

DUPLICATE

W. S. 1,226.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1,226

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,226.....

Witness

Michael Russell,  
Cree,  
Ennis,  
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Battalion Officer

Third Battalion, West Clare Brigade.

Subject.

- (a) Cree Company Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Clare, 1917-1921;
- (b) Execution of Patrick Darcy as a spy  
by I.R.A. June, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2513.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL RUSSELL,

Cree, Ennis, County Clare,

formerly Battalion Transport Officer, 3rd Battalion,

West Clare Brigade.

I was born on 16th December, 1896, at Cree. My first connection with the movement for Irish independence began in June, 1917, when I became a member of the newly formed company of Irish Volunteers in Cree. This company was started by Michael Fitzmartin, and the first officers were: John Tubridy, Captain; Michael Fitzmartin, 1st Lieutenant, and Thomas Walsh, 2nd Lieutenant. The company at the outset numbered 16 men, and it remained at this strength until the conscription threat in the spring of 1918 when it increased to about 22. In normal circumstances the adjoining company of Cloghanmore should have been part of the Cree Company, but because of a dispute over the appointment of officers the men in Cloghanmore and Cloghanbeg refused to have anything to do with the people in Cree.

The company began drilling as soon as it was formed, mobilising for this purpose in the fields adjoining the village of Cree. For the first few months all the time was spent at foot drill. After that each Volunteer got a wooden rifle and we went on to rifle drill. By the end of 1917 we were well advanced in all aspects of company drill. Our sole instructor was Michael Fitzmartin, who picked up a good knowledge of drill instruction from military training manuals.

The first real guns which came into the possession

of the Cree Company were shotguns, about twenty of which were obtained from farmers around the countryside and one lot of six shotguns which were given over by a Volunteer named Jim McGrath, Dromelihy. These guns were collected towards the end of 1919. While engaged in taking the shotguns from McGrath's place to Cree, seven or eight Volunteers under Michael Fitzmartin were intercepted by a patrol of four police from Cooraclare R.I.C. station. Both parties fired on one another, and in a running fight which ensued Fitzmartin was captured and taken prisoner to Cooraclare R.I.C. barracks. He was tried at Cree Petty Sessions Court and sentenced to three months' hard labour on a charge of carrying firearms. This was the first occasion on which an armed clash occurred in the Cree district between Crown forces and the Irish Volunteers. The area was inactive until November, 1920, when an ambush was arranged to take place in Moyasta.

At that time seven or eight R.I.C. travelled a few times a week from Kilrush towards Miltown Malbay in a Crossley tender and the Brigade Staff decided to attack them. A party of nine men under Bill Haugh, and including myself, Thomas Martin, Tommy Harrinan, Michael Pender, Michael Fitzmartin, James Fitzpartin, John Cunningham and Mick McGrath, took up positions behind a road fence in Moyasta South about 8 o'clock in the morning. Around midday the Brigade O/C, Seán Liddy, came on the scene and called off the attack without giving any reason. We had not gone a thousand yards from the position when the police tender came along and it passed without interruption. Apart from Haugh and myself who had service rifles brought in by the former, the rest

of the men had shotguns. We had good positions that day, and I often thought since that if we had been allowed go ahead with the ambush, West Clare's part in the Black and Tan war might have been entirely different.

Another ambush was arranged for a police patrol of four men on the outskirts of Cree village in January or February 1921, but this again was cancelled as the police took another road on that occasion.

I was involved in no other form of armed activity until June, 1921, when a man called Patrick Darcy, a native of Cooraclare, was executed as a spy. He was a teacher at Doonbeg national school and at the time of his death was about 28 or 29 years old. Though two of his brothers were active members of the I.R.A., he was never a member of that organisation so far as I'm aware. For a period he was on very friendly terms with the leading I.R.A. men in the locality, especially the Brigade O/C, Seán Liddy. However, during the year 1920 it was noticed that he had begun to frequent a publichouse in Kilrush owned by an ex R.I.C. man named Sheehan, which was the principal drinking haunt of the R.I.C. and Black and Tans in that town.

A number of wanted I.R.A. men who were "on the run" stayed most of their time around the Cooraclare and Doonbeg areas where Darcy resided and taught. It became obvious from police raids that information regarding the whereabouts of these wanted men was being given to the British authorities. Any man at the time who was known to be keeping company of R.I.C. or any member of the British garrison naturally came under suspicion, and Darcy, who was the only one from his side of the country

who was ever seen in this type of company, came to be regarded by the local I.R.A. as a dangerous man and a potential spy.

Two prominent Volunteer officers who were much sought after by the British forces - William Shanahan, Doughmore, and Michael McNamara, Doonbeg, were captured in the house of a man named Reidy in Newtown, Doonbeg, about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning of 20th or 21st December, 1920. They had not been long in the house that night when a party of British troops from Kilrush raided the place and found the two I.R.A. men in bed. The prisoners were taken first to Kilrush R.I.C. barracks and a day or so later were removed to Ennis. One of them, Michael McNamara, was brutally murdered on the road to Ennis, having been bound and chained to the back of one of the lorries and dragged after it along the road. Shanahan also received most inhuman treatment. The unfortunate man, bereft of several of his finger and toe nails and with nearly every bone in his body broken, was left lying in a prison cell in Ennis jail for the most part of a week before death came to his relief.

As the year 1921 wore on, Darcy's name was a byword amongst all the I.R.A. in West Clare as a British spy. He continued to frequent Sheehan's publichouse and to mix in the company of the enemy forces. Every decent person in West Clare strongly condemned the Shanahan and McNamara murders, and even people who were not in sympathy with the Sinn Féin movement shunned the company of the British garrison in Kilrush after these happenings. But Darcy was seen to come into more frequent contact with the enemy as time went on. He also drank more.

About the middle of June, 1921, Sheehan, the publican to whom I have already referred, was visiting a farm which he had in Kilminihill. As he was about to leave the farm he was apprehended by a group of I.R.A. men under the Brigade O/C, Seán Liddy. I was a member of this party, as were also Tom Martin, Tom Murrinan, Michael Melican and James Fitzmartin. Sheehan was taken into an outhouse and accused of being a spy. He strongly denied the accusation and was particularly emphatic in asserting that he gave no information to the British troops regarding Shanahan and McNamara. On being threatened with execution by the Brigade O/C, Sheehan began to cry and said, "It was not I who gave the information about Shanahan and McNamara, but it was "Pa" Darcy who gave it to the police in my house". The Brigade O/C then released him and Sheehan proceeded home in his pony and trap which he had brought with him from Kilrush. I have a very distinct recollection of having heard Sheehan make this accusation against Darcy. I should, perhaps, add that I was not present in the outhouse from the commencement of Sheehan's interrogation as I was detained outside on some other business. In fact, I only got inside towards the end of it, so I cannot say what else he disclosed to any superior officer prior to my arrival.

On the same night, myself, Tom Murrinan, James Fitzmartin, Michael Cunningham, Michael Eriody and John Golden were sent to Darcy's house in Cooraclare with orders to arrest him. We arrived at Darcy's about midnight but he was not at home. We returned to Cree where the Brigade O/C was waiting, and, on learning of the failure of our errand, he ordered us back again to search the house for any photograph of Darcy which might be

available. We complied with this order, and I think it was Tom Harrinan who eventually found a snapshot, which we took with us.

On reporting back the second time to the Brigade O/C, he took the snapshot and dictated a dispatch to some prominent I.R.A. man in Ennis. The dispatch was taken by Michael Fitzmartin, who cycled off immediately to Ennis. It was then about half-past six in the morning. The Brigade O/C was under the impression that Darcy had fled on hearing about Sheehan's arrest and was trying to get out of the district before falling into the hands of the I.R.A.

Fitzmartin duly delivered the dispatch, and when the recipient read it he told Fitzmartin that everything was alright, that Darcy had come to Ennis to see his brother, Jack Darcy, on some business and that he was returning to West Clare on the late train that evening, taking with him a Kerry blue terrier which an Ennis man was sending to Thomas Hennessy in Doonbeg. I cannot think now who this man in Ennis was, but I have an idea it was either Bill McNamara or his brother. Fitzmartin returned to Cree and acquainted the Brigade O/C of the position. I and a number of others were in bed in a dug-out when we were roused around six o'clock in the evening by the Brigade O/C. He gave myself, John Cunningham, James Fitzmartin, Tom Harrinan, Michael Reidy and John Golding orders to proceed to Doonbeg station and to take over Darcy from the local I.R.A. police, who had been detailed to effect his arrest as soon as he landed on the platform off the evening train from Ennis. When we came near the station we met the I.R.A. police but they had no prisoner. They explained that

as they thought that British troops were on the train they did not wait at the station for its arrival.

Bill Haugh, a Brigade Officer, came on the scene at this stage, and learning what happened, sent myself and John Cunningham along the Doonbeg-Cooraclare road and John Golding and James Fitzmartin along the road running through Cree to Cooraclare, to see if we could locate Darcy. Cunningham and myself cycled on to Darcy's house, and as we entered it we saw him leaving by the back door. We followed and overtook him in the yard. I told him that Bill Haugh wished to interview him. His reply was: "What would Bill Haugh or anyone else want with me?" I told him to come along and that Haugh was only a short distance away. He did so, and meeting Haugh about 600 yards from Cooraclare we delivered the prisoner to him. Addressing me Haugh said: "You take my bike, Micky", and turning to Darcy, he said: "You come with me. I want to have a few words with you". The two of them then went across the fields towards Cree, while John Cunningham and myself cycled on to that village.

In Cree we learned that the Brigade Staff were holding a courtmartial on Darcy in an outhouse owned by Tim O'Donnell. There was a guard of I.R.A. men thrown around the village. Cunningham and myself waited outside O'Donnell's place. Half an hour later Darcy and the members of the court, which was comprised of the Brigade O/C, Seán Liddy, Bill Haugh, Comor Whelan, Tom Marrinan and Tom Martin, came out of the building. Darcy sat on a seat and called John Cunningham, with whom he had a brief conversation. The latter then returned to me and said: "Darcy is after telling me that he is going to be shot



and he asked me to intercede on his behalf with Seán Liddy". We both went to Liddy and suggested that before doing anything to Darcy, that the latter should be confronted with Sheehan, the Kilrush publican. Candidly, I felt that Sheehan was as much guilty as Darcy and that the latter when faced with the former might be able to incriminate him also, and that between the pair of them a lot of useful information might be obtained. We volunteered to go right into Kilrush to arrest Sheehan. Liddy told us that he was finished with the case and that Darcy was now in the hands of Bill Haugh. We then approached Haugh and put our proposal to him. His answer was: "Have you a bike, a whistle, a gun and stuff. You are to be No. 1 scout on the way to Doonbeg". He also detailed Tom Harrinan and Thomas Martin as scouts No. 2 and 3. He ordered us to proceed on bikes to McNamara's house in Doonbeg and clear everyone we met off the road. He gave us strict orders, too, to guard against enemy forces getting through to the party of Volunteers who were coming behind escorting Darcy to Doonbeg.

All the party and the prisoner arrived in Doonbeg, where the local parish priest, Fr. McNamara, was asked to come to give spiritual attention to the prisoner. Fr. McNamara did not come but sent word to carry on as the prisoner was all right. Darcy was then tied and blindfolded and was about to be shot in front of McNamara's house when the local company police officer jumped over a fence adjacent to McNamara's house and asked who was in charge. I answered and said it was Bill Haugh. He spoke to Haugh, pointing out that it was most unfair to the McNamara family to shoot Darcy outside their door, that they had already had a son murdered by the British

forces and would almost certainly have their home destroyed as a reprisal if the execution was carried out in the vicinity.

This intervention caused a further delay in the execution, as the prisoner was marched to the other end of the village of Doonbeg. There, after being blindfolded and bound, he was shot by a firing party comprised of two members of the Brigade Staff - Bill Haugh and Tom Karrinan. I was standing near Darcy as he was being blindfolded and I distinctly heard him say: "I forgive ye, boys. Ye are shooting me in the wrong".

After being shot, a label was pinned to the dead man's breast bearing the words "Spies beware". His body was left on the street, where it remained until next day when British troops from Kilrush removed it in a lorry to the R.I.C. barracks in that town. Widespread raids throughout West Clare by British forces followed the execution of this man. As this was foreseen, special steps were taken to ensure that each I.R.A. company in the brigade maintained a strict watch-out for enemy raiding parties. Until the Truce the state of alertness continued, with very good results as far as we were concerned, as not a single man wanted by the enemy was captured during the course of the raids.

It was about the end of 1919 when I was appointed Battalion Transport Officer. My principal work in this post was to supervise dispatch carrying. I established three centres in the battalion area at which dispatches were to be received and from which they were to be delivered. One centre was at Cree, another at Dromeliny and the third at Churchtown. These places were from three

to five miles apart, and at each centre it was the duty of the local company transport officer to ensure that there was a serviceable bike always available, as well as a Volunteer to take the dispatch. The arrangement worked satisfactorily. I cannot recall any instance in the battalion area where delay occurred in dealing with dispatches or where a dispatch fell into enemy hands.

Signed:

Michael Russell

(Michael Russell)

Date:

14<sup>th</sup> August 1955

14th August 1955.

Witness:

D. Griffin

(D. Griffin)

(Investigator)

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