

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1538

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1538.

Witness

John Barrett,
Shanbally,
Ringaskiddy,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Battalion G/M.

Subject.

Activities of Shanbally Coy.,
I. Vols., Co. Cork, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2872.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JOHN BARRETT,
 Shanbally, Ringaskiddy,
 County Cork.

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I was born on the 1st April, 1887, in the parish of Monkstown, County Cork. I went to the local National School until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I went to work as an apprentice fitter in Rushbrook dry docks.

In the early part of 1917 a Company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Rochestown, which I joined at the time. Our strength was twenty-five at first. A man named O'Brien was appointed Captain. Henry O'Mahony became 1st Lieutenant and Daniel McNamara 2nd Lieutenant. Drilling and route marching started immediately and continued to the end of the year. In the autumn of this year Míceál Lynch - who was attached to the Cork City Volunteers and who had been released about August after his arrest in 1916 and had come to live in the area - was appointed Captain instead of Mr. O'Brien.

Early in 1918, with the help of Míceál Lynch, I organised a Company of Volunteers in the village of Shanbally. We numbered only fifteen at first. A short while later Florrie O'Donoghue, an officer of Cork City Brigade, came out and held an election for Company Officers. There were twenty-four Volunteers present on the occasion. Thomas O'Sullivan was elected Captain. I became 1st Lieutenant and John O'Neill 2nd Lieutenant. We drilled and carried out field exercises regularly each week. During the conscription period our Company strength increased to 130 men. When the scare was over all the new recruits left which reduced our strength once more to twenty-five. During the period, we collected a number of shotguns in the area. A Sinn Féin club was formed in Shanbally some time earlier. I became a member and often presided at the meetings.

During the General Election at the end of the year all the local Volunteers canvassed for the Sinn Féin candidate Diarmuid Lynch.

In April, 1919, we received information that a number of rifles were in a pavilion located in the Naval training grounds at Ringaskiddy. I mobilised the Company and raided the premises in the absence of the Naval personnel who had just gone to sea on a sloop. We discovered that they had taken the rifles with them, so we burned down the pavilion. Routine drilling continued to the end of the year. Other activities included raids on Post Office mails.

In August, 1920, the area was reorganised by the Brigade Staff. Up to this our Company had been attached to one of the Cork City Battalions. A new Battalion was formed which became known as the Passage West or 9th Battalion. The Companies comprising the new Battalion were Rochestown, Passage West, Ballinhassig, Ballygarvin, Carrigaline, Shanbally, Kinsale, Monkstown and Ringaskiddy. Richard O'Mahony was appointed Battalion O/C., Denis Lordan Vice O/C., Henry O'Mahony, Adjutant, and I became Quartermaster. The average strength of each of the five Companies was thirty-five men. Our arms consisted of thirty-five shotguns and a few revolvers. A short time after the formation of the Battalion I obtained six rifles from our Brigade Headquarters in Cork City. Around the same time Seán Hyde, a native of Ballinhassig who was attached to G.H.Q. in Dublin, managed to get a number of rifles for the use of the Ballinhassig Company.

At this time the R.I.C. and Black and Tans, supported by Military, (the Cameron Highlanders) were raiding and searching by day and night the homes of known I.R.A. men. The R.I.C. had done

their work well and most of the earlier active Volunteers were well known to them from the time they drilled and paraded in the open. In the month of October, with other known I.R.A. men, I had to go 'on the run'. The Military were stationed all around us in Rafeen, Ballybricken, Fort Camden and Fort Carlisle.

In the month of November Henry O'Mahony - who had become Vice O/C. of the Battalion instead of Denis Lorden who had left the area - carried out an attack on an R.I.C. patrol in Passage West, with the help of the local Company. One R.I.C. man was wounded, but the rest managed to reach their barracks in safety. Several plans for ambushes were prepared but nothing ever came of them. Edward Sisk, who was at one time Company Captain of Carrigaline Company, with members of Passage West and Rochestown Companies attacked a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans near Passage West on the road to Rochestown. In this attack, which took place in the month of March, 1921, one R.I.C. man was killed. Edward Sisk had by this time been appointed Vice Commandant of the Battalion instead of Henry O'Mahony who had been arrested.

There were no further major engagements in the Battalion area until the 9th July, 1921, when Seán Hyde, Mick Walsh, Company Captain of the Ballinhassig Company, and myself decided to attack Ballinhassig R.I.C. barracks with members of the local Company. We took up positions in the early morning behind a ditch 300 yards from the front of the barracks. The barracks, which was a two-storied building, stood on a hillside and was separated from houses on either side by a distance of about ten yards. Between the barracks and the ditch where we had taken up our positions, flowed the River Owenabuee. We numbered twenty-two men all armed with rifles. We knew the habits of the garrison. They usually came

out in the early morning and after lining up for a few minutes sat on a couple of seats outside the building. Our intention was to attack them as they sat outside.

On this particular morning, about nine R.I.C. men came out as usual, but one of them left the vicinity at once and proceeded along a road out of the village. Mick Walsh and a Volunteer left our party and followed him. It had been arranged that as soon as Walsh and the Volunteer had intercepted this policeman by opening fire on him we would open the attack on the R.I.C. outside the barracks. After a short time we heard the shots fired by Walsh and the Volunteer as they shot the policeman dead. The R.I.C. outside the barracks also heard them and rushed into the barracks before we opened fire. As they got inside we opened fire on the windows firing five rounds each. The R.I.C. returned our fire with machine-guns and rifles. We withdrew as they did so.

After the Truce I attended a training camp at Caunrhue, Gugane Barra.

SIGNED: John Barrett

DATE: 3rd December, 1956.

WITNESS: John J. Daly

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