

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1295

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,295.....

Witness

Timothy Keohane,
Lackenalloha,
Clonakilty,
Co. Cork.

Identity:

Member of Column, Cork III Brigade;
Second Lieut. Timoleague Company.

Subject.

Timoleague Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2604.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

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| BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-21 | 1,295 |
| BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1013-21 | |
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STATEMENT BY TIMOTHY KEOHANE,

Lackenalloha, Clonakilty, County Cork.

I was born at Ballinroher, Timoleague, on March 17th 1896. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Timoleague National School until I reached the age of 14 years, when I left school to work in Tobin's cornmill in Timoleague.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Timoleague in the summer of 1917. The pioneers in the organisation of the unit were: Con Lehane, Jim Hodnett and Jack O'Driscoll. Other members at this time were: Dan Minihane, Michael Deasy, Con Sexton, Seán Sexton, Paddy Lehane, Wm. Foley, Pat Sexton, John Collins and Dan Keohane. Hugh Thornton - I think he was Adjutant Bandon Battalion - was present at the initial meeting. The first O/C of Timoleague was Con Lehane. He was appointed by Hugh Thornton. Jim Hodnett was also an officer of the unit. The strength of the company at this stage was about 20.

Timoleague Company was a unit of Bandon Battalion, Cork Brigade. Other companies in the battalion were: Bandon, Ballinadee, Kilbrittain, Barryroe, Clogagh. The officers of the battalion were, I think:

O/C - Tom Hales

Vice O/C - Charlie Hurley

Adjt.- Hugh Thornton

Q/M - Wm. Walsh.

The only type of training carried on was ordinary close order foot drill under our own officers. Parades

were held on Sunday afternoons and on two nights each week. The company (Timoleague) was slowly gaining in strength and by the end of 1917 or early 1918 had reached about 30.

There was a further increase when the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918. About this period several raids for arms were carried out in the area - all members of the company being engaged at one time or another. The company now had about a dozen shotguns, with a small supply of ammunition for same. All members who joined up during the conscription period continued to serve after the threat had passed.

After the conscription period there was no unusual activity. Normal parades and training sessions were held.

There was no activity in the area in connection with the general election in December, 1918, as the Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed.

The next occurrence of note was the formation of Cork 111 Brigade. This brigade covered the area of West Cork and was composed of the following battalions: Bandon, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Bantry, Skibbereen. The first officers of the brigade, as far as I can recollect, were:

O/C - Tom Hales

Vice O/C - I cannot recollect

Adjt.- Liam Deasy.

Q/M - Seán Lehane (I think).

There was not very much activity during 1919 beyond the normal training, which was now becoming more advanced. All members were having some target practice with .22 rifles, while selected men were being trained in scouting and signalling. Companies were then drilled in extended order, and there were occasional battalion mobilisations in which

all companies took part. All Volunteers were trained in the use of cover on the occasion of these parades.

There was a change in the officers of the Timoleague Company about this time, as the O/C (Con Lehane) was transferred to the Battalion Staff as Engineering Officer. He was replaced as O/C by Jack O'Driscoll. Jim Hodnett was still 1st Lt.

The attack on Timoleague R.I.C. barracks in February, 1920, was the first real indication to us that we were really soldiers. This was a battalion operation under Seán Hales, who had replaced his brother Tom (now Brigade O/C) as O/C Bandon Battalion. As far as I can recollect, the companies represented in this attack were: Timoleague, Barryroe, Kilbrittain and Clogagh. All members of the Timoleague Company were on duty. The attack was not a success, due to the failure of a mine, which had been laid at the door of the barrack, to explode. I was not a member of the attacking party but was engaged on outpost duty on the Timoleague-Courtmacsherry road about 300 yards from Timoleague. I was armed with a shotgun and was unaccompanied. The attack continued from about midnight until sometime after 4 a.m., when all sections were ordered to withdraw and I returned home.

In the early part of 1920 several raids for arms were carried out in the area, from which about 20 shotguns and 2 rifles were collected. All members of the unit took part.

When the evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Courtmacsherry was destroyed at Easter, 1920, I was engaged with several other members of the Timoleague Company on the work of demolition. The building was destroyed with crowbars and pickaxes. This operation was carried out under Seán Hales

(Battalion O/C), by members of Barryroe and Timoleague Companies.

During April and May, 1920, several ambushes were laid in the Timoleague area for R.I.C. patrols, but all were abortive as the enemy patrols did not turn up. Amongst those engaged in these activities were: Charlie Hurley (Battalion Vice O/C), Mick Crowley, — O'Neill (Kilbrittain) Jim Hodnett, Con Lehane, Jack O'Driscoll, Dan Minihane, Michael Deasy, Con Sexton, Wm. Foley, Tim Keohane (witness). All members of the local company were armed with shotguns, while the three first mentioned had rifles.

In August, 1920, Dan Minihane - a member of Timoleague Company - took part in an ambush of a party of British military at Brinny near Bandon. About the same time the company was represented in an attack on an enemy party (military) at Newcestown by Dan Minihane and Con Lehane. I did not take part in these engagements.

During October, 1920, I was engaged with other members of Timoleague Company on the construction of dumps (2) and dug-outs (2) in the district. The dumps were made by burying a waterproofed wooden box in the middle of double bank (stonefaced). The opening was so arranged that a large stone gate-post acted as a cover for the open end. It was thus possible to remove any signs of traffic when the dump was being used by dragging bushes through the passage at the gateway. The box which was buried in the fence was about 6" X 1½' X 2'. At this time, also, all members were engaged in the collection of a levy for the arms' fund for the I.R.A. This levy was based on the Poor Law Valuation of the holding or premises at a rate of 3d in the £. (MOT/200)

Early in November, 1920, at a parade of Timoleague Company the O/C asked for volunteers to join the Brigade Column. There were three volunteers - Pat Sexton, Dan Minihane and Tim Keohane (witness). Only one man was required and lots were drawn to see who would go. I was selected and was then told to await instructions. About November 20th 1920 I was instructed by my Company O/C to proceed to Kilmacsimon Quay - a few miles from Bandon in Ballindee area - where I was to report to the Column O/C (Tom Barry). At Kilmacsimon Quay I met Liam Deasy, Tom Barry and some other members of the column. We then moved to Crosspound and on to Castletown-Kinneigh, where we billeted in an empty farmhouse. During the following week we were engaged in training in the use of the rifle, drilling and field exercises at night. We remained under cover during the day. There were about 35 or 36 in the column at this time. On the evening of November 27th 1921 all members of the column went to Confession to a priest who visited the billets.

Early on the morning of November 28th 1921, the column was paraded by the O/C (Tom Barry), who told us that we were going to attack a convoy of Auxiliaries at Kilmichael on the Macroom-Dunmanway road. The site selected for the ambush was on a straight stretch between two right-angled turns about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Kilmichael. We reached this position about 7.30 a.m. and immediately set about building a protection wall of loose stones at the Macroom side (west) of a high rock just north of the road. A few stones were also placed on the fence at the eastern end of the straight within which the convoy was to be ambushed. All sections were then moved into their positions. I was with Pat Deasy on a high rock at the northern side of the road and within a short distance ^{about 150 yards} of the command post at the eastern

end where the O/C (Tom Barry) had 3 riflemen. Mick McCarthy (Vice O/C Dunmanway Battn.) was with a party of 4 just underneath our position on the rock and behind the wall of stones which had been erected as cover. There were also 5 or 6 others just to the west of our position and slightly to the rear. There was another section of about 10 men at the western end of the position and also north of the road, while about midway in the straight and south of the road was a section of five or six men. This latter section were behind some rocks about 50 yards from the road. The remainder of the column were north of the ambush position at the western end. It was about 8 a.m. when all sections took up their positions and we remained until about 4 p.m. without incident. In the meantime, we had been supplied with tea by some girls from a nearby house.

About 4 p.m. our scouts to the west reported the approach of an enemy convoy. Our orders were to allow the leading lorry to pass our position, to be dealt with by the party at the command post at the eastern end. The first lorry then drove past us and fire was opened on it by the section to the east at Tom Barry's post. We then opened fire on the second lorry, as did the other sections north of the road. The Auxiliaries, who survived the opening burst, jumped from the lorries and took what cover they could behind rocks at the north side. The enemy party in the leading lorry was disposed of in about five or six minutes, but the survivors from the second lorry continued to fight for about 20/30 minutes. At this stage Tom Barry blew a blast on his whistle as a signal that all men should get on to the road. At the same time he moved with his section along the road from the east to take the survivors

in the rear. Tom Barry then called on the enemy to surrender and some of them put up their hands, but when our party were moving on to the road the Auxiliaries again opened fire. Two of our men (John Lordan and Jack Hennessy, I think) were wounded by this fire. Pat Deasy had been wounded, while Jim Sullivan and Mick McCarthy (V/C Dunmanway Battn.) had been killed prior to this happening. The O/C (Tom Barry) immediately ordered an all-out attack, and after a few sharp bursts the enemy forces were silenced. We then found that everybody on the road had been killed. The surviving members of the column then collected all enemy arms and ammunition. The enemy lorries were set on fire. I cannot recollect how many rifles we captured but all members of the enemy party had revolvers (Webley). I should have mentioned that Mick McCarthy (V/C Dunmanway Battn.) was in charge of the section with which I operated in this action. I was armed with a shotgun, as were about five or six other members of the column. This was due to the fact that a number of rifles which were being sent from the western end of the brigade did not reach the column before the operation.

When all was over, the column were assembled by the O/C (Tom Barry), who, in a short address, congratulated us on the fight and expressed regret at the death of our brave comrades. A horse and car was then procured from a neighbouring farmhouse, on which our dead and wounded were removed. We then moved across country to Granure, where we remained in billets for a few days.

The column next moved to Ahiohill, where we were in billets when Charlie Hurley (now Brigade O/C, having replaced Tom Hales who was arrested in July, 1920) took us into

positions at Gaggin on December 8th 1920. A number of men from the Bantry area, who had been late for Kilmichael, had now joined the column. They were armed with some of the rifles captured at Kilmichael. All members of the column were now armed with rifles. At Gaggin the column was divided into two sections and took up position on high ground about 20 yards south of the Bandon-Clonakilty road. An enemy convoy of one lorry was expected, but just as the lorry entered the position a rifle shot was accidentally discharged by one of our men and the enemy dashed through before effective fire could be brought to bear on it. Several shots were fired at the lorry as it dashed away. The lorry, however, stopped some distance from where we had been in position and the occupants took to the fields. The lorry went on to Bandon, which was about 3 miles away. When the column was withdrawing from the ambush position it was attacked by the party (enemy) who had entered the fields, but our return fire forced them to withdraw. During the attack a member of the column (Michael McLean, Skull Coy.) was killed. He had been guarding the members of a household on the opposite side of the road and when the column was withdrawing he was shot while crossing the road to join the main body.

After Gaggin the column withdrew to Kilbrittain area and later moved to Ahiohill, where it was disbanded just prior to Christmas, 1920. I then returned to Timoleague Company area.

My brother, who was running the farm at home, was arrested in a round-up early in 1921. I was then forced to attend to some of the farm work as well as to take on my share of the activities of the company area on the work of

cutting enemy lines of communication. My mother was also seriously ill about this time and died in February, 1921. About this time I was appointed 2nd Lt. Timoleague Coy.

Owing to the large enemy forces operating in the area, the column was now disbanded for a short time. It was reassembled early in March, 1921, when I took my place with the other members. As far as I can recollect, I rejoined the column in the Newcestown area. We then moved around the district until the night of March 16th, 1921, when we were in the vicinity of Innishannon. On the morning of March 17th we took up a position at Shippool on the Bandon-Kinsale road. The strength of the column was now about 100. We were in position behind a wall north of the road and were extended over about 400 yards. It was then about 9 a.m. Although we remained in position until darkness was approaching, there was no appearance by the enemy. All sections then withdrew to billets in the area (Shippool).

We moved across the main Cork-Bandon road on the night of March 18th, 1921, and went into billets in Crossbarry area. We were only a short time in billets when reports were received that large enemy forces were raiding throughout the district. The column was then alerted and divided into a number of sections. The O/C (Tom Barry) then addressed the assembled column, informing us that large enemy forces were endeavouring to surround us. He instructed each man to fight to the bitter end. The sections were then allocated to various positions - all north of the old Cork - Bandon road. It was now about 6 a.m. I was with a section who took up a position in the yard of Harold's (I think) farmhouse. There were about 14 men in the section and all were armed with rifles. I do not

recollect the name of the O/C of my section, which was at the eastern end of the centre of the ambush position.

About 8 a.m. a convoy of enemy lorries, with a small number of men in each, drove into the ambush position. The main body were apparently raiding in the area. When two or three lorries had passed by the section with which I was operating, the convoy halted as one of the soldiers had apparently seen some member of the ambush party. As the lorries halted the enemy began to detruck and fire was immediately opened on the enemy party in sight. At the same time, Flor Begley - a member of the Brigade Staff - began playing tunes on the bagpipes. He was in a field at the rear of the farmyard behind our section. Firing continued for about 20/30 minutes, when the enemy party were silenced. With the members of my own section and those of the other sections in the centre of the position, I moved on to the roadway where we collected the arms and ammunition of the enemy's dead and wounded, including a Lewis gun and a supply of ammunition. The enemy lorries were then set on fire.

At this stage the enemy raiding parties in the area were attacking our covering and flanking parties. The sections in the centre, who had completed their job, were then withdrawn and some of the flanking parties were called in. Reinforcements were sent to strengthen points at which the enemy appeared to be strongest. Fighting went on for some time at positions to the rear and on the eastern flank, but eventually the enemy forces were forced to withdraw. After about 2 hours the column was again assembled to the rear of Beasley's farmyard. Flanking and covering parties were arranged and we then withdrew in a northerly direction

for about 600 yards, where we made contact with a further enemy force which we compelled to withdraw. After this the column moved across country to Kilmichael parish, where we billeted. We remained in the area until the night of Monday (21st March, 1921), when we travelled to Clogagh for the burial of Charlie Hurley (Brigade O/C). He had been killed on the morning of Crossbarry (19th March) when trying to break through a ring of enemy forces who surrounded his billet. The column were not aware of his death until the night of March 20th, 1921. Military honours were rendered at Charlie's funeral about 2 a.m. on the morning of March 22nd, and the column then withdrew to billets in, I think, Ahiohill area.

Some days later, it may have been in early April, the whole column moved into an ambush position on the Drimoleague-Dunmanway road, but there was no appearance by the enemy and we were withdrawn to billets after being in position from early morning until dark. Liam Deasy and Seán Lehane were in charge on this occasion.

The column continued to move round the area during April without making contact with the enemy. Early in May (I think) we moved to the west of Bantry, where we took up positions on the Kenmare-Bantry road, but there was no action as the expected enemy convoy did not travel. We then moved to Rossmore area, where, after a few days in billets, the column was disbanded.

I then returned to Timoleague area, where I continued to operate on the local activities of scouting, blocking roads, carrying dispatches, etc. as required until I was arrested in a round-up by enemy military forces in Timoleague district. It was then early in June, 1921. I was removed

to Clonakilty Barracks, tried for giving a false name and sentenced to six months with hard labour. I was then removed to Military Detention Barracks, Cork, Cork Prison and, later, Spike Island Prison Compound. On completion of my sentence I was transferred to Spike Island Internment Camp and finally to Maryborough Prison, from where I was released on December 8th 1921.

My rank at the Truce - 2nd Lt., Timoleague Coy., Bandon Battn., Cork 111 Brigade. The strength of the company was about 60.

Signed: Tim Keohane
(Tim Keohane)
Date: 28th November 1955
28th November 1955.

Witness: P. O'Donnell (P. O'Donnell)
(Investigator)

At the end of page 4 I stated that the Arms Fund Levy was computed on the basis of the Ordnance Valuation but on reconsideration I am of opinion that, as far as the farmers were concerned, it was based on the number of stock carried on the holding.

Tim Keohane

