

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 3-3-21

No. W.S. 1106

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,106

Witness

Denis Prendiville,
Castleisland,
CO. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Cordal Company, 1st Battalion,
Kerry No. 2 Brigade.

Subject.

Cordal Company, 1st Battalion, Kerry
No. 2 Brigade, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.. S.2361

Form B S M 2

ORIGINALSTATEMENT BY DENIS PRENDIVILLEMain St., Castleisland.(Former address: Brehig, Cordal, Castleisland,
Co. Kerry)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURÓ-STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
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In my young days the Land War was much spoken of in the district in which I grew up. Some local men had been executed - John Joe Twiss was executed in Cork Jail in 1895; Poff and Barrett were executed in Tralee Jail in 1893. These men were innocent of any crime. In ¹⁷⁹⁸~~1898~~ two men were executed, one from Brehig and the other near Castleisland; they were 'Buck' O'Grady and John O'Daly. After their execution their heads were hung on the Market House.

The Irish Volunteers were formed in the Castleisland area early in 1914, I think about June. I joined up at the start. I was then 15 years of age. I was attached to Cordal Company. The captain then was T.T. O'Connor. Dan O'Mahony was Battalion O/C.

In 1916 there were, I think, about nine Martini rifles and some shotguns with very little ammunition for either in our company. The company was called out in 1916 and with other local companies we marched to a camp west of Castleisland. The next day we were sent home. We were to get the rifles which were to be landed from the 'Aud'.

In July 1917, I was summoned under the Defence of the Realm Act by Sergeant Barney Oates of the R.I.C. for shouting 'Up Germany'. Michael O'Leary, who lived in the same area, was also summoned. We were tried by an R.M. and fined £2. About a month later we were again summoned by the same sergeant for jeering at him and marking time as he passed. The case was dismissed.

On the reorganisation of the Volunteers in 1917, our company was reorganised. David McCarthy was appointed captain,

Michael O'Leary 1st Lieutenant, and I was made 2nd Lieut. Some of our company went to Waterford for the 1918 elections There were no seats contested in Kerry at the General Elections held the same year.

In 1919 I was engaged in training, collecting arms and organising the company in special services (signalling, first aid and arms). The local R.I.C. Barracks (Cordal) was evacuated about 1918.

The fighting in our battalion area developed from an attack made on Gortatlea R.I.C. Barracks in 1918. The attack (known as the first attack) was carried out by Thomas McEllistrim (Tommy Mac), Jack Cronin, Laide and Browne. Laide and Browne were killed on the job. Thomas McEllistrim and Jack Cronin were on the run after the attack and round them later a fighting column started to form. The column was composed mostly of men from Ballymacelligott and Brehig companies. Thomas McEllistrim and Jack Cronin were in charge.

My first fight was the attack on Gortatlea Barracks; the date was March 24th 1920. The barracks was taken after being set on fire. Those taking part from Cordal Company were myself, David McCarthy, Ned McCarthy and Michael O'Leary. One R.I.C. man was wounded. I got a police carbine and bicycle out of the barracks. Michael O'Leary got a carbine. John Cronin got a carbine and Johnny O'Connor of Farmers Bridge got a revolver. If more arms were got I cannot remember them.

The principal position for the attack was from the stationmaster's house which overlooked the barracks. The slates on the barrack roof were broken and paraffin soaked rags were thrown in; the barracks then took fire and it was a roaring furnace when the R.I.C. surrendered and we got in. I think some arms and ammunition went up in the

fire. I was posted in the stationmaster's house during the attack along with Thomas McEllistrim, John Cronin, Johnny O'Connor, David McCartney, Michael O'Leary and Ned McCarthy. There were probably some others I have forgotten.

Our next attack was on Scartaglin^{R.I.C.} Post ~~about~~ about a week later, I think the night of 31st March/1st April 1920. The R.I.C. post was a single storey structure hut formation with wooden walls and corrugated iron roof. It was detached standing back from the road. A low loose stone wall ran along near the back of the post. I was in position opposite the front of the post and across the road from it behind a low stone wall. Mick Leary and Humphrey Murphy (R.I.P.) were with me. All the men who had been on the Gortatlea attack in March were on the job along with my brother, Jack Prendiville and Jack Barrett of Cordal Company.

The plan for the attack was that we would open fire at the post and some of our men would approach the back of the post under cover of the low stone wall and throw paraffin soaked rags, which had been set alight, against the walls. Then a home-made bomb would be thrown. The post was, in fact, set alight and the home-made bomb was thrown, but the bomb burst a large water storage tank which put out the fire.

The fight lasted until daybreak, but the R.I.C. would not surrender and we had to give up. Ned McCarthy received a bullet wound during the fight.

All the attacks were carried out by the same group with help from the local companies. The names of the column, as I remember them are:- Thomas McEllistrin, Jack Cronin, David McCarthy, Ned McCarthy, Michael O'Leary, Denis Prendiville, Moss Carmody, Johnny O'Connor, Jack Herlihy, Jack Prendiville, Jack Barrett, Moss Galvin, P. Clifford, F. Garvey, P. Burke, Jim Bailey, and there may have been others I have forgotten.

On 9th June 1920 I participated in an attack on Brosna R.I.C. Barracks. Tadhg M. O'Connor, who was then O/C. 1st Battalion, Kerry No. 2 Brigade, was in charge.

Brosna is a small village near the Limerick border. The barracks was situated in the square. It was a two-storey stone building protected by steel shutters and barbed wire. The garrison consisted of 6 or 7 R.I.C. men under a sergeant. The attacking party was composed of a mixed group of 10 or 12 drawn from the Ballymacelligott and Cordal companies. We were all in possession of arms and consequently we got a chance of going on any attacks being planned. I was directly under the command of Thomas McEllistrim.

In preparation for the attack, the roads leading from Castleisland, Cordal and the Limerick road from Feale Bridge were blocked by the local companies. As far as I remember, the roads were blocked with trees. I was placed in a house opposite the barracks (O'Toole's). There were other parties of our men in different houses covering the barracks. The attack was opened when two or three home-made bombs were thrown at the barracks. We opened fire and the garrison replied and sent up flares. The nearest point from which the barracks could be reinforced was Castleisland, a distance of about 10 miles. The attack started at about midnight and lasted until about 3 or 3.30 next morning. We could make no impression on the building and had to withdraw before daylight. We saw no attempt made to reinforce the garrison from Castleisland, and we retired without opposition. None of our men was hurt and I got no report^{of any} of the garrison being killed or wounded.

The next day some Volunteers from the Cordal area including myself, Michael O'Leary, David McCarthy, Jack Prendiville, M. O'Sullivan, Humphrey Murphy and possibly some others took up position at Glenlahern Cross. After

some hours a British military car came from Castleisland direction. The military saw some of our Volunteers before coming into the ambush position and, after an exchange of shots, the car turned back and returned the way it came. In the exchange of shots Humphrey Murphy was slightly wounded.

During July, August and September 1920, I was at several prepared ambushes. One was at the railway bridge on the Tralee road; another near Knocknagoshel. On November 1st, 1920, we prepared an attack on a patrol going for the mails to Castleisland Post Office, but it was called off at the last minute as the military had spotted something. We occupied Castleisland town on two occasions waiting for British patrols, but they did not show up.

During November 1920, three of our men - Michael O'Leary, Moss Carmody and Jim Bailey - fired at and wounded a Tan.

During this period we of the Brehig area were sleeping in dugouts, and on 21st February 1921, I was in the dugout with David McCarthy, Michael O'Leary and J. Barrett. My brother, Jack Prendiville, was helping a neighbour to take cattle to Castleisland Fair when he saw lorries coming. He left the cattle and made straight for the dugout and got us out just in time. In a matter of minutes they were on the dugout which they burned. They had come straight for Castleisland to the dugout before daylight and there was no doubt they had accurate information. We never found out how they got their information.

During the last days of February 1921, I was ordered with the other members of our column to proceed to a place called The Bower which is just "a spot on the road" between Killarney and Rathmore. We were informed that a lorry convoy was expected and it was proposed to attack it. We were joined by some men from the North Cork Column. We remained in position for two days, being billeted in the houses around.

The convoy did not arrive and, as we had been in the position so long, it was decided to move. The local men were disbanded and our party of 15 to 20 proceeded to Clonbanin.

Clonbanin is a small village on the main road between Castleisland and Mallow. The road divides at Clonbanin, one road (the main road) going on to Mallow, and a branch to the right for Rathmore.

We were under the command of Thomas MacEllistrim and when we got to Clonbanin we found we were on a big job. Sean Moylan with the North Cork Column joined us. He took charge of the operation. The job was an attack on a British lorry convoy which was acting as escort to some high ranking British officers who were on a tour of inspection.

Our party were allotted positions about 20 or 30 yards back from the main road coming from Mallow. Sean Moylan's column were on the right of the road. We went into position on the morning of the ambush and, after a wait of about three hours, the convoy was sighted. It consisted of about five lorries and a Rolls Royce armoured car. Our party were armed with rifles and revolvers. Sean Moylan's column had a Hotchkiss gun in position in a haggard overlooking the road. The British officers were travelling in a touring car. The convoy drove into the ambush position and the order was given to us to open fire. The first shots put the touring car out of action and it swerved across the road out of control. The armoured car collided with the tourer, and the driver, in attempting to avoid the collision, drove the armoured car on to soft ground at the side of the road where it got bogged. By this time all our men were firing. The Hotchkiss was raking the lorries with fire. The British were called on to surrender, without result. The Vickers gun in the armoured car opened fire, while Sean Moylan's Hotchkiss went out of action. It was then a case of our rifles against

the British troops and the armoured car. The British were seeking cover by the roadside and an officer who had been in the tourer jumped for cover, but he did not reach it. He was shot. We learned later that he was Brigadier General Cummins. The fight lasted about three hours. We could not silence the armoured car and our ammunition was giving out. We had to withdraw. We retired with Moylan's column to a place named Cullen where we had a meal and changed our socks. We left Moylan's column there and returned towards the Kerry border. We stayed at Ballydesmond (on the Kerry side of the Cork/Kerry border) that night and returned to the Cordal area next day. I cannot say how many of the British were knocked out at Clonbanin.

After the Clonbanin ambush a brigade column was formed. Myself, Michael O'Leary and David McCarthy were brought in. We spent time in training at the Gap of Dunloe under the joint command of Dan Allman and Thomas McEllistrim. The strength of the column was about 30.

The first fight of the column was at Headford in March 1921, I think the 21st. We were billeted some miles from Headford and when word came we ran all the way to the station. We were moving some wagons from the line when the train from Kenmare came in. We had no prepared positions and scrambled into position as best we could. I was in a section commanded by David McCarthy. We were on the railway embankment with very little cover, but a good field of fire. I think most of the military were put out of action early on, but some two or three got down on the tracks under the train and kept up a continuous fire. No doubt they could have been dislodged but a full trainload of British soldiers entered the station and we had to withdraw.

I understood that 26 of the 30 British soldiers who were on the first train were knocked out. Two of ours -

Dan Allman and Jim Bailey - were killed, and Jim Coffey was wounded.

On the 4th May 1921, myself with David McCarthy, Michael O'Leary, Pa E. O'Connor, Jack O'Connor and Jack Prendiville, all from Brehig, were asked to go to Rathmore where an ambush was being planned by the O/C. of Rathmore Company - Manus Moynihan.

A spy who had been tried some time before (Thomas O'Sullivan, or Old Tom) was being held in the Rathmore area awaiting execution, and Manus Moynihan planned to use the spy as a bait to draw the Tans or R.I.C. out of Rathmore. The spy was brought to a place called the Bog Road near Rathmore on the morning of 4th May 1921. We took up position on a boreen which crossed the Bog Road and on both sides curved slightly, like two arms. The spy was shot and labelled while we lay in cover. After some time a man and a young boy came along in an ass cart and after the man had approached the body and seen the label they proceeded on to Rathmore. After some time we saw a group of R.I.C. and Tans coming along the road from Rathmore. The road was open in flat marshy land while there was a low bank and a hedge on the boreen where we were in cover.

The police party advanced in a group (eight of them). Another member of their party was some distance behind. When they came to the body some of them bent down. We got orders to fire. Most of the police fell at the first volley. A couple fired a shot or two. We continued to fire until they were silent.

The R.I.C. man who had lagged behind turned and ran for cover. He may have fired from cover, I am not sure, but eventually he made back for Rathmore leaving his rifle behind him. We collected nine rifles and about 200 rounds for each. The garrison in Rathmore made no attempt to come to the aid

of their comrades.

In June 1921, I helped to burn the Library in Castleisland. The building held a commanding view of the town and it was to be occupied by British military. In the same month our battalion held a training camp at Glounthane near Cordal. Thomas Fleming, who was giving instructions to a group in the filling of mines, was killed when one of the mines exploded. Bernard Coffey, Heffernan and Nolan were badly burned.

In July 1921, the Brigade O/C., Humphrey Murphy, gave orders that an attack be carried out on a curfew patrol in Castleisland. It was usual for the patrol to leave their barracks at the southern end of the town and parade up the Main St. to the northern end. The patrol consisted of from 15 to 20 soldiers. The Brigade O/C. fixed the attack for the night of July 10th 1921. On that night I took up position in a laneway at St. Stephen's Church with Michael O'Leary and Jack Barrett. Other parties of our men were posted in laneways on both sides of the Main St. The brigade and battalion staffs took up positions in the ruins of the Library (which we had burned the previous month). The men in the Library ruins were Humphrey Murphy, Brigade C/C., Thomas Daly, Jerry O'Leary, Jack Walsh, David McCarthy and Con O'Leary.

The patrol came out of the barracks as usual and proceeded up the Main St. When they got to the point on the Main St. where the Limerick road enters, they came under fire. A general fight developed. The party in the Library ruins opened fire down the Main St. My party opened fire out of the laneway and brought our fire to bear on a party which had got out of the barracks to reinforce the patrol.

While some of the British military held us engaged the remainder retreated to the barracks and, passing through, left the barracks by the rear, came round behind our men on both sides of the town.

My party held the British coming in behind our position and we started retiring towards the north of the town. We retired along the backs of houses fighting as we went. All our parties on the west side of the town retired, while my party covered them. My party then withdrew under heavy machine gunfire.

Our men who had been holding positions on the east side of the town found themselves being surrounded and commenced to retreat, but they ran into difficulties when a machine gun was brought into play against them - three (my brother Jack Prendiville, Dick Shanahan and Jack Flynn) being killed before the party could finally withdraw.

The British lost six killed out of the original patrol.

Signed: Denis Prendiville
(Denis Prendiville)

Date: March 1st. 1955

Witness: James J. O'Connor (James J. O'Connor)

Investigator.

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BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
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