

MS. 759
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 759

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 759

Witness

John Jones,
Killowen,
Newmarket,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Kingwilliamstown (Co. Cork)
Irish Volunteers, 1917 - ;

Lieutenant same Company, 1920-.

Subject.

Activities of the Irish Volunteers,
Kingwilliamstown, Co. Cork, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2068

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 759

STATEMENTBYJOHN JONES, KILLOWEN, NEWMARKET.

I was born in Kingwilliamstown, Co. Cork, in 1902. My people were farmers.

1917.

There were no Volunteers in Kingwilliamstown up to 1917. About the end of that year a meeting was held locally for the purpose of forming a Company, and practically all those present at the meeting got enrolled as members, including myself. An election was held after a short period for the purpose of appointing officers for the Company, and the following were appointed: Tom Jones (a brother of mine) as Company O.C., Tom Herlihy, 1st Lieut., and the 2nd Lieut., was John Finucane. The strength of the Company would be from 80 to 100. At this time we were an independent Unit as the Battalion organisation was not introduced for a few months.

Parades were held at least once weekly and others twice a week. The training was mostly drilling and marching, as we had no arms available at the time. This training was carried out by the Company Officers and also we had the frequent services of an organiser from Cork City, named Seán O'Sullivan. Seán used to stay with Paddy Scanlon, who was the Honorary Secretary of the local Sinn Féin Club. This Club had been started prior to the Volunteers. As far as I can remember I think Seán O'Sullivan was "on the run" at the time. Seán put in a lot of good work with the Volunteers and was very popular locally.

Our parades, which were held in the open, were fairly well attended: of course, the absence of rifles permitted very little variety in the training.

With the exception of a few revolvers and some shot-guns owned by individual members, there were no other arms in the Company.

1918.

Very early in 1918 our Company became part of the 6th Battalion (Newmarket) Cork No. II Brigade. Seán Moylan was the Battalion O.C. The other Companies in the battalion were: Kiskeam, Knocknagree, Umeraboy, Taur, Rockchapel, Meelin, Tullylease, Freemount and Newmarket. A lot of these Companies would be up to 100 strong and three or four of them would be about the 50 mark.

Our parades continued during this period and we had frequent visits from Seán Moylan and other battalion officers.

When the Conscription crisis came along I remember we had many arguments with local British soldiers home on furlough, and also with some of the local R.I.C., Scuffles took place from time to time. Our Company strength increased to some extent at this period, but when the scare had passed most of those who had joined up took their departure again.

Unless for some shot-guns which were voluntarily handed in to the Company our arms position had not otherwise improved. We did have a number of pike heads made by a blacksmith named Tim Corcoran, and I saw one of these at least with a handle fitted to it.

I do not recollect if there were any arrests during this period, but some houses were searched by the R.I.C., including my father's - these searches were probably looking for arms. My brother, myself and another lad were in the farmyard when the District Inspector (Johnny McCoy) and some R.I.C. called. A Constable Corduff said to the D.I. pointing to us, "these are his three sons", although only two of us were brothers. Corduff resigned from the R.I.C. when the opposition against the R.I.C. became pronounced. The D.I., who was stationed in Newmarket, was a real busy-body and most officious in his attitude to the public generally. He had failed to realise the big changes which were in the offing.

We had some, but not very much, General Election activities in our area as the Sinn Féin candidate - Pádraig O'Keefe - was returned unopposed.

Tom Jones still held the appointment of Company O.C. at the end of 1918.

1919.

This was generally a very quiet year and nothing of any serious importance occurred. Unless for some extra shot-guns, our arms supply had not increased. We might have got one or two extra revolvers, but no rifles had come our way.

Seán Moylan was arrested later in the year and Charles Reilly was appointed Acting Battalion O.C. in his absence. No other changes of the officers occurred.

About October or November, 1919, the local R.I.C. barracks

was evacuated but it was only burned down in February, 1920, when the general order was made for the destruction of all such evacuated buildings.

There were no enemy activities of much note throughout the year, for the reason that all the people in our locality were whole-heartedly on our side and the R.I.C. were completely ignored. They got no information, whatever, as to any happenings that might occur.

During the latter part of this year Tommy McEllistrum and John Cronin of Kerry and a few lads from North Tipperary, who were "on the run" stayed at my father's home at Glencollins, Ballydesmond.

1920.

Our weekly drills continued and were still carried out in the open as we had no Volunteer or other hall available for our use.

Early this year my brother Tom had gone to America and also John Finucane - another of the Company Officers. Tom Herlihy was then appointed as Company O.C., and I was appointed as 1st Lieut. with Dan Fitzgerald as 2nd Lieut.,

The strength of our Company was still roughly about 100, and our arms position continued poor.

In April, 1920, a Volunteer named Ned McCarthy, who had been wounded in an attack at Scartaglin, was brought to our home at Ballydesmond. We had him attended by a Dr. Collins who

removed the bullet which had travelled from the shoulder to the hip. He survived and had the use of his limbs. The poor fellow, however, met his death accidentally later when out shooting rabbits.

During the Summer, mails, which had been seized by Seán Moylan and Paddy Clancy and others, were brought to my father's house at Ballydesmond for censorship. As a result of this censorship some information was obtained regarding the activities of the Newmarket R.I.C. but not of very great importance, as far as I remember.

Due to the many Volunteer activities happening all over the country and which were published in the daily papers, our battalion area, I suppose, like many others, began to sit up and take notice and most of the Volunteers were very enthusiastic and were prepared to play their part. All this led to a gradual increase of tension and excitement, but one big drawback was the scarcity of arms and this was a handicap which could not be easily overcome, more especially as far as rural Companies were concerned.

In September, 1920, three other members and myself from the Company participated in the ambush at Ballydrohane. This was an ambush carried out by the Brigade Column under Liam Lynch. Ernie O'Malley was also present. Other Companies of our battalion were also represented. This was an attack on a lorry of troops proceeding from Buttevant to Newmarket which was hit up at Ballydrohane between Newmarket and Kanturk. The total number which participated in the attack was about 30 and we were disposed at both sides of the road. A few of the troops were

killed and some others wounded, and some arms and equipment were captured. I do not know the exact details of the casualties or the equipment captured.

.

During December, 1920, a training camp was established for the battalion officers at Ballydesmond. Each Company had four representatives. I was one of the number selected from our Company. Seán Moylan and Paddy Murphy attended. The duration of this Course of training was about a week or ten days and included rifle training, field training and use of ground and cover and some physical training. The training was carried out by a man named Roche, who was a native of Tullylease. He was a very good instructor. Roche had been a member of the R.I.C. for about seven years and had resigned in protest against the military and R.I.C. activities. He was aged about thirty and was a very good type of lad and had the complete confidence of everyone in the camp.

.

At the end of 1920 a Volunteer, named Con Morley, and myself collected three old cannons from Rathmore. These, which were of 2" or 3" muzzle, had been taken from Ross Castle by the Kerry Volunteers and removed to Rathmore en route for our area. During the succeeding months some members of our battalion - Con Moylan and others - made all sorts of improvisations to try and devise shells for them. They also had them mounted on wheels for mobility. Tests of various quantities of explosives were made and, at the start, I think some little success was achieved. However, on the day selected for the final test - sometime in March, 1921 - and which was attended by Liam Lynch, Ernie O'Malley,

Seán Moylan and others, the test proved a flop for the cannon blew up.

1921.

Following the Training Camp in December, 1920, I joined the battalion column. Seán Moylan was then in charge.

On the 4/1/1921 the Column had been in position on the Newmarket side of Meelin village from the early part of the day on the off chance of some enemy lorries showing up. Later in the evening as the column leader had given the order to withdraw from the position and to proceed to selected billets, when in the process of withdrawing, word was received of the approach of two enemy lorries. The members of the column hurriedly took up whatever positions available on one side of the road and attacked the enemy party on the top of Meelin hill and an exchange of shots continued for some time. Eventually we had to withdraw as we were not sufficiently strong to force the fight to a finish, but, had the enemy made their appearance before we had left our old positions, the story could have a very different ending. No arms were captured and the enemy casualties are not definitely known, but it was stated later that four or five of them had been wounded.

The strength of our Column was seventeen or eighteen - we all had rifles.

This action took place just as darkness was approaching.

On that night and on the following day either four or five houses were burned by the enemy as an unofficial reprisal.

Every house in Meelin and district was friendly to the column.

. . . .

On the 28/1/1921, the Battalion Column, under Seán Moylan, and some men from the Kingwilliamstown and Kiskeam Companies were lying in ambush at Kingwilliamstown. The ambush position was alongside a rather steep glen and the road was blocked roughly at a bend in the middle of the position, and we occupied positions on one side of the road only as the other side of the road did not afford good fire effect. I was there and about 15 or 16 members of the column. The Crossley tourers containing R.I.C. and Tans ran into the ambush position, and a concentrated volley of fire was centred on the cars which stopped immediately. There was practically no reply from the enemy as all the occupants were either killed or wounded in the first volleys. Divisional Commissioner Holmes and two other R.I.C. were killed and the remainder of the party - four or five - were wounded. I do not remember the amount of arms captured but it must be about six or eight weapons. One of the cars was taken away and the other one burned. Divisional Commissioner Holmes had replaced Divisional Commissioner Smyth, who had been shot in the County Club in Cork some time before. Holmes had been carrying out a tour of inspection of Kerry and this, I understand, was his first outing and also proved his last.

Three houses in the district were burned as an official reprisal - Tim Vaughan's, Wm. McAuliffe's and Tim Sullivan's (the Post Office). There was intense excitement for a few days and the death of Holmes shook the enemy morale and gave a great fillip to our own people, more especially as he had taken over from Smyth, another would-be tyrant.

On the 2/3/1921, the combined Columns of Cork No. 2 Brigade and Kerry No. 2 Brigade, and representatives of the Charleville and Newmarket Battalions had occupied a position at a place called The Bower, west of Rathmore. The Brigade O.C., Seán Moylan, and Paddy O'Brien were the leaders of Cork No. 2, and Tommy McEllistrum was in charge of the Kerry party. Our Unit Column O.C., was Mick Sullivan. After remaining in this position for two days it was decided to move to a new position as some information had reached the Column that the enemy in County Kerry were aware of the Column lying in wait.

On Saturday, 4/3/1921, the Column moved to a new position at Clonbannin and immediately mined the roads. The mines used, as far as I remember, were made of about 6-inch piping, filled with gelignite and secured at each end by steel plates with a bolt running through the centre of the mine. The mines were to be set off by battery: I am almost certain gelignite was the explosive used because some of the lads who handled the explosives complained of headaches, which, I understand, is a common complaint from gelignite. After some time a large enemy convoy, consisting of two lorries of troops, followed by an armoured car, a touring car and two more lorries of troops bringing up the rear approached our position. The signal for all our lads to open fire was when the first mine exploded, on the leading lorries reaching a certain part of the ambush position. The mine, however, failed to explode when the leading lorry had passed the spot for the explosion: we realised that something had gone wrong and in a few seconds all the Column, which were located on both sides of the road, opened fire and the convoy stopped at once and the men dismounted from the lorries taking up whatever positions they could. The driver of the armoured car had been

killed in the first volley for the car zig-zagged into a dyke in the roadside, but, although it was slightly askew, it did not prevent the gunner in the car from making full use of the mounted machine gun. A heavy exchange of shots was kept up for almost three or four hours. Some of the troops who had dismounted at the front and rear of the ambush position had gradually made their way to cover, one lot getting into a nearby cottage and the other party moving towards a fence from which our position could be outflanked. The Column then withdrew from the position.

During the action Major General Cummings was killed and a large number of the convoy killed and wounded. As far as I know there were no serious casualties on our side. Had the mines exploded at the appointed time much heavier casualties would have been inflicted on the enemy. The failure of the mines to explode was due, I think, to having a wet cell detonator with a dry cell battery, or vice versa. I am not sure which, but apparently the wrong type detonators were used. Of course, at that period the use of mines was, more or less, only in the experimental stage.

. . . .

Late in the month of March Denis Galvin was trying to free a stoppage in a .32 revolver, which, I think, was the only weapon captured in Clonbannin. While he was endeavouring to clear the stoppage the round went off wounding me right through the leg. I was laid up for about three weeks with this injury. Following the accident the wound was carefully probed and dressed by Doctor Verling and the dressings were continued by a nurse - Mrs. Lenihan. I stayed in the home of a Mrs. Cronin of Ballinguilla,

Tullylease. I would like to pay a very sincere tribute to those three persons for the great care and attention which they devoted to my comfort and welfare, and to the steps taken by them to prevent any information of the incident reaching enemy sources.

Following an arrangement with the O.C. Rathmore Battalion, nine others and myself from our Unit Column proceeded to the vicinity of Rathmore on the 3/5/1921. The local Company shot a spy that night. His name was O'Sullivan, a bit of a tramp, but had been found guilty of giving information to the enemy. His body, suitably labelled, had been placed on the roadside in the early hours of the morning. Our party and some of the Rathmore Company took up position about a hundred yards from where the body was placed as we anticipated when the R.I.C. would hear of the body they would move out. Sure enough a man going to work in the bogs went back to the barracks and reported seeing the corpse. Sometime between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. on the 4/5/1921, a patrol of nine R.I.C. and Tans arrived out and got in a huddle around the body. We opened fire and with one exception we killed the whole party. The one who escaped made a record sprint back to Rathmore. I do not know what became of him eventually.

On that night the military and R.I.C. burned the Creamery and a lot of shops and houses in Rathmore.

We had cleared away earlier in the day.

.

During June, 1921, a Divisional Council was held at Ballydesmond. Liam Lynch, the Divisional O.C. was present, also

representatives from the Cork and Kerry Brigades and West Limerick Brigade. George Power, Paddy O'Brien and a lot of the other well-known leaders were present. Our Battalion O.C. at the time - the late Seán Nunan - also attended. Seán, who was a native of Liscarroll and was the Creamery Manager at Freemount. In my honest and sincere opinion Seán was one of the outstanding types in the whole movement, a great fighter and a splendid character.

. . . .

On June 5th, 1921, Mick Sullivan, our Column Leader, myself and ten others of the Column moved to Abbeyfeale, on the invitation of Jimmy Collins, to join with his Column in an attack on a mixed R.I.C. and Tan patrol in Abbeyfeale. This enemy patrol, usually about ten or twelve strong, used to make a nightly patrol of the town and district and had become very aggressive and obnoxious to the local people. We took up our allotted positions and, as soon as they made their appearance near the Father Matthew Statue on the Square, we opened fire, killing one and wounding five. One rifle was captured.

I am unable to say what reprisals, if any, followed this shooting.

. . . .

On June 16th, 1921, the combined Unit Columns of Millstreet, Mallow, Kanturk and Newmarket Battalions, under Paddy O'Brien, took up an ambush position on both sides of the road at Rathcoole near Millstreet as information had been received of a convoy of Auxies operating in the district. We had taken up position on the outskirts of a wood, and a short distance from our position

was another wood. After making a close examination of this latter wood, the convoy, consisting of four lorries of Auxies moving very close together, moved towards our position. We had the road mined in the ambush position, which covered about half to three-quarters of a mile. On the lorries entering the position the mine was exploded under the rear lorry which stopped it immediately and a few seconds later the leading lorry was also mined, but the two lorries in between stopped when they heard the explosions and avoided being mined. On the first mine explosion, the Column which had been split up into Sections each fired into their own target, but the personnel in the lorries returned the fire through portholes in the sides of the lorries which were armoured plated. Immediately on the first explosion a number of the enemy had jumped out of the front and rear lorries and some of these had been killed and wounded. The enemy, however, in the remaining two lorries were still able to effectively cover the position, and especially the road with their light machine guns. Firing continued for about an hour when the Column leader decided to withdraw from the position, as it was realised that a complete capture of the convoy was not practicable. It was estimated that about ten or twelve of the enemy were killed and about fifteen or twenty wounded. The Column had no serious casualties, as far as I remember.

The amount of explosives we had in the mines, while sufficient to stop the vehicles, was not, however, powerful enough to blow them up completely, so after this try-out it was decided to double the quantity of explosives in future mines.

RANK.

I held the rank of 1st Lieutenant at the Truce. Our

Battalion, which was the 6th Battalion, Cork No. 2 Brigade, was changed to the 2nd Battalion shortly prior to the Truce on account of the fact that the enemy had captured some documents which gave the designation of the battalions.

SIGNATURE: John Jones
DATE: Dec 6 1952
(John Jones)

Dec. 6, 1952.

WITNESSED BY:

Thomas Haepin
(Thomas Haepin) LIEUT.-COLONEL.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 759