

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1,128

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Thomas Hallahan,
Ballinagigla,
Bonmahon,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Lieutenant Bonmahon Company 2nd Battalion
West Waterford Brigade.

Subject.

Bonmahon Company 2nd Battalion
West Waterford Brigade, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS HALLAHAN,
Ballinagigla, Bonmahon, County Waterford.

I was born in the year 1898, in Ballinagigla, Bonmahon. My father was a blacksmith and, after I had attended the local National School, I also attended my father's trade which I do to this day.

When the National Volunteers, i.e. John Redmond's Volunteers, were started in Bonmahon in the year 1913, I joined up. We were trained by an ex-British Army man, Maurice O'Brien, but when the split in the Volunteers came in 1915 the National Volunteers 'fizzled out' in the district.

A few of us formed a small unit of the Irish Volunteers at the split but, when the Rising came off in Dublin in 1916, we took no action down in our district because we knew nothing about what was happening in Dublin until about the middle of Easter Week, 1916, and then we had no word from anybody as to what we were to do. In any case we only had a couple of shotguns and we couldn't do very much with them without some help from others.

In 1917, a Sinn Féin Club was started in Bonmahon. I organised it. We had about a dozen or so members and we helped as best we could to spread Sinn Féin propaganda by holding meetings and giving lectures. We staged some good Irish-Ireland concerts as well, to stir up enthusiasm.

Early in 1918, a Volunteer unit was reorganised in Bonmahon. James McKeown was Captain. I was Lieutenant and Jack Kirwan, Bonmahon, was the Adjutant. The Company area included Ballylaneen Boat Strand and Ballynabanogue, about two miles distant.

We had, at first, a strength of about ten men. This grew later on to twenty men or so. For arms we had about four or five shotguns and a couple of old-fashioned revolvers. We carried out drilling without being spotted by the local R.I.C. I should have mentioned before this that there was an R.I.C. barracks in Bonmahon, with five men under a Sergeant.

During 1919 and up to about autumn 1920, our activities were mostly confined to raiding houses for arms, carrying dispatches and raiding for mails.

On our raids for arms three or four of us used go out at night (disguised) and call to farmhouses where we had a good idea that there was a gun or two. We were very successful in those raids as a rule. I'm sure we got upwards of thirty shotguns and a few revolvers. Although the local lads, like myself, kept their own guns hidden at home, we had a dump down in one of the caves at the seashore which would be almost impossible to spot by any enemy forces on the look-out for arms dumps. At regular intervals myself and Jack Kirwan used to go down to the cave and oil and clean up the guns. They were used later in several engagements against British troops when large parties of our men would be called out for action.

Jack Kirwan, our Adjutant, Davy Connolly a local Volunteer and myself were the ones who normally took part in the raiding for mails. We held up local postmen from time to time and raided the local Post Office and the Post Office at Annestown four miles east of Bonmahon a few times. Any letters we got, which were addressed to R.I.C. or Coastguards at the Bonmahon Coastguard Station, or, for that matter, any addressed to people whom we knew to be opposed to us, we opened and read them to see if there was anything concerning Volunteer activities in them. We never got much of any value to our Intelligence Service in these letters.

The dispatch work I spoke about was handled, as a rule, by Jimmy Duggan of Kildwan, Bonmahon. The dispatches, which usually came through James McKeown or myself, were passed on to Jimmy who delivered them on his bicycle.

Early in 1920, classes on the making of gunpowder and the construction of land mines were held, periodically, in Englishtown, Stradbally, County Waterford, by a man named Jack Norris, who, I believe, was the Brigade O/C. of Engineers. I attended all these classes along with others of our Company, of whom I remember Dick Cleary of Bonmahon was one.

In September, 1920, Jack Kirwan, Bonmahon, Rody McKeown, Ballydivan (a Column man) and myself were ordered to be at Kill village, about six miles north-east of Bonmahon, to help in the attack on Kill R.I.C. barracks which had a garrison of six men, so far as I can remember. I bought a shotgun and a revolver. I don't remember what guns the other two men had.

When I got to Kill it was dark. I suppose the time would be about nine o'clock at night. I met up with Pat Keating, the Commandant of the Kilrossanty Battalion and a Column man, together with about fifteen others from Pat's side of the country. There were about forty men all told engaged in this attack, but this number would include scouts and others who were felling trees to block the roads leading to the village of Kill. I am not, of course, certain now as to the number of men we had, but to the best of my recollection, I would say there were forty there, as I remember Pat Keating lining up and sending us to various positions around the barracks.

The East Waterford Brigade were also strongly represented there that same night under their O/C., Paddy Paul. As a matter of fact,

this was an Eastern Brigade job as Kill was in their area. We were only asked to help them out.

The West Waterford men were under Pat Keating and were armed mostly with shot guns, so far as I can remember, but there were also a few "mud bombs" because I myself was handed three of these bombs to hold in readiness for use by Pat Keating. These bombs consisted of a stick of gellignite with a fuse attached inserted into a ball of soft clay. When the fuse was lighted and the bomb thrown on a roof it would explode and blow a hole in the roof. Petrol or paraffin poured into the hole and set alight would send the barrack roof up in flames.

After the attack commenced six of us were picked to get into a position close to the barracks on its eastern side. Just as we had got into position a shot rang out in Kill village. The R.I.C. men in the barracks must have heard the shot because they began firing up verrey lights for help and opened rifle fire through loopholes in the barracks.

We learned afterwards that the explanation for the shot which alarmed the garrison was this. Some R.I.C. man who happened to be out of barracks and in a public-house in the village was held up by some of the East Waterford men. The R.I.C. man gave a bit of trouble, or, someone fired a revolver shot over him to quieten him down. This shot had the effect of arousing the R.I.C. in the barracks.

At any rate, when the R.I.C. started firing from the barracks general fire was opened by our men in reply. I fired at the port-hole windows of the barracks as instructed by Pat Keating.

There was some hitch then about a pump to throw petrol on the roof when the "mud bombs" were thrown. I believe the pump handle was missing and the pumping apparatus couldn't be got going. Anyhow, I can say definitely that none of the "mud bombs" which I carried were thrown, because I had them with me when the action was broken off after about twenty minutes. In any case there was no point in bombing the roof of the barracks when, as happened, the petrol could not be thrown up through the holes they would have made.

We were ordered to ~~disperse~~ after about twenty minutes or so because it was reported that military in force had come out from Waterford and were encircling our men. This report came from the East Waterford Brigade O/C. Paddy Paul, who proceeded to withdraw his men, leaving us no alternative but to do likewise.

We retired west to Bonmahon and encountered no British military on our way back; neither did we see any signs of enemy forces in the vicinity of Kill at any time while we were there. I believe it was said that horses galloping in a field near the barracks gave the warning of approaching military, but as I have said already, we saw no British troops that night in Kill.

In late 1920, I think, when Bonmahon R.I.C. barracks was evacuated a party of us burned the building. It was about the same period, so far as I can remember, that the Coastguard Station at Bonmahon was attacked and burned.

Prior to the attack on the Coastguard Station we got word that a party of British Marines were going to occupy the station. A supply of mattresses and bedding was on its way one evening to the station when about six of us, armed, held up the car containing the stuff, burned all the bedding material and wrecked the car. At the time there was a British gunboat out off Bonmahon discharging ammunition for use by the Coastguards and the Marines when they would take over the Station.

The attack on the Coastguard Station was carried out on a dark night by Pat Keating and about twenty men. The sentry was surprised and captured and the boys then ran through the building without opposition. It was set on fire and totally destroyed. I think there were six or eight Coastguards there at the time.

I cannot say what arms or ammunition were captured. All I can now remember is that I am certain of one rifle being taken, a telescope and a pair of binoculars. Jack and Andy Kirwan, Rody McKeown all of Bonmahon, and myself, took part in this affair.

On the night of 7th January, 1921, I was told by our Adjutant, Jack Kirwan, to get ready to go with himself, David Connolly and William Salmon, all of Bonmahon, to a place near Tramore, County Waterford to help out the East Waterford lads in an ambush they were preparing at Tramore.

Armed with shotguns, the four of us set out for Tramore (six miles distant) and arrived at our destination about 10 p.m. When we got there we met others of the West Waterford Brigade under Pax Whelan of Dungarvan, the O/C.

We were then posted to a position on high ground on a road about a quarter of a mile west of Tramore town and approximately 1,000 yards west of the ambush position. This latter position was at a spot near the Metal Bridge which spans the Waterford-Tramore road and is about one and a half miles east of Tramore town. Our instructions were to open fire on any enemy forces approaching our position from the west.

After a fairly short while there we saw very lights going up from Tramore R.I.C. barracks and could hear quite plainly the explosions of what seemed like bombs and also rifle fire. Actually

there was only a feint attack being made by our boys on the barracks, to draw out the British from Waterford and ambush them at the Metal Bridge.

It would be about 11 p.m., or, maybe, somewhat later, when we heard heavy firing coming from the direction of the Metal Bridge. We knew it was our boys in action with the Military coming out from Waterford to help the R.I.C. garrison in Tramore.

This firing went on for quite a while. I can't say how long, but it might be about half an hour. Next thing happened was that some of the men of the West Waterford Brigade, retiring from the scene of the ambush, contacted us and told us to make our way home. At this time there was the noise of only a stray shot or two coming from the direction of the Metal Bridge. We returned on our bikes to Bonmahon without meeting up with any enemy troops.

Early in March, 1921, I was one of a large party who held up a train at Durrrow railway station. There were a number of jurymen travelling to the Court in Waterford City on this train and about 7 a.m. the train was stopped by our men just outside Durrrow and the jurors told us to get out.

My part in this was to mount guard on the jurors and also see that the train did not proceed.

I remember, immediately after the train hold-up, watching a body of our men marching in two files down the railway line all carrying shotguns or rifles. Doctor Walsh, now in Clonmel, was with them. He was the Medical Officer to the West Waterford 'Column'. I counted seventy men in that party of ours.

I kept an eye on the jurors and the train for at least four hours, when I got instructions to withdraw. There was subsequently an engagement in the Durrrow station area between our men and a large

force of military but I cannot give accurate details as I was not in action.

Sometime in the early part of June, 1921, an ambush was prepared at Ballyvoile about four miles east of Bonmahon on a British military patrol raiding in that district.

I was mobilised the night prior to the ambush which took place the following morning. Our men to the number of about twenty were placed in positions overlooking Ballyvoile railway bridge and the road which runs by it, but some twenty others were on scout duty and road blocking for some miles around.

It was in the early forenoon that the British came along. So far as I can remember, I think it was a cycling patrol. It seems as if the British officer had some suspicion that there was something wrong because he halted his men before he ran into the ambush position and fired a shot. Some of our men replied and the British, seeing where our boys were firing from, tried to encircle the I.R.A.. A sort of running fight went on for nearly half an hour when our men had to retire owing to lack of ammunition. In the fight we lost John Cummins of Stradbally, killed. I do not know if the British suffered any casualties.

Subsequent to the Ballyvoile ambush I took part in the hold-up of the Cork-Rosslare express at Durrow Station. The train was stopped by one of our lads putting the signals against it, as this train didn't usually stop at Durrow. We searched the train and found quite a few soldiers on it, but none of them was armed.

During the end of June and early July I was engaged in carrying dispatches to Keating's of Comeragh and elsewhere, digging trenches in the roads and felling trees to abstract the movements of British troops in our area.

Nothing much else of note happened in our area until the Truce came in July 1921.

Signed:

Thomas Hallahan

(Thomas Hallahan)

Date:

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Witness:

T. O'Gorman

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