan, Ovens, was appointed O/C, with James Foley again as Vice O/C.

No engagement of any military consequence took place during the six months before the Truce. The battalion was engaged mostly on police and administration work and as a working component of brigade. I was appointed Vice O/C in April, 1921, after my brother had been accidentally shot whilst bringing his column home from Macroom where they had been held as a reserve force for a brigade operation west of Macroom town. Morale was good during this period and all the Battalion Staff were on full-time duty. It was, however, a very quiet area and, as can be seen by the foregoing, very few military operations worthy of note took place. From a brigade and battalion point of view, the big military barracks at Ballincollig was invulnerable to our strength and equipment and, except for attacks on individual units, was outside our province.

Signed: *Mr Foley*

Date: *Apr 26<sup>th</sup> 1956*

Witness:

*John J. Doherty*  
(Investigator)

BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION	NOV 1913-21
BUREAU STAFF	113 21
No. W.S. 1534	