

W.S. 757

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 757

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 757

Witness

Sean Toibin,
Ballymacmaque,
Dungarvan,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Dungarvan, 1917 - ;
Vice-Comd't. 2nd Battalion, West Waterford
Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

Activities of the Irish Volunteers,
Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2063

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-21
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STATEMENTBYSEÁN TOBIN, BALLYMACMAQUE, DUNGARVAN.

I was born in Glenbower district, near Carrick-on-Suir, in 1897. My parents were farmers. I was educated in the local National School.

I joined what was then known as the National (Redmond) Volunteers in 1914 at Ballyneill, Carrick-on-Suir, and was in that district for a few years.

The local O.C. at Carrick-on-Suir at that time was Maurice Davin, the famous Coursing judge, and a member of the equally famous athletic family.

After being in the National Volunteers for nearly two years I left the Carrick-on-Suir district to reside with an uncle of mine, who lived near Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

A re-organisation of the Irish Volunteers took place in Garranbaine, near Dungarvan, in 1917, and I became a member. Garranbaine was then an outpost of the Dungarvan town Company and comprised about 25 to 30 Volunteers. On account of my previous experience with the National Volunteers I knew a little more about training than the remainder and, consequently, became its first instructor, and later, when Garranbaine became a Company, I was appointed as its first O.C.

When the Battalion organisation was formed late in 1917, or early in 1918, Lar Condon was appointed O.C., 1st Battalion, Waterford Brigade, and Pax Whelan was Brigade O.C.

The Companies in the 1st Battalion were: Dungarvan, Garranbaine, Colligan, The Brickleys and Modeligo.

There was a further re-organisation of Battalions subsequently, when our Company became part of the 2nd Battalion, which was then being formed in 1918 or 1919, and a re-arrangement of the Companies followed and the 2nd Battalion comprised the following Companies: Stradbally, Kilrossanty, Garranbaine, Kilmacthomas, Bonmahon, Newtown and later Kilnafrehan. Pat Keating became O.C. 2nd Battalion and I was appointed as Vice O.C., with Jimmy Kirwan of Colligan as Adjutant and Paddy Joe Power, Glen, as Quartermaster.

Thomas Keating was appointed O.C. in April, 1921, following the death of Pat.

1918-1919.

The usual weekly training parades were held during 1918 and 1919, but, as no hall accommodation was available locally, all our training had to be carried out on the open roads or in the fields. The training was mainly confined to foot drill and arms drill, training in the use of shot-guns, also some scouting and field training. Intelligence work was initiated to some extent, in so far as enemy movements - troops and R.I.C. - were concerned.

From information gathered also, we knew the location of almost every shotgun or other weapon in our area. Some of these shotguns were collected by us in 1918 and 1919, and some of the friendly farmers had already handed their weapons over to us.

ARMS.

Unless for some shotguns and a few revolvers, there were very little other arms available. The same applied largely to most of the other Companies. I think there were two or three rifles in the whole Battalion in the early stages; however, this position was improved and a fair amount of rifles became available in 1920 and 1921, and all those on permanent duty with the active service unit had each a rifle.

OTHER ACTIVITIES.

Similar to most other Battalions, our Unit participated in all other activities, including election activities, Sinn Féin, propaganda parades and meetings, National Loan activities, raids for shotguns, mails, etc., also occasional cutting of communications, blocking and trenching of roads and other kindred activities throughout the whole period.

1920.

May, 1920.

Our first Battalion operation of any importance was an attack carried out on the Stradbally (Co. Waterford) R.I.C. barracks during the first week of May, 1920. A small selected party was picked from Stradbally, Kilrossanty, Kilmacthomas and Bonmahon Companies. Most of the lads were armed with shotguns, a few had rifles and revolvers, together with some home-made bombs. Positions were taken up at front, rear and gable end of barracks. Bombs were thrown on roof with the object of breaking through it, and fire from the

guns and rifles was concentrated on the windows and doors. Heavy fire was returned by the garrison and grenades were thrown at the attacking party. Verey lights were shot up at frequent intervals.

After exchanging shots for about 30 minutes our party withdrew, leaving the R.I.C. in possession. The reason for the withdrawal was the failure of the home-made bombs, which were encased in a heavy covering of sticky yellow clay so as to stick on the roof and if and when exploded they would break openings in the roof, through which bottles of petrol and oil would be thrown. Those thrown on the roof failed to stick or explode, so no purpose could be served by continuing the attack, for if enemy reinforcements turned up our party was neither strong nor experienced enough at this period to successfully engage them.

June, 1920.

Our next operation was the hold-up of a troop train on a Sunday morning in June, 1920. The late Pat Keating was in charge. Word had been received the previous day from some of the railway lads of the movement of this train.

On that Sunday morning a fairly large party of Volunteers from various Units had been mobilised at an old quarry near Durrow station. As can easily be understood, the vast majority of those present had never been under fire previously; the greatest tension prevailed as to the possible outcome of the scrap and most of the lads were "on edge" anxious to get it over.

We were placed at different points around the station, under cover, and were strictly instructed that under no circumstances was any man to fire a shot until the leader - Pat Keating - fired first. We all knew, of course, his position and would know immediately when he fired.

We heard the train pulling into the station and we were all anxiously keyed up, waiting to hear the sound of the first shot. Minutes, what seemed hours to us, passed and no shot was fired and we were naturally wondering what was up or what our next move would be. Gradually we learned that, although the train was packed with enemy troops, they were all unarmed: however, we held them up and made a close examination of the railway coaches so as to ensure that no rifles and other weapons were hidden under seats or elsewhere. We got quite a lot of equipment, such as belts, bandoliers and haversacks.

We had no fight, which was a relief for the time being, but, afterwards, all the lads were very disappointed because a scrap had not ensued, due to the fact that all were tensed up and in readiness for it; therefore, the result was in the nature of an anti-climax.

SEPTEMBER, 1920.

Another Unit operation was an attack on an R.I.C. patrol in September, 1920. In expectation of an R.I.C. patrol passing from Leamybrien to Kilmacthomas, a party of Volunteers under Pat Keating (R.I.P.) lay in ambush near

McGrath's Cross, about two miles West of Kilmacthomas on the main Waterford-Dungarvan road. Our scouts were out in front and our men occupied suitable positions and some trees were partly cut in readiness for falling on the word being given. After waiting the whole day, no patrol turned up and our men withdrew.

On the following day the local I.O. in Kilmacthomas reported to Pat Keating that a party of R.I.C. on bicycles was to leave Kilmacthomas that day for Stradbally and Leamybrien. Armed men available at short notice were immediately mobilised for the same position as occupied on the previous day. The police, however, arrived earlier than expected and before all our men got into position the police made their appearance, cycling two abreast. Those of our lads in position fired on them, killing a Constable Morgan and capturing another. The remainder of the R.I.C. - five of them - got away. As this action occurred on the main road, and due to the danger of larger enemy forces arriving, it was decided to release the prisoner and the Volunteer party then withdrew.

1921.

February, 1921.

My next engagement of any note was again at Durrow at the end of February, 1921. I was then the Vice Commandant of the Battalion. It was still the custom at that time to have the Grand Jury in attendance at the Assizes at Waterford City.

The day prior to the attendance of members of the jury I was given instructions from Brigade Headquarters to block the road leading to Durrow from Dungarvan and cut all communications and carry out some other demolitions. I was out all night with about half a dozen men of 'C' Company, 2nd Battalion, and we cut trenches in the road leading down to the coast at Ballyvoile. We put down a road block at Ballyvoile road bridge and cut all telephone wires, etc., in that area, and also leading to the Coastguard Station at Ballincourty.

We had instructions to wait at Ballyvoile the following morning for the Brigade Column, which was to hold up the jury train on the Waterford side at Durrow. The jury train was a special which used to collect the jurors at different stations in the county to convey them to Waterford city. When the jury train was held up it was expected that enemy troops would be rushed from Dungarvan to clear the line and it was the intention to ambush those if they arrived.

At 8.30 that morning the Column came along and took up positions along the railway line at Ballyvoile, and my party took up positions with them. We waited for the enemy troops to come along by road from Dungarvan. At 12 noon it was signalled that a train was on the line from Dungarvan, and it was suspected that some troops may be travelling on it. The Column Leader (George Lennon) decided to fall back from off the railway line to see what would happen. We next discovered when the train was

entering the tunnel at Ballyvoile that the train was full of troops and we just had time to fire a volley of shots into it as it disappeared into the tunnel.

The Column Leader then decided to follow the train into the station and a short time after we left four lorry loads of troops arrived by road and, of course, no one was there to intercept them. About this time another troop train arrived ^{from Waterford} to relieve the train on the line. There were by now approximately 300 to 350 troops in the vicinity of Durrow station. The Column Leader decided to break up into small parties of three or four each and organise sniping attacks; all shotgun men were dismissed, which meant that we had only sixteen or eighteen men left. However, we kept up a continuous attack - firing at one point now and again at another. This was kept up until darkness fell. There were casualties inflicted on the enemy, but to what extent I cannot say, although I heard later that a good number were wounded.

My party withdrew at darkness as we had neither food nor rest for over twenty hours.

March, 1921.

On St. Patrick's Day, 1921, I attended a Brigade Council meeting at Ballymullalla (in the hills about three miles from Dungarvan) where I got instructions to have a bridge near Dungarvan destroyed. This was known as Tarrs Bridge and was situated about two miles outside Dungarvan on the main Dungarvan-Waterford road.

I asked to have the protection of the Brigade Column while the job was being done, as this bridge was between three military centres - Dungarvan, Ballinacountry and a post at C. Nugent Humbles at Cloncoskerne.

On the night arranged two lorry loads of enemy troops travelled over this bridge before the time appointed for its destruction, and it was decided to attack them on their return. They returned at about 1 a.m. and had some prisoners with them. These lorries were attacked at a place known as the Burgery, about one mile from Dungarvan. This was the night of the 19th March. I had the pleasure of having the first shots at this enemy force from a bend in the road at Cloncoskerne before they came into the ambush position. I had gone back to dismiss the large working party I had assembled with picks, shovels, crowbars, etc., for the destruction of the bridge.

I opened fire on them again from the old road leading to Deelish and this operation delayed them for some time as they dismounted and deployed, but, owing to the nearby woods and having a thorough knowledge of the whole countryside, I was quite safe in my position. I had only about a dozen rounds with an old Martini-Henry rifle and on this being expended I was compelled to withdraw.

The enemy proceeded from there and ran into the Column which was in position at Morrissey's house near the Burgery and the Column engaged them from one side of the road and, after the first few volleys, the enemy scattered in all directions and one party of them conveyed one of

their prisoners - J. Murphy - into Dungarvan; the other prisoners escaped during the melee; one of their lorries was burned. A short time later enemy reinforcements arrived from Dungarvan and this lot was again attacked by the Column at the Burgery. The enemy suffered at least twelve casualties, including three or four dead.

The Column then withdrew to Castlequarter, bringing with them two prisoners - a military officer, Captain Thomas, and an R.I.C. Sergeant named Hickey. Captain Thomas was later released but the R.I.C. Sergeant was executed for the reason that he was the local "eyes and ears" of the troops, and earlier that night he had been out making arrests of Volunteers.

It was decided later that night to send ten (10) selected members of the Column back to the scene of the ambush to collect some arms which had been captured and hidden. This party arrived just about daybreak but a party of the enemy was also there and as our lads arrived they were ambushed and John Fitzgerald was shot dead and Pat Keating fatally wounded. Two members of the Cumanna-Ban took charge of Paddy and conveyed him to J.J. White's house at Moonarud, Dungarvan, where he died at 4 p.m. that day. It was my job to arrange the removal of his remains on that night to Kilrossanty but he was buried temporarily in Newtown Churchyard and later removed to Kilrossanty.

Immediately following the Burgery ambush the enemy put a levy on each of five houses in Dungarvan and when

the levy was not paid within the prescribed time the furniture and effects of the following houses were completely destroyed: the Strand Hotel, Abbeyside, Lar Condon's (who was then in prison), Tom Fahey's, Dunlea's and Morrisseys.

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS:

(1) My next engagement was at Clancoskerne, where a party of about 25 troops were stationed with a dual purpose: (i) as a protection for a well-known loyalist - C. Nugent Humble, and (ii) as a suitable centre for a small garrison. One night J. Power, J.J. Cummings, Bill Dee, K. Gough and myself staged an attack on the Post, each of us firing 25 or 30 rounds through the windows. The enemy returned with rifle and machine gun fire and rifle grenades. We remained there over twenty minutes and then withdrew. I do not know if we caused any enemy casualties. We had none.

(11) I also took part in an engagement at Ballylynch at the Waterford side of Durrow Station. Though I was not actively in this engagement, it was my job to round up all the men who took part but I had a scrap of my own with a party of military who were sent from Dungarvan to assist.

This engagement was made on the spur of the moment by the Brigade Column Leader - George Lennon - who had only one member of the Column with him at the time. He heard a troop train was about to pass along the line so he closed and locked a level crossing gates and asked me

to hurriedly get whatever available men who had rifles. After some difficulty I succeeded in getting ten or eleven men but their supply of ammunition was meagre. However, the train was attacked but our party had to withdraw after 15 or 20 minutes owing to lack of ammunition. This could have been a most successful operation were sufficient men and ammunition available, for the position was ideal for a train ambush.

(111) In June, 1921, I took part in an engagement with an enemy cycling unit. This unit operated from Dungarvan, under Captain Thomas. The unit moved on patrol from Dungarvan to Stradbally on the 4th June and, on arrival there, commandeered a premises and put up there for the night. One of our lads in Stradbally heard that the unit would be returning to Dungarvan on the following day and he conveyed this information to Battalion Headquarters. The Battalion O.C. (Thomas Keating) and myself decided to mobilise a party from the local Companies, most of whom had only shotguns, and we had, in addition, one service rifle and one Martini-Henry; practically all this party were inexperienced. We attacked the party at Ballyvoile, with myself in charge and about thirty men, but, owing to the inexperience of the men and our scouts, everything went wrong. One of our scouts, who was to give us the signal of the enemy's arrival by waving a handkerchief, got excited and ran off when he saw them coming. However, we wounded three of the enemy, although one of our men - Volunteer J. Cummings - was shot dead.

(1V) For practically a full year prior to the Truce we were continuously on the go, blocking roads, destroying bridges and

communications, raiding and censoring mails, and other activities such as scouting, intelligence and dispatch work, in addition to providing billets and guards, etc., for the Brigade Column when in our Battalion area. Considering that we had four military posts in the district, viz., Dungarvan, Kilmacthomas, Ballinacourty and Clansoskerne, we were kept constantly on the move with raids, rounds-up and patrols, etc. This was a period of tension and terror and one never knew what was going to happen next. Looking back on it all now, it is very hard to visualise the conditions which then existed in 1920 and 1921, and the enemy certainly did not pull his punches but rather the reverse, for his declared aim was to instil a state of terrorism throughout the whole country. Had our men been properly trained and with ample arms available, what a different story might have been written of those stirring years. However, situated as we were, our men everywhere made a great fight against terrific odds.

(V) About a week before the Truce, Jack Power of Ballymacmague, Dungarvan, and a party of men dug a rather large trench across the road in the vicinity of Kilgobinet graveyard, a few miles North-West of Dungarvan. A day or two following the trench being dug they filled in half of it to permit the funeral of a local person to enter the graveyard. On the day after the funeral, ~~November~~^{July} 8th, 1921, Jack Power and a few Volunteers, with some local commandeered helpers, went to reopen the trench and a huge explosion occurred with the result that one Volunteer (Johnny Quinn) and five of the helpers were killed. All died within a week, in fact, Johnny Quinn's funeral was actually on the day of the Truce.

The enemy had obviously planted a mine in the refilled portion of the trench.

BATTALION HEADQUARTERS.

During this period we had our Battalion Headquarters at Ballinasheha, Durrrow, and later at Kilmacthomas Workhouse, where it remained until the Truce.

RANK HELD AT THE TRUCE.

I held the rank of Vice Commandant, 2nd Battalion, Waterford Brigade, at the Truce.

Signature: _____

Sean Toibin
(Sean Toibin)

Date: _____

25 Nov 52

Witnessed by:

Thomas Halpin

(Thomas Halpin) LIEUT. COLONEL.

