

W. S. 1. 211
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1211

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,211

Witness

John O'Connell (Jack),
Cloon,
Castletownroche,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C. Lombardstown Coy. Mallow Batt'n.,
Cork II Brigade.

Subject.

Lombardstown Coy. Mallow Battalion,
Cork II Brigade, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
No. W.S. 1211

STATEMENT BY JACK O'CONNELL,

Cloone, Castletownroche, County Cork.

I was born at Lackendarra, Glantane, Mallow, on 10th November, 1898. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Brittas National School until I reached the age of 15 years when I left school to work with my parents on the farm.

During my youth I often heard my father speak of the Fenians and of the connection of his uncle John Carroll with the '67 Rising. My grand-uncle was, I understand, a member of the I.R.B. and one of James Stephen's right-hand men. Following the Rising he emigrated to America where, although a self educated man, he became a member of the United States Congress. The stories told at the fireside of my home about the '67 Rising left a lasting impression on my mind.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at the formation of the Lombardstown Company in June 1917. The strength of the unit was in the neighbourhood of 40. The Company was started by Jack Breen, who was a medical student at University College, Cork, at the time. Seán O'Sullivan, a Volunteer organiser from Cork, also visited the area. Jack Breen is now a doctor on the staff of St. Bricin's Military Hospital, Dublin. The first officers of the Company were, I think :-

O/C. Denis O'Shea,
1st.Lieut. Ned Murphy,
2nd Lieut. Dan McCarthy,
Adjutant Jack O'Connell (witness),
Q.M. Con Buckley.

The O/C. returned to the ranks after about three months and was replaced by Ned Murphy. Dan McCarthy then became 1st. Lieutenant and Con Buckley 2nd Lieutenant. The latter was replaced as Quartermaster by Dan O'Callaghan. The Company was a unit of Mallow Battalion of Cork Brigade. Other Companies in the Battalion were :- Dromahane, Mourne Abbey, Mallow, Ballyclough, Ahadillane and Analeentha. The officers of the Battalion were :-

O/C. Liam Jones,
 Vice O/C. Jeremiah Buckley,
 Adjutant Paddy McCarthy,
 Q. M. Mick Nagle.

The Company usually trained in the fields in the area. We did not have any hall. The only type of drill carried out was close order drill.

During 1917 all Volunteers were busy organising Sinn Féin in the area. This organisation was mainly composed of Volunteers and the members of their families. A man named McAuliffe, who was a dentist in Newmarket, was the principal organiser for Sinn Féin who visited the area. The leading men in Sinn Féin in Lombardstown area were Mike Hallinan and Pat Sullivan.

There was nothing unusual to report until Conscription was threatened in the spring of 1918. There was a big influx of new recruits and the strength of the unit reached 84. There was no change in officers at this time. Nearly all the new recruits drifted away when the threat of Conscription had passed. The arms held by the Company, at this time, comprised a couple of revolvers and about 25/30 shotguns, which were the personal property of the individual Volunteers.

The usual training went on about this time but the approach of the General Election in December 1918 led to increased activity by the Volunteers on the political front. We were engaged in checking voters' lists and preparing to canvass the voters in the district, but there was no election in the area as the Sinn Fein candidate was returned unopposed. The Sinn Féin candidate was Paudeen O'Keeffe.

When Cork II. Brigade, which embraced the area of North Cork from the Waterford border at Fermoy to the Kerry border beyond Millstreet, was formed in January 1919, Mallow Battalion became a unit of the new Brigade. The other Battalions were :- Fermoy, Castletownroche, Charleville, Kanturk, Newmarket and Millstreet. The officers of the new Brigade were -

O/C. Liam Lynch, Fermoy,
 Vice O/C. Dan Hegarty, Mallow,
 Adjutant Tom Barry, Glanworth,
 Q. M. George Power, Fermoy.

The training during 1919 and early 1920 became more advanced. We had classes in signalling, scouting, as well as occasional route marches, and field exercises in conjunction with neighbouring Companies. At this time we had a couple of .22 rifles which enabled the members to have some target practise.

At Easter 1920 the members of the Company, assisted by some members of the Dromahane and Ahadillane Companies, destroyed Glantane evacuated R.I.C. post. Some of those who took part in this operation were :- Ned Murphy, Con Buckley, Dan McCarthy, Mick McCarthy, Jack Connell (witness) from Lombardstown, Tim O'Shea and a number of others (Ahadillane), Davey Barrow, Denis Hegarty and several others (Dromahane). The post was destroyed by setting it on fire.

At the Local Government election in June 1920, I was elected with Ned Murphy (Company O/C.) to represent Glantane area on Mallow Rural District Council.

Towards the end of June 1920, the Station Master, Great Southern & Western Railway at Mallow was arrested by the local (Mallow) Company. His name was Slattery. At this time the railway workers were refusing to operate trains which carried British Military or stores. Slattery was alleged to be responsible for the selection of the men to be detailed for the operation of the trains and he appeared to be selecting married men to fill the jobs of those who had refused. In this way it was felt that he was trying to cause as much hardship as possible to the men who were standing by Ireland. In order to frighten him he was arrested by the Mallow Company and taken (as it was described at the time) to "an unknown destination". He was, in fact, taken to my home. He arrived there with his escort about 1 a.m., I think, the date was 28th June, 1920. Sentries were posted, viz. Con Buckley and Con Breen.

Before the arrival of Slattery and his escort I was instructed by Denis Ryan - a Volunteer in the Lombardstown Company - to go for Con Buckley and to take him to my home. I went and collected Buckley and when we arrived back Slattery was at my house. He was accompanied by Mick McCarthy (Myles) and his brother (Dan). Con Buckley and Con Breen were then posted as sentries as stated at the end of the previous paragraph.

This was the position at 3 a.m. when Ned Murphy, Jerry Buckley, Jerry Hanlon and Liam Lynch arrived. They were escorting another prisoner who was none other than General Lucas, Officer Commanding the British garrison at Fermoy. He had been taken prisoner by Liam Lynch and some other Brigade officers in the vicinity of Fermoy

on the previous evening.

Following the arrival of General Lucas, Slattery was removed to the home of Con Buckley. He was escorted by Con Breen, Con Buckley and myself. I then returned home. Sometime early next month (Sunday I think) I replaced Jerry Buckley as guard with Jerry Hanlon. Guards were changed at regular intervals until Monday evening when my brother, Patrick, who was a student at St. Colman's College, Fermoy - returned home. He was unaware of the presence of General Lucas in the home and he did know Liam Lynch who was sitting at the kitchen fire reading a book. My mother asked if he had any news and he said that the British Military were going to blow up Fermoy. Liam Lynch then had a short conversation with Patrick and then went into the room where General Lucas was detained. In a short time he returned with a dispatch written by General Lucas to O/C., British Forces at Fermoy telling him to ensure that no reprisals were to take place. Liam Lynch then sent for me and asked me to go to Fermoy with the dispatch. As I was preparing to go he changed his mind as he considered it undesirable to send a member of the household where General Lucas was a prisoner with the message. Mick McCarthy (Myles) was the guard on duty at the time and Liam Lynch instructed him to go to Fermoy with the dispatch. As far as I know Mick McCarthy travelled to Fermoy with instructions to leave the message at a certain house in Fermoy but when he got there the people of the house would not take the dispatch. I think that he eventually arranged for the delivery of the message to the British O/C. by one of the priests in Fermoy.

On the Monday night following the departure of the messenger for Fermoy, General Lucas was removed about 11 p.m. to Dan McCarthy's, Creggane, and after three or four days there he was moved from Cork II. Brigade area to, I think, West Limerick.

On Sunday 26th September, 1920, about six members of Lombardstown Company were standing-to in anticipation of an ambush which was planned to take place in Mourne Abbey area that night. Amongst these were :- Ned Murphy, O/C., Dan McCarthy (1st. Lieut.), Con Buckley (2nd Lieut.) and witness (Jack Connell). During the day Ned Murphy paid a number of visits to Mourne Abbey area where the Brigade Column were in training. The job was called off.

On my way home from Devotions, which had been held in the local Church in connection with the hungerstrikers (Terry McSwiney, Mick Fitzgerald and others), I fell from my bicycle and injured my knee. I was confined to bed as a result but on Tuesday morning (28/9/1920) about 2 a.m., Denis Ryan - a member of Lombardstown Company - called to my home to advise me to get ready for mobilisation. As I was unable to move out my brother - Michael - went in my place. I was not aware of what was on until Tuesday about 1 p.m. when I got a note from Michael to say that Mallow Military Barracks had been captured and advising me to remove two shotguns which we had dumped in the haybarn. I removed the guns and hid them in a fence some distance from the house.

About 10 p.m. on Tuesday night (28/9/1920) the Brigade Column, which had taken part in the capture of Mallow Barracks, arrived in Lombardstown area. They were billeted at Myles McCarthy's and Pat Connell's. Guards were posted by the local Company. No further action was taken until early on Wednesday night (29/9/1920) when Lombardstown Company arranged transport to go to Ahadillane area to collect the stores captured at Mallow. The convoy was escorted by armed members of the Column. When the captured material was taken to Lombardstown area it was dumped at my home in a wooden container covered with felt which was buried in a stone-faced fence. The wooden container was about 8' long, 4' wide and 3½' high. The arms dumped

here remained in the dump until 14th October when some of them were taken to the Kilcorney area where they were handed over to the Brigade Column which was billeted in that district. It was on the following day, Sunday, that Hugh O'Brien - one of those charged with the robbery of a Bank at Millstreet - was arrested by the I.R.A. He was taken to the home of Con Buckley (2nd Lieutenant, Lombardstown Company) where he was held for about a week. I believe that he was then tried by members of the Brigade Staff and sentenced to deportation.

I should have mentioned that on the night of 29th September, 1920, a section of the Brigade Column together with a number of shotgun men from Lombardstown Company took up positions in the vicinity of Lombardstown Creamery in anticipation of reprisals by enemy forces, but no enemy forces put in an appearance. I was not a member of this party.

There was nothing much doing in the area until early in December, 1920. The usual parades were held while the members of the Company were engaged in scouting and guard duty for the Brigade Column which was often in the area.

On the night of the first Saturday in December 1920 arrangements were made by Liam Lynch for an attack on Banteer R.I.C. barracks. The members of the Lombardstown Company were engaged on outpost duty but the job did not come off. The attack was, I understand, to have been carried out by the Column.

Early in January, 1921, Battalion Columns were formed throughout the Brigade. Ned Murphy (Company O/C., Lombardstown) joined the Mallow Battalion Column. This led to a change in officers in the local Company. The new officers were :- O/C. Phil Singleton, 1st. Lieutenant Jack^oConnell (witness), 2nd Lieutenant Con Buckley, Adjutant Con Breen and Q.M. Dan Callaghan.

On Sunday, 13th February, 1921, I escorted George Power - Vice O/C., Cork II. Brigade - from Lombardstown via Mourne Abbey to Glenville in Fermoy Battalion area. He contacted the Fermoy Battalion Column at Glenville and the Mallow Column in Mourne Abbey area. We returned to Lombardstown on Monday 14th February, 1920. George Power went to Brigade Headquarters at Pat Sullivan's, Mortonville, Lombardstown, and I remained at Tom Buckley's, Glantane.

About the end of February or early March, 1921, I was instructed to proceed to Beeing area to collect four rifles from the Battalion Column and to bring them to Liam Lynch at Jerry Sheehan's, Mount Hilary, where the Brigade Staff were billeted. I received these instructions on Sunday morning and the rifles were to be delivered on Monday evening. While at Gloundine in the Beeing area I heard that a large scale round-up was being carried out by the British in the Gortmore section of Lombardstown district. When I arrived back in the Mount Hilary area on Monday night I was accompanied by Volunteer Mick Twomey. We called to Jerry Sheehan's but the Brigade Staff had moved out and I was unaware of their whereabouts until I met Ned Murphy about 10.30 p.m. I remained with Ned Murphy in a haybarn near Glantane village that night and delivered the rifles to Liam Lynch about 4 p.m. next day (Tuesday) at Mrs. Roche's, Gortmore, where Brigade Headquarters was now established.

On the night of 9th March, 1921, all members of Lombardstown Company were engaged in blocking roads, felling trees and cutting communications on the Navigation (main Mallow-Killarney road). This was the night prior to the attempted round-up by large enemy forces in the Nadd area where Brigade Headquarters and two Battalion Columns (Mallow and Kanturk) were billeted. As a result of our activities the enemy convoys were delayed and prevented from closing the ring.

Brigade Headquarters was back in the area again on St. Patrick's Day, 1921, when a meeting (Brigade Council I think) was held at Tom Buckley's, Glantane. All members of the Lombardstown Company were engaged in outpost and scouting duty in connection with this meeting. They were similarly engaged while the Brigade Headquarters remained in the area.

On 1st April, 1921, members of the Lombardstown Company removed some rails at Gortmore on the Mallow-Killarney railway line with the intention of derailing a troop train which, it was reported, was due to travel. The troop train did not pass.

Another job which proved abortive was planned for Easter Saturday 1921. It was planned to capture three British officers who were expected to travel from Mallow on the Killarney train, but the scout on duty at Lombardstown station signalled that there were no military on the train.

About mid-May, 1921, two goods trains were held up on the Mallow-Killarney line by members of the Lombardstown Company. On the first occasion some military stores (bins, wearing apparel) were taken. Some of the stores were burned while a supply of boots was removed for use of I.R.A. forces. Amongst those who took part were :- Con Buckley, Jack Healy, Ned Murphy, Con Breen, Denis Cremins and Jack^oConnell (witness).

All units in the area were engaged full time in keeping roads blocked and enemy lines of communication cut as well as sniping enemy posts at Mallow from now until the Truce. In addition, as Brigade and Battalion Headquarters were in the Lombardstown Company area at irregular intervals and for long periods at a time up to the Truce, members of the Company had to be available at all times for guard, outpost and dispatch carrying duties.

Prior to Rathcoole ambush on 16th June, 1921, the members of Mallow Battalion Column who took part in this engagement assembled in the Company area at Laharn Cross. A large part of the ammunition issued to the Column for this job was taken from dumps in the Company area. The members of the Battalion Column were, as far as I can recollect :- Jack Cunningham (O/C), Jeremiah Daly, Tadg McCarthy, Leo O'Callaghan, Tom Callaghan, Batt Walsh, Con Buckley, Ned Murphy, Joe Morgan, John Moloney (Congo), Paddy Buckley, Batt Walshe, Denis Mulcahy, Tadg Mullane.

The Company O/C. (Phil Singleton) was arrested in a round-up in the area about 5th June, 1921, and I then became Acting O/C. of the Company (Lombardstown).

Rank at Truce - Acting O/C., Lombardstown Company,

Mallow Battalion,

Cork II. Brigade I.R.A.

The strength of the Company was about 54.

Signed:

John O'Connell
(John O'Connell)

Date:

22nd July 1955

22nd July 1955.

Witness:

P. O'Donnell

(P. O'Donnell)

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