

W.S. 743

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 743

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 743

Witness

Daniel Daly,
Parklands,
Glanmire,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Rathcormac (Co. Cork) Company,
Irish Volunteers, 1916;

Engineer, Cork No. II Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

National activities, Co. Cork (North)
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2049

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STATEMENT

BY

DANIEL DALY, PARKLANDS, GLAINMIRE, CO. CORK.

I was born in the village of Rathcormac, Co. Cork, in 1890, but before the end of the century the family moved to Bushy Park House, about three miles from Rathcormac. My parents were farmers. I attended the local school.

Prior to the Easter Rising, 1916, there was little or no Volunteer activity in Rathcormac although there was a fairly well organised Company in the adjoining village of Glenville. This Company was frequently visited by the late Tomás MacCurtain.

Immediately following the Rising a Volunteer Company was organised in Rathcormac and I became a member. This Company came under the control of the Fermoy Battalion and the Battalion O.C. then was the late Michael Fitzgerald, who died subsequently in Cork Jail from hunger-strike. The late Liam Lynch succeeded Michael Fitzgerald as the O.C., Our Company O.C. was the late Tim Ring and he had to go 'on the run' later for the reading of the Proclamation in 1918, and Pat Nolan was Acting O.C. in his absence. This was not the Proclamation of 1916: it was one issued from General Headquarters to be read throughout the whole country.

Weekly drills were held sometimes in the open country and on other occasions in various houses in the locality.

During this time, and for some time later, I had not been very much in public eye, as Liam Lynch, for personal reasons, was anxious that I would keep myself to a certain extent under cover.

I suppose I could classify myself as his personal representative in the district and I met him occasionally and kept him informed of activities generally.

When the Conscription crisis came, however, I attended all the local parades, as practically every able-bodied man in the locality joined up, the vast majority of whom, however, as quickly severed their membership when the crisis had passed. Our Company was only a small one and its normal strength would be between twenty and thirty.

Some months later I transferred to the Watergrasshill Company my home, Bushy Park House, was situated about midway between the two villages and Watergrasshill at this period was a more active Unit. Shortly after transferring to Watergrasshill, Dave Cotter and myself destroyed the evacuated R.I.C. barracks, when both of us had a very narrow escape from a petrol explosion in carrying out the job.

WATERFORD ELECTION, 1918.

As a result of a call for Volunteers for duty in Waterford for the election of Dr. Vincent White about twenty of us, including myself, volunteered and proceeded to Waterford, where we remained for three or four days. We took part in numerous scuffles with the opponents but the Volunteer organisation for this Election activity was not good, and there was a very bad mix-up on the actual night of the polling as our activities were not properly organised.

For the period we were billeted in an old corn loft under the most primitive conditions.

1919.

Parades continued to be held fairly regularly.

My own home was the centre for a lot of activity as it was situated in a rather quiet part of the country. Part of our activities comprised the making of buckshot and also home-made bombs - these were made with ordinary tin canisters, some cement, pieces of old metal from old pots, etc., and a half stick of gelignite to which a piece of fuse was affixed.

Following the Knocklong ambush Ned O'Brien and Jim Scanlon of Galbally remained in our house for a period, while the main activity of enemy pressure to capture the participants was in operation. During their stay we kept a very close watch on enemy movements so that we would not be taken unawares.

ORGANISATION.

The organisation of our Battalion about this time was: the Battalion Headquarters and one Company were located in Fermoy town and the other Companies were: Rathcormac, Watergrasshill, Glenvill, Bartlemy, Cenna-Aghern, Ballynoe and Clondulane. The strength of these Companies would vary between twenty to sixty. From my experience, however, I would say that normally only about ten or twelve of the Volunteers would be really effective. The majority of them were only on the rolls and could hardly be relied upon in an emergency.

Our Battalion was now known as the 1st Battalion, Cork II Brigade.

Other than parades and some money collections and political activity, Sinn Féin, etc., there was very little or no action in 1919.

1920.

In January of 1920, five others and myself lay in ambush for an R.I.C. patrol at Castlelyons. The patrol we awaited normally consisted of one Sergeant and two Constables from Rathcormac, and from observation it had been noted that they had a fairly regular patrol route. We were very keen to strike at this patrol because the Sergeant, whose name was O'Shea, had gained a bad reputation locally. The patrol failed to turn up, however, so after waiting several hours we dismissed and returned home. Perhaps it was just as well that the patrol failed to appear for we learned later that Sergt. O'Shea was not a bad sort at all and he became very popular eventually.

On the 1/2/1920 we had our first successful ambush. Owing to some land trouble an R.I.C. patrol used to go nightly to Aghern district to give protection to the so-called "Grabber". The patrol consisted of a Sergeant and two other R.I.C.

It was decided to capture this party, so on the night of February 1st about fifteen or twenty men were placed in position in the surrounding hedges. I was on the road hidden behind a corner. When they approached I gave the order "Hands up". I was armed with a revolver. They seemed a bit stunned at this order and appeared to be slow in responding. The lads inside the hedges then came out on the road and the three of them were captured without any difficulty. This resulted in the capture of: 3 Webleys, 2 Carhines, one shot-gun, together with some

ammunition for each of the weapons.

The patrol was then brought under guard to Bealalountine Ford on the River Bride between Rathcormac and Conna, where we were to meet some of the Battalion staff. Moss Twomey and George Power - members of the staff - were there on our arrival. The original intention was to bring the patrol to the R.I.C. barracks at Aghern and compel the Sergeant to give the password and when the door was opened, our lads to rush in and capture the place. There would only be about three or four Constables left in the barracks. Through some mix-up it was decided not to go ahead with the proposed plan: Liam Lynch, who was expected to be present, was unable to turn up for some reason. I do not know the reason. None of the other staff members present would take the responsibility of going ahead with the operation owing to the danger of some lives being lost. I understand it was the policy at this stage to make whatever capture of weapons which could be made without actual loss of life.

Some few weeks later plans were made for an attack on this barracks (Aghern). The attack was carried out on the night of February 16th, 1920. The attacking party consisted of about forty drawn from all the Companies of the Battalion. Six others and myself were from Watergrasshill Company. We had a number of the rifles which had been captured by Liam Lynch a short time before in Fermoy; we also had some shot-guns and revolvers and some of the home-made bombs.

The intention was to put in a charge of gelignite in the gable end of the barracks and, following the explosion, to make a rush in through the breach created by the explosion. However, unfortunately, our plans did not work out that way, for the bar

with which we were making a hole in the gable end for the insertion of the charge, instead of working into the solid wall penetrated into one of the fireplaces in the barracks. Immediately this occurred a shower of grenades was thrown at us from the upper floor of the barracks causing us to beat a hasty retreat. Firing at the barracks then started and those in the barracks returned the fire. This exchange of shots continued for half an hour or more. It was then considered hopeless to continue as we had not the wherewithal to push home the attack. It was, therefore, decided to withdraw. One of our lads - Mick Condon - who was wounded in the attack was, through a misunderstanding, forgotten about. Some of the lads were sure that Condon had moved off. Such was not the case, however, because he was found later that night by the R.I.C. It appears he got a rough time of it and was brought to Cork Jail. He was subsequently court-martialled but I do not know what sentence he got. He was released on the general amnesty, but the poor lad died some years later.

BRIGADE COLUMN.

The Column of Cork II Brigade was formed early in September, 1920. It was from my home they moved for the capture of Mallow Barracks. Liam Lynch was in charge, and the strength of the Column would be from twenty-five to thirty. Liam Lynch and about twelve others remained in our house and the remainder were billeted in the surrounding farmhouses.

I had the job of arranging the billets and also the provision of transport for the movement of the Column. I made a special request to Liam Lynch to be permitted to proceed with the

Column. Liam refused and said I was doing equally important work at home. This was the first operation of the Column.

Subsequent to the capture of Mallow Barracks a number of the weapons captured were sent to me for safe keeping.

BATTALION COLUMN.

About October, 1920, a battalion flying column was formed under Seán O'Mahony of Araglen. There were about fifteen to eighteen of us in it. I had one of the rifles taken in the capture of Mallow Barracks in September by Liam Lynch's column, together with a Webley revolver. Others had some of the rifles captured in Araglen R.I.C. Barracks and a few had shot-guns.

We moved into different areas and those not 'on the run' could go home when no operation was arranged.

Ambush positions were taken up on several occasions, including about three times on Blackstone bridge, about two miles from Watergrasshill on the Rathcormac side. Nothing resulted, however, as no enemy appeared.

DECEMBER, 1920.

On the 10th December, 1920, the battalion column lay in ambush at Leary's Cross, Castlelyons, on the off chance that something would turn up. A short time after taking up positions a single enemy lorry made its appearance and it carried about fifteen or eighteen soldiers. We opened fire immediately, most of the lads aiming for the petrol tank: the lorry stopped at once and the majority of the troops dismounted and took up positions along the hedges which we had covered from our position. The fight ensued

for some time and eventually the enemy cleared off across country. We were not organised sufficiently to follow up our advantage as, otherwise, none of them would have got away.

The nett result of the ambush was one enemy dead and four wounded. Our party had no serious casualties. I think we got three or four rifles in this fight.

1921.

On the 2/1/1921 an enemy lorry arrived at our home. I saw it just as it arrived and I ran off post haste to warn my brother, Paddy, also a Volunteer, who was out on the farm spreading manure. The military saw me running and they ran quickly after me. After going through some fields I found that I was being fired on from all sides. I tried to hide but they eventually captured me and also my brother. They conveyed both of us to Fermoy Barracks where we were placed in the guardroom. Paddy was moved to Ballykinlar for internment, after three or four days.

I was still in Fermoy in the month of March, and on numerous occasions had been carried around as a hostage on the lorry patrols I was tied up with ropes on such occasions.

A short time following my arrest I had been charged with "the murder of Gunner Cambridge at Deerpark on the 10th December, 1920". This was the Castlelyons ambush in which I had participated. On a few occasions when I was brought before the Military Court, and on the charge being read out, I informed the Court that I was reserving my defence. Later, I was informed that I could get legal assistance. Some friends outside sent in a Solicitor named Troy (now a District Justice) to see me and after several

conversations with him he said they had tried to get the services of Tim Healy, K.C., but failed for some reason or other. He then told me that they were trying to get Paddy Lynch, K.C. When I told Troy that I was actually in the ambush he did not think much of my chances. Some efforts were then being made to prove an alibi. I was getting pretty desperate at this stage of the proceedings and I redoubled my efforts to see what possible way I could effect an escape. I had carefully observed the sentries on duty and the changing of the guards, etc., Special care was given to me for seemingly I was an important prisoner in their eyes. I had examined the bars of the cell windows several times and did not think that much could be done with them for each of the bars was almost an inch thick.

I had also taken note of the slack time in the barracks, which was approximately from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. I also closely observed, as far as I was able, the movement of cars, etc.,

As already stated, I was getting fairly desperate, so on the evening of the 3rd March, 1921, I had another look at the cell window bars and thought that with a little preparation and good leverage one of the bars could be loosened. I should remark now that at this time I had a cell mate named Paddy Condon, who had also been arrested following our ambush, but was completely innocent.

I told Paddy I intended making a bid for it and he remarked that he would join me. On that same evening we got working on the window in between the sentry's movements, and, after what I consider a superhuman effort, we got one of the bars free. It made such a racket, however, that we could only pull it back into

place and go resting on our beds. Sure enough, within a few seconds, two members of the Guard rushed along to our cell and saw the two of us talking peacefully together - they must have assumed that the noise occurred elsewhere.

The big problem facing us now was that there were two sentries on the guardroom and nothing could be done until one of the sentries was moving away from our cell and the other had taken four paces into another block when he would be out of view for a few seconds. I told Paddy I would make the first try and that if I succeeded in getting out of the cell they would never retake me alive. I carefully watched the sentries and after awhile saw my chance, lifted up the bar and got out, all which had to be done in a few seconds. An armoured car parked alongside the cell proved a blessing as it helped to obscure me from the sentries when I got out. As a result of prior visits to the toilet and ablutions I had already made up my mind where to make for. I then walked across a back square and although I heard several calls to halt and passed a number of soldiers I still continued to move across near a Coachhouse of the Commanding Officer, which adjoins the boundary wall. At this part of the wall the barbed wire had been partly battered down, apparently by some of the troops getting in or out of barracks. Eventually, I got over the wall and remained in the vicinity, for ages apparently, although I was in fact less than five minutes, but there was no sign of Paddy Condon making an appearance. So I considered it inadvisable to remain hanging around any longer. My big problem now was to know where to make for. I felt it might be disastrous to make for my own home so I made up my mind the best thing to do was to try and contact the Unit Column. I struck out along the Fermoy-Mitchelstown road and after going some distance I thought it

advisable to get off the roads and go across the fields. I did this and after walking for several hours where did I find myself but almost into the town of Fermoy again. I was wearing a heavy frieze coat and was absolutely tired out. It was getting pretty late at this stage and I saw a lady pulling down a curtain in a house and I felt very much like knocking at the door and to look for some food. Luckily I did not as I heard later it was the house of one of the garrison Officers.

I shall never forget that night as I experienced all sorts of horrors and got numerous frights, but at the back of it all I was determined not to be captured alive. I set out again and kept along by the river so that I could jump in were any attempt made to arrest me. Later, I took a chance in knocking at the door of a cottage about three miles from Fermoy, and asked the man who opened the door for some food. He must have presumed I was one of the "queer fellows" because he gave me a good helping of bread and milk which refreshed me very much. On going away I told him if any troops came searching, to forget all about me. I moved on then and in the vicinity of Kilworth village - Moorepark - I saw a light in a small farmhouse and after knocking them up an old man came to the door. I enquired if he knew where any Volunteers lived near hand, when suddenly I heard a voice from upstairs saying "I'm a Volunteer". I recounted my troubles and experiences, so I rested in that house for the remainder of the night. On the following day, with the Volunteer as a guide, I contacted the Column near Araglen. This was our Unit Column under Seán O'Mahony of Araglen. The normal strength of this Column was about sixteen and each member had a rifle and several of them had also a revolver. I cannot recollect the actual amount of ammunition held but I know it was not too good for it was

distributed very sparingly when any operation was contemplated. The Column was augmented on occasions, for any special jobs, by members of local Companies armed with shot-guns. As far as I can remember I think the Column had all the available rifles in the battalion.

On contacting the Column, I found that my former cell-mate, Paddy Condon, had got there in front of me and was sleeping peacefully. I could write a book on that particular night, for I had so many trying experiences that I would not wish to my greatest enemy. I suppose, however, "All's well that ends well".

It may be of interest to record the aftermath of my escape. I heard on very good authority that the morning following my escape instructions had been received from Major General Strickland ordering a Drumhead Courtmartial for me, which, of course, would have written "Finis" to my career within twenty-four hours; therefore, I felt that my escape was providential.

All members of the Guard on duty that night were punished, and the N.C.O. i/c - a Sergeant Farmer - who was a very decent chap, received a term of imprisonment.

I remained with the Column until the Truce but in the meantime there was not a whole lot of activity. We took up ambush positions and remained hours on various occasions without anything happening. In conjunction with the local Units we fired a few times into the Aerodrome, Fermoy, and also into Rathcormac barracks which was impregnable. We moved into the outskirts of Fermoy on a few occasions.

RANK HELD AT THE TRUCE.

A short time prior to the Truce I was appointed as Engineer,

Cork No. II Brigade.

Signature: Daniel Daly
(Daniel Daly)

Date: November 1st 1952
November 1st, 1952.

Witnessed by:

Thomas Halpin
LIEUT.-COLONEL.
(Thomas Halpin) Lieut.-Colonel.

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