

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S.** 1560

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1560

Witness

William Foley,
Shannonvale,
Clonakilty,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Munitions, Cork No. 3 Brigade, I.R.A.
Lieutenant of Engineering, Cork No. 3 Brigade,
I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Timoleague Company, Bandon Battalion,
Cork No. 3 Brigade, I.R.A., 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S.2854.**

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY WILLIAM FOLEY,

Shannonvale, Clonakilty, County Cork.

My uncles were active in the Fenians and later were prominent in the organisation of the United Irish League.

I joined the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin in Cork City in 1913. I cannot recollect the names of the officers of my unit of either organisation at this time.

The only type of training carried out by the Volunteers was ordinary close order foot drill as well as arms' drill with wooden guns. The unit to which I was attached trained in the City Hall and in the Cornmarket two or three nights each week. There were, in addition, route marches on Sundays and sometimes week-end camps.

At Easter 1916, I was employed as a fitter and turner in Haulbowline Dockyard. Early in Easter Week I was called on with a number of the fitters employed at the Dockyard to build an armoured train at Queenstown (now Cobh). This train was to be used to convey troops to Dublin or to other places throughout the country to attack the Volunteers. We refused to perform this job and were dismissed.

Early in 1917 I returned to my home area - Timoleague - and joined the local Company of Irish Volunteers which had just been re-organised by, I think, Fergus O'Connor. This unit was attached to the Bandon Battalion, Cork Brigade. The O/C. of the Timoleague Company was Con Lehane. The strength of the unit in the early stages was about thirty.

Beyond normal training and parades there was no great activity during 1917. We were mainly engaged in organising and strengthening the Company, as well as helping to organise Sinn Féin clubs in the area. With the other members of the Timoleague Company I became a member of Sinn Féin. As a matter of fact, this organisation was mainly composed of Volunteers and the members of their families.

When conscription was threatened by the British in the spring of 1918 there was an increase in the strength of the Company and the majority of the new recruits continued to serve after the scare had passed. All arms in the area - mainly shotguns - were collected at this time. A few revolvers were also obtained in the raids for these arms, in which the majority of the members of the Company took part at one time or another. We now had about 30/40 shotguns, and Con Lehane (O/C), who was a blacksmith, made bayonets which could be affixed to the shotguns. In addition, I was engaged with Tadg O'Sullivan, Dr. Cullinane and Con Murphy in the manufacture of mines and home-made bombs. The mines were made from pieces of piping about 12/18 inches long, sealed at both ends by metal plates held in position by a bolt running through the centre of the pipe and filled with shrapnel and concrete. They were charged with gelnite suitably detonated and fused. These mines and bombs - made by filling canisters with shrapnel and using gelnite as explosive - were made at Murphy's, Carrig, Lehane's, Ardmore, and O'Driscoll's, Abbeymahon. I was also engaged with the others mentioned in the manufacture of lead slugs - buckshot - for reloading cartridges and in the manufacture of powder.

I joined the I.R.B. in the summer of 1918 and was elected Centre of the local Circle, which position I held for two or three years. I was also appointed a Sinn Féin Judge about this time.

All these activities, at this time, were carried out in secret and only specially selected men were engaged on them. The enemy

intelligence in the area, through the R.I.C. and local loyalists, was very active in the district. The loyalist section of the population - or the vast majority of them - formed themselves into an organisation known as the Anti-Sinn Féin League, and were active in organising intelligence for the British.

During 1919 organising and training went on as usual. In addition, we were engaged in the organisation and collection of the first Dáil Éireann Loan. Training was also becoming more advanced at this time and special sections were established in each Company to deal with Scouting and Signalling, Engineering, First-Aid and Intelligence. The members of these sections were trained in the various aspects of the work which they were likely to be called on to perform.

About August 1919 the Irish Volunteers, which had been controlled by an independent Executive selected at an annual convention each year, came under the control of the Government of the Irish Republic - Dáil Éireann. All members now took an oath to support and defend the Republic against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We were now members of the Army of the Irish Republic and were henceforth known as the I.R.A.

Towards the end of 1919 I attended several meetings at which plans for an attack on Timoleague R.I.C. barracks were discussed. These meetings were attended by the Battalion O/C. (Seán Hales) with representatives from the neighbouring Companies, Kilbrittain, Ballinadee, Barryroe and Timoleague. Eventually the date for the attack was fixed for 25th February, 1920. In company with Con Lehane (O/C) and Tim Coughlan, I was instructed to make a mine to be exploded at the side wall of the barracks. We made the mine on my own milling premises at Timoleague. It was planned to blow out the

side wall of the building, to rush the breach and capture the garrison's stock of rifles and ammunition.

About 11 p.m. on the night of 25th February, 1920, accompanied by James Hodnett, Con Lehane and Con Murphy, I met Seán Hales, who was in charge of the operation, and we led the Ballinadee and Kilbrittain men to the houses in the street opposite the barracks. I was placed with Jim Hodnett, Jack Fitzgerald and Con Crowley in the house directly opposite the barrack. We were armed with shotguns and rifles. The mine failed through, I think, damp detonators. An attempt was then made by James O'Mahony, Seán Hales, Con Murphy, and "Flyer" Nyhan who drew a car loaded with hay to the barrack wall with the intention of setting fire to the building. This also failed. Fire was opened on the barrack by all covering sections and continued intermittently for about five hours. As there was no hope of capturing the building the action was abandoned. I should have mentioned that about six months previous to this operation Tadhg O'Sullivan, James Hodnett, Con Lehane, Con Murphy and I had been instructed by Battalion Headquarters not to sleep at home any night. On the day following the attack on the barracks Con Lehane, Tadhg O'Sullivan and I were questioned by the local R.I.C. Sergeant and one of his Constables about our movements on the previous night, and the British Military raided our homes that night. We were not from that date able to resume our ordinary work.

In April 1920, Charlie Hurley, Con Lehane, Con Crowley and I lay in ambush from daybreak on the Lislevane Road for two or three R.I.C. men who usually passed there. Although we remained in position behind the roadside fence until 5 o'clock in the evening, the patrol failed to turn up. Next day we took up positions on the Bandon Road at Seardown at 6 a.m. We remained there until 3 p.m.

but the expected party of R.I.C. failed to pass. Having developed pneumonia following these operations I was out of action for some weeks.

I was elected a Rural District Councillor for Timoleague area at the Local Government Elections on 6th June, 1920. During this month I was a member of a party under Charlie Hurley and Seán Hales which assembled at Ballinadee Feis to capture rifles from a party of British military which was expected to visit the grounds. The other members of this party were drawn mainly from Ballinadee and Kilbrittain Companies. There was no activity as the soldiers did not turn up. About this time, acting in co-operation with Seán Hales, Con Lehane, James Hodnett and Con Murphy, I took part in the arrest of James Whelton and his wife at Carrig, Ballinascarthy, as we had learned that they were giving information to the British Military at Timoleague Castle. We took them to Tinker's Cross area where they were held for some days before being released with a warning regarding their future conduct.

Towards the end of June, 1920, I with members of the Timoleague and Barryroe Companies - Con Lehane, Con Murphy, James Hodnett, Jack Driscoll, James Moloney, Daniel Santry, Tim Keohane, Dan Minihane and others - attended Mass in Timoleague with the intention of attacking a party of British soldiers and disarming them. These soldiers usually guarded two R.I.C. men who came to Mass in Timoleague. However, Mass was finished earlier than usual and the soldiers had not arrived so we had to abandon the action.

When a training camp was established at Ballymurphy towards the end of September, 1920 I attended and underwent a course of training there under Charlie Hurley and later Tom Barry. I volunteered for service with the Brigade Flying Column on its formation, but was

ordered by the Brigade O/C. (Charlie Hurley) to be ready to go to Dublin to work in a Bomb Factory there for G.H.Q.

In November, 1920 (I am unable to give the date) my milling establishment on the outskirts of Timoleague was attacked by a party of the Essex Regiment from Courtmacsherry, and a man - Michael O'Driscoll, Clonakilty - received six bullet wounds. O'Driscoll was coming to Timoleague about once every two weeks to keep a 40 H.P. Section Gas Engine in working order. The military were informed that it was William Foley (witness) who was there and, as I was to be shot at sight, they opened fire on the mill from all sides. The wounded man was detained in the military hospital at Cork for about six months. Having considered that they had shot the wrong man, the military party tried to burn the Mill on the night of the attack. However, the men working in the Mill managed to save the building except for the stairs which was burned. The Gas Engine was wrecked by the attackers.

On 7th December, 1920 (I am not sure of exact date) my home - a public house and grocery store - was burned out by the British as a reprisal for my activities in the area and for the burning of the house of a loyalist - Travers - in the village. Later in the month, on the instructions of the Brigade Commandant - General Charlie Hurley - I proceeded to Dublin. It was arranged that I was to meet the Adjutant General - Gearóid O'Sullivan - Vaughan's Hotel, Parnell Square, to get instructions concerning the Bomb factory. I met Gearóid as arranged. He told me that it would be alright to remain at Vaughan's Hotel that night; but about 11 p.m. the building was surrounded by a large force of military. With a large number of others caught in the hotel I was questioned for several hours and was then released. After a few days I was brought to the factory in Parnell Street by Joe O'Reilly. I worked there

on the manufacture of bomb casings until it was discovered by the British a few days before Christmas 1920.

Following the discovery of the bomb factory in Parnell Street, Dublin, I returned to West Cork at Christmas 1920. I took part in the attacks on Kilbrittain R.I.C. barracks, under Commandant Seán Hales, on January 2nd and 15th, 1921.

On 18th January, 1921, I met Patrick Sexton and Seán Hales at Skeaf. We proceeded to Quarry's Cross, Newcestown, where we joined up with the Brigade Flying Column under Charlie Hurley, Liam Deasy and Tom Barry. Within a few days we took up positions at Nawmore on the Manch road between Ballineen and Bandon. I was taken out of the ranks and given to the British agent - Dwyer - to guard. I had orders to shoot him should he try to escape. Dwyer was tried and executed on 23rd January, 1921 near Bandon. I operated with the Column at Tinker's Cross, Laragh, near Bandon and ^{guarded} Bradfield; Carhue was also executed at this time as a spy.

I helped to arrange for the collection of the Arms Fund in Bandon Battalion area. I was acting as a scout when John Good, Barry's Hall, was shot as a spy.

I was instructed by the Brigade O/C. (Charlie Hurley) to go to Cork on 12th March, 1921, to operate in a bomb factory which was being set up at Donoughmore in Cork I. Brigade area. This factory was discovered by the British before it went into production.

I returned to Cork III. Brigade area about the end of March, 1921 and took part in the burning of Courtmacsherry Hotel which was to be used as a barracks for a force of Auxiliaries. The hotel was situated quite close to the Coastguard Station where a strong force of military were stationed. James Hodnett was in charge of this operation which was carried out by men of the Timoleague and Barryroe

Companies. About the same time I took part in the burning of Poolis, Mayfield and Longfields, Kilcoleman, which were also occupied by enemy forces. These operations were carried out under John Jordan (Vice O/C., Bandon Battalion).

During the destruction of the Coastguard Station at Howes Strand on 22nd June, 1921, I was severely burned on the face and hands. I was under the care of Dr. Dorothy Stopford for several weeks. This operation was carried out under Captain Jackie O'Neill and Dan Holland.

While convalescing I was attending to Brigade correspondence, arranging for a member of Cumann na mBan to collect a dispatch from Bandon each day and forward it to Brigade O/C. (Liam Deasy). I was also responsible for the safe custody of Lord Bandon in Clogagh area and for Sealy King in Newcestown when they were arrested and held as hostages.

My rank at the Truce - Brigade Lieutenant of Engineering,
Cork III. Brigade, I.R.A.

SIGNED:

William Foley

DATE:

Dec. 31. 1956.

WITNESS:

P. J. Donnell

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