

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO' STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 756

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 756

Witness

Con Leddy,  
Gortnaskehy,  
Araglin,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Araglin (Co. Cork)  
1914 - ;  
O/C. same Company, 1917 - ;  
O/C. 1st Battalion, Cork No. 2 Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

Activities of Irish Volunteers, Araglin (Co. Cork)  
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ....S.2065.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT

BY

CON LEDDY, GORTNASKEHY, ARAGLIN.

I was born in Araglin in 1891 in the house in which I am living. My people were farmers.

1914.

I joined the National Volunteers at the inception of the Movement in Araglin in May, 1914. There had been no branch of the Volunteers as such prior to this in our locality. There was not, to my knowledge, any election of Officers, although we had a strength of fifty to sixty Volunteers after some months. A lad named Jerry Mulvey was one of the recognised local leaders at the time.

Weekly parades were held mostly on Sundays, when an ex-soldier from Kilworth used to visit us regularly as a training instructor. These training parades were mostly confined to foot drill and open formations and extended order drills. We had no arms at this period, although some of individual farmers' sons had shot-guns - their own property.

This training continued regularly for several months, until shortly after the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, but on the Sunday following John Redmond's speech in Woodenbridge I went along to a place called The Lawn where half our lads used to train, and found no one present. It would appear that all those lads acting individually on their part decided spontaneously to have nothing further to do with the Volunteers on account of Redmond's speech in which his offer of the services of the

Volunteers to the British Government of that time proved anything but popular locally or nationally.

1917.

The Volunteers then remained lapsed in our district until 1917, when a few of us got together and decided it was up to us to try and get a Unit established. We carried out a reorganisation and in due course we had about fifty on our rolls. A lad named Liam Denn, who had worked in Barry's of Fermoy, visited us occasionally and helped us in the reorganisation. Liam was a Volunteer Officer in Fermoy.

In an election held in 1917 I was elected as O.C. the Araglin Company.

We had our usual Sunday drills and later on we also had drills on Wednesday evenings. Any training being done, foot drill, field training and route marches, was carried out by myself.

During the latter part of 1917 - about the end of August or early September - a Company parade was held and which was attended by Liam Denn from Fermoy. The local R.I.C. Sergeant, who was nicknamed "Snowball", and a few Constables were at this parade. Following the parade the R.I.C. picked out four Volunteers at random and charged them at Ballyporeen Court with "Illegal Drilling". The lads in appearing at the Courthouse brought with them a Sinn Féin flag, but the flag would not be allowed inside the Court during the trial. The trial was presided over by a Justice of the Peace, who ordered an

acquittal. A Volunteer named Seán Hennessey, Fermoy, composed some verses following this trial and which achieved wide popularity throughout the whole district. A few of the verses were:-

"On the 4th September, 1917,  
Some dashing young fellows  
That day, they were ween,  
They carried a banner  
White, Orange and Green,  
They were bound for the Courthouse  
in Ballyporeen."

Chorus:

"Form ones, form twos,  
Form threes, form fours,  
Tens and elevens,  
In fact form scores.  
Keep working away boys  
And drilling don't stop,  
And keep your scouts out  
To watch "Snowball" the Slop".

Our Company was then part of the Fermoy Battalion. The other Companies were: Kilworth, Fermoy, Ballynoe, Conna, Castlelyons, Bartlemy, Watergrasshill, Glenville and Rathcormac. The average strength of the Companies would be in or about the fifty mark. Some of them could be a little stronger, while others would be under the fifty.

Nothing of much importance happened later in 1917, only

that we began to come out more in the open. One day the R.I.C. Sergeant followed us almost the whole day and sometime later he warned me if I did not stop this drilling that I would find myself doing a period in jail.

There were no special activities or arrests around this time.

1918.

Our weekly parades were continued and we met with little or no trouble from the enemy forces, R.I.C. or military.

When the Conscription crisis came we had very little increase in strength in our Company area, as all those young men in the district who wanted to be Volunteers had already joined up long before the threat of Conscription.

Our arms position was still very poor at this time, so we collected what shot-guns were in the area - about twelve or fifteen - which were given to us without any trouble. We also converted an old house on the side of the mountain into a forge, and got a couple of blacksmiths working one or two nights a week and made about sixty pike heads. One of the smiths, I remember, was Breedy of Ballyporeen, and the other was Dempsey of Mocollop, Ballyduff.

As the Conscription scare gradually faded out, handles were never affixed to those pike heads.

I asked Liam Lynch for permission during 1918 to raid the local R.I.C. Barracks for arms, but he remarked that it might be

inadvisable to go ahead with the raid on account of the national unity then prevailing. By the end of 1918 we had neither rifles or revolvers.

I was still the Company O.C. at the end of 1918, with Seán O'Mahony, 1st Lieutenant and Mick Hynes, 2nd Lieutenant.

1919.

- (I) Parades continued and we added to our supply of shot-guns by further raids and collections.
- (II) Michael Fitzgerald of Fermoy was then O.C. of the 1st Battalion, Fermoy, having been appointed in 1918.
- (III) Early in 1919 I broached the subject of a raid on Araglin R.I.C. Barracks to the Battalion O.C. and he was strongly in favour of it, and promised to participate in the raid. Liam Lynch, the Brigade O.C., also gave his permission for this raid.

We then made our plans, and on Sunday morning, 20/4/1919, Michael Fitzgerald, myself, Seán Mahony, Tom Brennan, Owen McCarthy, Maurice Hyland and John Donovan made our way quietly and got in at the rear of the barracks. All of us had donned masks for the job. One of the lads peeped in at a window and saw a Constable O'Malley in the barracks. He was the only one there as the Sergeant and two remaining Constables had gone to Mass. After a minute or two O'Malley was seen getting a bucket and he left the barracks to go for water about sixty yards away. When he left we immediately went inside and secured any arms were there, which were four rifles and a revolver and two hundred rounds of ammunition. Both Mick Fitzgerald and I were armed with revolvers for the raid - the

others had shot-guns.

When Constable O'Malley returned with the water we were inside the door and when he saw us he made an effort to throw the bucket at us and then dropped the bucket and made a run for it. He fell and was quickly overhauled and when I placed a revolver to his ribs he changed his tune very quickly and agreed that we could take everything in the barracks. At his request we fired a few shots into the stairs and gagged him so as to give the impression to the Sergeant and other Constables that he had put up a fight in defence of his post.

He had not been very long in Araglin and he made no effort to identify us later on.

On this raid we took all the books and records of the barracks and after examination destroyed them. These disclosed no information of Volunteer importance.

Liam Lynch, who had gone on a visit to Dublin, had mentioned this proposed raid to Michael Collins. On the morning following the raid Mick got in touch with Liam and showed him the "Cork Examiner" which had an account of the success of the raid. He expressed his delight and asked Liam to convey his congratulations to all who took part.

After the raid the District Inspector and a number of R.I.C. rushed out from Fermoy and made local enquiries, and in about a week's time they raided three houses, including my own, and also the houses of two Volunteers who had not participated. They got nothing.

(IV) Following this raid, training in the use of rifles was initiated and this was done in different outhouses throughout the district.

Some short time later Mick Fitzgerald, the Battalion O.C., was arrested and some ammunition was found in his house. He was sentenced to two or three months' imprisonment in Cork Jail. While he was in jail, Lar Condon, who was the Vice O.C. was acting in his place. Mick was later released on completion of his sentence.

(V) In September, 1919, myself and eight others from the Araglin Company went to Fermoy to participate in what is now known as the Wesleyan raid. Representatives from Kilworth, Fermoy, Rathcormac and Ballynoe Companies also took part.

We met in a field near the town early that Sunday morning and later moved in ones and twos to the vicinity of the place where raid was intended. Liam Lynch and George Power were in charge of the operation. Mick Fitzgerald, who was not long released from jail and was not in the best of condition, insisted on participating in this raid.

We were all placed in position, while at the same time giving the impression to any observer that we were only casually hanging around.

When the party of troops made their appearance - sixteen of them and all but one armed - we made a simultaneous pounce on them and quickly snapped the rifles from their grasp. One of the soldiers, who proved more aggressive than the others, was fired on and fatally wounded, dying later that day. The



rifles were then put in a few motor cars and taken to Clondulane district. Trees were felled across the roads to prevent any enemy pursuit.

Enemy raids and intense excitement immediately followed. Seán O'Mahony and myself went to a late Mass in Fermoy that morning and during the Mass I overheard one old woman telling another that a crowd of murderers had attacked the troops that morning and had killed one of them. Needless to say, I passed no remark.

Those of us from the country districts made our way home individually later that day.

(VI) No other activity of note occurred later that year, with the exception that our Battalion O.C., Michael Fitzgerald, was again arrested and conveyed to Cork Jail, where he died later following a prolonged hunger strike. Michael was a grand sincere type and a lovely character and his loss was a big one to the battalion and the country.

Lar Condon was then appointed as Battalion O.C.

1920.

(1) In January, 1920, there was a combined raid by military and police in our district, and four others and myself were arrested - the former were Patrick Donovan, Matt Mahony, Paddy Buckley and Batt Joyce. We were brought to Cork Jail and no charge was preferred against us. After being held for about a week in Cork we were removed to Wormwood Scrubbs, where we were

retained for about three months. We got out as a result of a hunger strike, which we were on for twenty-one days. We were permitted to return home. I am glad to say that I never suffered any ill-effects from this hunger strike.

Shortly after my release from prison I was appointed Quartermaster of the Battalion.

(II) The R.I.C. Barracks in Araglin, which had been evacuated about October or November, 1919, was destroyed in February, 1920, following the general order for the destruction of all evacuated barracks.

(III) In June, 1920, Owen McCarthy, Seán O'Mahony and Maurice Hyland from the Araglin Company participated in the capture of Major General Lucas and Colonel Danford at Castlelyons. Liam Lynch and George Power were in charge of this operation. Other Companies also took part.

There was no special activity around our area after the capture: heavy enemy activity occurred in other areas.

(IV) Another very good job of work carried out by the Araglin Company early in 1921 was the destruction of the residence of a gentleman named Cook-Collis at Castlecook, near Moorepark, Fermoy. Cook-Collis was an ex-Colonel of the British Army - he was a real bad type and very anti-Irish. His loyalist sympathies were well known and he was a frequent visitor to the nearby garrisons of Moore Park, Kilworth and Fermoy, and it was a fair assumption that he was giving any information he could pick up to the enemy. In fact this was confirmed following the burning of the house, as one of the Officers of the Moore Park garrison

mentioned that he had no sympathy for Cook-Collis for the reason that he was too keen in carrying stories to Moore Park.

On the night of the burning our party approached the house under cover of darkness as the house was very adjacent to Moore Park, which had a large garrison. He was handed an official order for its destruction signed by the Brigade O.C. The members of the family then left and were permitted to take away whatever money was in the house, together with some personal documents. The house and contents were then set on fire and the whole building was burned to the ground. The military garrison, only a mile away, did not send out a party although the flames could be observed for miles around.

(V) In November, 1920, two lorries of troops called to my home and the Officer in charge enquired for me. I was not at home. He then told my mother that I should report to Moore Park within two days and if I did not obey this order our home and property would be destroyed and our farm taken over. After this I went "on the run" but remained in Araglin district.

Some weeks later the military again visited our place and made havoc with our dairy, spilling out all the milk and cream and damaging the dairy utensils and threw out all our furniture and other property from the home. They did not burn the house. They found no one at home on this visit as my mother and sister were staying with neighbours as due to the previous threat they were naturally nervous to remain in the home.

Following this exhibition of terrorism my people disposed

of all our stock and did not again reside in the house until after the Truce.

(VI) In late November or early December, 1920, as a dozen or more of our Battalion were "on the run" it was decided to form a Unit Column and to intensify activities in the area. Our first operation was on the 8th December, 1920, when a party of about twenty of us, with Moss Twomey, the Brigade Adjutant, in charge, occupied an ambush position at Blackstone Bridge on the Cork-Fermoy road. Myself, Seán O'Mahony, Tom Brunnock, Owen McCarthy, Maurice Hyland, John Doherty and Batt Joyce from Araglin were present, and the remainder were from other Companies of the Battalion. We took up position at about 7 a.m. as we were hoping some enemy lorries would make an appearance, or R.I.C. patrols. For some weeks previously hardly a day had passed without some enemy activity on this road. We remained in the position the whole day and only withdrew nearing nightfall, during which time neither military nor R.I.C. had shown up. We were not too long gone from the spot when a convoy of fifteen lorries passed.

On that night we went into billets around Watergrasshill area, but Moss Twomey, who went home to Clondulane, was arrested the following day.

(VII) On the 10th December, two nights after being in position at Blackstone Bridge, our Unit Column, which had remained in the locality, was moving along towards Leary's Cross, near Castlelyons. Seán O'Mahony and Paddy Egan were in charge. An enemy lorry was seen approaching along the road so the Column hurriedly went into position in the vicinity of Leary's Cross and attacked

this lorry which contained an Officer and fifteen or sixteen troops. After the first volley the troops dismounted, took cover and put up a stiff fight until one of their party was killed. During the fight four of their men fled across country to Fermoy Barracks. The remainder surrendered and handed over eleven rifles and ammunition to our Column.

Other members of the Column who took part in this ambush included Dan Daly and Jim Brennock, Rathcormac, William Buckley, David Kent, M. Mansfield and Dan Cronin, Castlelyons, and P. Egan, J. Egan and Martin Condon, Bartlemy.

On the following night the military destroyed two farm-houses - Mahoney's and Cotter's - as a reprisal.

Two of the participants in this ambush - Daniel Daly of Bushy Park, Rathcormac, and Volunteer Patrick Condon, Bartlemy, were later arrested and charged with the murder of the soldier who was shot that day. Daniel Daly and Patrick Condon subsequently escaped from military custody in Fermoy.

(VIII) Following the attacks on the small lorry patrols of one, two or three vehicles, the military became much more careful and it was generally their practice to send convoys of at least six or eight lorries. On account of the strength and large number of garrisons within a radius of ten or twenty miles of Fermoy they were active, and big rounds-up and searches were of frequent occurrence. Our Column had many lucky escapes and were it not that we only stayed one night in any house in which we billeted we would have been captured for on two occasions, at Glenville and Ballynoe, the houses in which we stayed the previous nights were raided the following day.

In November, 1920, Lar Condon, our Battalion O.C., was arrested, whilst working as a plate layer on the railway and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment as he was caught with a dispatch on him. Following his arrest, Liam Lynch appointed Tom Griffith, Ballynoe, as O.C., and on the following day he was arrested. About mid December, 1920, Liam Lynch held a meeting in Castlelyons and I was appointed O.C., with Michael Hynes, Araglin, as Vice O.C., and Michael Keane, Castlelyons, as Battalion Adjutant and Mick O'Connell, Bartlemy, as Battalion Quartermaster.

1921.

(I) During the early months of 1921 the Column took up ambush positions in various parts of the battalion area, but nothing of importance occurred as the enemy did not show up. We then carried out heavy sniping attacks on military and R.I.C. Posts, including Fermoy, Moore Park and Kilworth. It was only much later I began to realise that we should have pursued a more vigorous policy as regards these sniping attacks for the reason that they helped to tie the enemy down to their posts in addition to a weakening of their morale and making them jittery.

(II) In this period, also, we did quite an amount of road blocking and wire cutting, and on a few occasions we tore up the railway lines in the area.

(III) In April, 1921, two strangers were observed prowling around Castlelyons for a short period and it was only when they had gone from the district that the significance of their presence was fully realised. They could have been enemy agents.

Battalion Headquarters were duly notified and a warning was later issued to all Companies to be on the alert to any strangers in their localities. About a week after this instruction had been circulated a stranger was noticed around the Watergrasshill Company area. He was arrested by members of the Company and it was subsequently discovered that he was a Lieut. Vincent, a British I.O. from Fermoy garrison. He was tried and sentenced to death and the sentence was duly carried out.

This put a stop to any further visits of intelligence personnel.

(IV) During the month of April we took up ambush positions on the Fermoy-Lismore road for four days in succession. The following day two enemy lorries passed. Similar happenings occurred on other occasions.

(V) In the month of May, 1921, an intensive push was made by the enemy in the battalion area, and for that matter throughout the whole county, as big rounds-up seemed to be the order of the day. While these big raids were in progress our Column decided to move into West Waterford and in co-operation with the local Company we blocked the road a short distance from the village of Ballyduff. This was done early in the morning. About 11 a.m. a patrol of six R.I.C. and Tans arrived at the road block. We opened fire on the party killing one of them and wounding another. They returned the fire and the fight was continued for some time. Later enemy reinforcements arrived from Fermoy and we were compelled to withdraw. An enemy plane, also, from Fermoy kept us under observation for nearly five miles as the country we had to cross over was mountainy

and almost devoid of cover: however, we managed to elude the plane when we got into the close country. We returned to Araglin.

In May, 1921, some of the members of the local Company of Kilworth village observed one of the Tans stationed in the village moving some distance outside the village. Mick Condon, a Volunteer of the local Unit, hurriedly got together a few other members, who trailed this Tan and shot him dead a short distance from the village. I forget the name of the Tan.

(VI) Near the end of May we again moved across the Blackwater and stopped in Ballynoe district, where I met the O.C. of the Midleton Battalion - the late Diarmuid Hurley. This was a short time after the Clonmult ambush and Diarmuid was on his own at the time. Following a discussion, he requested me to fix an ambush position on the Cappoquin-Tallow road. He informed me he had a mine in Midleton and went to get it. I proceeded on my journey to select a suitable position. Our Column was waiting for Diarmuid to return, but he never came back and it was only later that we learned he had been killed when crossing the Cork-Midleton road. Troops in an enemy lorry called on him to halt, and he made an effort to fight his way out but he was killed in the exchange of shots. This turn of events cancelled the proposed ambush.

(VII) During the month of June it was decided to ambush a mixed R.I.C. and Tan patrol in Tallow - the strength of the patrols was normally about eight to ten. From observation of their movements it was noticed that their usual procedure was to take different roads on alternate days on departure from the town. We took up position on the expectation that they would move out by a certain road; however, they went by an adjoining road which did not exactly meet the positions we had taken up. This meant that we were one hundred yards away from them instead of 25 or 30 yards: however, we opened fire on them killing one and wounding two, the remaining five rushed into some adjoining houses and got away.



A short time before this we had commandeered a car and we used this vehicle to convey us from Ballynoe to Tallow, in two batches of eight, for the job and conveyed us back similarly afterwards.

(VIII) Early in July, 1921, three other members of the Column and myself decided to stage an attack on any British Officers found on the Golf Links at Fermoy. We left Bartlemy by car and at Watergrasshill we went off the main road into a bye-road with the intention of using the bye-roads for our journey. Shortly after moving off the main road we met an I.R.A. man who knew the four of us very well. He signalled to us to stop the car and then informed us we were moving right into a big enemy round-up. We turned the car towards Watergrasshill again and, on our arrival there, we learned we had just escaped a convoy of twenty-four enemy lorries going from Cork to Fermoy. To add to our good luck on this occasion, we had only just left Watergrasshill the second time when a convoy of fifteen enemy lorries passed, moving towards Cork, so we felt that we escaped capture by the narrowest of margins. We did not proceed to Fermoy on our proposed job under the circumstances.

RANK AT THE TRUCE.

My rank on the 11/7/1921 was O.C. 1st Battalion (Fermoy), Cork No. 11 Brigade.

SIGNATURE:

Con Leddy  
(Con Leddy)

DATE:

6 December 1952

WITNESSED BY:

Thomas Halpin  
(Thomas Halpin)

LIEUT.-COLONEL

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