

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 55



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ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21).

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIAITH.
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S.55

Statement by

Christopher Connell,
Eyeries,
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Dated: 22 November, 1947

On: Eyeries Company I.V.,
November 1915 to May 1916.

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STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL,
EYERIES, CASTLETOWNBERE, CO. CORK.

PERIOD: NOVEMBER, 1915, TO MAY, 1916.

UNIT: EYERIES COMPANY, I.V.

In November, 1915, a number of men from the parish of Eyeries were amongst the intending emigrants to U.S.A. who were turned back at Liverpool. Emigration from the district had been going on for many years, and there was nothing abnormal in the fact that these men intended to emigrate at the time. On their way back home, two of them - Seán O'Driscoll and Pat Mullins - got in touch with Terence MacSwiney in Cork. As a result of their conversations with him they began the organisation of a Volunteer Company in Eyeries as soon as they returned.

When Terence MacSwiney paid a visit to us on New Year's Day, 1916, we had built up a Company of about 30 men. There was no ex-serviceman amongst us, and we had to carry on training as best we could ourselves. Parades were held once a week and route marches and field exercises every Sunday. Officers were elected. Jim McCarthy was elected Commandant and Seán O'Driscoll Captain. They were the only Officers, as far as I remember. This was not in accordance with the usual procedure, but it is what was done in the case of the Eyeries Company.

Daiti Barry, Brigade Adjutant at the time, came to Eyeries and stayed with us for a while. Seán Hennessy also came for a short period. Seán O'Driscoll attended an Officers' training course in Sheares' Street, Cork, in January, 1916. The Company strength increased rapidly in the early part of 1916, and at Easter we had about 100 men. There was no change of Officers:

The arms we had at Easter, 1916, consisted of one seal rifle, which Joe Foley had, eight or ten shot guns and a few revolvers - some of them Colts .45. The shot guns were not owned by members of the Company, but were readily available from the owners, who resided in the parish. There was very little ammunition for any of the weapons. The rifle or the shot guns were not carried on Easter Sunday.

There was a meeting in Eyeries of the Officers and some men from different parts of the parish on Easter Saturday night, 1916. At that meeting the orders for Easter Sunday were given. I think we were told that Kenmare was the point to which we would march next day; at any rate we were told we were to march into Kerry. We had no information of what was intended on Easter Sunday, and I don't think anyone knew. We were not told anything about arms coming in. We got no instructions to bring food.

About 80 of the 100 men in the Company mobilised in Eyeries after first Mass on Easter Sunday. A cycle patrol of five or six men, amongst whom were Joe Foley and a brother of mine, were sent in advance to Kenmare with a despatch. The remainder of the Company marched, and we reached Lauragh some time after midday. There was no Volunteer organisation in that area or in Ardgroom through which we passed. In fact, there was no Volunteer organisation nearer to us than Bantry on one side and Kenmare on the other. We were in a very isolated district.

The day was very wet and we halted at Lauragh. We had brought no food, and there was very little to be had locally, with the result that most of the men had nothing to eat. The people of the locality were quite indifferent. The church was open; we took shelter in

it, and most of the Company spent the night there. A few got into houses. Early next day we straggled back home. Most of the men had nothing to eat until they got back to their own area.

As far as I know, the cycle patrol did not contact anyone in Kenmare and did not return to Eyeries until the next day. No orders came to us during Sunday, and we had no information as to what was happening in other areas.

We were not mobilised again during Easter Week. We got no orders from Cork or elsewhere. A small gun boat came into the harbour during the week and kept the village under cover of its guns. The following week a party of military came from Bere Island, surrounded the village and searched all houses. Part of this force were Munster Fusiliers. I got outside the cordon. They searched my brother's forge and another forge along the road. They did not find anything either there or in the village.

An R.I.C. party under a D.I. went to Joe Foley's, Ardacluggan, and searched his house. They demanded his rifle. He refused to surrender it. He was arrested, and although they searched for the rifle they did not find it; it had been safely dumped. After Joe Foley's arrest, someone, without his knowledge or consent, brought the rifle in to the police in the belief or hope that he would be released if it was surrendered. He was not released and was interned in Frongoch. A revolver which Pat Mullins had was the only other weapon surrendered in Eyeries. Joe Foley was the only one arrested.

There was no Fianna or I.R.B. organisation in Eyeries before Easter, 1916.

SIGNED: Christopher O'Lonnell
DATE: 22nd Nov 1947

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WITNESS: Florence O'Donoghue