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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1008

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,008

Witness

Thomas Brady,
Leastown,
Oldtown,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer
2nd Batt'n. North Roscommon Brigade.

Subject.

North Roscommon Brigade,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MR. THOMAS BRADY,LEASTOWN, OLDTOWN, CO. DUBLIN.

I was born and reared and went to school at Drinane, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon, and lived in that locality until I moved to my present abode.

During the Count Plunkett election in 1917 I met Mick Dockery who was afterwards Brigade O/C. North Roscommon, and who was killed in the Civil War. Dockery was very interested in football and so was I; both of us were active members of the G.A.A. and played regularly. Dockery approached me about joining the I.R.B. and explained the objects of the organisation to me. I agreed immediately to join. Dockery took me into the I.R.B. and administered the I.R.B. oath to me. Another man named Jack Murray also joined at the same time. Dockery appointed me as centre of a local circle which was not yet formed with instructions to recruit men into it. He was very explicit as to the type of men who were to be recruited into it - only men who could be thoroughly relied upon and who had a genuine independent outlook.

I now started to enroll men into the circle and gradually built up a nice little unit. Amongst our members that I can remember now were Pat Mullyooly, Farrell Connery, Paddy Collins, Brian Carroll, Peter Connor, Pat O'Beirne, P.C. Lennon, Eddy Holmes and Tom McCormick.

We paid 3d per week towards a fund for the purchase of arms and other expenses. We had no arms of any sort then. We used to meet the Elphin Circle at Cortoon and drill there.

After the Plunkett election a meeting was held at Croghan to establish a brigade for the north part of the county (Roscommon). James Ryan of Strokestown was appointed to be the Brigade O/C. and Martin Killilea of Doon was quartermaster.

I cannot remember any others of the brigade staff at the moment. This was about August 1917. We now started to organise Volunteer companies in the area. Actually I never really joined the Volunteers. Those of us who were in the I.R.B. and who were organising the Volunteers automatically became Volunteers. A company of Volunteers were now organised in Killena which was my area. Pat Collins was made company captain; Peter Connor, 1st Lieutenant, and Paddy Connery 2nd Lieutenant. The members of the company were: Paddy Collins, Peter Connor, Paddy Connery, Jack Collins, John Flynn, John Joe Toolan, Tom Looby, John Joe Looby, Ned Flanagan, Michael Connery, Ned Keegan, Denis Darcy, Mick Lenihan, Tommy Flanagan, Tommy Cullen, Greg Carroll, John Joe Connell, Brian Carroll, Tom Larkin, Paddy Cummins, Mick Brady, James Brady, Pat Beirne, Tom McCormack, Mick Hanley, Peter Neary, James Neary, Jim Rattigan, my brother Peter and I, also Jack Connor and Packy Moran. There may have been others whom I cannot recollect now.

Parades were held every Tuesday evening or night in secret - generally at Ball Alley House. We had no arms except a few shotguns and one old Bulldog revolver and two Peter-the-Painter pistols. The pistols were the property of my brother who had served in the British army. The shotguns were the property of members of the company. Collins and my brother did the drill and other instruction, but after a while my brother went to live in Dublin and this left us without anyone of previous military experience and we had to rely on an old drill book to carry on our drills. Each Volunteer paid a subscription of 3d per week. We took in only selected men whom we were satisfied that we could trust.

We continued to train ourselves as best we could on into 1918. The only addition to our membership was Martin Duffy

who joined after the Plunkett election, and Pat Murray of Manor Tulisk.

Early in 1918 the conscription crisis threatened the country. Even now, although other units in the country were enrolling new members wholesale, we did not take on any new members. We believed by now we had recruited any man who was any good in the area. There were plenty of anti-conscription meetings being held in the area and a collection was made for the anti-conscription fund. This collection was carried out by the Volunteers and realised about £150 for our area.

Instructions were given to the Volunteers on methods of constructing road-blocks and demolition of bridges and suchlike, and the construction of dugouts. First aid dressings and bandages were made and a census of all food supplies in the area was taken.

Father Kane did an enormous amount of work at this time and gave instructions on how to cook meals under unusual conditions and so forth. When the crisis was over, all our members carried on as heretofore except Ned Keegan, who was really too old to be an active Volunteer, also Jim Rattigan. In the general election of 1918 things were very quiet in this area as Count Plunkett was returned unopposed.

Early in 1919 the first Dail met and now the Volunteers became the I.R.A. Each Volunteer was now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dail as the Government of the Irish Republic. All our members subscribed to this oath and we suffered no decrease of membership. We continued to train and organise, but took in no additional recruits.

In the late part of 1918, as well as I can remember, battalion organisations came into effect in North Roscommon. Up to this, although there was a brigade staff organised, there was no battalion organisation. Companies existed in many areas and although there was splendid cooperation between

then there was no immediate directing authority. We now became the 2nd Battalion North Roscommon Brigade. The companies comprising the battalion were: Mantua A/Company; Killina B/Company; Tulsk C/Company; Creeve D/Company; Elphin E/Company. Sean Owens was made the O/C. Battalion, Martin Dockery Vice O/C., Brian Carroll - Adjutant; John Toolan - Quartermaster, and I was appointed Intelligence Officer. The company commanders were:- Thomas O'Connor, Mantua Killina; - Patrick Collins; Tulsk; - Edward Simpson; Creeve; - Brian Beirne, and Elphin; - Timothy Beirne.

The strength of the battalion was roughly about 120 all ranks and, even at this, in some companies a number were only paper soldiers and were inactive. The armament of the battalion was very small. There was, I think, three service rifles, a number of shotguns - about 70, and each company had also a few revolvers of different calibres. Ammunition for all weapons was very limited.

Intelligence sections were now organised in the battalion. Paddy Simpson was i/c. in Tulsk; Jack Quinn in Creeve; Jim Duffy in Elphin; Jack Murray in Mantua; Jack Flynn in Killina. These sections' principal work was to watch, time and tabulate the operation of enemy patrols and their strength and armament and to watch but and detect civilians who might come under suspicion as enemy agents. If one wanted a report on any person in the area it could be procured without delay. Simpson was very successful in uncovering the activities of two men who were supplying information to the enemy. Their reports were picked up in a raid on the mails and they were traced to ^{individuals} the ~~individuals~~ by comparison of their handwriting. The people in that area were wont to give orders for groceries and such-like in the local shop in writing and to write on bills. The owner of the shop kept a file of such things and a comparison of the handwriting revealed the culprits. When our boys went

to get them, one of them succeeded in making his escape and got to the police barracks and joined the Tans. The other was arrested by our men and taken to an unknown destination. Unfortunately in an enemy round-up of the area, they found this man together with the man who was guard on him. They took both of them with them. The Volunteer was interned and the prisoner disappeared and was never heard of again.

The girl who is now my wife, Mary Ellen Brady, was then a student at the Grammar School in Elphin. Another girl in the school was doing a line - 'courting' - one of the Tans. The girl got information from her Tan friend that they were going to raid the Killina area. She told my wife about this and she immediately passed on the information to me. I called a meeting of the men of that area and told them not to sleep at home that night, that the place was going to be raided. Some of them, despite my warning, did stay at home and were arrested - I think about six.

Some time about mid-March 1921, I was passing through Elphin on foot. I was on the run for quite a long period at this time. Two of the Tans - Evans and Ross - followed me. I walked briskly and, on reaching the school, I turned in above the school and near the chapel and took across the country. The Tans thought I had entered the chapel and they entered it and proceeded to wreck it. They were arrested for this and taken to the camp of the Lancers in Strokestown. These men were subsequently captured by our men at the ambush at Scramogue when they were being conveyed to Longford for courtmartial. They were subsequently executed together with another R.I.C. man who was also captured at Scramogue.

We were not able to make contact with any of the R.I.C. and Tan garrison in Elphin for intelligence purposes. One policeman - a Constable Campbell, who was stationed in Strokestown - often gave us some useful tips, but he was not

in a position to give us any big information. One day I was arrested by Captain Peak who was in charge of the Lancers stationed at Strokestown, and who was later killed at the ambush at Scramogue. I was taken to the police barracks and, on arrival there, Campbell saved me by telling the Captain that I was not the Brady they were looking for and I was released.

The girls in the post office in Elphin - a Miss Cullen and another girl - used to pass copies of the code messages that arrived for the local garrison to us. We could not decipher such messages as we had never been supplied with a 'key'. We forwarded such messages to brigade headquarters. We never got back any information from the brigade as a result of these messages. Miss Cullen left the post office and after that this source dried up. Mick Deignan was the Brigade I.O. at this time and it was to him I sent the code messages.

We never received any intelligence training of any sort and had to plod along in our own ignorant way. There were no spies shot in the 2nd Battalion area. Certain individuals were under suspicion of supplying information to the enemy, but we could not get anything definite on them at the time. While the Truce was in force I made contact with some of the Tans and I was able, through them, to confirm that such individuals were supplying information to the police.

In the harvest time of 1919, which was on the whole a quiet year for the Volunteers, Ernie O'Malley came from H.Q. in Dublin to Roscommon to reorganise the Volunteers in the county. He visited every company area, spending a week in ours. That week we paraded every night and O'Malley drilled us and gave us instruction. O'Malley generally was not liked by the Volunteers. He was too much of the 'officer' class and did not succeed in getting himself down to the level of the ordinary

country Volunteers and appreciate their problems.

In the end of 1919 and early 1920, the R.I.C. evacuated their smaller outlying posts and concentrated their men in larger ones principally in the towns and key points. Ballinameen and Tulsk Barracks were evacuated in this area, but Elphin was held and strengthened and later reinforced by Tans. We burned Ballinameen Barracks on Easter Saturday night 1920, and later on we burned Tulsk. We had no trouble in destroying either of them.

The Sinn Fein Courts were now getting into their stride and the Volunteers had to take on the job of policing the country. Although this entailed a large amount of duty for the Volunteers, it was comparatively easy in this area as the people were of a very peaceful, law-abiding nature, and it was not necessary to make any arrests. There was a detention or "unknown destination" at Killacolgher where prisoners were kept by us, but such prisoners were from other areas. The Sinn Fein Courts had practically nothing to do either. There was only one Court held at Hillstreet where a man was up for stealing a bicycle.

In the harvest time of 1920 a general raid for arms was carried out on orders from H.Q. Only in one case did we meet with any resistance. A stubborn man who, when we went to his house, threatened us with a poker and refused to hand over his gun. His eldest son, however, had more sense and handed over the weapon to us. We collected 10 or 12 shotguns, one revolver, an old "Bulldog" type with no ammunition. We also got a small amount of shotgun cartridges. Some time in 1919 a brother-in-law of mine, who was manager of the North City Mills, Dublin, sent me four boxes of cartridges (shotgun) concealed in a sack of flour by rail. I gave the four boxes which contained one hundred cartridges to Dockery.

Sean Connolly from Longford came to Roscommon on a reorganising mission. He was sent by G.H.Q. Connolly organised

an attack on Elphin police barracks. I was detailed to take charge of a party and block the 'Blackstick' and Tulsk-Killienana Roads and to occupy an outpost position to prevent reinforcements reaching Elphin. We burst a bridge on the Blackstick road and felled trees across the Tulsk road at Ross.

The attack on Elphin Barracks was a failure. After the attack the enemy, consisting of military and police, carried out a very extensive round-up. The place where I lived was searched. I was not at home when they arrived, but in another house which was also searched, but I escaped by the back and went to John Kelly's. All the males in the villages of Caltra, Drinan, Clooncullana, Drummin and Laughhausk were collected and brought for identification to a central position. Sergeant Cawley from Strokestown and Constable Reilly from Elphin were doing the identification. They finally arrested only one man who was not a Volunteer - Stephen Shiel. They did not illtreat anyone during the time they held them.

During the Scramogue ambush Tim Caulfield, Mick Tiernan from Kiltrustan Company and I occupied an outpost position on the Strokestown-Roscommon-Elphin road at Cregga about six miles from Scramogue. A road block was put down a mile nearer to Strokestown at which another party were working and we were to warn those of an enemy approach. We had shotguns and had orders to fire on any enemy and hold them up. A lorry of military came from the Elphin direction and we fired at them with our shotguns. They halted and took cover and returned the fire. We had to take cover in a boghole and they did not attempt to follow us up. We delayed them for sufficient time to enable the men on the road block to get clear away. The lorry was delayed by the road block for a long time before getting to Strokestown and by this time the fight at Scramogue was long over.

I had several narrow escapes from capture and was fired on in doing so, at least twice. One pretty dark night I was cycling from Tulisk to Drinan and on approaching a bend in the road I suddenly got the smell of cigarette smoke. I dismounted and turned my cycle around. Immediately I was called upon to halt. I got round the bend of the road and threw my cycle away from me and got into a drain. I worked my way along this drain and got around where the enemy party were on the road, coming in more or less on their rear. I had an old Bulldog revolver on me and I opened fire on them. The Tans took cover and fired back on me, but never made any attempt to close with me. I had no trouble in making a getaway from the place. They did not even get my bicycle.

On another occasion earlier in the trouble they raided my house for me. I was in bed at the time and had no chance to get away. Sergeant Cawley came into the room. I let on that I was ill with pneumonia. My father got on to them saying that he or his family had nothing whatever to do with what was happening and pointed out that his other son (my brother) had served in the British army. This seemed to have upset them and gave them the impression that they had made a mistake and they all withdrew leaving me in the bed. No sooner had they left than I jumped from bed and quickly pulled on some clothes and made my way from the house by the back. They returned in a few minutes and, on finding me missing, they beat up my father and threatened to shoot him. Our house was raided practically every week after that and my father was subject to abuse by beating and putting revolvers to his head and telling him he was going to die and so forth. He was then almost eighty years old.

One night - 2nd January 1920, Pat Beirne and I were in Strokestown. We saw a soldier coming along the street. He had a revolver hanging from a lanyard from his shoulder. As he

passed by we grabbed him by the collar of his tunic and dragged him into a yard and gave him a few punches knocking him out. We took the revolver - a Service Webley - from him and then locked him in a shed in the yard. We then made out of town with our prize.

The only attempt at making munitions in the area was the filling of shotgun cartridges with ball bearings as slugs which we obtained from old cycles and cycle shops. The mine that was used in the attack on Elphin Barracks was made by Jack Collins of our company. It was of the concrete type and filled with gellignite and black powder.

In January 1921, an order was issued from H.Q. that a policeman was to be shot in each battalion area. Jack McGowan, 'Matey' Reynolds and another man went into Elphin and found Constable Sharpe - a Black and Tan - going up Kearney's Lane. They followed him up the lane and shot him dead. Sharpe was one of the bad boys of the Tans.

I was on the run all the time up to 11th July when the Truce came into force. The Truce came as a surprise to us all and seemed too good to be true. We could not for some time believe that it was effective and, of course, none of us had any idea but that it would not last long and were all suspicious of it and inclined to believe that it was only a ruse by the English Government to catch us out. It took some time getting used to. It was good, however, when you did get used to it to be able to go around again freely and to get proper regular meals and to sleep even though for a while it was a 'jumpy' sleep one had.

Signed: Thomas Brady
(Thomas Brady)

Date: 20 September, 1954.
20th September 1954.

Witness: Matthew Barry
(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

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