

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1623

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1623.

Witness

Luke Bradley,
Fordstown,
Navan,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

Captain, Fordstown Coy.
Vice Comdt., Athboy Battn.,
4th Brigade.

Subject.

Fordstown Coy., Irish Volunteers,
Co. Meath, 1918-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2945.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.623

STATEMENT BY LUKE BRADLEY

Fordstown, Navan, Co. Meath

I was born in Fordstown, Navan, in the year 1894. I attended the local National School until I was 12 years of age. After leaving school I worked for a farmer for 12 months for 4/- per week. At the end of 8 years working for different farmers I was receiving 10/- per week.

On 15th August 1912, which was a holiday in country areas, I went on an excursion train to Dublin. Excursion trains were usually run on Church holidays in those days. I did not return to Fordstown for nearly four years. I got a job at Kingsbridge railway station working with plate layers at a weekly wage of £1 per week. After six months in this job I left and got a job at Inchicore foundry, Here I had to become a member of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. The branch secretary was Michael Mallin. After joining the I.T. & G.W. Union I then joined the Citizen Army.

The members of the Citizen Army met on Sundays at Liberty Hall for parades and drill and a route march occasionally. We numbered about 200. Michael Mallin or Lieutenant Sean Connolly drilled us in turn. On occasion we had a revolver or two or a German Mauser rifle for practice. By the end of 1915 we had acquired a quantity of shotguns, various types of rifles and odd revolvers and were proficient in handling and using them. With a .22 rifle we had target practice in a big hall in the building. At that time publicans were forbidden by the authorities to serve soldiers with drink if they were carrying rifles. Soldiers on leave lost many a rifle when they handed them to someone who obligingly offered to look after them while they had a drink in one of the pubs on the quays. Our members were always on the lookout for such soldiers.

When the soldier came out to get his rifle the "friend" who had offered to look after it was on his way to Liberty Hall. In this way we got several Lee Enfield rifles.

On one occasion we got word in Inchicore that Liberty Hall was about to be aided by police. We were ordered to proceed to the Hall at once. We arrived at 3 p.m. each man carrying his rifle. We remained in the building for some time but no incident took place.

At noon on Easter Sunday we paraded at Stephen's Green and after a route march through the city went to Beresford Place where we were inspected and addressed by James Connolly, Commander-in-Chief. After the address, we went into Liberty Hall where we remained for the night. On Monday morning we were at liberty to come and go as we pleased until 11 a.m. when we were lined up in Beresford Place. At least 500 men were on parade armed with rifles and shotguns. Not all of them were Citizen Army men. A lot of them were members of the Irish Volunteers. Each man was issued with a loaf, a pound of bully beef and 50 rounds of ammunition. The section to which I was attached numbered 20 with Michael Mallin in charge. After a short time Mallin marched his section as far as Trinity College where he ordered ten men in charge of Lieut. Sean Connolly to proceed to the Castle. With Mallin in charge, the rest of us proceeded through Grafton St. to Stephen's Green.

In Stephen's Green, with one of my companions I was detailed to take up an outpost position in one corner of the Green. We had only been about an hour on duty when shooting started generally in the city. By Wednesday at lunch time we had run out of ammunition. I had a Lee Enfield rifle while my mate had a shotgun. Snipers behind some chimney stacks opposite our positions had opened fire on us some time

earlier. We replied to their fire. I do not know whether the snipers were military, police or civilians. I sent my mate to get in touch with Mallin in the Green. He ordered us to retreat to Little's publichouse on the corner. When we got there, four members of the Citizen Army were already there. Soon after the British located our positions and blasted the building with machine gun fire. All our ammunition was expended that evening. One of our section leaders said: "We will have to fall back". By this time, Mallin had evacuated the remainder of his section from the Green to the College of Surgeons. We retreated to Jacob's Factory.

Jacob's Factory was full of our men. British soldiers around the building from time to time fired an occasional shot at one of the windows from the shelter of a nearby corner. Our men within took a shot at one of them whenever a chance presented itself. I was at a window facing Digges St. and was fired at once. While this was going on, several of our men within left on raiding missions for food, such as milk, vegetables or anything they could get. This situation continued up to Sunday morning when we received an order at about 11 a.m. to cease fire as there was a truce.

Among the officers there were Major McBride and Thomas McDonagh. All our men were called together. McDonagh, accompanied by a priest, read the terms of surrender. The priest then advised anyone in civilian clothes to escape if possible. With another man, I got out through a window. The other man, who was a Dublin man, had friends nearby. He brought me to his friend's house where I got a civilian suit and discarded my uniform. I got to Inchicore that evening before curfew and stayed at No. 1 St. Mary's Terrace. At 5 a.m., when curfew was lifted, I started for Fordstown via Lucan, Leixlip, Maynooth, Kilcock, Trim and Athboy.

After three months idleness, I got work on a farm where I remained for 28 years. I had no further contact with the Citizen Army or Volunteers until the year 1918. In the month of January of that year, I helped to form a company of Volunteers in Fordstown. By then, companies had been formed in Athboy, Kells, Kildalkey and other towns and villages in Co. Meath. In the Fordstown company we never had more than 14 men, the reason being that all, or nearly all, the small farmers and their sons in the area were of the loyalist type. I would not trust one of them or ask them to join. I was appointed captain of the company, Ned Lenihan 1st Lieutenant, Peter Smith 2nd Lieutenant, Pat Timmons Q.M. and Joe Reynolds Adjutant. We became attached to the Delvin, or 3rd Battalion, Meath Brigade. The other companies, comprising the 3rd Battalion, were Athboy, Kildalkey, Delvin, Clonmellon and Archerstown. The officers were Michael Fox, O/C., Patrick Corrigan, Vice O/C., Larry Ginnell Adjutant, Patrick Carey, Q.M. and Joe Martin, Engineers.

During the conscription period the company strength remained as it was. We drilled regularly throughout the year. At the general election at the end of the year we canvassed for the Sinn Fein candidate, Liam Mellows, who was elected with a good majority. In 1919, the principal duties of the company consisted of routine drilling and keeping lines of communication open. It was after the assembly of the 1st Dáil in 1919 that the Oath of Allegiance to the Republic was administered to each man in the company. I attended weekly meetings of the Battalion Council. At one of these meetings, an order was read from the Brigade O/C., Sean Boylan, to collect all arms in civilian hands; the order was carried out at the latter end of the year. Subsequently, another order was received to trench roads and demolish bridges in the battalion area. In our company area, as well as trenching the roads, we also demolished two bridges, one at the Athboy end and the other at the Kells end of the area.

In the summer of 1920, with 12 members of the company, I took up an ambush position at a place named Girley Chapel to ambush a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans. The patrol of eight men, in charge of a sergeant, usually came from Athboy and patrolled our area after which they returned to Athboy. With the exception of one man who had a rifle, we all had shotguns. After waiting for a few hours, we gave up the attempt when the patrol did not turn up. At the next Battalion Council meeting, when asked by Commandant Fox if I had anything to report, I told him of my wait to ambush the Tans and R.I.C. He reprimanded me for doing so, saying that we were acting like a mob and told me that permission to ambush the enemy would have to be sanctioned by the Brigade staff.

Shortly after, with a couple of members of the company, I held up the local postman and took his mail bag. After censoring the letters, I hung the mail bag with the letters on the door of the Post Office at Fordstown. When I reported this incident to Commandant Fox, all he said was "O.K.". Around Christmas 1920, Seamus Finn, Brigade Adjutant, mobilised the battalion near Athboy to attack Athboy R.I.C. barracks one night. After a consultation with Commandant Fox and Joe Martin, the attack was called off, due, I think, to lack of ammunition.

In the late spring of 1921, Co. Meath Brigade was reorganised. Our area became the Athboy, or 2nd, Battalion of the 4th Brigade which had its H.Q. at Delvin. The 4th Brigade was one of nine brigades which formed the 1st Eastern Division. The 2nd Battalion was one of three making up the 4th Brigade. The others were Ballivor the 1st, and Delvin the 3rd. The 2nd Battalion staff appointed then were John Corrigan, O/C.; I became Vice O/C., Patrick McGurl,

Adjutant, Matt Ledwith, Q.M., James Gilligan, Engineer, and Peter Gillrean, I.O. The Brigade Staff were Michael Hiney, O/C., Patrick Corrigan, Vice O/C., Joe Monaghan, Adjutant, John Tyrrell, Q.M., Joseph Martin, Engineer, and Edward Thornton, I.O.

After the Truce, a divisional training camp was established at Dunboyne. Battalion commandants attended for a course of training for the first fortnight, followed by a further course for another fortnight for the vice-commandants. Later, a brigade training camp was set up in the Workhouse at Delvin. John Corrigan, Battalion O/C., was in charge.

Signed: Luke Bradley

Date: 3rd June 1957

Witness: John J. Doherty

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,623