

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 718

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 718

Witness

Sergeant T. Crawley,
Garda Barracks,
Ballyfarnon,
Boyle,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Vice-Commandant 1st Battalion,
South Roscommon Brigade I.R.A., 1920-1921;

Sergeant Garda Síochána.

Subject.

National activities, South Roscommon,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY SERGEANT T. CRAWLEY,

Gárda Barracks, Ballyfarnon, Boyle, Co. Roscommon.

Some of my ancestors were engaged in the Fenian Movement. From that association I suppose I developed a sympathetic feeling for all things Irish, particularly those that tended to free our country from the tight grip in which it was held by the British government.

Start of the Volunteers in the Loughlynn area:

In 1917 a Company of Volunteers was started in Loughlynn to combat the threat of conscription which was then menacing us. This Company was about 60 strong. The O/C was Pat Glynn. We had no arms except that there were some shotguns in the area which would be available to us in the case of a crisis. Our instructor was Tom Rodgers. He had had service in the British Army. The principal instruction we received was drill. When the threat of conscription died out the organisation dwindled away also. Before, however, it had completely died out some of the members had made up their mind to form a proper Company of Irish Volunteers in the area.

About the 1st April 1918 Dan O'Rourke came to Loughlynn and gave us some instruction about the formation of a Company. We started a Company of Irish Volunteers there then. Dan O'Rourke came down to Loughlynn on several nights and gave us instruction. We had somewhere around twenty members to start with. We did not then take any oath or make any declaration as far as I can remember. Pat Glynn was appointed Officer Commanding the Company, and I think Martin Ganly was the

1st Lieutenant. I cannot remember now who was the 2nd Lieutenant or who, if any, were the other officers at this stage. We had a few shot guns and a .22 rifle or two for armament.

I think Thomas Rodgers joined up with us again and gave us instruction. This was only for a while, however, for as soon as things began to get serious he fell away, as also did some others. We continued on training as best we could. Pat Glynn and the other officers imparted instruction to the best of their ability. We did close order drill, signalling and some tactical training. All training was carried out in secret and the police never got on to us. Our strength remained approximately the same. When we joined we took no oath - this did not occur until later.

The General Election of 1918:

We carried on with our training and organisation until the 1918 Elections. Dan O'Rourke visited us often and was a great source of help and encouragement to us. During the General Election in the end of 1918 we had a very busy time. The duties carried out by the Volunteers entailed canvassing voters, checking the register, getting voters to the polling stations and arranging transport to take them there. We were also required to have protection parties for the various speakers on duty at the meetings. The Volunteers had also to provide escorts for the ballot boxes when they were being taken to the main centre for counting. The R.I.C. also provided escorts. There were no clashes, however, between the two forces, and except for the usual shouting and small rows everything went off quite peacefully.

The Volunteers and the Dáil and Dáil Loan:

Early in 1919 the first Dáil met in Dublin as the government of the Irish Republic. The Dáil now took over the control of the Volunteers. All Volunteers were now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic. A few of our men declined to take this oath and ceased their Volunteer activities. From now on the Volunteers were officially known as the I.R.A., although amongst the force itself and the people generally they continued to be called the Volunteers.

The Dáil now floated a loan and the Volunteers were required to collect subscriptions for this. We got subscriptions from about 98% of the people. All this money was handed over to Pat Glynn who passed it on to an agent in Roscommon. Official receipts or bonds were issued to all subscribers.

The Sinn Féin Courts:

After the General Election our strength increased somewhat but not very much. The Sinn Féin Courts now got functioning efficiently and were availed of extensively by the people who abided loyally by their decisions. This entailed further work for the Volunteers in giving effect to the decisions of these Courts. When the servants of the British Courts came into the area to serve summonses and so forth, we took the documents from them and did not allow them to serve them. The Sinn Féin Courts as already stated were used extensively by the people and the British Courts were almost idle. One of the reasons perhaps why our Courts took on so well was that there was a lot of local talk being handed around that the Sinn Féin Courts would divide up the big landed

estates amongst the local people. The Sinn Fein organisation set up the Courts and all the local judges or magistrates were selected from the members of that organisation. The Volunteers were mostly also members of Sinn Fein and ran the organisation in the area and the work of running the Courts there devolved on them.

Armament.

We had a few revolvers of different types which we picked up here and there, and quite a few shotguns. We did some raiding for arms, but not very extensively at this period. Most of the guns were given to us voluntarily. Some belonged to ourselves.

Training of officers.

Towards the end of 1919, Ernie O'Malley came down from Dublin and established a training centre for officers. This was of great assistance to us, as, apart from the knowledge we gained from him, it gave the officers a status which they had lacked previously and helped considerably in establishing a spirit of leadership in the Volunteer force. Two or three companies of Volunteers would be concentrated at some point and O'Malley would attend and give them instruction.

Evacuation of police barracks by the R.I.C.

In the latter part of 1919 and early 1920, the R.I.C. evacuated all the smaller stations in the country and concentrated the police in larger stations, principally in the towns. The work of policing the country now depended completely on the Volunteers and added enormously to their duties.

It must be remembered that the Volunteers for the most part consisted of young men who had to earn their living by their various vocations

and they normally had only their spare time to devote to soldiering. Now they had to make arrests and detentions, give effect to the decrees of the Courts, police public houses, take care of lunatics etc. and the many other duties falling to a police force. In addition, a boycott of the R.I.C. had been started and the Volunteers had to try and prevent shopkeepers and traders from supplying them with goods. This boycott was not very effective as the traders continued to supply them under the pretence that the goods were commandeered by the R.I.C.

At Easter 1920 all the vacated R.I.C. barracks were destroyed, mostly by burning by the Volunteers. There was a police barracks in Loughlynn, but this was not vacated by the police until about August of that year.

General raid for arms:

Some time around January 1920 a general raid for arms throughout the country was carried out by the Volunteers on the orders of Headquarters. In our area we secured a good many shotguns, something around twenty, together with a small supply of cartridges. No weapons of a service nature were secured. In most cases it was only a matter of calling for the guns when they were handed up voluntarily.

Organisation of the 1st Battalion South Roscommon Brigade:

A Battalion organisation had been in existence for some time previous to this in the area. The Companies comprising the Battalion, which was known as the 1st Battalion South Roscommon Brigade, were Loughlynn, Ballinlough, Moore, Treen, Castlereagh, Ballingar, Cloonbonniffie, and later Companies were also organised in Cloonfad and Cortaganny.

Pat Glynn was Officer Commanding the Battalion. I cannot remember now who the Adjutant was or the Quartermaster then. Some service rifles had been procured from the British military. I cannot say how but a few of them were brought into this Battalion area.

Attempt to capture and disarm Guard at Castlereagh Railway Station:

A guard of about half a dozen British soldiers were on guard duty on Castlereagh Railway Station. We arranged to send a party into the station to disarm this guard. A train coming in from the Dublin direction was boarded by another party up the country somewhere. This party were to leave the train when it stopped at the Station and join forces with our party and then rush and disarm the guard. Transport had been arranged for the purpose of taking the raiding party and the captured arms away. It was learned when we arrived at the Station that the guard had been augmented and were on the alert and apparently waiting for something.

The Battalion Commander decided to call off the operation and he had the incoming train stopped while still a good way from the station and the party on it warned and taken off. This worked out successfully and our whole party then dispersed and nothing happened. Somebody had talked or given information of our intentions to the enemy.

Plans to attack military post at Kilmurray:

The British had a strong party of troops at Kilmurray. There was a dispute about the division of land in that district and that was why the troops were there. It was planned to attack and capture and disarm

this party. For this purpose the 1st and 2nd Battalion carried out a number of training parades. I understand the Brigade O/C sent the plans for this attack to General Headquarters and that they were not sanctioned there. At any rate the attempt was never made. The plans for attack included the rushing of the place at night time when the camp would be at rest. We had a few rifles and revolvers and quite a good number of shot guns all in readiness for this job.

Seizure of petrol:

About June 1920 information was received from somewhere, probably Dublin, that a large amount of petrol was being consigned by rail to the military barracks in Ballina. Plans were got under way immediately to seize this petrol at a place between Castlereagh and Ballinlough. The train was held up at the point stated and the petrol which was in tins was removed to lorries which were waiting closeby. It was a pretty big consignment. No escort of British troops accompanied it, so the job was comparatively easy.

Evacuation of Loughlynn R.I.C. Barracks:

About July 1920 the police evacuated Loughlynn barracks. The evacuation took place during the daylight hours and that night it was destroyed by burning. A patrol of R.I.C. arrived from Castlereagh just when the place was due to go up but they found everything in order. The party of I.R.A. had spotted the patrol and withdrawn to a safe distance. The police left and when about half a mile outside the town their barracks went up in flames. Other than this there was no incident.

Ballinlough R.I.C. Barracks:

Some time after the Loughlynn evacuation took place the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks in Ballinlough and it was decided to burn the place that night. Pat Glynn, the Battalion O/C, and a party of Volunteers proceeded there to do the job. When this party were preparing the premises for burning they were fired on from across the street by a patrol of enemy who had come out from Castlereagh and gone into hiding covering off the barracks. Three Volunteers were killed including the Battalion Commandant Pat Glynn, also Michael Glavey and - Keane. The rest of the party got safely away. The Barracks was destroyed some time later without any further incident.

Appointment of Bn. O/C and other officers:

After the unfortunate affair of Ballinlough R.I.C. barracks there was for a period nothing but delay and indecision in the Battalion and our spirits and morale were at a low level. Some of the Battalion Officers deserted. Actually they were chased out of the district by the R.I.C. who now were more or less complete masters and unopposed. Gerald O'Connor was appointed Battalion O/C and I was appointed Vice O/C. Albert Darr was now appointed Adjutant in lieu of - Beatty who had cleared out of the area. John White was appointed Quartermaster.

Attack on Frenchpark R.I.C. barracks:

About the 2nd October 1920 an attack was made on Frenchpark R.I.C. barracks. This was a Brigade operation. All available men who had arms of any sort were ordered to turn out. Our only means of destroying

the barracks was a load of hay on a cart which was soaked in paraffin or petrol. This load was to be backed up against the door of the barracks and set on fire. At the same time the barracks was to be attacked in front and rere by rifle fire. A party had been detailed to climb on to the roof of the barracks from an adjoining building and to break a hole in the roof through which petrol and oil was to be poured and set on fire

Some of the attacking parties were in position when the man detailed for the job pushed the cart load of hay towards the door. When he got near the door hand grenades were thrown from the barracks window and intense rifle fire opened up from that building. The man had to abandon his cart of hay which needless to say was not lighted. He, however, got safely away. Fire was returned on the barracks for some time but it was impossible to get near the hay to set it alight. Needless to say the party detailed to make the hole in the roof did not get into action either.

After about half an hour the attack was called off and we all withdrew and disbanded. We had no casualties. I don't know if the police had any either. It would appear as if the police had been warned about the impending attack. Personally I believe otherwise. While we were assembling and moving to our attack positions, which took some considerable time, every dog in the area was barking and generally kicking up a row and there seemed to be a plentiful supply of dogs around there. It was obvious from this that something unusual was afoot and that a number of strangers were around so the police were just naturally alerted and took no chances.

Attacks on enemy as reprisals.

In January 1921, Pat Madde, who was O/C. of the 3rd Battalion area, and Luke Duffy, his Vice Commandant, came down to our area and put up at a house in Cloonmaul. The Brigade O/C., Dan O'Rourke, and two more were also there. It was planned that we were going to attack Castlereagh, or in other words, we were going into the town and shooting anything we found in enemy uniform there. The day prior to the date on which this operation was to have taken place, the house in Cloonmaul where the Brigade O/C. and the others were staying was surrounded in the early morning. A running fight took place and O'Rourke, Madden, Duffy and the others succeeded in making good their escape. The operation scheduled for Castlereagh was called off as a result of this raid. John Crean and I were not aware that the operation had been cancelled and we went into the town. We did not see any enemy on the streets as far as we went. On failing to contact any of our comrades we realised that there was something up and we withdrew.

In April 1921, a Volunteer - I think by the name of Conroy - was taken out and shot dead by the R.I.C. and Tans. As a reprisal for this a party of ten of us armed with two rifles and shotguns and a few revolvers went into the town of Castlereagh with the intention of shooting anything we found in British uniform. We only got one soldier and we shot him dead. No other enemy could be found on the streets. The enemy opened fire from the barracks and a civilian was shot on the street. We were withdrawing from the town at this time. We had no casualties.

Enemy raid and the death of some Volunteers:

About June 1921 some Volunteers who were on the 'run' were staying in a house at Cloonsuck. The house was surrounded by British Forces including R.I.C. The Volunteers got out of the house, but in trying to get away John Vaughan and Ned Shannon were killed. Martin Ganly was captured and I think one other man. I don't think anyone got away. All were armed but they got no chance to use their weapons. It would appear as if information had reached the enemy about them.

Capture of a Spy:

Around the month of June 1921 Dan O'Rourke, Gerald O'Connor and I were in a house between Castlereagh and Ballangare. We noticed a strange man passing the house. He was in civilian attire and riding a bicycle. He seemed to be taking a great interest in the house in which we were. Gerald O'Connor who was my Bn. O/C decided to follow him and find out who he was and so he set out after the man. Some few minutes later I decided I would follow O'Connor in case he got into trouble. About a mile down the road I found O'Connor had this strange man held up. He had got in front of him and then held him up.

I stood behind the man and Gerald O'Connor then relieved him of a Webley revolver and some ammunition. Dan O'Rourke now came on the scene. Although this man, whom we now knew to be a Black and Tan, professed no religion he agreed to see a Catholic priest. We got the priest for him and he was baptised. We bound him and drowned him by throwing him into the river Suck at Dunammon. He admitted that he was on intelligence work

for the enemy.

More Volunteers die.

Around this time Michael Carty of Loughglynn Company and Peter Shannon, both of whom were 'on the run' were staying in a house at Aughadriscan. The house was surrounded in the early hours of the morning by the police. Carty and Shannon were fired on by the police while still in their beds. Carty was shot dead and Shannon received about six bullets in his body. He survived, however, and is alive today. He was made a prisoner. I am not quite sure now but that there was a third or fourth man also in this house and if they were also captured. It would appear that their location had been given to the enemy by some friend or agent.

Earlier on in the year, probably around May, we left a party at a house in Loughglynn demesne to rest there. Another party including myself went on into the next townland. Some hours after daylight the house in the demesne was surrounded by military. The four men who were inside got out and a running fight took place. Some of our men, at least two, were armed with rifles. One man, Tom Scally, was wounded, but he still kept going and escaped. Three others were captured and the rifles and what other weapons they had were lost. Of the three captured by the enemy, two were brought up the wood and put against a tree and shot by the British military. The third man was an ex-British soldier and he apparently convinced the British that he was in the house under duress and escaped shooting. They kept him as a prisoner, however. They could not afford to let him out and let him talk. We had used this place for resting previously and the enemy had probably got to know about it and their raid coincided with our occupation.

The shooting of Sergeant King.

Sergeant King of the R.I.C. was the principal man in the murder gang that was organised in the R.I.C. in Castlereagh and was responsible for a number of killings around the area. He was badly wanted by us. On the morning of the Truce, 11th July, we made a final effort to get this man. Between 10 and 11 a.m. on that morning we proceeded into the town on this mission. We got some of the Treen Company to block the road leading to Ballymoe by which we came in and by which we intended to leave.

We went into a shop to get a drink of lemonade and when only a few minutes there Sergeant King came out of his own house on the opposite side of the street and proceeded to get on his cycle as if to go to the barracks. We left the shop. Ned Campion and I let him have it. He died immediately.

Although the Truce took effect at 12 o'clock on that day, the enemy chased us until about 6 p.m. that evening. As I cycled away from the scene of the shooting, I found that my companion, Campion, was running behind me. His cycle chain had broken. I stopped and put him on my cycle and pushed him to the railway station where we abandoned my cycle and took to the fields. We were closely followed by the enemy and had some anxious hours of it. We finally escaped them, however, by adopting the role of shepherds gathering up sheep. They must have concluded when they saw us working at the sheep that we were locals and they did not even question us.

Active Service Unit or Column.

An active Service Unit or Flying Column was established in the battalion area about Christmas 1920. This column was about 15 strong and could, of course, be augmented easily as the situation demanded. The column had four service rifles, the remainder being armed with shotguns. There were a good few revolvers and some of the men were also armed with hand grenades. Sean Bergin was mostly in charge of the column except when Gerald O'Connor or I was with it, when, by reason of our seniority of rank, we took charge. We made a large amount of buckshot in the area which we loaded into shotgun cartridges. We also attempted to make gunpowder, but this was not a success.

Intelligence and counter-intelligence work.

Except for the period after the death of the battalion O/C., Pat Glynn, battalion council meetings were held regularly. Battalion staff officers and all company commanders attended these meetings. Business was mostly of a routine nature such as checking up on training, activities of enemy agents and so forth. Brigade council meetings were also held regularly.

Two women, one the wife of an R.I.C. man, were giving information to the enemy. We burned their places and compelled them to get out of the area. They made no secret of it that they were working for the enemy. An ex-R.I.C. man and an ex-British soldier were also giving information. A party of our fellows dressed in British uniforms visited these men in their houses and were given all the information they wanted to know about the local I.R.A. Both the men were shot. We were damned right from the start by having traitors and agents amongst us and in the area and we were never really able to get control

over this situation or eliminate that danger. Our Brigade Intelligence Officer was found out to be an Intelligence agent for the British. He cleared out of the country and was never got. Quite a number of men in the Castlereagh area were either shot in their beds by the R.I.C. and Tans or taken out of their beds and shot, and all of these can be put down to the activities of that ruffian.

This was the situation we were confronted with in our area, but despite that, the Truce found us not despondent. On the contrary, our morale was improving and we were gaining confidence in ourselves and satisfied that we would in the very near future have the situation under our control.

Signed: Thomas Crawley
(THOMAS CRAWLEY)

Date: 31/7/1952

Witness: Matthew Barry Comdt
(MATTHEW BARRY) COMDT.

