

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21
No. W.S. 990

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 990.....

Witness

John Fanning,
Bettysville,
Fermoy,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Fermoy Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork, 1917 - ;

O/C. same Company, 1918 -

Subject.

Fermoy Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

3

File No. S. 2307.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BUREAU STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 990

STATEMENT BY JOHN FANNING,
Bettyville, Fermoy, Co. Cork.

I was born at Clondulane, Fermoy, on 29th June, 1897. I do not recollect that my parents took any part in the political movement of the time during my boyhood days, and it was not until after Easter Week, 1916, that I became interested in the national movement.

There was a Company of the Irish Volunteers in Fermoy before 1916, but I was not a member. The Captain of this unit was Seán O'Brien. He was a native of Fermoy and was employed as gardener at the Presentation Convent in the town. Seán O'Brien and a number of others were arrested early in May, 1916. Seán O'Brien was interned in Frongoch and was released in June, 1917.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in March or April, 1917, at the Sinn Féin Hall in Chapel Square, Fermoy. There was a good crowd present at the meeting at which I joined up. I'd say that the strength of the Company on that night was about sixty. An election of officers was held that night and the following were selected:-

O/C	Liam Denn.
1st Lieut.	Liam Lynch
2nd Lieut.	Lar Condon
Adjt.	Geo. Power
Q.M.	Mick Fitzgerald.

Regular drills and parades were held a couple of nights each week. Some of these were held in the Sinn Féin Hall, while others were held in the fields in the vicinity of the town. The only drill carried out at this stage was simple foot-drill. The instructors were the Company officers who took sections in turn. It should be realised that, at this time, very little activity took

place in the open and new recruits were usually "vetted" by the officers before being admitted to the Volunteers.

About October, 1917, the Company O/C (Liam Denn) was arrested for illegal drilling and sentenced to a term of imprisonment in Cork Gaol. Within a few weeks his arrest was followed by that of Lar Condon (2nd Lieut.) on a similar charge. He was also sentenced to imprisonment. Both were released sometime before Christmas, 1917, as a result of a short hunger-strike. I remember that, at the time, there were amongst the hunger-strikers four men who subsequently became Mayors and Lord Mayors of Limerick and Cork, respectively. These were Terry MacSwiney and Tomás MacCurtain (Cork), George Clancy and Michael O'Callaghan (Limerick). As is already well known, the latter three were murdered by enemy forces while Terry MacSwiney died on hunger-strike in Brixton Prison. Following the arrest of Lar Condon, the officers were: O/C, Liam Lynch; ^{2ND}~~1st~~ Lieut., John Fanning; ^{1st}~~2nd~~ Lieut. Mick Fitzgerald.

The Volunteer organisation in the surrounding districts was growing in strength from day to day at this period, and early in 1918 the Fermoy Battalion was formed. It was attached to Cork Brigade. There were ten Companies in the Fermoy Battalion, viz.: Fermoy, Watergrasshill, Glenville, Kilworth, Araglin, Rathcormac, Ballynoe, Bartlemy, Castlelyons and Conna. The first officers of the Battalion were:-

O/C	Martin O'Keefe, Ballynoe.
Vice O/C	Lar Condon, Fermoy.
Adjt.	Liam Lynch, Fermoy.
Q.M.	Mick Fitzgerald, Fermoy.

The organisation of the Battalion led to a further change in the officers of the Fermoy Company, who were

now:-

O/C John Fanning
1st Lieut. "Pa" Gallagher
2nd Lieut. Mick Sweeney.

The Company continued to increase in strength until, towards the latter portion of 1918, the membership was about 120. This figure remained constant to the Truce.

I should have mentioned that during the Conscription scare in the Spring and Summer of 1918 there was a considerable influx of new recruits. The strength of the unit at this time must have reached something like 350/400. However, the threat of conscription passed and the vast majority of the new recruits faded out.

Early in 1918 Liam Tobin, who was on Headquarters Staff of the Volunteers, arrived in the area. I do not know what his actual position was while here. He may have been acting as organiser, but I know that he took part in any major activities in the area.

One of the first jobs in the area in which I was engaged was a raid for arms on a train at Castletownroche sometime in May, 1918. At this time the military garrison at Fermoy usually obtained their stores from the depot at Cobh. It was noted that, when empty ammunition boxes were despatched from Fermoy railway station to Cobh, they were usually returned full within the course of a few days. In addition, I know that Liam Lynch had a contact in the Army Stores Section at Cobh, who was in a position to keep him posted as to the movements of the supplies. This man's name was, I think, Paddy Hackett. He was a native of Fermoy.

Information was received from Paddy Hackett that a

large consignment of rifles and ammunition was being sent to Fermoy on a date in early May, 1918. Liam Lynch and the Battalion officers, Lar Condon, Vice O/C, and Mick Fitzgerald, Q.M., immediately made plans to hold up this train and seize the stores. As O/C of the Fermoy Company, I took part in the discussions as did Liam Tobin. Arrangements were made to secure transport to enable the goods to be taken to selected dumps in the Araglin area where the local Companies were made responsible for having everything in readiness on the appointed date.

Two cars were hired from Magner's Garage ^{ostensibly} to take a party to a funeral. The drivers were Tom Cavanagh (later Battalion Intelligence Officer) and Mick McCarthy. Others who took part in this job were Liam Tobin, Liam Lynch, Lar Condon, Jack O'Neill, Mick Fitzgerald, George Power, John Fanning (witness), Jeremiah Corkery, Tom Egan and - Sheehan (the latter three were railway employees), who travelled in the cars to the pre-arranged meeting place at Renny boreen. The remainder of the Fermoy men, to the number of about ten and including Pat Ahearne, Tim Fenton, Jack Herlihy, Jack Fitzgerald and "Powder" Moloney, cycled. In addition to the above named, some selected members of the local Companies in the area were engaged on various activities, such as, scouting, outpost duty, as well as standing by at Renny boreen - the site selected for the transfer of the captured arms and ammunition to the cars - to transfer the stuff to the cars.

One carload (Jack O'Neill, Tom Egan, - Sheehan, Jeremiah Corkery and witness) proceeded to the vicinity of Castletownroche railway station. Liam Denn and Ted Heskin were in the station to take up a position on the footplate and compel the driver to take the train to our

position. They were to board the engine as the train was moving out from the station. The plan appeared to have worked perfectly up to this stage, but the train did not leave the station as anticipated. This was due to an error in timing the cutting of the wires at Renny boreen. It was later discovered that the wires were cut as the train was entering Castletownroche station instead of when leaving. The Volunteer delegated to this job cut the wires when he heard the whistle of the train (as he thought about to pull out from the station, when, in fact, it was only coming in). At this stage it was too late to alter the plans and we all returned to our own areas. Subsequent investigations revealed that there were, in fact, no army stores on this train. The arms, however, reached Fermoy on a later train which arrived there about 6 a.m. on the following morning.

About this time Fermoy Company under Paddy Ahearne, 2nd Lieutenant, and witness (John Fanning), who was O/C, carried out a raid for explosives on the magazine at Messrs. Barry's who carried on a hardware, firearms and explosives business at the Timber Yard, Fermoy. A considerable quantity of fuses, detonators, gelignite and shotgun cartridges was obtained in the raid. It was all dumped in Clondulane. Nearly all the members of the Fermoy unit took part in this raid.

There were several raids for arms in the district about this time, and the Company accumulated the following stocks of arms from same: 7 or 8 rifles, 30 shotguns and about half a dozen .22 rifles.

During 1917 and 1918 the Volunteers in Fermoy co-operated in every possible way with the political

organisation, Sinn Féin. As there was no contest in the area at the General Election in December, 1918, when David Kent was returned unopposed, the Volunteers did not have to take on much work for Sinn Féin in the area. However, during 1918 the Company sent a strong party of Volunteers to Waterford, both at the bye-election in March and the general election in December, to help to protect the Republican supporters from the attacks of the "separation women" and Redmondite supporters who were violently opposed to Sinn Féin at this time.

The formation of Cork II Brigade on January 6th, 1919, led to further changes in the staff of the Fermoy Battalion. The new staff was:-

O/C	Mick Fitzgerald
Vice O/C	Lar Condon
Adjutant	Moss Twomey
Q.M.	Con Leddy.

The staff of Cork II Brigade was:-

O/C	Liam Lynch, Fermoy.
Vice O/C	Dan Hegarty, Mallow.
Adjutant	Tom Barry, Glanworth.
Q.M.	George Power, Fermoy.

In the early part of 1919 drilling and parades continued. Volunteers at this stage were becoming more military-minded and great interest was taken in the occasional opportunities which arose to have some shooting practice with .22 rifle.

The next activity of note in the area was the capture of Araglin R.I.C. Barracks. With the exception of the Battalion O/C (Mick Fitzgerald), this was I think a purely local job.

During the Summer of 1919 there was no appreciable change in the Volunteer position. The usual activities - drill and parades - were carried on.

At this time small parties of the military (Shropshire Light Infantry) stationed in the military barracks used to parade to the churches of the various denominations in the town on Sunday morning. It was noticed that a party of normally eighteen to twenty paraded each Sunday and marched to the Wesleyan Church, opposite the Gasworks at the end of Walker's Row. This party, as well as all the others, usually carried rifles. The Brigade O/C (Liam Lynch) decided to examine the possibility of capturing the rifles carried by this party. In this connection, several meetings were held at which officers of the local Company, as well as those of some other Companies in the Battalion, were present. The task of carrying out most of the preliminary scouting work was delegated to Fermoy Company and regular reports were furnished to the several meetings held by the group of officers who were responsible for planning the operation. The ^{final} ~~first~~ meeting, which was held in the Sinn Féin Hall on Friday night (September 5th, 1919) was attended by Liam Lynch, Lar Condon, Moss Twomey, John Fanning (witness), Paddy Ahearne, George Power (all Fermoy or Clondulane), Tom Griffin (Ballynoe) and Con Leddy (Araglin).

The movements of this party were kept under observation for a couple of months, and it was found that they usually marched in fours from their barracks to the Wesleyan Church via Barrack Hill, The Square and Patrick Street. The rifles were carried at the slope until the party were within a short distance of the church when the order was given to "trail arms".

Enquiries were then set on foot to establish whether the rifles were loaded, and it was ascertained from the contact in Cobh (Paddy Hackett) that, in accordance with instructions, the rifles should be loaded. I think that at the time it was stated that the order to carry loaded rifles on church parade was made because of an effort to disarm a soldier in Castletownbere district.

In addition to all the other aspects of the movements of the enemy party covered in the preliminary enquiries, steps were taken to ascertain whether, when the soldiers entered the church, they stacked their rifles at the end of the church or took them into the seats with them. Observation by Paddy Ahearne over a few Sundays revealed that the rifles were taken into the seats.

When all reports from the various observers had been examined, the Brigade O/C (Liam Lynch) decided to attempt to overpower the party just as it reached the Wesleyan Church and about the time they would get the instructions to train^L arms.

He then made arrangements to obtain a car from Mallow Battalion - this car carried the Brigade Vice O/C (Dan Hegarty), Leo O'Callaghan (driver), Owen Harold (O/C, Mallow Company), Ned Watters and Bryan Kelly. Another car was obtained in Rathcormac - driven by Jack Mulvey - while the O/C of the neighbouring Waterford Brigade (Pax Whelan) was to arrange to supply a third car. The Mallow and Rathcormac cars arrived at the appointed meeting place at the rear of the Fermoy Hospital, but the car from Dungarvan did not arrive. I believe that the driver, when informed by his passengers - George Lennon (Brigade^{Vice} O/C) and Mick Mansfield (Q.M.) - of the intended operation, refused to proceed into Fermoy. I do not

remember whether George Lennon and Mick Mansfield actually took part in this engagement.

The Mallow car was piloted to the meeting place by Paddy Ahearne, who picked it up at the Limekiln on the Castlehyde road. I think that Mick Fitzgerald was to meet the car from the Waterford Brigade which failed to arrive. The driver of the Rathcormac car, of course, knew the district well and so did not require any assistance.

In addition to the men from the Fermoy and Mallow areas already mentioned, there were several Volunteers from Araglin and Ballynoe Companies engaged in various activities. Some were strolling round - reading papers and appearing disinterested - in the vicinity of the route taken by the military party as they neared the Wesleyan Church. All had instructions to close in gradually, so that, when the military party received the order to trail arms, they would be in a position to rush on them immediately they heard the order, "Hands up", from Lar Condon, who was in charge of the main attacking party. This party was composed of Mick Fitzgerald, Lar Condon, Paddy Ahearne, Jack Fitzgerald and witness (John Fanning).

Liam Lynch was with the party in the Mallow car, which was parked slightly to the east of the Wesleyan Church, and behind it was the car from Rathcormac. As the military party drew near the Wesleyan Church, the Mallow car with its passengers drove slowly towards them. It reached the end of the parade just as it was about to halt outside the church and just as the order, "hands up", was given by the O/C of the main attacking party. The driver swung his car across the road while the other occupants jumped on the soldiers. The whole job did not take five minutes, and the rifles (sixteen) were loaded into the cars.

As a member of the main attacking party, I was within an arm's length of the soldiers when the order, "hands up", was given. I immediately grabbed the rifle of the soldier nearest to me and attempted to wrest it from him. After a short struggle, I succeeded in doing so. All the other members of the main attacking party, as well as those in the Mallow car and the hangers-on, who had previously been strolling round the road, were engaged for a minute or two in a sharp struggle, but the enemy were soon overpowered. During the scrimmage a couple of shots were fired and one of the military party (Private Jones) was shot dead. Two or three of the military were wounded. Our only casualty was Liam Lynch who sustained a slight wound on the shoulder.

When the rifles had been loaded into the cars, I jumped on the running-board of the Mallow car which carried, amongst others, Liam Lynch, Owen Harold, Ned Watters, Bryan Kelly and Leo O'Callaghan (the driver). We proceeded with all speed to Carrigabrick, about one and a half miles from Fermoy, on the Fermoy-^{Mallow}~~Lismore~~ road. Here we halted to pick up William Ahearne (Chemist) who was our First-aid man. A number of the others engaged were in the Rathcormac car which was also with our party.

Both cars were then driven to Kilmagner, about four miles further on towards Lismore. I should have mentioned that, when we passed Carrigabrick, the road was blocked behind us by felling two large trees. These had already been sawn through earlier that morning and were held in position by ropes until we had passed.

At Kilmagner we unloaded the rifles from the cars. Assisted by Ned and William Lane (brothers), Crough, Lar Condon, Mick Fitzgerald and witness (John Fanning) took

the rifles about one mile across the country to a drain in Kilbarry woods where they were dumped. With Mick Fitzgerald I then went home to Clondulane, had a meal and later that evening returned to Fermoy to attend a Féis which was being held there.

Liam Lynch and William Ahearne went with the Mallow party in the direction of Youghal, and the Rathcormac car (Jack Mulvey driving) went towards Mount Melleray with Tom Griffin and others from Ballynoe area.

When the Féis was in progress, large parties of military came into the grounds and proceeded to attack the general public present, indiscriminately. The civilians retaliated, using stones, bottles and every available weapon. I remember that on this occasion the students of St. Colman's College came out with hurleys and used them freely on the military.

With Lar Condon, Mick Fitzgerald, John Swaine, James Fanning (brother), witness (John Fanning) was arrested on the following Monday morning (8th September). They were all taken to Fermoy R.I.C. Barracks where they were placed on an identification parade that morning (Monday). Mick Fitzgerald was picked out by a soldier who said, "I think this man is like one of the men". District Inspector Lewis, R.I.C., who was in charge of the parade, said to the soldier, "Thinking won't do you, boy!"

While we were prisoners in the R.I.C. Barracks, there was a military guard on duty at the gate. During the course of the night of September 8th, when the soldiers of the Shropshire Light Infantry were rioting and wrecking the town, I can clearly remember that there was a crowd outside the gate of the R.I.C. Barracks,

shouting to the soldiers, "Come up here to the murderers!". This was the attitude of a goodly proportion of the townspeople of Fermoy at this period.

Following the identification parade, we were removed to Cork Gaol under military escort which included two armoured cars. Jack Mulvey, Rathcormac, was also included in the party. He had been arrested early on the morning of September 9th, 1919 (I think). On our way through Cork city, the lorry in which we were travelling was in collision with a cyclist who was killed on the spot. As a result of this accident, the convoy was halted and a large crowd collected. The officer in charge of the escort instructed them to shoot the prisoners if there was any trouble. The cyclist who was killed in the collision was a Volunteer.

We were lodged in Cork Gaol on the evening of September 9th, 1919, and thereafter for a period of six weeks we were remanded at weekly intervals as well as being paraded for identification purposes. At the end of this period Jack Swaine, Jim Fanning, Lar Condon and witness (John Fanning) were released.

Following my release, I resumed my activities as O/C, Fermoy Company, and was to all intents and purposes "on the run".

About the end of January, 1920, arrangements were made by Moss Twomey (Battalion Adjutant) and George Power (Brigade Adjutant) to carry out an attack on Agh^{ERN}~~rin~~ R.I.C. Barracks. Volunteers from Araglin, Watergrasshill, Bartlemy, Fermoy and Castlelyons were mobilised for this job, but owing to intense enemy activity in the area on the date selected for the attack (1st Feb. 1920) the operation was called off.

Early in February, 1920, I was arrested and deported to Wormwood Scrubbs. I was released after a period of about four months as a result of a hunger-strike lasting twenty-one days.

Shortly after my release, I was instructed by Liam Lynch to obtain a supply of petrol for the cars which were to be used in the capture of General Lucas, who was O/C, British Forces stationed at Fermoy. I got the petrol from Tom Cavanagh (later Battalion I.O.). I also notified the members of the Araglin Company who took part in the capture, but Liam Lynch would not allow me to go on the job.

After the capture of General Lucas, arrangements were made between the I.R.A. and British Army authorities at Fermoy for the transmission of correspondence and clothes and other personal requirements to the prisoner. The messages for General Lucas were generally left by his people at O'Keefe's, MacCurtain Street, where they were collected by Volunteer Michael Barry and handed to me. On at least two occasions I took parcels and correspondence to Mourne Abbey area, but I did not see General Lucas on either occasion.

About this time British forces, dressed up as priests, ministers and civilians, raided Rice's, Strawhall, where the I.R.A. used to hold meetings. The raiders turned the parents (Mr. and Mrs. Rice) and a young family out of the house and then set it on fire. When the military had gone, the local people helped to quench the fire and to save portion of the premises. An examination of this section revealed that the raiders had placed a quantity of explosives in the house with a view to ensuring that it would be a total wreck. These explosives were removed and handed over to the

Volunteers. Following this incident, Mrs. Rice insisted on being allowed to keep a shotgun and a supply of ammunition to defend her home. Arrangements were made whereby an armed guard of members of the local Company were on duty in the neighbourhood at night for some time after this raid.

In connection with the attempt to burn Rice's, Strawhall, investigations carried out in Fermoy revealed that the clothes in which the raiders were dressed were supplied by a man named Longhurst, who was the proprietor of a fish and chip shop at Barrack Hill, Fermoy. He was kept under guard by the British for some time and rarely left his home. However, he eventually moved out to a club, where he used to play cards, one Sunday evening. Word was immediately sent to me by the local Intelligence Officer, and with Paddy Moloney (Powder) and William Twomey I entered the club where we seized Longhurst. We took him out to bundled him into a milk car in which we were driven by Volunteer Michael Barry to Castlelyons where the prisoner was handed over to William Buckley (Bronco) who was O/C at the time. Longhurst was later taken to Brigade Headquarters where he was tried by Liam Lynch. He was defended by Paddy O'Brien (Brigade Q.M.) and was sentenced to deportation. He passed through Fermoy on his way to Rosslare. He was met at Fermoy Station on his way through by his family. He never returned to Fermoy.

The Brigade Column was formed in September, 1920, and was in training in Mourne Abbey area under Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley. With Lar Condon I joined the Column at Freemount in the Newmarket Battalion area a few days after the capture of Mallow Barracks. This would be, I

think the last day in September or October 1st, 1920. We remained with the Column for about a fortnight undergoing a course of training in the use of arms, scouting and the use of cover. We were ordered to return to our own Battalion area by the Brigade O/C about the end of the second week in October, 1920. I then spent about a fortnight in Araglin Company area as Training Officer. I was instructing the members of the Company in the use of the rifle and small arms.

While I was in Araglin, the Battalion O/C (Mick Fitzgerald) died on hunger-strike in Cork Gaol. With all Volunteers in the Battalion area, I took part in the funeral procession and, with Paddy Ahearne and Daithi Barry, proceeded to Kilcrumper to fire three volleys over the grave when the military guard, which had surrounded the graveyard during the interval, had withdrawn.

It was now the end of November, 1920, and arrangements were made to carry out an ambush of a convoy of Auxiliaries which usually travelled between Fermoy and Cork each day. The site selected for the ambush was Blackstone Bridge on the main Cork-Fermoy road, about three miles on the Cork side of Rathcormac. The ambush party, which was in charge of Moss Twomey, was made up of representatives from Fermoy, Araglin, Castlelyons, Rathcormac and Bartlemy Companies. Half the Column which, including armed members of local Companies, numbered about forty, took up a position behind a stone-faced fence, a field in from the road and in a position overlooking same. The second section of the Column took up a somewhat similar position on the opposite side. However, in order to ensure that Blackstone Bridge was effectively covered, it was necessary for four members

of this latter section to dig themselves into two shallow trenches; this latter party were William Buckley (Bronco) and Maurice Regan, Martin Condon and Michael Keane.

The Column took up their positions at dawn on the 8th December, 1920. They were armed - about 22 with rifles and the remainder with shotguns. The O/C of the operation had decided that, if the convoy consisted of more than three lorries, we would not take them on.

About four p.m. our scouts reported that the enemy were approaching from Fermoy direction and Moss Twomey got ready to give the signal to open fire, but at that moment a large funeral party in about thirty or forty horses and traps entered the ambush position. In addition, the enemy party, which arrived at the same time, was composed of five lorries, so the signal to open fire could not be given in the circumstances. The convoy of Auxiliaries was allowed to pass through and the signal to withdraw was given.

In addition to some local scouts, those who took part in this operation were:-

Fermoy Company

Paddy Moloney (Powder), Billy Twomey, Jack Herlihy, Paddy Cleary, Paddy Egan, William Magner, Tom Swaine, Art Hanlon, Tom Leahy and John Fanning (witness).

Araglin Company

Con Leddy, Seán O'Mahoney, Owen McCarthy, Michael Hynes, Tom Brennock, Maurice Hyland, Jack Doherty, John Donovan.

Castlelyons and Rathcormac Companies

William Buckley (Bronco), Dan Cronin, Martin Condon, Mick Mansfield, Paddy and Jack Egan, Dan Daly, Dan O'Connell, James Donovan, Dave Cotter, Jerome Ahearne, Michael Keane, Maurice Regan.

Following the order to withdraw, all members of the Fermoy party returned to Clondulane area, while the others moved into billets in Castlelyons district. The members of Fermoy Company were continuously on duty at night in the town area in anticipation of reprisals by the enemy, but no enemy action of such a nature took place in the urban area.

In the first week in January, 1921, with Moss Twomey I was engaged in making a final check on the Company and Battalion position preparatory to our joining the Battalion Column on a full time basis, when we ran into a round-up being carried out by a large concentration of enemy forces in the Clondulane area. Despite our knowledge of the country and the co-operation of the civilians in the area, we failed to break through the encircling movement and were eventually captured.

I was then taken to Fermoy Military Barracks and eventually to Ballykinlar where I was interned until December 8th, 1921.

My rank at the Truce was: Captain, Fermoy Company. The strength of the Company was about 120.

SIGNED: John Fanning
(John Fanning)
DATE: 16th August 1952

WITNESS: Phil O'Donnell
(Phil O'Donnell)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 990