

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,527

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1527.

Witness

Liam O'Dwyer,
Ardgroom,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

C/C Castletownbere Battalion,
Cork 111 Bgde., I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Castletownbere Battn.,
Co. Cork, 1915 - 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2822.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILÉTAIR 1913-21
No. W.S. 1527

STATEMENT BY LIAM O'DWYER,

Ardgroom, County Cork.

I was born at Cailroe, Ardgroom, on 9th January, 1896. I was educated at Ardgroom National School.

My family were always active in National affairs. All my uncles were members of the Land League. My uncle ^{Liam} ~~James~~, who was principal teacher in Eyries National School, was chief organiser of the Land League for the area. As a result of his activities he was forced to relinquish his post as principal teacher. He died 'on the run' at the early age of 27 years. He was a Professor of French and Irish. He wrote several books in both languages, which were never published. He was, I would say, the man whose activities were my greatest inspiration to take part in the Fight for Freedom.

The Irish Volunteers were started in ^{Eyries} ~~Ardgroom~~ area in November 1915. I was working in Bandon at the time, but when I returned home at Christmas 1915 I did not go back. I joined the local unit and became active in all its operations. The officers of the Company were :- O/C. John O'Driscoll; 1st Lieutenant Dan Harrington (Causkey) 2nd Lieutenant Robert O'Dwyer (brother). James McCarthy, the President of Sinn Féin, was considered to be O/C. of the district.

The unit was seldom together as a Company. It was divided into four sections - Urhan, Inches, Eyries and Ballycroovane. Each section with an average strength of 35/40 - trained separately. The whole Company only came together for public parades.

The only type of training carried on was close order foot-drill under our own officers, and the only arms held by the unit were three revolvers, which were the property of the officers. This was the position at February, 1916.

The first public parade of the full Company, which I can recall, took place to Castletownbere on St. Patrick's Day, 1916. Our appearance in the town was not very popular with a section of the public there as they were under British Naval and Military influence.

Beyond the normal section parades, which were held twice weekly, there was no further activity until Easter Week 1916.

The full Company mobilised after First Mass at Eyries on Easter Sunday 1916. The main body were not aware of the purpose of the mobilisation until just prior to the order "Fall In". At this stage there were 102 men present exclusive of officers. The purpose of the parade was explained to those present by the officers who moved around amongst the assembled Company. The men were informed that they were likely to be "out" for a week and were given the option of going back home if they wished. The order to "Fall In" was then given and ninety-two numbered off. In addition four men, who were under orders to proceed to Kenmare, did not number off. The strength for the parade was thus 99 including the officers.

The Company now marched to Ardgroon. The four men with bicycles, who were under instructions to go to Kenmare, were ordered to follow on. The Company halted at Ardgroon and the four cyclists (Ned O'Connell, Dan Hanly, Joe Foley, Liam O'Dwyer -witness) were instructed to proceed to Kenmare to make contact with a special courier. As we (the cyclists) left for Kenmare the Company began its march to Lauragh, County Kerry.

When we reached Kenmare about 2 p.m. we endeavoured to make contact with the courier. After some enquiries from friends we learned that things had gone wrong. We then returned about nightfall.

to meet the other members of the Company at Lauragh and to report to our officers. We found the Company sheltering from heavy rain in Lauragh Church. The officers, having heard our report, decided to dismiss the Company - instructing all men to return quietly to their homes. As far as I can recollect there were no arrests following Easter Week.

When the news of the Rising in Dublin came to hand the officers of the Company were "not at home". The Company was 'standing by' during Easter Week, but no orders were received.

Immediately following Easter Week there was an intense organising campaign in the area. Each section was organised to Company strength. I was Adjutant, Ballycrovane Company from its formation. There were now four Companies in the area. About this time I organised a Company in Lauragh, County Kerry. This Company was attached to our area (Castletownbere) until December 1917 when, on the formation of the Kenmare Battalion, Kerry Brigade, it was transferred to that Battalion.

A Company of Irish Volunteers was formed in Adrigole in February 1917. Following the formation of this unit a Battalion organisation was set up in Castletownbere area. The first officers were :- O/C. James McCarthy, Vice O/C. Seán Driscoll, Adjutant - no recollection, Quartermaster Peter Neill.

On the formation of the Battalion I was attached to the staff in an organising capacity. I toured the area during the summer of 1917 and organised ^{KILCATHERINE AS} a section in Ballycrovane Company, and a Company in Ardroom. About the same time a Company was organised in Castletownbere by Charlie Hurley - later to become O/C., Cork III. Brigade. The Battalion (Castletownbere) was now composed of the following Companies :- Eyries, Adrigole, Urhan, Inches, Ballycrovane, Ardroom, Castletownbere, Bere Island. There was no change in the officers of the Battalion.

Beyond normal training in close order foot-drill and organising, things were generally very quiet in the area. The officers felt that, unless somebody somewhere struck a fresh blow at the enemy, the outlook of the Volunteers and the general public would revert to constitutional methods. It was felt that there was a possibility of obtaining some arms through a raid on Eyries R.I.C. barracks. In order to facilitate this operation it was decided to organise a parade of Irish Volunteers to Castletownbere.

On St. Patrick's Day, 1918, the four Companies in the parish - Eyries, Urhan, Inches, Ballycrovane - were mobilised for a parade to Castletownbere. They marched into Castletownbere and on the return journey I was placed in charge of the parade by Seán Driscoll. He instructed me to dismiss the parade when I reached a point about two miles from the town. While this return journey was being made the R.I.C. Barracks at Eyries was raided and five rifles (carbines) were seized. The parade to Castletownbere was organised in order to induce some of the R.I.C. garrison at Eyries to leave their post. This was the first raid on a garrison post since Easter 1916.

The threat of the British to impose Conscription had no bearing on the activities in the area beyond intensifying slightly the interest in the activities already in being. All arms - mainly shotguns - were collected, while all Volunteers took part in the organisation of the general public into an organised body to resist Conscription. At this period two additional units were organised in the area at Allihies and Garnish. The establishment of these units completed the organisation of the area. I should mention that units of Cumann na mBan were formed in each Company area during the spring of 1918.

A meeting of the Battalion Council for Castletownbere Battalion was held on 1st May, 1918 at which the following officers were

elected to the Battalion staff :- O/C. Charlie Hurley, Vice O/C. Seán Driscoll, Adjutant Mick Crowley, Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.

Towards the end of April, 1918, the rifles seized in the raid on Eyries R.I.C. barracks were used to arm a party of Volunteers drawn from Eyries, Inches, Ballycrovane and Urhan, which lay in ambush at Bealnalappa on the Castletownbere-Eyries road for a night patrol of R.I.C. The party, which numbered about twenty, were armed with five rifles, a dozen shotguns and three revolvers. About twenty others were engaged on scouting and roadblocking. All sections took up positions about 11 p.m. but, although we remained in position until dawn, there was no appearance by the patrol.

I was one of a party of six which lay in ambush for a patrol of R.I.C. at Swanton's Lane, Castletownbere, for several hours one night early in May 1918. We were armed with rifles and revolvers, but the patrol did not turn up. Some members of the party were :- Murt McCarthy, Jerry Sullivan, Edmond Harrington, Chris. O'Connell, Liam O'Dwyer (witness).

On 5th June, 1918 the men of Bere Island Company seized about 30-cwt. of gun-cotton, primers and detonators at a British Military store on the Island. This material was taken across the bay by small boat and dumped in Adrigole area. It was later used in the manufacture of mines and bombs throughout Cork III. Brigade area.

The Battalion O/C. (Charlie Hurley) was arrested on, I think, a charge of illegal drilling on 26th July, 1918. Seán Driscoll was now acting Battalion O/C., but at a Battalion Council meeting on 23rd August the following were elected to the Battalion Staff :- O/C. Mick Crowley, Vice O/C. Seán Driscoll, Adjutant John Sullivan and Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.

Charlie Hurley, who had been 'on the run' prior to his appointment as Battalion O/C on 1st May, did not return to the area after his release from prison.

The R.I.C. at Eyries attempted to arrest Con Dwyer - a member of the local Company - early in August 1920. They were prevented from carrying out the arrest by Con O'Neill, Chris. O'Connell, Peter Harrington and Michael Foley. The obstruction of the police in the discharge of their duty led to the installation of a party of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in a private house in Eyries. Within some days of their arrival Seán Driscoll, Peter Harrington, Michael Foley and Chris. O'Connell were arrested and removed to Cork. Seán Driscoll was charged with illegal drilling while the others were charged with obstructing the R.I.C. All were sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

Arising out of these incidents a state of Martial Law prevailed in the area. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Unit in the village established a sandbagged post at Eyries Cross. The rations and supplies for the Military outpost were sent from Castletownbere by military convoy once a week. The convoy usually consisted of a mule drawn cart with infantry escort. The rearguard of this escort was attacked by four Volunteers from Inches Company at Bealnalappa one day towards the end of September 1918. One rifle was captured. I did not take part in this operation, nor can I recollect the names of the men who did.

The next clash with enemy forces took place in the early days of October 1918 when a patrol of two R.I.C. men was fired on near Eyries by two men of the local unit. One R.I.C. man was wounded, but both members of the patrol escaped back to their barracks. This incident led to the proclamation of Martial Law in Cork West Riding on 4th October, 1918.

About mid October another attempt was made to capture the convoy and escort conveying the supplies to Eyries outpost. At this time it was customary for this convoy to travel at night. Approximately forty men drawn from Inches, Eyries and Ardgroom Companies were mobilised at Pallincha bridge. They were divided into five sections and took up positions behind the roadside fence about 11 p.m. We remained in position until daylight but the convoy did not travel. On this occasion we were armed with six rifles, several shotguns and a good supply of ammunition, which had been received from Bere Island Company.

There was no activity in the area in connection with the General Election in December 1918, as the Sinn Féin candidate was unopposed.

The Irish Volunteer organisation in Cork County now consisted of about twenty Battalions organised into Cork Brigade. This system of organisation was now considered unwieldy and it was decided to divide the area into three Brigades. The areas to be controlled by the new Brigades were :- Cork City, East and Mid Cork (Cork I. Brigade); North Cork (Cork II. Brigade); West Cork (Cork III. Brigade). Our Battalion (Castletownbere) now became a unit of Cork III. Brigade. The other Battalions in this Brigade were :- Bandon, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Bantry and Skibbereen. This reorganisation took place in January 1919. The officers of the Brigade in August 1919 were :- O/C. Tom Hales; Vice O/C. Hugh Thornton (I think); Adjutant, Liam Deasy and Quartermaster Pat Harte.

The Companies in the Eyries-Ardgroom area were still active, seeking engagements with enemy patrols. On St. Patrick's night, 1919, three or four members of Eyries Company lay in ambush for a patrol of R.I.C. at Drohadeenagath near Eyries village, but there was no appearance by the enemy. ~~During April and May 1919 I lay in ambush~~

~~was held~~

~~There was no patrol of R.I.C. at Droghadeenagh near Eyries village, but~~
~~there was no appearance by the enemy.~~ During April and May 1919
 at
 I lay in ambush with five others - all armed with rifles -/Boffikil
 Gap on the Eyries-Ardgroom road on five successive Sundays awaiting
 two R.I.C. men but they did not turn up.

A change in the personnel of the Battalion Staff took place on
 10th April, 1919, when I was appointed Adjutant. The officers of
 Castletownbere Battalion now were :- O/C. Mick Crowley; Vice O/C.
 Seán Driscoll; Adjutant, Liam O'Dwyer (witness); Quartermaster,
 Dan Sullivan.

Beyond normal training there was no other activity locally during
 the remainder of 1919. In August I attended a Brigade Training
 Camp which was set up at Glandore. The officer in charge of the
 camp was Dick McKee (O/C., Dublin Brigade). Another Dublin officer
 present was Leo Henderson. At this camp, which was attended by
 representatives from all Battalions in the Brigade, we underwent an
 intensive course of training in arms drill, tactics and all aspects
 of military affairs. The only other representative from Castletownber
 Battalion at this Camp was Denis Sullivan - later to become Battalion
 Lieutenant of Signalling.

On my return from the Camp at Glandore I undertook the training
 of the various Companies throughout the Battalion. I was engaged
 wholtime on this job until I was arrested at Bantry in November,
 1919 on my way from Cork. A dispatch was found hidden in the inner
 band of my hat and I was removed to Cork gaol where I was detained
 until the end of February, 1920. While in Cork gaol I took part in
 a three day hungerstrike for political treatment which was granted.
 John Sullivan was now re-appointed Battalion Adjutant.

While I was in Cork gaol, Allihies R.I.C. barracks was attacked by men drawn from several Companies in the Battalion, on 12th February, 1920. The back wall of the barracks was demolished by a charge of guncotton. The garrison refused to surrender. The approach of daylight compelled the attacking party to withdraw. The barracks was evacuated next day.

Within a week of my return home from Cork gaol at the end of February, 1920, I was re-arrested, taken to Cork and transferred to Wormwood Scrubbs. While imprisoned here, with a large number of other I.R.A. prisoners, ⁽⁹²⁾ I took part in another hunger strike. I was released under a General Amnesty towards the end of May, 1920.

Shortly after my return home Christy O'Connell (O/C. Eyries Company) and I discussed the possibility of a repetition of history resulting from the stagnation of I.R.A. activity throughout the country. We feared the danger that the movement would fizzle out. Here and there one heard the suggestion that the ex-prisoners should be helped back into "useful occupation". The British boasted a return to peaceful conditions and more contentment amongst "His Majesty's subjects". The whole atmosphere was depressing and called for a burst-up, and we decided to start the burst-up on our own.

We had five carbine rifles, taken at Eyries R.I.C. barracks' raid in 1918, with four or five cartridges for each; one Lee Enfield Service rifle, taken when a convoy rearguard was disarmed at Bealnalappa at the end of September, 1918, during the Martial Law period; three or four revolvers with some three or four cartridges a piece. With these and some shotguns we felt confident we could do something. The coastguard stations at Ballycrovane and Castletownbere had recently been supplied with arms and we decided that we should try to capture the Ballycrovane Station, and get

Castletownbere Company to attack the station there. This Company, we knew, had some revolvers and a couple of rifles and they could augment these with shotguns. We started immediately to organise the raids.

Our first concern was Intelligence. With the help of some members of Eyries Cumann na mBan, who feigned friendship with a station^{OFFICERS}master's wife, we got a fairly accurate description of the defence arrangements inside the Ballycrovane station. We took it for granted that the same pattern of defence was followed at Castletownbere: In the Ballycrovane Station there were twelve men, mostly marines, including two officers, armed with rifles and revolvers with a big supply of ammunition. The upper windows were sandbagged and only the upper floors of the four houses in the station were prepared specially for defence - to cover the yard walls and the surrounding fields. We saw from this that our strategy should be to get into the ground floors by surprise and fight from there. We could never scale the yard walls under fire. In case we failed to force a surrender from there by any other means, we could get access to the paraffin supply and burn the station. We laid our plans in accordance.

Our storming party should include four sledge-men with heavy sledges to burst in the doors. We should have a "mule section" in hiding a short distance from the station to carry away the arms, and a signal section extended along the heights between Eyries and Castletownbere. We should have the telephone wires cut immediately before alarming the station. We should wear disguise, as there would be several men who could thereby avoid suspicion and not to have to go 'on the run' immediately. Finally, every member should be sworn to secrecy and told the price of a lapse.

We, Chris. O'Connell and I, now made several trips to Castletownbere by night to get the Company there organised to handle the

Castletownbere station. We gave them what information we had about station defence and gave them the plan of attack we thought best to follow. When we were satisfied that the organisation was completed in both areas we set the date and time for both raids at 12 o'clock, noon, on Sunday, 25th July, 1920.

On the morning of 25th July, our party assembled in a field near Eyries. The signal men were sent out and the "mule men" were told to slip into position after the raid had begun. Our arms and ammunition comprised, roughly, one Lee Enfield rifle and five carbine rifles with four or five rounds for each, three or four revolvers with four or five rounds apiece, about six shotguns with two cartridges for some, one for the rest and four heavy sledges. As the hour approached the men were given a "good-as-possible" idea of the general pattern of the attack. I was to handle the officers' quarters with one squad. Christy O'Connell was in charge of all the rest to handle the other buildings. The officers' quarters housed Chief Officer Snowden, Second Officer Brown and Mrs. Brown. My squad consisted of two shotgun men - one with two cartridges, the other with one - and one sledge man. I had a Colt revolver and five cartridges with the cylinder so arranged that the trigger would start on the first cartridge beyond the blank.

All ready - at 12 o'clock, as the bell for last Mass was tolling - we streamed away along a pre-selected route, which took us to the edge of the sea about 400 yards from the station, then along the strand; until we got within about fifty yards of the wall of the station yard. Here we had to climb a goat-path up a high bank, which had been worn by the sea to a sixty feet height, almost sheer, facing. During this climb the atmosphere was tense, as we were thinking that Coastguard Sweeney's white terrier - "Beauts" - would hear the loose stones

falling to the strand and bark the alarm. The top of this climb landed us under cover of a fence leading to the north-western corner of the yard wall. Along this fence on all fours, up along the western wall and east along the southern one. Every man knew his job - get over the wall together and race for the doors - once inside there was no retreat.

The men were just in position to scale the wall when the terrier tore the still air of that beautiful summer morning. No time to spare now; but the surprise was sufficient, for the boys had climbed and pushed one another over the five-foot wall and were clear of it before the Marines had grabbed their guns. I held my squad outside the western wall, facing the officers' quarters, till the men along the southern wall were clear of it. I could see the officers grabbing guns and cartridge belts. At this point one of my shotgun men covered an officer from the wall and pulled the trigger on the only cartridge he had but there was no report. In no time our sledge man had the kitchen door driven in, as part of a chorus of sledge blows all along the station, and we were in the kitchen with a screaming Mrs. Brown. Second Officer Brown rushed in from the day room. I shouted "Hands Up!" Mrs. Brown rushed between us pleading with him not to fire. He ignored everything but "duty". As his revolver was coming to firing position I fired at his arm from his wife's shoulder. The revolver dropped to the floor and as he was either falling after it or stooping to pick it up with the left hand, I noticed Chief Officer Snowden passing outside the day-room windows to get us from the rear. I left my good shotgun man in charge of the situation in the kitchen and rushed out to intercept Snowden in the yard. I fired left-handed round the corner and he (Snowden) doubled back into the day-room. I followed as far as the centre pillar between the two large bay windows of the day-room. Here a shot

crashed the glass in front of me. As I stooped to fight from the cover of the pillar I heard a shot in the kitchen and Brown rushed from there into the day-room. There was a lot of ordering by Snowen as he fired to right and left of the pillar. Kill now or get killed, thought I as I chanced a quick peep to the right to get their position inside the pillar - Brown at the right standing and Snowen crouched close to him re-loading. A bullet followed my head as I ducked back and fired without looking. There was a thud and a groan. Then a shot to the right and a shot to the left as Snowen was back in action after re-loading. Hitherto all the firing was low, so I straightened up somewhat and chanced a sudden peep part way up the window. I ducked downwards and when his (Snowen's) shot had come through where he had seen part of my head, I fired from a lower position without looking. Another heavy thud inside - and a sudden feeling of relief outside. I peeped again - a little longer this time, for the two officers were dead on the floor. I had one round left.

I rushed to the kitchen to enquire about the shot I had heard ~~then~~. I found that my shotgun man had fired at the ceiling as Brown was getting up with the revolver in his left hand. This was what had frightened Brown back into the day-room. The ceiling rendering was scattered all over the room and Mrs. Brown's hair was a mess. I got out of the kitchen to see how things were elsewhere. The Marines were blazing away at the yard walls and anything that appeared to be moving in the fields. I could hear Christy shouting - "Come down with your hands up or we'll burn the station from this floor" or words of the same meaning. I contacted him to tell him that the officers were dead and to tell the Marines. This he did but to no avail until we dragged the bodies out into the yard to convince them that their officers were really dead. The white flags came out of the upper windows and we thought the fight was over. When we went to take the

surrender, however, one man in the house at the eastern end held out and Christy had literally to shoot him out. After a liberal spray of bullets from Christy's rifle he found his position untenable and surrendered.

The fight was over now and we felt impressed by the success of our planning and fighting, but we couldn't allow the tension of hurry to slacken as we had to shift a lot of spoils to a place of safety before His Majesty's troops came swarming in.

We searched the place well and found nineteen Ross-Canadian rifles and 7,000 rounds of .303 ammunition, six short Webley revolvers with about 50 rounds, about two dozen double bandoliers and clips, two Sam Brown belts and holsters, some cartridge belts and web bandoliers, verey pistols and rockets and a large Marine telescope.

We carried our spoils away to the east, flanked on one side by the sea and on the other by a few riflemen with a good supply of ammunition. After we had hidden the heavy load of ammunition and sent the rifles in different directions we learned that an unfortunate mishap had turned the raid at Castletownbere from apparent success into failure at the last minute.

In connection with the Ballycrovane Station raid, it was remarkable that as we left the station a thick fog settled into the area of our retreat and someone remarked "God helps those who help themselves".

The men who took part in this operation were drawn from Eyries, Inches, Ballycrovane, Ardgroon and Kilcatherine units.

Some time after this operation we were made aware that the formation of a Brigade Column was under consideration. I had at this time - August, 1920 - been appointed Battalion Vice O/C. When the

formation of the Column was mooted our Battalion was asked to send the rifles captured in the Ballycrovane raid to Brigade Headquarters. We refused to do so, at first, as we had been planning other engagements now that we had an armament of twenty-five rifles, about a dozen revolvers and 700 rounds of .303 ammunition in the Battalion.

The training of the nucleus of a Brigade Column was begun at a camp in ^{BANTRY} ~~Bandon~~ Battalion area towards the end of September, 1920. The training was carried out under Tom Barry, who had been appointed Brigade Training Officer and who became O/C. of the Column on its formation.

Early in November our Battalion (Castletownbere) was asked to send in to the Column a section of our best trained men, fully armed. Fourteen men drawn from the Battalion were selected, They were armed with rifles and double bandoliers of ammunition and set out for the Column about the third week in November, 1920. Some members of this party were - Liam O'Dwyer (witness), Christy O'Connell, Murt McCarthy, Tim O'Dwyer, Jim Sullivan, "Quinlan" Sullivan, Jeremiah McAuliffe. *MICHAEL O' SULLIVAN, JACK SULLIVAN (SHAMROCK), JIM SULLIVAN.* When we reached the assembly point notified to us - Togher near Dunmanway - we failed to make contact with the man who was to meet us or with the other members of the Column. We remained in this area making discreet enquiries but failed to find our contact man or anybody of the name in the area. We then decided that there must have been an error in the dispatch notifying us to travel and we returned to Baurlin in Bantry Battalion area where we remained for some time making fruitless enquiries. We then returned home.

The Brigade Column was disbanded prior to Christmas 1920. When the Column was called up again in mid January, 1921, Christy O'Connell and five others left the area to report to the Column. I was prevented from travelling on this occasion by an order from Brigade

Headquarters ordering Battalion Officers to remain in their own areas to keep the local organisation going and make trained men available for the Column. The party travelling to the Column, on this occasion, took with them 50% of the rifles in the Battalion with a double supply of ammunition. Within about a week Christy O'Connell returned with orders to collect the rest of the rifles in the Battalion and some more men. On the night following his return to the area the two of us (Christy and I) went into Castletownbere to seek an engagement with the enemy. We were armed with rifles and revolvers. We took up positions in the town, but the expected patrol travelled in such a formation that my position was between the patrol and the barracks; and Christy, although in a position to attack, was afraid to do so in case I would be cut off. We withdrew without taking any action.

On our way home that night it was decided that I would take six men into Castletownbere next night to seek an engagement with the enemy patrol. Christy O'Connell was to leave that evening for the Column. About 8 p.m. I moved along the main road towards Castletownbere with six riflemen as arranged. We were to be met in the vicinity of the town by a member of the Castletownbere Company who was to act as scout. The scout was not at the appointed spot, but we learned from a girl we met on the road that the town was surrounded "for the past hour" and that the military were apparently expecting an attack. We withdrew a short distance by the same route as that by which we had approached the town and then took to the fields. We soon discovered that enemy troops were lying in ambush some short distance from the road awaiting action by our party. Apparently they did not expect us to approach the town via the main road and we were outside their encircling line before they discovered our presence. When they discovered that we had passed through they pursued us for a distance of approximately a mile while we withheld our fire and withdrew to our home area. With the exception of the six rifles held by this party all others had been taken by Christy O'Connell and his party to the Brigade Column.

Towards the end of February or early March, 1921, Christy O'Connell again returned to the area and took away the balance of the rifles in the Battalion with the exception of two (in poor repair) which we retained for training purposes. This was prior to the engagement at Crossbarry.

The number of men from our Battalion (Castletownbere) who served on the Brigade Column was approximately sixteen at a time. With the exception of four or five, who served full time, new men were sent to the Column on each call up. The policy of sending such a big percentage of new men each time was adopted in order to ensure that as many men as possible would be trained under Active Service conditions. It was not, however, approved by the Column O/C, who was regularly seeking the recall of experienced men. As far as I can recollect I got a dispatch from Brigade Headquarters advising me to this effect, but when I submitted the explanation of my action it was apparently accepted, and I continued to send a number of new men on each occasion.

When the Divisional Order to shoot-up enemy forces on sight, as a reprisal for the execution of I.R.A. prisoners in Cork gaol, was issued in May, 1921, the majority of the Column men were back in the area. They were armed with some of the Battalion's rifles. Positions were occupied by a section on a commanding site in the vicinity of the town while six of us were ready to move into attack any enemy forces to be seen. We sent in two scouts to examine the position and on their return they reported that the town was clear. As there were no R.I.C. or military to be seen anywhere we withdrew without taking any action. The covering section in position to the left of the Castletownbere-Eyries road did some long range sniping as we withdrew. The date was 14th May, 1921.

While we had been endeavouring to contact the enemy forces in the town the men in Rosmacowen area ambushed a patrol of military at Furious Pier. They killed three and wounded two members of the patrol.

Following these incidents the British Military burned my home and that of Jeremiah O'Connor in Ardgroom district on 25th May, 1921. On the following day they burned the homes of Miceál Óg O'Sullivan and Tim Spillane in Rosmacowen area. These burnings were apparently carried out as reprisals for the attacks on their forces.

Between the end of May, 1921 and the Truce on 11th July, 1921, the men back from the Column were touring the area, as a Battalion Column, seeking engagements, but failing to make contact. The Column men, as well as the members of the local units, were engaged on sniping enemy posts throughout the area at irregular intervals.

Just prior to the Truce arrangements were made to divide Cork III. Brigade into two Brigades. Although the Brigade (Cork III.) was divided prior to the Truce I don't think the plan actually came into operation until immediately after the Truce. The Battalions at the western end of the area - Bantry, Castletownbere, Schull, Skibbereen and a newly organised Battalion in Drimoleague district - were formed into a new Brigade - Cork V. Some members of the staff of my Battalion (Castletownbere) were transferred to the staff of the new Brigade and the officers of the Battalion now were :-

O/C. Liam O'Dwyer (witness)

Vice O/C. Christy O'Connell

Adjutant Mark Sullivan

Quartermaster.... Dan Sullivan.

The officer changes in Castletownbere Battalion from its formation to the Truce were, as far as I can recollect :-

February 1917	O/C. James McCarthy Vice O/C. Sean Driscoll Adjutant-Cannot recollect. Quartermaster Peter O'Neill.
1st May 1918	O/C. Charlie Hurley Vice O/C. Sean Driscoll Adjutant Mick Crowley Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.
23rd August, 1918	O/C. Mick Crowley Vice O/C. Sean Driscoll Adjutant John Sullivan Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.
10th April 1919	O/C. Mick Crowley Vice O/C. Sean Driscoll Adjutant Liam O'Dwyer (witness) arrested Nov. 1919. Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.
November 1919	O/C. Mick Crowley Vice O/C. Sean Driscoll Adjutant John Sullivan Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.
February 1920	O/C. Peter Neill Vice O/C. William Neill Adjutant John Sullivan Quartermaster Dan Sullivan.

June 1920	O/C.	Peter Neill
	Vice O/C.	Seán Driscoll
	Adjutant	Mick Crowley
	Quartermaster	Dan Sullivan.
August 1920	O/C.	Peter Neill
	Vice O/C.	Liam O'Dwyer (witness). (Full time on training 6/9/20).
	Adjutant	Mick Crowley
	Quartermaster	Dan Sullivan.
6th Sept., 1920.	O/C.	Peter Neill
	Vice O/C.	Miceál Óg O'Sullivan
	Adjutant	Mick Crowley
	Quartermaster	Dan Sullivan.
End of March 1921	O/C.	Liam O'Dwyer (witness)
	Vice O/C.	Miceál Óg O'Sullivan
	Adjutant	Mick Crowley
	Quartermaster	Dan Sullivan.
My rank at the Truce	... O/C., Castletownbere Battalion,	
	Cork III. Brigade,	
	I.R.A.	

The strength of the Battalion was about 700.

Following the Truce on 11th July, 1921, training camps were set up throughout the Battalion and the members of all units underwent an intensive course of training - Special Services receiving particular attention.

After the attack on the Four Courts, when the men in the area discovered that a Civil War was developing, it was decided to submit a case to the Headquarters, 1st Southern Division, suggesting that all British garrisons in the area should be attacked. In this way it was hoped to offset the Civil War aspect. A Divisional meeting was called to consider the suggestion from our Battalion and with Christy O'Connell (Vice O/C.) I proceeded to the Falls near

Kenmare where the meeting was to be held. Owing to unforeseen circumstances the meeting did not take place and on our way back home Christy and I fired several rounds at a British Destroyer, anchored in Kenmare Bay, which had attempted to shell a post held by I.R.A. forces on the previous day. Two of the crew were killed and we hoped that this would involve us in a renewal of the fight with the old enemy and that, in such an event, the Civil War would have to be forgotten. This approach to the problem was not followed throughout the country, hence the clear cut Civil War.

SIGNED:

P. Sawyer

Date:

Nov. 9 - 1956

Witness:

P. Donnell

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1527