

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉ STA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1712

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1712.

Witness

Michael Cordial,
Kinnitty,
Co. Offaly.

Identity.

Q/M, 3rd Battalion, Offaly No. 2 Brigade.

Subject.

"C" (Kinnitty) Coy., 3rd Battalion, Offaly No. 2 Bgde.,
I.R.A.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S. 3024.

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STATEMENT BY Mr. MICHAEL CORDIAL,
Kinnitty, County Offaly.

Formerly Quartermaster, 3rd Battalion, Offaly No. 2. Brigade.

I joined the Kinnitty Company of the Irish Volunteers at its formation in 1917. Four of my five brothers were also members of the Company of which I had the honour to be elected Captain. At one period the strength of the Company was as high as 96 men; but, due to a big falling off in membership when the Conscription menace passed, and to arrests and interments in 1920 and 1921, the strength fell to as low as, approximately, twenty men.

From 1917 to 1920 the whole of County Offaly and a small portion of County Tipperary formed the area of the Offaly Brigade. The Kinnitty Company was attached to the 6th Battalion which also included Companies in Birr, Druncullen, Coolderry, Banagher, Lorrha and Borrisokane. Eamon Morkan (later Colonel in the Army) was the first Commandant of the Battalion with Eamon Bulfin, as Vice-Commandant. Other officers of that Battalion at various times were the late Seumas Corrigan, the late Sean Mahon, Felix Cronin, Sean Casey, Paddy Hogan, Pat Delahunty and Pat Riordan. In 1920, the Brigade was divided and two separate Brigades, Offaly Nos. 1 and 2 were formed. About the same time, the 6th Battalion was subdivided into two Battalions which became the 3rd and 4th Battalions of Offaly No. 2. Brigade. Kinnitty Company was allotted to the 3rd Battalion as "C" Company.

I was appointed Quartermaster of the Battalion and the other members of the Battalion staff were Michael Kelly, Battalion Commandant; Laurence Langton, Vice-Commandant, and Sean Kelly,

Adjutant. In March, 1921, Laurence Langton was wounded and captured in Birr, and was succeeded as Vice-Commandant by Joseph Connolly.

The 3rd Battalion was comprised of four Companies which were :-

"A" Company,	Killoughey	- Michael Seery,	Company Captain
"B" "	Kilcormac	- Thomas Cooney,	" "
"C" "	Kinnitty	- James Coughlan,	" "
"D" "	Drumcullen	- John Toher,	" "

Council meetings were held at various intervals in Jack Murphy's garage and Jerry O'Meara's, tailors shop in Kinnitty, and at Father O'Kennedy's house in Coolderry. Our earliest activities included drilling and training, raids for arms, dismantling of motor cars, the destruction of the evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Kinnitty, at Rath, at Kilcormac and at Mountbolus, and the blocking of roads on the nights of the attacks on Clara and Borrisokane R.I.C. barracks.

These activities led to a big round-up by British military accompanied by R.I.C. and about fifteen of our best men in the Kinnitty area including Henry Egan, Andy Cordial, William Grimes, Frank Doyle, Jimmy Coughlan, and the late Jack Guilfoyle, were arrested. The Cordial home at Cumber was frequently raided and I and my remaining brothers at home had to go 'on the run' and leave the care of our farm to our aged parents and to my sister, Mary.

Two major incidents which took place in the 3rd Battalion area, were the Kinnitty ambush and the execution of the brothers Pearson and the burning of their house at Cadamstown. The latter incident has usually been referred to locally as "The attack on Pearson's".

The Kinnitty Ambush.

For some time prior to May of 1921, we had a small Battalion Active Service Unit in operation. It consisted of five men, viz. Joe Connolly, the Battalion Vice-Commandant; Joseph Scully, Michael Seery, Michael Carroll and myself (Michael Cordial). We were armed with five Lee Enfield rifles which were part of the arms captured from a British military patrol by Barney Trench of the 2nd Battalion at Belmont in October 1920. We had waited in ambush in various places without encountering any enemy forces.

About 8 or 9 p.m. on the night of 16th May, 1921, we received a dispatch from the 4th (Birr) Battalion informing us that a cycle patrol of R.I.C. men and Black & Tans would leave Birr for Kinnitty on the following morning. At the time we were in the Kilcormac area and were about ten miles from Kinnitty. We decided to move towards Kinnitty and arrived in the vicinity of that village early next day. A local Volunteer who was acting as scout, reported to us that the patrol had already passed through Kinnitty and were gone to Cadamstown. They were out serving summonses on jurors to attend the Assize Court and were expected to arrive back in Kinnitty within the hour.

That left us with no time to select and prepare a suitable position on the road, so we decided to attack them in the village on their return from Cadamstown. At that time we did not know the strength of the patrol. Joe Connolly and Michael Carroll went to a position in the ruins of the R.I.C. barracks and Michael Seery, Joe Scully and I took up a position in the chapel-yard. There was an abundance of trees and shrubs in the chapel-yard which gave us good cover.

We had about twenty minutes to wait until the patrol returned. It consisted of a mixed party of seven R.I.C. men and Black & Tans. They were armed with rifles and revolvers. On reaching the village, the patrol divided - three going along the Main Street and four towards the Kilcormac Road. This brought the latter four in front of our positions. They were in pairs and were, approximately, forty yards apart. Connolly and Carroll opened fire on the first two and almost simultaneously we fired on the second two. Only a few volleys were fired. One policeman was killed instantaneously; another died a few minutes later in a public-house to which he rushed when wounded, and the other two were seriously wounded. I think one of the latter never recovered and died some time later from his wounds.

While concentrating on the four members of the patrol, we lost sight of the other three and had no idea whether they had taken cover or not. Later we learned that they had hastily cycled back towards Birr. We withdrew to Killoughey and remained there for a few days. The official account of the ambush which the British authorities released to the press, alleged that the patrol was attacked by a big party of armed men.

British military activities on a large scale followed and many men in the Kinnitty area were arrested but the arrests did not include any of the five members of the Active Service Unit. One of my brothers, William, chanced to make a visit home to milk cows. Our place was raided while he was there and he was captured. An officer offered to give him a chance to escape and advised him to make a run for it to a wood which was about 150 yards away. He refused to move which was fortunate for himself, as at least a dozen soldiers concealed at the fringe of the wood, had their rifles

trained on him. Luck was on his side, for, on the way to the barracks, he and a comrade prisoner named, Dick Conway, were twice taken down from the lorry and put against a wall to be shot but on each occasion were saved by an intervention. Kinnitty village had a narrow escape from being burned as a reprisal. It is thought that it was saved by the late Father Houlihan, C.C., who intervened when Black & Tans arrived in force and unloaded cans of petrol on the street in preparation for the burning.

Shortly after the Kinnitty ambush, the Brigade Staff decided that a unit of five men was too small to carry on as an Active Service Unit and we received orders to disband and to dump the rifles, which we concealed in a sandpit near Kilcormac.

My home at Cumber was raided again and again by the enemy forces. On one occasion when they arrived, only my parents and my sister were there. On being informed that I was not at home, the raiders ordered my father, then a man of 75 years of age, to go on his knees and to say his prayers as his hour had come. A rifle was pointed at his forehead and my sister, fearing for her father's safety, seized the rifle and in the struggle that followed she disarmed the raider in full view of his companions who stood looking on but did not interfere. Her action probably saved our father's life. He had, however, to remain away from home until after the Truce; for, when leaving, the raiders issued a warning that he would be shot if I were not there when they called again.

The attack on Pearson's.

The Pearsons were a family who lived on an extensive farm or estate about one mile from Cadamstown and about three miles from Kinnitty. They were - particularly so, the male members of the family, father and three sons - violently opposed to the National Movement and they looked with contempt on local Volunteers or I.R.A. men.

Things reached a climax some time before the Truce when they fired with shotguns on a small party of Volunteers who were blocking a road. One Volunteer, a man named Heeney, was seriously wounded. A full report on the matter was made to the Brigade staff who after serious deliberation ordered that the four male members of the Pearson family should be executed and their house burned down.

On 30th June, 1921, a party of about thirty men were mobilised to implement the order. The house was surrounded and all women folk were removed from the scene. Fortunately for themselves, the father and one son were away from home that day. The other two sons, Richard and Abraham, were captured in a hay field. They were brought into the yard and informed of the order. A firing party was appointed and the executions were there and then duly carried out. Next, the house and out-offices were set on fire. Heavy explosions were heard while the house was burning which indicated that a large amount of ammunition was stored in it.

The remaining members of the Pearson family left the district and did not return. Years later, the Irish Land Commission acquired their estate and divided it amongst the local people.

SIGNED: Michael Leardial

DATE: 13th December 1957.

WITNESS: J. Grace.

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No. W.S. 1,712