

ORIGINAL

W. S. 1,039

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ 1913-21

No. W.S. 1039

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,039

Witness

John D. Crimmins,
Kilbolane,
Milford,
Charleville,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Milford Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork, 1916 - ;

Q.M. same Company later.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Milford Company, Cork II Brigade,
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2356

Form B.S.M. 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-21

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Statement by John D. Crimmins,

Kilbolane, Milford, Charleville, Co. Cork.

I was born in New York City in October 1901. My father was head foreman for the contracting firm of Thomas E. Crimmins. When he retired in 1908 he came back to Ireland to live and took up residence at Kilbolane, Milford where I now reside. In my boyhood days most of the people of the district were supporters of John E. Redmond. My father was a supporter of this party and a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

My first connection with any organisation was with the Irish Volunteers, which I joined when they were formed in Milford in 1916 at the age of 15 years. The Volunteers were formed in February 1916 by Jim Brislane, Seán O'Dea and Larry Hedivan. Other members of the unit were Jerry Falvey, John Manahan, Denis Noonan, Jim Coughlan, Patrick Fitzgibbon and my brother Tim. The unit was about 14 strong at this time. Foot drill and parades were held about twice weekly in the open, and sometimes at the week-ends we used to go on a route march to neighbouring units. Drilling was carried out by John Drew who was an ex-British soldier. He was only with us for a few weeks when the drilling and control of the unit was taken over by Jerry Falvey who was elected Captain. There was no other officer at this time.

The Milford unit was attached to the Galtee Battalion which was, I think, in charge of Liam Manahan, a creamery manager at Árdpatrick, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick.

On Easter Sunday 1916 the Milford unit paraded at Glenquin Castle, Co. Limerick, where a supply of arms was

expected to be available. I think the arms were to be some of those due to be landed in Kerry with Roger Casement. The only arms carried on the occasion were a few shotguns which were the property of the members. The parade was made up from units from West Limerick area and Milford unit was the only one from North Cork. The parade was in charge of Charles P. Wall, Drumcollogher. As the arms did not arrive from Kerry we returned home. The following members of the Milford unit paraded at Glenquin Castle on Easter Sunday at about 2 p.m. : Maurice Noonan, Denis Noonan, Jim Fox, Jerry Falvey, Jim Coughlan, Paddy Fitzgibbon, John Manahan, John Crimmins (witness).

Following the events of Easter Week the Milford unit still continued to carry on regular parades and drills. This continued throughout the year 1917 and 1918. During the early part of the latter year there was a large increase in the membership of the unit due to the British threat to impose conscription. The strength of the unit now reached about 85 and a large number of shotguns which were held in the area were collected. These arms were collected by Jerry Falvey, John Manahan, Denis Doonan, Jim Coughlan, Patrick Fitzgibbon, Maurice Noonan, John Crimmins (witness), Tim Crimmins, Patrick Sheehan, James Fox, Ned Fox and John O'Regan. They were kept in a number of dumps in the area. The dumps were mainly made under the floors of outhouses on farms. At this time Denis Noonan was appointed 1st Lieutenant and Patrick Sheehan 2nd Lieutenant of the company. About this time an officer named Seán O'Sullivan from Cork City was sent out to give drill instruction to the officers of the battalion. This training took place in the Dromina and Newtown area. When the conscription scare passed all the new members dropped out and the strength of the unit

returned to normal (about 14).

A unit of Cumann na mBan was formed in the area about this time. It had a membership of about ten and was trained in first aid by Dr. James McCarthy, M.O. Milford. Some of the members of this unit were: May Hennigan, Alice Falvey, Margaret Crimmins, Josephine Murphy and Margaret Sheehan.

During the general election in December 1918 there was no political activity in the area as the Sinn Féin candidate for the area was returned unopposed. I should mention that all members took an active part in organising Sinn Féin and in supporting all other national organisations including the Gaelic League and G.A.A. during the years 1917 and 1918.

When Cork 11 Brigade was formed in January 1919 Milford unit was detached from the Galtee Battalion as were all the other units inside the borders of Cork County. Our unit then became "B" Company, 4th Battalion (Charleville), Cork 11 Brigade. The other companies in the battalion were: Effin, Charleville, Ballyhea, Buttevant, Lisgriffin, Liscarrol, Churchtown, Dromina and Newtownshandrum. The first officers of the battalion were, I think:

O/C - Jim Brislane, Charleville.

Vice O/C - Denis O'Driscoll, Newtownshandrum.

Adjt. - Robt. Joyce, Charleville.

Q/M - James Winters, Churchtown.

The usual drilling and general activities in connection with the work of the other Irish Ireland organisations went on throughout 1919. The success of Sinn Féin in the general election in December 1918 gave a general boost to

Volunteer activities. Sometime towards the end of the year the Milford unit was reorganised by Paddy O'Brien who was at this time Vice O/C Charleville Battalion. He appointed the following officers:

O/C - Patrick Sheehan

Adj.- Maurice Noonan

Q/M - John Crimmins (witness).

No Intelligence Officer was appointed but any information to hand would be sent once a week to Battalion Headquarters by the Company Adjutant. Jerry Falvey went back to the ranks. On the same occasion he (Paddy O'Brien) administered the oath to the Republic to these officers and also to Jerry Falvey who now had no rank.

Early in 1920 the oath was administered by Liam Lynch to the full company on parade at O'Callaghan's, Curryglass. At this time Battalion Council meetings were held every two weeks, while weekly reports were furnished by the Intelligence Officers of each company.

Arising out of the general order for the destruction of evacuated enemy posts at Easter 1920 the following members of the unit took part in the destruction of Liscarrol R.I.C. Barracks: - Denis Noonan, Paddy Sheehan and Maurice Noonan. This operation was under the control of Jim Brislane (Battalion O/C).

With Patrick Sheehan (O/C) and Maurice Noonan I was on outpost duty at Kelly's, Pike Cross, on the Charleville-Buttevant road on the occasion of the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks in May 1920. We were armed with revolvers and were accompanied by about 25 members of the Ballyhea Company under Ned Ryan. The road was blocked a mile nearer Buttevant to impede the approach of enemy forces

to Kilmallock. We had instructions to hold up anybody passing through our position. The password on this occasion was "Wolfe Tone". We withdrew at 1 a.m.

Since the R.I.C. were withdrawn from their outlying stations they were not doing much duty in the country. In July 1920 a dispute occurred between the mother and son of an Imperialist family named Sheehy from Fortwilliam. The mother sought the protection of the Milford Company I.R.A. and took proceedings against the son in the Republican Courts. As the sum involved was too large the local parish court could not hear the case and it was transferred for hearing to the District Court at Freemount. The members of the latter court on the occasion of the trial were: Con Sullivan, Druminarrigle (Chairman), M.B. McAuliffe, Paddy McCarthy, Paddy Clancy and Seán Moylan. The Court decided that the son should pay the mother £300.

During the summer and autumn of 1920 systematic raiding of mails took place in the Charleville Battalion area but nothing of military interest was, as far as I know, discovered. All members of the unit took part in these activities. The members were also engaged from October onwards in doing scouting and outpost work for the Battalion Flying Column when billeted in the district.

In August 1920 an ambush was planned on the Charleville Milford road at Gibbonsgrove - about 1½ miles from Milford - but when the position was inspected by Paddy O'Brien (Battalion Vice O/C) he decided that the ambush position was not safe so the ambush party withdrew. The arms for this job were taken to Crimmins's house (witness), Kilbolane, Milford, on the day prior to the date of the proposed job.

At the end of October 1920 the Charleville and Newmarket Battalion Columns took up a position at Doona, Milford, about 400 yards from Milford R.I.C. barracks. It was proposed to ambush a patrol of Black and Tans and R.I.C. who usually travelled the main Drumcollogher - Lisscarrol road nearly every day. The patrol did not arrive on this occasion. Within a few days, however, news was received by my brother, Timothy D. Crimmins, from the local postmaster, who tapped the news going through, that Milford R.I.C. post was to be evacuated. My brother went with this report to Comdt. Jim Brislane, who gave him orders to watch the two roads leading from the R.I.C. barrack - one via Charleville and the other via Lisscarrol - in order to see if all the members of the enemy garrison were in the lorries which came to take them away. The local unit was ordered to stand by at Castle Grove Cross - a couple of hundred yards outside Milford on the Charleville road - at 6.30 p.m. that evening. The following members of the unit attended: Paddy Sheehan, Maurice Noonan, John Crimmins, Patrick Keating, Denis McAuliffe, Jim Crowley, Jack Regan, Jim Riordan, Peter Noonan, Ned McCarthy, Bill Keating, Ned Fox. Paddy O'Brien and Jim Brislane arrived and the whole party moved to the cross in Milford leading to the R.I.C. barrack. The unit was halted there and I was sent to scout around the barrack to see that everything was clear. I came back and reported and Paddy O'Brien asked me did I go into the barrack. I said "No" so he sent me back again to go into the barrack to see if everything was clear. I came back and reported everything all right and he handed me a shotgun. He ordered me to watch the road from Joe's Cross to the barrack. We proceeded to the barrack and Paddy O'Brien went in. The position allocated to me was about 100 yards beyond the

barrack. I proceeded there and after about 15 minutes firing started. No one knew what was up till my brother, Tim D. Crimmins, brought the news. Comdt. Jim Brislane and myself advanced towards the barrack and when we got there the Tans had fled. We went to the porch of the barrack and found Paddy O'Brien with a wound in his cheek. We took him to Riordan's, Kilbolane, and I got the doctor (Dr. McCarthy). Paddy O'Brien was removed to a Cork hospital the following day. The barrack was not burned that night but it was destroyed on the following Sunday during Second Mass. The destruction was carried out by the members of the local unit assisted by a few members of the Charleville Battalion Column. Amongst those who took part were the members named above in connection with the original attempt to destroy the barracks and in addition my brother, Tim D. Crimmins, as well as the column members Ned McCarthy and Tom Culhane.

The members of the Milford unit with two members of the column - Tom Culhane and Ned McCarthy - were engaged watching the premises of the Milford Co-operative Creamery for fear of reprisals for a week after the destruction of the evacuated enemy post. This guard was withdrawn at the end of a week and the Co-Operative Creamery was burned by enemy forces within a few days of the withdrawal of the I.R.A. guard.

Between November 1920 and January 1921 the members of the Milford unit raided the local mails on several occasions. In addition all members spent much time, as occasion demanded, on scouting and outpost duty for the column which was continually moving round the area (battalion) in search of enemy patrols.

During January 1921 nearly all members of the unit took part in the engagement known as Shininagh ambush on the Charleville-Buttevant road. This ambush arose out of a trench-cutting job which had been ordered by Brigade H.Q. The main Charleville-Buttevant road was to be trenched in the Ballyhea Company area. As the trench was to be 10' wide, 3' deep and the full width of the road, which at the spot selected was 35' wide, the Battalion O/C (Jim Brislane) ordered the mobilisation of all the local companies. This was necessary in view of the close proximity of the enemy post at Ballyvonare Camp (2½ miles) and the necessity for speed in completing the operation. With the other members of the Milford unit and representatives of Ballyhea, Charleville and Newtownshandrum Companies, I was engaged in cutting the trench. When the job of cutting the trench was nearly complete - after about 3 hours work - the men at the barricade on the Charleville side of the trench noticed the lights of a car draw near. The guard at this barricade was armed and opened fire on the car. The car, however, broke through the barricade and later crashed into the trench. The barricade was situated on a slight bend about 50 yards from the spot at which the trench was being cut. Immediately the party in the trench heard the shooting we dashed for cover and had only got clear when the car crashed into the trench. The occupants immediately left the car and took to the fields. They were pursued by the members of the column who were on guard at a barricade on the Buttevant side of the trench, but were lost in the darkness. It was learned later that one of the occupants of the car was Col. Hope (O/C British Forces stationed at Ballyvonare). With the other members of the Milford Company I returned home immediately the shooting ceased.

In February 1921 all members of the unit took part in the destruction of Madigan's Bridge on the Charleville-Buttevant road and also in the demolition of Miller's Bridge on a by-road in the same area. These operations were carried out in conjunction with members of the Charleville and Newmarket Battalion Columns who were in ambush positions awaiting enemy forces on these roads. The trenching and blocking of roads in the area was intensified during March 1921 and all roads were trenched or otherwise blocked several times during the month. In fact I would say that every member of the unit was on continuous night duty at this time.

I was arrested at home at Kilbolane, Milford, on April 1st 1921 when the house was surrounded by a large party of military. My brother Tim and Maurice Noonan were also captured with me. We were taken to Ballyvonare Camp and later to Buttevant Military Barrack. We were removed after a few days to Cork Gaol and then to Spike Island Internment Camp where we were detained for some weeks before being removed to Bere Island Camp where we were held till after the signing of the Treaty. We were released on December 10th 1921.

While in Buttevant Military Barracks we saw a man named Sullivan from Charleville associating with the enemy. We sent word to the Battalion Intelligence Officer (Eugene McCarthy) by a prisoner from Mallow who was being released that Sullivan was apparently in touch with the enemy. Sullivan was later taken prisoner by the I.R.A. and was held, I understand, in the Milford area until his

execution with his fellow conspirator, Patrick J. Sheehan,
as spies sometime in June 1921, I think.

My rank at the Truce was Company Q.M. Milford.
The strength of the unit at the time was about 14.

Signed: John D. Crimmins

Date: 18th November 1954

(John D. Crimmins)

18th November 1954

Witness: P. J. Donnell
Investigator.

