

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,423

W.S. 1423

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1423

Witness

Jeremiah Cronin,
20 Catherine Street,
Limerick.

Identity.

Volunteer, Mid-Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

National and Military Activities, Limerick,
1908-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No ... S. 2748.

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STATEMENT BY JEREMIAH CRONIN

20 Catherine Street, Limerick

My name is Jeremiah Cronin. I was born on 26th day of November 1892, in the parish of St. Michael, Limerick.

I attended the Christian Brothers Schools, Sexton St. Limerick, until I was 16 years of age. When I left school my father, who was a carpenter, had me apprenticed to the same trade.

The matter I am writing about is all from memory and, no doubt, there may be some inaccuracies regarding the exact date of the month; the year, I am sure, is correct.

Away back through the years leading up to the year 1908 the English settlers started to creep in, slowly but surely, into Limerick city and county, namely, the Inchiquins, Barrings, Ivors, Whiteheads, Spring-Rices, Crokers and many more too numerous to mention. The factories in the city were controlled by the Bannatynes, Cleeves, Goodbodys, Boyds, Dennys, Shaws, Hallidays, Russells. The business shops were owned and controlled by the Kidds, Lindsays, Woodhouses, Bennisses, Jacobs, Moodys.

To show you the influence that they had, I will endeavour to explain how the borough was determined. The engineer in charge stuck the compass on a spot on the barony map known as "The Nail" in the exchange located in Nicholas St. in the parish of St. Mary. All transactions transacted there were legally binding. The local Bard of Thomond made reference to it in one of his poems:

"For debt no man shall go to jail
That pays the reckoning on the nail".

The engineer, as I said, stuck the point of his compass on "The Nail" and described a large circle round the map. Now, all properties outside the circle were in the county and paying small rates, whilst those inside were paying large city rates. As this did not suit them at all they made representations to the Government who altered the borough stones and placed their property outside the circle. Such was the sway they held.

The very streets and terraces were called after British royalty and famous (or infamous) English statesmen. They were: George St. (now O'Connell St.), Nelson, Queen's, Brunswick, Cornwallis, Newtown-Perry, Perry Square, Hartstronge, Glentworth, Barrington, Henry, Military Road, Roden, Cecil, and lots of others. The terraces were:- Victoria, Wellington (old and new), Alexandria. The families were the Bloods, Vereckers, Wallaces, Maunsells, Christies, Newenhams, Wallers and others too numerous to mention.

Now, each of those families engaged two or three local girls as servants; their mothers before them and also their grandmothers were engaged in the same capacity. Those girls intermarried with the English servants brought over by the bigger houses and their children's children are still with us, namely, Barnetts, Williams, Jones, Crokers, Maums, Kings, Earls and many others.

The point I want to make here is that 75 years before 1908, 65% of the people of Limerick city and county spoke Irish and the people who employed them set about stamping out the language and we well know now how they succeeded.

The city around this period, say, the years 1908-9-10-11- and 12 were peaceful; no incident of any note was recorded

and this, maybe, gave the loyalists a sense of security, because I think in the year 1912 they put out a feeler by calling a Unionist meeting in the Theatre Royal which was filled to capacity with the loyalists. They invited the city bands to attend. Each and every one of them refused, so they had a band in from the county composed of British ex-servicemen

I well remember that night; all bedlam broke loose; the meeting was broken up and heads were broken. The Royal Irish Constabulary were called out but were just brushed out of the way. One of the organisers called on the band to play up; the drummer just got the big drum on his chest when, wham! a half a brick went right through both heads of the big drum. The police had reinforcements brought in from Counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary. Mounted policemen galloped their horses through the crowds, but could not disperse them. It was learned later that the soldiers were drawn up in the Square in the New Barracks where the Riot Act was being read. Meanwhile, some of the crowds set about breaking the shop windows of loyalists in the principal streets. Every window in the Protestant Young Men's Society was smashed to atoms. So the Unionists went back into their shell and did not attempt any more public demonstrations.

The British garrison around this time was between 1200 to 1500 officers and men housed in the following barracks:- The New Barracks (now called Sarsfield Barracks), the Castle Barracks (King John's); the Ordnance Barracks, the Strand Barracks and what was known as the Staff Barracks (Recruiting). In every district was a resident recruiting sergeant and the number of young men taken kept the strength of the five battalions of the Munster Fusiliers up to full strength of 1000 or 1200 officers and men.

I think I have given a fair idea of the state of Limerick City up to 1908 when in that year Bulmer Hobson came to Limerick to form a company of the Fianna Boy Scouts. On the stage with him were John Daly ('67 Fenian), the brothers John and Joseph Dalton. A goodly number of people turned up and a number of young boys handed in their names. I knew some of the boys; their names were:- Patrick and David Whelan, the brothers McSweeney and others whose names I have forgotten.

The building where the lecture was held was, perhaps, the coachhouse at the rere of John Daly's house in Barrington St.; it is now in the possession of Messrs. John Duggan and Sons, Glaziers, Limerick.

Very soon the young boys entered into the spirit of the movement. Parades were held frequently; field days were held every fine Sunday. Uniforms were now beginning to be worn and looked very smart indeed. They had indoor pastimes and games; a few air rifles were now introduced and target practice was held nightly. John Daly was greatly interested in the movement he sponsored, giving his time and money to encourage the boys. I may say here that John Daly was Edward Daly's (1916 hero) uncle.

The only boy scouts body in Limerick previous to the forming of the Fianna was the Church Lads Brigade who were seen frequently parading around the streets accompanied by their own fife and drum band and an attempt was made to introduce Baden Powell Boy Scouts, but they never made any headway and were disbanded. The Church Lads Brigade were taken off the streets and did not appear any more after the Unionist meeting.

As I have now dealt with events up to 1912, I now come

to 1913, a memorable one, as it was in this year the Irish National Volunteers were formed in the Athenaeum Hall, Upper Cecil St. Limerick. It was on this occasion that Roger Casement visited Limerick to address the meeting. He outlined the events that led up to the formation of the Volunteers and the impression I got at that meeting was that the people who organised it were not a bit concerned about the Home Rule Bill, but, rather, as a stepping stone to greater possibilities. Nevertheless, some three or four hundred men handed in their names. A man named Holland, known as the Captain, was very active on that night enrolling members. Other men I remember were some members of the Gaelic League - Joseph Purcell, James Gubbins, Sean Casey, John Grant, Patrick Whelan, Patrick Kelly, John Canty, Patrick Carey, Sean Carey and others.

A parade was called for the purpose of dividing the men and keeping them in their own districts. Each district elected its own officers. The drill instructors were ex-British soldiers and I must say here in all fairness to them they were very attentive, as they instructed the officers who, in turn, instructed the Volunteers. The Volunteers, after a few weeks, were well versed in forming fours, marching and counter-marching and the time was ripe to learn the handling of a rifle, so the local sawmills were pressed into service and a formidable array of wooden guns was produced which did good service at the time.

Some two or three months after, the first of the real thing began to arrive - rifles of Italian make, long and short Martinis. Each man in turn got a few lessons on the handling and care of a rifle. Dances were held in the parade grounds of the Cornmarket, Mulgrave St. Limerick. The proceeds went towards the purchase of these rifles.

Events were now moving fast; dissention was creeping into the ranks, and about 30% of the Volunteers became suspicious when it became known that John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party in the British House of Commons, made speeches hinting at the formation of an Irish Brigade to go to France to fight for the 'rights of small nations' and, to confirm that suspicion, a wellknown loyalist, Captain Eric Shaw, came into the ranks and rubbed shoulders with some of his employees - a very strange fact - the only single member of the Protestant community in Limerick to do so.

Captain Holland called a full parade of the Volunteers and appealed to them to stick together, and he said and led by John Redmond who, as he said, was doing a great thing for Ireland, namely, placing the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book, and to show that the Limerick Volunteers had confidence in John Redmond, he ordered a march to the residence of one of the Members of Parliament for Limerick - Michael Joyce - who lived at "The Moorings" in the then Military Road (now O'Connell Avenue). He addressed the meeting and warned the Volunteers to stand fast because, if the Home Rule Bill was passed, the Volunteers were to see that no one in all Ireland would prevent it being put into effect. He also hinted that Sir Edward Carson also had formed a volunteer force to prevent Ireland getting Home Rule.

All their pleadings were ignored and no one made any comment whatsoever. The 30% now definitely broke away and formed into the Irish Volunteers and all they had was the knowledge that they had learned in the Irish National Volunteers - not even a wooden gun, as all these were kept locked up in one of the stores at the Market.

In Limerick at that time was a society called the

Young Ireland Society; their rooms were in Thomas Street. It was known as a secret society. Now, the members would not in any circumstances join the National Volunteers and held aloof until the split came, and then they joined in a body the Irish Volunteers. At least 60 men from each of the five districts broke away and elected their own company officers and battalion staff and became known as the Limerick City Regiment. The officers of the battalion staff were:- Michael P. Colivet, Battalion O/C. (or colonel, as he was called); James McInerney, Vice O/C.; Michael Byrne, adjutant; John Grant, battalion Q.M. Company officers elected included - James Leddin, James Gubbins, Michael Hartney, George Clancy, Liam Forde, Rafe Slattery, Ned O'Toole, James Connaughton and others.

The officers of the Irish Volunteers got busy building up their ranks, buying rifles anywhere they could be got. Some soldiers of the garrison were got at and were induced to steal them from the barracks. As these could not be brought out the barrack gate direct, other means had to be found. After some planning, an idea took root. A small four-wheeled trolley was made to which was attached a long length of rope - sash line used for hanging sashes - and placed in a convenient place inside the barrack railing on the military roadside where there is a disused quarry (known as the Widow Fitzgibbons) and away from the public gaze. The rifle was strapped on to the trolley and, at a given signal, was hauled out through the bars, and so another rifle was added. The soldier was well paid and everyone was happy. A raid was made one night on the rifles of the National Volunteers and a good number taken away.

The following Sunday, the Irish Volunteers were returning

from a recruiting meeting in Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare. Nearing the city, one of our advance scouts on a bicycle reported back to the main body that the National Volunteers were drawn up to disarm us. The officer in charge - Michael P. Colivet - halted the battalion and gave the order to fix bayonets. The band, of which I was a member, was sent to the rear. I must state here that the Irish Volunteers were not at all popular and we could not induce any city band to accompany us on parades; so we got our own band together and, after a lot of hard work, we succeeded in having a fairly good combination. The man responsible was a musician by the name of Thomas Glynn, who was a personal companion to John Daly. No incident took place on the occasion.

Another incident happened at another recruiting campaign. On this occasion, we went to O'Callaghan's Mills, Co. Clare, where we got a good reception and succeeded in forming a company of Irish Volunteers. Michael Brennan of Meelick, Co. Clare, was with us. On our way back, at a place called Doon Lake between Broadford and O'Callaghan's Mills, Co. Clare, a number of shots were fired at us, but there were no casualties. It was believed at the time that those shots were fired by the Royal Irish Constabulary. Some of our officers were of the opinion that the rifle reports were those of a carbine - a type of rifle carried by the police - and, I think, the first shots fired in the campaign?

The Volunteers behaved very well on that day; when a warning whistle sounded, the column divided up and took cover behind the hedges at both sides of the road and scouts were sent out to reconnoitre and report if any armed men were in the vicinity. None were sighted, so the Volunteers fell-in, the officers taking the precaution to send an armed advance guard some hundred yards in front and a further guard bringing

up the rere. No further incident occurred.

Recruiting went on without stop to the borders of Tipperary and Kerry, but not without opposition. I remember at Foynes, Co. Limerick, during a meeting, a section of the crowd became hostile and heckled the speakers continuously; dogs were set fighting and the din was awful. James McInerney jumped down from the platform with a loaded gun in his hand and said if the dogs were not separated he would shoot them and then shoot the man who would interfere with him. The dogs were separated and the meeting went on without further interruption.

On 23rd May (Whit Sunday) 1915, a Volunteer Convention was held in Limerick. Great preparations were made to welcome the Volunteers from Dublin and the surrounding districts. It was the best parade of Volunteers that was ever held in Limerick. Everything went well until we came to Mungret St. where an organised attack was made on us. The leader of the mob was a man who afterwards became an excellent Volunteer and who finished up with a good national record. When the parade was dismissed, isolated groups of Volunteers were mobbed by a howling mob known as the separation allowance people and the "Allies Backers"; hence my reference to the recruiting sergeants in each district and the numbers of young men joining the British army.

One Dublin Volunteer was disarmed by a British ex-soldier - a fellow by the name of Benson. The rifle was later recovered by the local Volunteers who re-assembled and escorted the Dublin men to the railway station. As the train moved out, a volley of stones was thrown.

On Easter Sunday 1916, approximately 275 Volunteers paraded in Barrington St. outside John Daly's house. He sat the window as the Volunteers marched past. I could

almost name every man present. We were halted some miles out the road and were addressed by Rev. Father Hennessy, O.S.A. who informed us that very serious business was at hand and gave us a General Absolution. We then proceeded to Killonan. When Easter Monday dawned, there were intense feelings of suspense, nobody knowing what was going to happen. A little way from the main body, the officers were grouped together in a very earnest debate. What the new position was we did not know. No doubt the plan of campaign was being worked out. All we knew was that outside Volunteers were to come into Limerick and seize the General Post Office - one body from Meelick under Michael Brennan, and another from Castleconnell under Sean O'Carroll. I understand the march of the Mid-Limerick Brigade, as we were known, was only a move to throw off the suspicion of the authorities. It was made to look like an ordinary Sunday parade. Suddenly, a young man arrived on a motor cycle and carried a dispatch which he handed over to Michael Colivet.

We were then told that the fight was off and that Eoin MacNeill had left a Council meeting in Dublin because he thought that the time for a rebellion was not ripe and had given instructions to acquaint all Volunteers standing-to. We were then told to get back to Limerick as quickly as we could and not to go in a body and to keep off the main road as far as possible. Miss Madge Daly came out on a sidecar from Limerick to know the facts. No doubt the news had gone to Limerick of a slip up. As no Volunteers came into Limerick to carry out their part, we all got back home without any incident whatever. We did not know that the rebellion was actually on at that time, as all wires were cut over a wide area.

By this time, the military were in possession of the

facts, and guards were posted at all the entrances to the city; all vantage points including the post office were manned by British soldiers. The officer commanding the garrison then issued an order that all arms and ammunition were to be handed in to him at the Town Hall. The Mayor of Limerick acted as Liaison Officer. Whether all were handed in or not I do not know, but I handed in mine, which was a single-barreled shotgun, and so ended the first battalion of the Mid-Limerick Brigade and the start of the rival 2nd Battalion at the latter end of 1916 or early 1917.

The man who organised it was none other than the man who organised the attack in Mungret Street on Whit Sunday, 1915 - Mr. Meaney.

The movement was still carried on, drilling new members as well as the Fianna Boy Scouts became the heart and soul of the re-organised 2nd Battalion; raids were carried out in the surrounding gentlemen's residences and their gun-rooms cleaned out of anything that looked like a gun - old horse pistols, flintlocks, old fowling pieces, bayonets, daggers and spears.

I remained loyal to the 1st Battalion officers. Shortly after the formation of the 2nd Battalion, several attempts were made at a reconciliation, but it was not until early in 1921 that the two battalions amalgamated under one set of officers. In between I acted as I.O. for both battalions and, in my capacity as an employee of the contractor for fitting folding partitions in new National Schools, I was in contact with the officers in the brigade area outside Limerick city battalion area, carrying dispatches and keeping them in touch with up-to-date news and with the Brigade staff and with one another.

In the month of April 1919, the position in Limerick was getting very acute. The citizens were combining perfectly; not the least bit of information of any importance leaked out. The business of the different trades unions was done by a special committee; no general meetings were held to ensure that no spies got in. Fortunately, we knew all the shady characters and they were closely watched. The military authorities were at a loss to know what was going on, as things were coming to a head. The Lord Bishop of Limerick, Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, had a few years before snubbed the British General Maxwell and denounced the activities of the British garrison. "Irishmen", he said, "had no desire to die in France or lay their bones to rot on the burning sands of Mesopotamia".

To curb any activities on the part of the citizens, Limerick was placed under martial law. Guards were placed on the entrances to the city and everyone passing those barriers was searched and closely questioned as to his business, either entering the city or leaving it. The amount of people who were presenting themselves on one pretext or another at the barriers must be, to the reckoning of the authorities, twice more than the population, and they felt their legs were being pulled.

In order to make the job of the guards more easy, the authorities determined that they would issue permits to all citizens whose business took them outside the city boundary so as to enable them to return when their work was finished. This they did, without thinking of the consequences, for, if they had thought of it, they would have left very well alone. The blunder they made was that men who worked outside the city had, in fact, to come back to dinner and come home

after work, and they had of course to apply for a permit to do so.

My father, John Cronin, who was chairman of the special committee, called a meeting and put before them the position of permits as relating to the workers. As he said: "It is bad enough for a man to have to work without looking for a permit from an alien government to do so". An order was then made for a general strike. All work in the city was to close down and any person who had special work to do had to apply to the strike committee for a special permit for it. Now the shoe was put on the other foot.

The people came out in the street all dressed up in their Sunday best. The authorities got alarmed and trebled the guards at the approaches and placed tanks and armoured cars at convenient places. One tank had a name painted on it "FANNY ADAMS", the other "SCOTCH AND SODA".

On the next Sunday, which was fine and sunny, a football match was billed to be held out at Canirdavin, about two miles on the Ennis road and about 75% of the people went out there. Meanwhile the garrison got busy and, towards evening, the officer commanding placed soldiers in a double line across the Wellesley Bridge (now Sarsfield Bridge). They remained there all night. Nobody came back; they were sorely puzzled and if they were puzzled that night, they were more so next day, as all the people were back in the city and moving around just as usual. How did these people get back without being seen; surely some thousands of people could not get back; there must be some underground passage or, perhaps, they were spirited in using a kind of black magic. No such thing! we had it all planned. We knew, through our railway workers, that a goods train with 60 or 70 empty

wagons was due to pass the Longpavement station around about 6 o'clock. This station is at the far side of the city at the Clare side and the first station out of Limerick to Ennis. The signalman at Ballycar, Co. Clare, was contacted and we made arrangements with him to stop the train at the Longpavement, otherwise the driver would have carried right through to Limerick non-stop.

A bigger lot of people never got on a train at that station since or before, so when all were aboard we rolled across the Shannon Bridge and into the Limerick Terminus. A complete victory without firing a shot.

We can still beat them, said the bewildered General. These people have no money and will soon be crying for bread and that is only a matter of time now. But our leaders thought otherwise. They approached all shopkeepers who were in sympathy with us and asked them would they accept token paper money issued by them and which would be guaranteed by the Trades and Labour Council. In no single instance were they refused. So the notes were printed and everything was in order, but the notes were never issued. The British Government's permit system collapsed and the permits were withdrawn. A clear case where brains beat brawn. The value of the notes issued were 10/-, 5/- and 1/- (copy enclosed for inspection).

1919	GENERAL STRIKE	April
Limerick	The Workers of Limerick	Limerick
	promise to pay bearer	
	1/- One shilling 1/-	
	for the Trades and Labour Council	
	(Mechanics Institute, Limerick)	
April	Jno. Cronin, Chairman. James Casey, Treasurer	1919
	Against British Militarism	

A start was now made to break the power of the British Government. The City Council refused to submit the Council's books for audit to the Local Government Body and a Mandamus was immediately issued for their recovery and was ignored. The Councillors' houses were raided frequently, but no trace of the books could be found. My father's house where I lived was turned inside out and any suspicious-looking floor board was prized up. Wardrobes, lockers, every nook and cranny was looked into, but no trace of the books was ever found.

Sinn' Fein Courts were set up. Judges were appointed from the ordinary people. The Trades Council was well represented by my father, John Cronin, James Casey, Thomas Burke. My father, let it be said, never missed a Court and sat on every one of them. Some wellknown people brought their cases to the Courts. Just to name one - the Earl of Dunraven - his case was relating to plans of his Manor House at Adare, Co. Limerick. The Court decided in his favour.

I must mention here that all the legal proceedings and the proper procedure of handling Court cases were drawn up by Mr. John MacNeice who was a solicitor's clerk of long experience. The Records of these Courts are now in the Registrar's office in the Limerick Courthouse. In order to make the cases legal, they were placed before Judge Meredith of the Supreme Court, Dublin, and in no single instance did he reverse one of the decisions. Surely a great tribute to logic and commonsense of the Judges!

In the month of March 1921, the citizens of Limerick were profoundly shocked when they learned of the savagery of the Crown Forces when masked and armed men broke into the homes of Limerick's Mayor, Alderman Clancy, and ex-Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan, and shot them. Silent, sullen people stood about in groups, some crying, more praying.

Meanwhile, the Royal Irish Constabulary, accompanied by the Black and Tans, set about breaking up the groups, flying through the streets in Crossley tenders. They succeeded for a while and the people reassembled again.

Some strong-minded men went amongst the people and advised them to keep indoors as the Tans were only looking for an excuse to mow them down. Some were inclined to attack the police with whatever weapons at hand.

On the day of the funerals which, of course, were of a civic nature as can be seen by the snapshot, the Corporation, the Fire Brigade and prominent citizens were drawn up in formation and the entire population turned out. Some flying columns operating nearby came in that night and fired a volley over the graves.

The Borough Council meeting was held and Alderman James Casey was made Mayor, having taken office from 7th March to 22nd March 1921, a most courageous act. Stephen O'Mara, junior, finished the remainder of the term of office and was re-elected Mayor for the following year. Agus Maire Bean Uí Donnobhain, duine ionaid mheire.

The Alderman James Casey mentioned is the man whose name is signed to the notes with that of my father, John Cronin.

See attached copy of an address presented to Charles Stewart Parnell by the congregated Trades of Limerick to prove the loyalty of Trades and Labour bodies in Limerick down through the years.

Back through the years the Limerick Trades and Labour bodies marched year in and year out in a procession through the streets up to the monument erected to the memory of the

Manchester Martyrs, Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, in the cemetery at Mount Saint Laurence. Originally this procession was organised by Richard Tobin and John O'Mara of the '67 Fenian movement and was held annually up to 1916 and was then taken over by Sinn Fein and kindred organisations who still carry out the commemoration parades.

Signed: *Emilia Brown*

Date: *May 23rd 1956*

Witness: *John J. Daly*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21 NO. W.S. 1,424
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COPY OF ADDRESS PRESENTED TO CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

by the

CONGREGATED TRADES OF LIMERICK

23rd OCTOBER, 1880

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Congregated Trades of the City of Limerick We, the undersigned, most respectfully and sincerely tender to you the freedom of our body and beg to inform you, your name has been enrolled amongst our several guilds as an honorary member, a privilege granted only on very rare occasions and to persons distinguished either for love of Fatherland and public beneficence.

We bid you a "Cead Mile Failte" to this ancient and historic city. We need not trouble you who are already familiar with them and who are so thoroughly alive to the wants of our race.

The Trades of Limerick have always been identified with every struggle for the welfare of our country and could not allow the present opportunity to pass without testifying how fully your services in the cause of our country have been appreciated by them and in honouring you who are so richly deserve a nations gratitude.

We leave others and more influential bodies the privilege of thanking you more fully on behalf of our suffering people for yourself sacrificing exertions on their behalf, and, be assured, Sir, that the Trades of Limerick are second to none in their attachment to you and their appreciation of your services.

We beg to remain Dear Sir with the greatest respect and regard

Your obedient Servants

Signed on behalf of the Congregated Trades

John Godsell President

Thomas Dooley Treasurer

John Cronin Secretary

Mechanics Institute,
Limerick.

October 23rd 1880

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