

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 571

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 571

Witness

Michael Newell,
Brierhill,
Castlegar,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

U/C. Galway No. 1 Brigade, 1920-1921.

Subject.

Reorganisation of Irish Volunteers, 1917,
and military engagements, Co. Galway, 1917-
date of Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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SECOND STATEMENT BY MICHAEL NEWELL

Brierhill, Castlegar, Co. Galway.

Following my release from Frongoch at Christmas 1916, I returned home to Brierhill. I found the Castlegar Company had been re-organised and working away. Tom Courtney, postman Galway, kept the Company going during our absence in jail. Our old Captain Brian Molloy who had been sentenced to 10 years penal servitude for his part in the rising, was not released until June 1917.

About the first week in August, 1917, a meeting of the Company was held to re-elect officers. Brian Molloy was re-elected Captain. My brother Thomas (Sweeney) Newell was elected 1st Lieutenant. The Company was about forty strong. We had not a rifle, and although we had forty shotguns during Easter Week we had only a few now as during our absence they had been returned to the farmers who had given them to us prior to Easter Week.

In the spring of 1918, Seumas Murphy formed the Galway Brigade and acted as Brigade O/C. Training parades were held every week. During the conscription threat in 1918 the Company carried out a house to house collection in the area and collected over £300, which was handed over to Father McHugh, P.P., Castlegar.

At 7 p.m. one evening during July 1918, the Company Captain got instructions from the Brigade O/C. to parade the Company at 11 p.m. that night at the

Racecourse, Ballybrit, which was in the company area. This was a test mobilisation. The Company mobilised at full strength before the appointed time. The Brigade O/C. arrived and inspected the Company. He then addressed the Company and expressed himself as well satisfied with the turn out at such short notice.

On the eve of the Galway races with other Volunteers we climbed the telegraph poles from the entrance gates to the stands and hoisted a tricolour on each pole. The following morning the R.I.C. arrived in force and removed all the flags before the races started. The Company took an active part in the election of the Sinn Féin candidates at the General Election 1918. The Volunteers carried out a thorough canvass of the area and on polling day acted as personation agents and also organised transport to bring voters to the polling booths.

Early in 1919 on instructions from the Brigade O/C., we carried out raids for arms in the area. We raided the house of Connie French, Income Tax Collector, Rocklawn, and got one double-barrelled shotgun. On the same night we raided Eddie French's house at Cloon and got three sporting guns. A week later we carried out another raid on Moffitt's, Wellpark, Galway. We got one .22 rifle. On the same night we raided Colonel Joyce's, Mervue, but all we got was a pair of field glasses.

About mid-summer 1919, Captain Brian Molloy was appointed Vice O/C. of the Battalion, and Bernard Fallon was elected Company in his place.

Early in May, 1919, I was instructed to parade at the hill Two-Mile-Ditch with my brother Willie and Joseph Donnellan, and to hold up the mail car which passed that way every day and seize the mails for the British military and the R.I.C. Andy Naughton, the driver of the mail car was a sympathiser. We carried out the raid as planned and captured all enemy mails, which we sent on to the Brigade O/C. Soon after this I was appointed Battalion Intelligence Officer.

The Vice O/C. of the Battalion told me about a week before the attack on Loughgeorge R.I.C. Barracks that the attack was to take place. Loughgeorge Barracks was in the Claregalway Company area. The attack took place on the 25th May, 1919. The Castlegar Company was instructed to have five cars at the outskirts of Galway Town to convey the members of the College Company (University College, Galway) to Loughgeorge for the attack on the Barracks. This arrangement was carried out. The Castlegar Company was also instructed to take up position on the road near Killeen on the Galway - Claregalway road, and to engage enemy reinforcements which might be sent that way to the help of the R.I.C. We took up the position as instructed. The attack opened at about 6 a.m. and continued for over an hour. We remained in position until the attack was called off. Enemy reinforcements did not come our way. The attack which took place on the 25th May, 1919, was not a success.

Following the dismissal of railwaymen who refused to drive trains conveying enemy troops or munitions, the Company carried out collections in the area to help the

railwaymen. About the end of June 1920, with Brian Molloy, Dan Fallon, Tom Newell, I brought land mines and a box of gellignite to Oranhill about one mile beyond Oranmore and left them at Sonny Farrell's to be used in the attack on Bookeen Barrack.

About August, 1920, some members of the Battalion Staff and representatives of the various Companies held a meeting in the Forge, Brierhill. Among those present were Brian Molloy, Vice Battalion O/C., Thomas (Baby) Duggan, Maurice Mullins, Dan Fallon, Bernard Fallon, John Fallon, Michael Flaherty, Sonny King, Paddy King, John Mulroyan, Tom Mulroyan, Ned and Pat Broderick. As Battalion Intelligence Officer I reported to the meeting that a Sergeant and five or six constables of the R.I.C. stationed in the R.I.C. Barracks, Oranmore, usually left the Barracks on bicycles between 9.30 and 10 o'clock every Saturday morning and proceeded in the direction of Galway. I also reported that they travelled in single file about twenty to thirty yards apart. It was decided to attack them the following Saturday. The men detailed for the job were instructed to mobilise at the rear of Weighman's House on the Oranmore-Galway road at 8.45 a.m. the following Saturday. Our party was about sixteen in number including officers. Eight were armed with rifles, the remainder had revolvers. When all were assembled we were "fell in" by Brian Molloy who was in charge of the attack. He told us we were to take up positions on the hill about 200 yards west of the railway bridge. The first man was placed at the foot of the hill and the remainder at intervals and the last man was near the top of the hill. Baby Duggan and Maurice Mullins

were instructed to take up positions on the overhead railway bridge so as to prevent the enemy retreating back to Oranmore. I was about midway the hill with about six men on either side of me. We were instructed not to fire until the leading R. I. C. man had reached a spot almost at the top of the hill; by that time the remainder of the enemy would be completely inside the ambush position. At about 10 a.m. the enemy came along, two cycling abreast and three others singly at about fifty yards apart. When the leading two had reached about midway the hill and therefore about the middle of our ambush party, the last man had just passed under the bridge, our men on the bridge, contrary to orders, opened fire on him.

The main party then opened fire on the leading two men who were about to dismount. One of them was shot dead, the other ran through a gap on the left side of the road. The remaining three who had not reached the main ambush position succeeded in getting behind cover and returned fire eventually making good their escape although two of them were wounded. The engagement lasted only a few minutes. We suffered no casualties. We captured two .45 revolvers and five bicycles. The O/C., Brian Molloy, then assembled us in the wood where we hid all the guns and the five bicycles. We were then dismissed and went home across country in two's and three's.

Soon afterwards planes from Oranmore Aerodrome flew continuously over the area at tree top height. Several times we had to lie flat in the ditches to avoid being spotted. That night we returned to the wood and collected the arms and bicycles. The Company was mobilised and remained under arms at Brierhill expecting

the enemy would carry out reprisals there but they did not come. While under arms we saw flames in the direction of Oranmore, the enemy had carried out reprisals there by burning several houses. This attack came to be known as the Merlenn Park ambush. The following took part in it :-

Brian Molloy, O/C.
 Thomas (Baby) Duggan,
 My two brothers, Thomas (Sweeney)
 and Willie Newell and myself,
 John Mulroyan,
 Thomas Mulroyan,
 Pat (Sonny) King,
 Bernard and Dan Fallon, brothers,
 Michael Flaherty,
 Pat Broderick,
 Ned Broderick,
 Maurice Mullins,
 John Fahy,
 John Fallon.

This ambush was carried out without the permission of Seumas Murphy, the Brigade O/C., and who when he heard of it threatened to courtmartial those responsible.

Shortly after this the Galway Brigade was divided and re-organised into four separate Brigades. Our area came into the Mid-Galway Brigade. Joe Howley was appointed O/C.; Brian Molloy was O/C., 1st Battalion. I was Intelligence Officer, 1st Battalion.

A couple of weeks before Joe Howley was shot dead at Broadstone Station, Dublin, by the R.I.C., "Baby" Duggan, who had been to Dublin, returned with instructions from G.H.Q. that I was to take over command of the Mid-Galway Brigade (No.1 Galway Brigade) in place of Howley as there was nothing being done in the area. I started to re-organise the Brigade. I appointed Tom Ruane Vice-Commandant; Joe Donnellan, Adjutant, and Thomas (Baby) Duggan, Quartermaster. We planned several

ambushes and on occasions remained twenty-four hours in positions but nothing came our way. We collected £35 for which we got eight Mausers with eight rounds of ammunition for each.

Kilroe Ambush: Louis Darcy, O/C. 3rd Battalion, requested me to go into his area and carry out an ambush so as to get things going in his area. In February, 1921, I organised a column from Castlegar, Clare-Galway, Cregmore and Aucleggeen Companies of about fifty men. Eight were armed with Mausers with only eight rounds each, the remainder had shotguns. We marched to Aucleggeen and remained overnight in an unoccupied house. At 7 a.m. we marched to Kilroe about five miles away on the Headford-Galway road. We selected the position as best we could as it was still dark. On the right-hand side of the road as we faced Headford was a stone wall with scrub behind it for some distance. I placed the main ambush party behind this wall and instructed them to fire on the first lorry that came in either direction. I put six men on high ground on the left side of the road to act as a covering party. I gave definite instructions; they were not to fire except to cover the main party if they found it necessary to retreat. I also took up position on the left side further on nearer to Headford.

Shortly after getting into position an enemy lorry came from the direction of Galway. Before it reached the main ambush position some of the covering party, contrary to orders, opened fire on it, hitting the engine and knocked it out of action. The lorry stopped beside a man who was leading a pair of horses on the road; the horses pranced around. Some of the main attacking party

opened fire but the majority refrained from doing so on account of the men and the horse. There were about fifteen auxiliaries in the lorry; they jumped out and some took cover along the roadside; others got under the lorry. The two machine gunners remained on the lorry and opened up an intensive fire on our positions. I unloaded my revolver at them and then threw four bombs which exploded near the lorry. The auxiliaries threw bombs in my direction. The enemy machine gunners continued to fire. I went past the lorry under cover of the wall to where the covering party should have been and found they had gone. I then returned past the lorry again and continued beyond the bend in the road on the Headford side. I then crossed the road and worked my way to near the main party and gave the pre-arranged signal - two long blasts of the whistle - to retire. We carried out a successful retreat. One of our men was wounded in the hand. We did not capture any arms. The enemy suffered several casualties.

Following this attack I came to the conclusion that we wanted an experienced officer to act as Column Commander. I applied to G.H.Q. to send us such an officer but no one came. I then recruited some ex-British soldiers with war experience to train the men and take charge of the Column, but before the training of the Column was completed the Truce came.

At this time the Brigade was well organised. My Brigade officers were:

Thomas Ruane (since deceased) Vice-Commandant
 Joseph Donnellan (since deceased) Adjutant
 Thomas (Baby) Duggan (since deceased)
 Quartermaster.

The Brigade was composed of three Battalions
as follows :-

<u>1st Battalion</u>	O/C.	Brian Molloy.
<u>2nd Battalion</u>	O/C.	Patrick Feeney.
<u>3rd Battalion (Headford)</u>	O/C.	Patrick Glynn.

The following seven Companies formed the
1st Battalion :-

Galway City: Castlegar: Cussaune: Moniva:
Derrydonnell: Newcastle and Cregmore.

The following four Companies formed the
2nd Battalion :-

Claregalway: Annaghdown "A": Annaghdown "B"
and Kilcoona.

The following three Companies formed the
3rd Battalion :-

Cloneen: Claren and Caherlestrange.

The total strength of the Brigade was
about 750.

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SIGNED

Michael Newell

DATE

Sept 6th 1951

WITNESS

Patrick King

Sean Brennan. Comdt.