

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. **W.S. 738**

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 738.....

Witness

Superintendent Philip Chambers,
victoria cross,
Cork.

Identity.

Member of Coppeen Coy. 3rd Battalion,
3rd Cork Brigade, 1918 - ;
Company O/C. March, 1921;
Superintendent Garda Síochána.

Subject.

Activities of 3rd Battalion
3rd Cork Brigade, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S. 2047**.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 738

STATEMENT BY SUPERINTENDENT PHILIP CHAMBERS,
VICTORIA CROSS, CORK.

I was born at Ballaghanure, Enniskeneane, Co. Cork, in April, 1900. My people were farmers.

I attended the local school up to the age of 19.

My first contact with the Volunteers was a few months prior to the threatened Conscription, when I joined the Coppeen Company of the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Cork Brigade. The O.C. of the Company was a James Barratt of Coppeen. I attended a number of the weekly parades.

1919.

In September of this year, having successfully passed the King's Scholarship Examination, I went to the De La Salle College, Waterford, to be trained as a teacher.

1920.

I remained in training in De La Salle College until mid-June, 1920.

On the 29th June I competed in a Volunteer Sports at Kilnadur (near Dunmanway). A military plane flew low over the sports field and apparently lost flying speed as it had to make a forced landing in an adjoining field.

A tender of R.I.C., armed with rifles, were on duty at the Sports but did not interfere in any way.

On Easter Saturday, 1920, I assisted in the demolition of an evacuated R.I.C. Barracks at Kenneigh, which was in the Company

area of Connagh in our Battalion - the 3rd Battalion.

Some time during May, 1920, it was planned to attack and capture a military cycling patrol on the Ballineen-Dunmanway road. This patrol normally consisted of about 20 all ranks and its routine movements had been carefully noted for some weeks beforehand.

Approximately 40, including myself, took up our allotted positions to await the patrol. The late Pat Harte, Q.M. of the 3rd Brigade, was in charge of the ambush. A few of our men were armed with rifles, a few had revolvers and more had shot-guns and about ten of our party had only sticks. If my memory serves me rightly, I think the intention was that those with the sticks were to jump out on the road on the approach of the patrol and make an effort to disorganise the enemy, when the armed Volunteers would join in. After waiting almost the whole night, the patrol did not make an appearance, hence all our plans went for nought. I never heard the reason why the patrol did not show up.

In August, 1920, another ambush was arranged on the Ballineen-Dunmanway road at a place called the Manch for another Cycling Patrol; this was the occasion of Ballineen Fair; Liam Deasy, the Brigade Adjutant, was in charge of the ambush party. I do not know the actual numbers of our party but there must have been between thirty and forty of us drawn from the whole Battalion area.

Our party lined the ditch at one side of the road and there was a rather high wall on the opposite side. A few trees were sawn through and ready for dropping at both ends of the selected position and men to do this job were standing by in readiness.

After remaining in our position from about 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. a false alarm was raised "that we were being surrounded". I cannot definitely state how this alarm originated. Orders to retire were immediately issued by Liam Deasy. About eight of us were together getting out on the road, including Liam Deasy, Seán Murphy, the Battalion O.C., and myself. Just as we did, a lorry of enemy troops came around a bend of the road about two hundred yards away. We ran back through our old positions on to the railway line which was running parallel to the road, where we took up new positions astride the railway line. We had only just taken up our new positions when the lorry stopped in front of us under cover of some trees and was only roughly ten or fifteen yards away from us. No shots were exchanged up to now but obviously our movements had been observed. Liam Deasy then gave the order to "move off". Immediately we commenced to move heavy fire was opened on us. We returned the fire and continued moving across a field. At the end of this field we came right up against the Bandon river. We continued the fire from the river banks, more in the nature of holding the enemy back while efforts were made to cross the river. Eventually we crossed the river with some difficulty and although it was the month of August the water was not shallow by any means and I found out later that a short distance from where we crossed there was a 40 foot hole and most dangerous to anyone unless a really strong swimmer. I was only a Volunteer at this time and had no say in the selection of the ambush position, but, looking back on it now, I can truthfully say it could have been a veritable death trap for us, for one of the main essentials of an ambush position should be a safe route of retreat.

After crossing the river we moved across country for a safe

distance and succeeded in getting a change of clothes in farmers' houses. There were no casualties on our side and none on the enemy side as far as I know.

In September, 1920, accompanied by Jeremiah O'Mahony, my new Company O.C., who had superseded the old Company Commander, James Barratt, I met the first flying column that I had seen. This column consisted of about 20 riflemen under the late Seán Hales. We met them near Newcestown and scouted for them from there to Behagh near Dunmanway, a distance of approximately twelve miles. For two nights we billeted in the local farm-houses and on the third day we moved into an ambush position at Fanlabus on the Ballineen-Dunmanway road (about three miles from Dunmanway). Tom Barry, who had arrived from Brigade Headquarters that day, took over complete charge. He lined us up and, after inspecting the weapons, he questioned each one of us, asking what experience we had. He then detailed us into different parties. The object of the ambush was to attack a military cycling party which was normally escorted by two lorry loads of Auxies. I was one of the party detailed to fire on the cycling patrol - I was armed with a shot-gun; there were from forty to fifty in our party. The Column had been augmented for this operation. We took up our positions about 2 p.m. and remained in them until almost 9 p.m. and there was no appearance of the enemy. While we held the positions all oncoming vehicles and pedestrians had been held up and parked under guard some distance from the ambush position.

When it was decided to clear off, the Column was got ready for moving and flanking parties were detailed as a protective measure. We moved to Ahakera (roughly six miles from Dunmanway) and again billeted in the surrounding farm-

On the following morning all the local Volunteers were dismissed and instructed to return to their own Company area.

The Rifle Column returned to Newcestown district on the same day and on the following night the Column had an encounter with the enemy in the vicinity of Newcestown. Two British Officers were shot, without any casualties to the Column.

In November, 1920, I took part in the demolition of the Ballineen Courthouse and the evacuated R.I.C. Barracks. No reprisals followed.

During the same month I acted as scout for the Column while it was training under Tom Barry at Ahilnane on the eve of the Kilmichael Ambush.

On the night following the Kilmichael Ambush my two brothers and myself were mobilised to repel any attempts to carry out reprisals. Nothing happened in our Company area. Some days later the Column billeted in our Company area and we were detailed for scout duty. On that day I personally proceeded to Enniskeane and commandeered bread and cigarettes from Con Donovan's shop for the use of the Column. I paid Mr. O'Donovan in full, several years later, for what I took on this occasion.

1921.

Some time in February, 1921, the Column was temporarily disbanded, due, as far as I know, to the heavy enemy pressure at that stage. Approximately twenty-five rifles and some other weapons and ammunition were handed over to our Company area for safe-keeping. Only three others and myself knew the location of the dumps.

We had three dumps in our Company area. In our part of the country there are a large number of double fences.

The dumps were made in such fences by digging down centrally about four feet. A heavy timber box, 6 feet long, three feet high and two feet wide with a hinged lid, was made to hold the weapons and the box was placed into the excavated portion and the top of the fence was then covered with stones and camouflaged in such a manner as to conform with the remainder of the fence. The rifles and any other weapons were well greased before dumping and the dumps were periodically inspected as suitable opportunities offered.

On the 5/3/1921 I was detailed, under Section Leader Denis Hickey, to commandeer men and tools for road cutting operations in our Company area. The Company O.C. (Jeremiah O'Mahony) was to meet us with some arms. We waited at the appointed place until well after midnight but he failed to turn up. Eventually his brother, Dan, arrived with the sad news that Jeremiah had been accidentally shot dead by a comrade Volunteer. We dismissed the commandeered party and proceeded at once to the scene of the accident. I got the late Canon O'Connell of Enniskeane to administer the last rites and, on the suggestion of Canon O'Connell, we buried him temporarily in a rifle dump on his own farm. The following night we produced a rough coffin and removed his remains to the graveyard at Castlwtown-Kenneigh where we buried him in the Republican Plot alongside the three Volunteers who had been shot in the Kilmichael ambush some months before.

Immediately following the death of Jeremiah O'Mahony, I was appointed to take over Company O.C. and I continued to hold

this appointment up to the Truce.

The Brigade staff at this time was: Charlie Hurley, Brigade O.C., Ted Sullivan, Vice O.C., Liam Deasy, Adjutant, and the Quartermaster was Pat Harte and after Pat's death the late Tadhg Sullivan (brother of Gearoid) took over as Quartermaster. When Charlie Hurley was shot dead by the enemy, Liam Deasy was appointed as Brigade O.C.

The Battalion staff was: Seán Murphy, Shinnagh, near Dunmanway, O.C., and Sonny Crowley, Vice O.C., Paddy O'Brien, Adjutant and Mick Dwyer, Quartermaster.

The Brigade area generally took in all that part of the County between Ballinhassig and Bantry.

Our Battalion area extended from Ballineen to Dunmanway and to Kilmichael on the north side and to Ahiohill on the south.

On Sunday, the 13/3/1921, I received a despatch - I think it was from Tom Barry - to the effect that the dumped rifles and equipment held in the Company area were to be moved to Galvins of Gurtaleen as the Column was mobilising again. I requested instructions from Tom Barry if he wanted the stuff removed during the day. In the meantime, I had called a Company parade and told my men to be in immediate readiness for further instructions. Later I received a reply from Tom Barry to move the rifles, etc., on that night. I then left for home and was carrying the dispatch on me and I also had an empty revolver which I had got that day from a comrade Volunteer. Some short distance away I met a man whom I knew well - Tim Hourihane, a labourer. I had a brief conversation with him and then we parted. I crossed into my own farm and about

150 yards away I saw an Auxie on high ground, armed with a rifle, and apparently scanning the countryside. I was full sure I had been seen and kept on moving towards him. I got lost to view in an intervening gully, where I hid the revolver and ate the dispatch and I stayed put where I was. A short time later the shadow of the armed Auxie showed right in front of me and I was convinced that I was nabbed but obviously he had missed seeing me. About the same time, Tim Hourihane, to whom I had been speaking a short time before, appeared about 20 yards away. I beckoned to him to move off and just as I did the Auxie, who had seen him, came along and searched him. I remained under cover. After the search Hourihane was allowed to proceed and as he moved along the high ground I heard a shot and saw poor Hourihane fall to the ground. In a short space of time about twenty Auxies were gathered around him. They secured a door from a nearby farmhouse and brought the remains on a door to his own home which was only a few hundred yards away.

The Auxies remained in the locality until near nightfall, when they moved off. I then returned to my own home.

I immediately sent a dispatch to Tom Barry, telling him of the presence of the Auxies and of the shooting of poor Hourihane. I received a reply, changing the location of where the rifles, etc., were to be moved and on that night I mobilised my Company and removed the arms and equipment to the house of Florence Crowley of Behagh, near Dunmanway, about seven miles from our Company area.

Later in the month of March I scouted for the Column after the Crossbarry ambush when they were billeted in the general

vicinity of Garranreigh convenient to Crookstown-Bealnablath.

On the 12/5/1921 I was present with Tom Barry, the late Seán Lehane, Billy O'Sullivan, Mick Crowley, and a few others at the house of James Dunlea of Garlands, Castletown-Kenneigh when plans were being arranged for a daylight attack on the enemy troops in Bandon. The proposed arrangements were discussed in detail and Tom Barry gave very explicit instructions as to what was to be done in certain eventualities. My main task was the commandeering of horse transport for the conveyance of the Column to the vicinity of Bandon, preparatory to the attack. At this time there were some Volunteers outside the house and I detailed one of them to a farmer's house and to secure a horse and trap. This man refused to obey my order on the grounds that he was a dispatch rider. I repeated the order and he still refused. I went back into the house and reported the incident to Tom Barry. He instructed to have the man brought before him. He told this man in no uncertain terms to have the order carried out and which was complied with. Barry then gave me instructions to have this man taken the following morning to Toger near Kealkil for trial by Barry and a few other Officers who were present. The man was severely reprimanded and informed that were it not for his exemplary service in the past the punishment would be much more severe. Tom Barry's principal method of dealing with acts of indiscipline which were not too serious was to send the offenders to the farms of some Volunteers on the run or in prison and to carry out whatever farm work was necessary for stated periods. It was the practice, too, to send such offenders to some remote part of the Brigade area, well away from their own localities.

the house of the late Canon Haynes, the Protestant Rector of Kenneigh. The punishment decreed was to have them tied to the railings of the local Parish Church on a Sunday morning. It was my job to have this order carried out. I look back on it now with extreme disgust, for I consider that it was a degrading and most inhuman procedure. It happened on that morning that the mother of one of them actually passed by on her way to Mass - one can very easily picture the poor woman's feelings. This was, in my honest opinion, a rotten method of enforcing the law and I would have much preferred to take these men out and shoot them rather than the procedure adopted.

General.

During all the above period, similar to the rest of the country, we participated in all the usual activities, including Sinn Féin, local and other elections, Republican police duties, etc.

SIGNATURE:

Philip Chambers
(Philip Chambers)

DATE:

October 14th 1952
October 14th, 1952.

WITNESSED BY:

Thomas Halpin

LIEUT.-COLONEL.

(Thomas Halpin), Lieut.-Col.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 738