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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BUREAU STAIRS MILE TA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1234

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,234

Witness

Jack Hennessy,
Knockaneady Cottage,
Ballineen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Adjutant Ballineen Company Irish Vol's.
Co. Cork;
Section Leader Brigade Column.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Ballineen, Co. Cork,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY JOHN HENNESSY,

Ballineen, Co. Cork.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at Kilmurry under Company Captain Patrick O'Leary in 1917. I remained with that company until 1918 when I moved to Ballineen, where I joined the local company under Company Captain Timothy Francis Warren. Shortly after joining the company I was appointed Company Adjutant.

During 1918 and the early days of 1919 the company was being trained and in 1918 we had preparations made to resist conscription. I attended meetings of the Battalion Council (Dunmanway Battalion) along with the Company Captain. The Battalion Council discussed the organisation and training in each company area.

In May, 1919, the Ballineen Company destroyed Kenniegh R.I.C. barracks which had been vacated by the garrison.

Orders were issued by the brigade through each battalion that the local R.I.C. garrison was to be boycotted by all persons in the area. This order applied to traders, who were requested to stop supplying the R.I.C. All the traders obeyed the order, with the exception of one firm, Alfred Cotters, Ballineen, who continued to supply the R.I.C. with bread. The whole family were anti-Irish and the R.I.C. used visit their premises.

The Company Captain, Timothy Warren, was living in the village of Ballineen and the Cotters kept a close watch on both Tim Warren and myself. It was the practice of Tim Warren's people to leave the key of the house

under a stone to facilitate Tim when he was returning in the early hours from battalion meetings. This fact became known to the Cotters as they used watch for Tim Warren's return.

The fact that Cotters were continuing to supply the R.I.C. was reported to Seán Murphy, Dunmanway, who was Battalion O/C, and after a discussion with the Battalion Council Seán Murphy issued orders for a boycott of the Cotters. We put up posters in and around the village of Ballineen calling for a boycott of Cotters and, as a result, most of their workmen left.

During the period 1919 and early 1920 Tim Warren and myself were being watched by the R.I.C. assisted by the Cotters, but we kept up the boycott.

On Sunday morning, 10th July, 1920, my house was raided by a party of the Essex Regiment under a Captain Davis. I was taken from my bed and made walk about 400 yards to the south of the town, passing over Ballineen Water Bridge. I was questioned about the Cotter boycott and a revolver muzzle was forced into my mouth and the hammer clicked. I was struck on the jaw with the butt of a revolver. They then beat me with their fists and rifle butts. I was ordered to move off and I jumped over a fence as they fired shots over my head. My house was burned and I had to go "on the run". We got what arms we could together for our own protection and decided that we would fight back against the Essex. We laid an ambush at Carrimore, Ballineen, for a party of the Essex who used to cycle from Dunmanway Workhouse to Ballineen. We waited for two nights but they did not travel. During all this period I continued to act as Company Adjutant and assisted in training the company.

The Republican Court which was set up in our area held its sittings at Keelaconnagh, Ballineen, and the local company supplied outposts and guards. The court consisted of Thomas Ahern, Forthrobort, Ballineen; David Walsh, Ahiohill, Enniskeane (decd.); and Company Captain Timothy Warren (at present a postman in Ballineen). The clerk of the court was Patrick O'Mahoney, Ahiohill, Ballineen, (now a Supt. in the Garda).

On the 4th September, 1920, I was mobilised to attend a training camp at Shanacrone in the Togher Company area. The camp was under Liam Deasy, Brigade Adjutant. The camp lasted three days and we had some target practice with rifles. On the night of the 7th September we moved to the Connagh Company area where we rested overnight, and on the morning of the 8th September we moved into an ambush position at Manch Bridge on the main Dunmanway-Ballineen road. The object of the ambush was to get a cycle patrol that used travel that road. After waiting about seven hours with no sight of the enemy we were ordered to move out, and as we were moving a party of British military in a lorry drove into the position. Our men opened fire on the British party as we retired. We all got away safely.

Some short time afterwards we lay in ambush at Farranbas on the main Dunmanway road under Tom Barry, without result. I also was with a party that lay for three nights at Drimoleague awaiting a British patrol which did not show up. Comdt. Ml. McCarthy (decd.) was in charge at Drimoleague.

About this time we got information that a Tan named Fowler was to travel to Dublin Castle, and we lay in ambush for him at Carrigmore for five nights. We then

heard that he had gone to Gaggin Station to board the train. We followed on to Gaggin, but he did not enter the train at the station and we lost him.

On the 21st November, 1920, I was called to join the Brigade Flying Column under Comdt. Tom Barry. We assembled at Coolmountain and moved under training to Ahilane.

On the 28th November (Sunday) we were told that we were going to attack the Auxiliaries, and our column of 36 or 37 riflemen moved silently to Kilmichael. Vice Comdt. Ml. McCarthy of the Dunmanway Battalion and Comdt. Tom Barry had already picked the ambush position. It was a little over a mile south of Kilmichael on the main Dunmanway-Macroon road between Kilmichael and Gleann Cross. Comdt. Barry paraded us when we got to Kilmichael and explained the plan of attack. No man was to show himself until the attack was opened by Comdt. Barry. Two lorries of Auxies were expected but we were being posted so that if three lorries came we could deal with them.

The place selected for the ambush was on the road running through marshy land. There were no fences but back a little off the road there were fairly large clumps of rock. There was no line of retreat.

The Column O/C, Comdt. Barry, who was dressed in Volunteer officer's tunic, took up his position at the Dunmanway side of the ambush position where a narrow boreen turned off to the left and a low stone wall gave some cover. A section of nine or ten riflemen were posted on a clump of rocks near the Column O/C's position where they would have a good field of fire on to the road. It was the job of the Column O/C and the party near him

to deal with the first lorry.

I was under Vice Comdt. Ml. McCarthy and it was our job to deal with the second lorry and, if necessary, a third lorry. Another section, under Stephen O'Neill, was placed in position on the Macroom side of our section but on the other side of the road. They were to prevent the Auxies from getting into cover on the south of the road. Six riflemen were held in reserve and posted back from the road so that their fire could command a long stretch of road in case more than two lorries came.

My particular position was on a clump of rocks overlooking the road, but there was no protection on either side. We were in position at 8 a.m. and I built a wall of dry stones round our position and covered the stones with heath. This gave us a box to fight from in case the Auxies made an attempt to surround us if anything went wrong with our attack. With me in the box were Vice Comdt. McCarthy (in charge of section), John Lordan and Tim Crowley. Pat Donovan, Pat Deasy and Jim Sullivan were near us spread towards the Macroom side of the position. We lay in position all day. It was cold and damp. Coming on for dusk near 5 o'clock two of our scouts who had been on the look-out signalled two lorries approaching from Macroom. Our orders were to keep under cover until the Column O/C blew one blast on his whistle or fired a shot. The first lorry passed our position. I heard a shot, followed by a bomb explosion from the Column O/C's position. At this time the second lorry was just opposite our position. The Auxies jumped out and tried to find cover. The lorry driver held his seat and attempted to back the lorry out of the position. I was engaging the Auxies on the road. I was wearing a tin hat. I had fired about ten rounds and had got five

bullets through the hat when the sixth bullet wounded me in the scalp. Vice Comdt. McCarthy had got a bullet through the head and lay dead. I continued to load and fire but the blood dripping from my forehead fouled the breech of my rifle. I dropped my rifle and took Ml. McCarthy's. Many of the Auxies lay on the road dead or dying. Our orders were to fix bayonets and charge on to the road when we heard three blasts of the O/C's whistle. I heard the three blasts and got up from my position, shouting "hands up". At the same time one of the Auxies about five yards from me drew his revolver. He had thrown down his rifle. I pulled on him and shot him dead. I got back to cover, where I remained for a few minutes firing at living and dead Auxies on the road. The Column O/C sounded his whistle again. Nearly all the Auxies had been wiped out. When I reached the road a wounded Auxie moved his hand towards his revolver. I put my bayonet through him under the ribs. Another Auxie tried to pull on John Lordan, who was too near to use his bayonet and he struck the Auxie with the butt of his rifle. The butt broke on the Auxie's skull. The Column O/C lined us up, and as I was wounded I was told to sit on the roadside where my head was dressed. Another man (Pat Deasy) who had been wounded was removed on a door. He died that day or night.

We lost three: Pat Deasy, Ml. McCarthy and Jim Sullivan.

During the action the driver of the lorry which we had attacked, having failed to back his lorry out of the ambush position, appears to have taken cover under the lorry. While I sat on the roadside a party of our men

was ordered to collect the arms, ammunition and papers of the Auxies and pull the bodies clear of the lorries. While this was being done one of our men, Sonny Dave Crowley, shouted to the Column O/C that an Auxie was running away across country. He was the driver who had been hiding under the lorry and who had slipped out from cover while our men were engaged taking the stuff of the other Auxies. Some shots were fired at the fleeing Auxie, but he got away to the Dunmanway-Macroom road and was next sighted at a place called Droumcarra, where he arrived at nightfall. He was seen by a group of men who were unarmed, one of whom attacked the Auxie with a stick and took an ~~Auxie with a stick and took an~~ empty revolver from him. He was held and handed over to Neilus Kelliher, O/C Tarelton Company, 1st Cork Brigade. The Auxie was executed by the 1st Cork Brigade and his body buried in Andhala bog. The Auxie's name was Gutteridge. The body lay in the bog until after the Civil War, when enquiries were started by the Auxie's relatives. It would appear that the British government would not pay compensation until the body was found and identified. One of the men who knew the location of the body was given permission by the I.R.A. to disclose its whereabouts, and the body was exhumed and handed over to the relatives for burial. The man who located the body was named Peter (Peenie) Sweeney. The full facts of the Gutteridge case must be known to Dan Corkerry or Charlie Browne of Macroom who were 1st Brigade officers.

We had wiped out a strong party, captured 18 rifles, about 30 revolvers and a lot of ammunition. When the arms had been collected and the lorries burned, we moved across the Bandon river three miles to the east of Dunmanway. We reached Granure, Ballinacarriga, about

eight miles from the ambush position, where we rested in a vacant cottage for one night. We then moved to Ahiohill (Clonakilty Battalion) area. On the 8th December, 1920, we moved to Gaggin on the main Bandon-Clonakilty road. Our objective was one or two lorries of Tans or R.I.C. I was picked as a sniper and placed in cover to pick off the driver of the first lorry. To my surprise only one lorry came, and just as I was about to give it to the driver one of the column (Condon of Mountpleasant) accidentally fired his rifle. The driver of the lorry at once put on speed and, in doing so, swerved the lorry, throwing the crew on to the road. The R.I.C. immediately took cover and backed into a nearby quarry, engaging us with heavy fire. The driver drove off for Bandon to get reinforcements and darkness was setting in. The column was ordered to retire as the position was being surrounded from Bandon. We got clear away in the direction of Maryborough in the Kilbrittain Company area, where we rested for two days.

We then moved northwards, crossing the Bandon river at Murragh Bridge, and went to Callaghan's house in the Newestown Company area. Next night we were at Dromfeigh (Kenneigh Company area), from which we moved to O'Neill's in Shanaway Company area. While the column was at O'Neill's I got permission to visit my home at Ballineen. I stayed at home for half an hour and soon after I left the house the Tans raided, looking for "the fellow that was wounded at Kilmichael". I proceeded back to Shanaway and the column then moved in the direction of Kildoe, where we were disbanded for Christmas.

The column was reassembled at Clubhouse on the 1st January, 1921, under Tom Barry and Charlie Hurley. We

received arms from the Kilmeen Company dump. Our first operation was an attempted ambush at Mawbeg on the main Enniskeane-Bandon road. The British did not appear.

During the preparations for the Mawbeg attempt a spy named Dwyer was captured. He had left Bandon after giving information to the British and was proceeding home when he was met up with by some of our officers. Our officers were dressed in full field equipment and the spy mistook them for British officers and gave himself away. He was courtmartialled and shot. His body was left on the roadside at Tinkerscross and a lady named Carty was sent into Bandon to report the body while we went into position to ambush any party which might come out to pick up the body. After waiting in position without result we had moved about a mile when the British came out for the body.

Some nights later I was one of a party which sniped Bandon military barracks. The sniping was to keep the garrison on the jump at night so that we would wear them down. The night following I took part in an attack on Innishannon barracks which was abortive. The mine failed to explode and after some firing at the steel shutters we withdrew. We moved across the Bandon river at Kilmacsimon Quay and went to Ahiohill, where we rested for some nights.

On the 1st February, 1921, we left Ahiohill and marched towards Rosscarbery. It was intended that we would attack Rosscarberry R.I.C. barracks and, as we wanted to be fresh for the attack, it was decided that we should lie up in a British loyalist's house. We occupied Burgatia House, about a mile from Rosscarberry. at about two or three o'clock on the morning of the 2nd February,

1921. The house was a large country house surrounded by large fields. It was near the main Rosscarbery-Clonakilty road and behind the house was the Atlantic Ocean.

When we went into the house the occupants were placed under arrest. The owner, Tom Kingston, was due for courtmartial as a British agent and while we occupied the house he was tried and ordered to leave the country. His house was to be burned and his lands and stock confiscated.

We lay low in the house with sentries posted. During the morning the local postman arrived delivering letters. He was a British ex-service man. He was brought into the house and questioned and he swore on the Bible that if he were released he would not mention the presence of the column. He was released and allowed to proceed.

At 4 p.m. Black and Tans were seen approaching the house. Every man was told to stay hidden and hold his fire. The British opened fire as they advanced. We kept silent. When the British got near the house we got orders to open fire. We opened up together and the British, taken completely by surprise, turned and fled. Some of our men, who had been told off for the job, moved out from the house east and west to hold a gap for our main party, while the main party maintained a heavy fire on the retreating British. The main party then moved out, and taking one of Kingston's horses to carry a land mine we had with us we retired to Kilbree, about two miles from Clonakilty. As we retired we could hear the British continuing to fire at Burgatia House. The Column O/C and some others returned to Burgatia House that night and burned it.

On the 9th February the column moved on to the town of Skibbereen. The town was garrisoned by several companies of the King's Liverpool Regiment and about 80 Black and Tans. The Column O/C and twelve men entered Skibbereen and about forty of the column were placed in ambush outside the town. The Column O/C and his men shot up the town for two hours but the British would not come out and fight. Some soldiers were captured on their way back to barracks but were released next morning.

We next moved into Drimoleague to attack the barrack, but a mine which had been prepared failed to explode and after firing some shots at the barracks we withdrew. We moved through Kealkil-Ballingeary to Gouganebarra, where we rested. On the 17th February, 1921, we crossed the mountains to Togher Company area, then on to Mountpleasant (1st Battalion area) and on to Bandon area.

We were within two miles of Bandon on the afternoon of the 23rd February. We were armed with revolvers in addition to our rifles. There were about 45 in the column. We were broken into sections. A party under the Column O/C (Tom Barry) was to enter the town of Bandon from the north side and another party under Vice Comdt. Lordan to enter from the west. Lordan's party was again divided in two and they were to flush out [?] as they came into the town from the Dunmanway road and shoot any British forces that came in sight. The main party of the column under Tom Barry were entering the town from the north or Dublin road side, in the hope of trapping a patrol of the Essex Regiment which patrolled the town at curfew time (8.30 p.m.). Tom Barry entered the town to locate the patrol and he ran into some Tans. One of the

Tans was killed and one wounded. Hearing the shooting the column were following their O/C into the town when he gave them the order to retire. The parties who had entered the town from the Dunmanway road had shot two of the Essex at the Laurel Walk. They found the soldiers speaking to a girl named Janie Crane (now Mrs. Johnston), an ex W.A.A.C. They also captured two British Navy men who were attached to the Bandon garrison as wireless operators. The Navy men were released and handed a letter addressed by Tom Barry to the O/C of the Essex in Bandon warning him that in view of the fact that the Essex had murdered and tortured prisoners, he (Barry) had given orders that the Essex were to be shot at sight whether armed or unarmed.

Early in my statement I referred to the case of Alfred Cotter of Ballineen who was supplying the R.I.C. with bread. The case of Cotter had been continually before the battalion and there appeared to be evidence to connect him with spying. After the O/C, Tim Warren, and I went on the run Cotter continued his contacts with the R.I.C. The case was dealt with by the Brigade when they were cleaning up the British spy ring in West Cork in the early days of 1921. Alfred Cotter was executed on brigade orders on the 27th February, 1921.

After the Bandon attack we moved to Newcestown, where the column was disbanded to await further orders. The column reassembled at Kenneigh but I got ill and was sent away on a month's sick leave. When I returned from leave I joined the column at Drinagh and we went into ambush position at Cloundra on the Dunmanway-Drimoleague road. The British did not show up and the column was again disbanded. The column men from the 1st and 3rd Battalions

moved with Comdt. Seán Hales via Ballygurteen, Granure, Ballineen, Enniskeane, and finally we dumped our arms in the Kenneigh Company area. I moved off on my own and next morning I found I was inside a round-up being carried out by Tans and soldiers under Major Percival.

Major Percival was O/C of the Essex in Bandon and in order to try and defeat our columns he had adopted column tactics himself. His column usually consisted of from two to four hundred men. The officers travelled on horseback and the men on foot or cycles. Provisions were carried by lorry or on pack mules. On some occasions the men slept in tents and on other occasions they followed our lead and slept in houses and barns. The troops made sweeps across country and surrounded groups of houses during the night, closing in at daybreak. We were usually kept informed of all Percival's movements. When he left Bandon or Kinsale with a column our scouts kept reports going to our brigade headquarters.

I took cover in a bog, where I lay from 6 o'clock in the morning until darkness fell as the British combed the area. I moved that night to Kilmurray, where I contacted the local Company Captain. Things got quiet in our area and I was back with my battalion (3rd Dunmanway) when orders came from the brigade to form a column in each battalion area. We got a column together and commenced lying in ambush at different points in the battalion, keeping on the move all the time. The days were long and it was dangerous to start a fight too early in the day. If things went against us the British would have too much daylight before them for a follow up.

Although we lay in ambush on several occasions right up to the Truce we failed to contact the enemy.

Signed: Captain Jack Hennessy

(Captain Jack Hennessy)

Date: August 23 1955

August 23, 1955.

Witness: James J. O'Connor (James J. O'Connor)
(Investigator)

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