

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 59



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Telefón 61018.

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BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RABH NA NÍARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 59

Statement by

Con Ahern,
Kippagh Ho.,
Drinagh, Dunmanway,
Co. Cork.

Dated: 13th October, 1947.

On: Dunmanway I.R.B. and I.V. Coy.
1914 to 1916.

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STATEMENT OF CON AHERN, KIPPAGH HOUSE, DRINAGH,
DUNMANWAY, CO. CORK.

PERIOD: EARLY 1914 TO MAY, 1916.

UNIT: DUNMANWAY COMPANY, I.V.

Early in 1914 a strong Company of Volunteers was started in Dunmanway. Practically all of them were followers of John Redmond and control was in the hands of Irish Party supporters. The small Republican group in Dunmanway took no part in this movement. They continued to drill and be active up to about April, 1915. After that they dissolved.

1915
l.a.
About the time that they faded out a small group, which included Tadhg O'Shea, Liam Duggan, Michael McCarthy and myself, started to organise a Company of Irish Volunteers. We had only about twelve men in the town at the start, but gradually worked up to seventeen. In May, 1915 Tom Donovan organised a Section of the Company in Behagh district, and in August, 1915, we got a Section going in Ballinacarriga. These three groups comprised the Dunmanway Company.

There was a sum of money in the bank here which had been held by the survivors of an old I.R.B. group in the district. The trustees were Patrick McCarthy, Main Street, James McCarthy, Main Street and Daniel McCarthy (the Cooper). These men, led by Dan McCarthy, had maintained the Fenian tradition, encouraged and supported every non-party national movement, and when Sinn Fein was started had established a Branch in Dunmanway, but they would not agree to use the fund they controlled for any political purpose. They held that it had been collected for the purchase of arms, and to that purpose only, when they were satisfied that men determined to achieve freedom by force of arms had been organised, would they agree to devote the money. They would not agree to have it used for the purchase of arms for the National Volunteers because they did not believe these men had any serious intention of fighting. When the Company of Irish Volunteers was started they agreed that the purpose for which the fund was intended was being realised in them, and that it was their duty to make the money available. A further difficulty arose in that one of them, James McCarthy, would not agree to the withdrawal of the money until he got a guarantee that he would get a weapon himself out of it. Eventually this was agreed to; a part of the money was withdrawn, and with it Peadar O'Hourihan purchased for us in Dublin two Mauser rifles and three pistols. Jim McCarthy got one of the pistols, and the Company never saw it afterwards.

There was then a balance of, I think, about £30 left in the fund. The Behagh Section made a collection for arms, and out of it put a similar amount into a fund. Both amounts were sent to Dublin for the purchase of arms a short time before the Rising, but the Company never got any arms for this money.

The men paid 2d or 3d a week into a Company fund for the purchase of equipment, and that fund was supplemented by collections. Out of it we purchased haversacks, belts, caps and puttees. Regular weekly parades were held, the Dunmanway Section usually meeting the Behagh Section and training with them. We were drilled by Seán Mackey and Tadhg O'Shea. On Sundays Dunmanway Section would join Behagh and both march to join the Ballinacarriga Section. Parades were held

every Sunday, and some of them were to neighbouring districts where meetings were held to recruit for the Volunteers.

The first public parade of the Company outside its own area was to the Manchester Martyrs' procession in Cork in November, 1915. About 60 men from the Company took part. We had no arms at that time. On St. Patrick's Day, 1916, about the same number again took part in the demonstration in Cork. On this occasion we had a few rifles, and the remainder of the men had shot guns. We had no pikes in the Company.

Shortly after the formation of the Company the following Officers were elected, and there was no change up to Easter Week, 1916:-

Captain: Con Ahern.

2nd i/c: Michael McCarthy.

There were no other Officers, but Tom Donovan was in charge of Behagh Section and Paddy O'Brien of Ballinacarriga Section.

Michael McCarthy and I attended the Course for Officers conducted by Captain J.J. O'Connell at the Hall in Sheares Street, Cork, in January, 1916.

Training was continued actively from our return off the Course up to Easter, 1916. The Company strength remained about 60 men. The arms position was somewhat better as we had got a few rifles and could call on a number of shot guns from local farmers at any time. *L.A. The Coy Officers and Section Commanders were present*

About a week before Easter, 1916, Terence McSwiney attended a meeting at the Hall in Dunmanway, and also Tadhg O'Shea and Liam Duggan. At that meeting McSwiney gave us instructions for the parade on Easter Sunday. They were to the effect that we were to parade at Dunmanway with all arms, ammunition and equipment and rations for three days. We were to march from there to Inchigeela and arrive there at some stated time, which, as far as I remember, was 3 o'clock. He gave us no indication of what the purpose of the parade was, or of where we were to go from Inchigeela. He said nothing about a Rising or about a landing of arms.

I met McSwiney again on (I believe) Good Friday at Fanlobus, one and a half miles east of Dunmanway. The appointment for me to meet him there had been made by Tadhg O'Shea when he met MacSwiney in Clonakilty some days previously. McSwiney had a motor cycle on this occasion and did not want to come into the town. He asked me "Is everything in readiness?" and I said "Yes". Having gone over our arrangements in detail, he said to me before leaving, "I want you to leave the town on Sunday without causing any suspicion, and as quietly as possible". I did not get any further information from him as to the purpose of the parade, except that we would get orders at Inchigeela.

The Company mobilised in Dunmanway after 8 o'clock Mass on Easter Sunday morning. the following paraded :-

Con Ahern.
Michael McCarthy.
Liam Duggan.
Tadg O'Shea.
Timothy O'Brien.
Richard O'Neill.
Con Sullivan.
Tim Coakley.
Eamonn Young.
Con Hurley.
Dan Keefe.
Con Keane.
Michael Connolly.
Con Donovan, Shinagh.
James Delaney.
Michael Dooley.

Dunmanway Section.

(16)

Thomas O'Donovan.
Denis O'Donovan.
Michael Murphy.
Pat Corcoran.
Tim Corcoran.
John Hennessy.
Dan Kelleher.
Paddy Coakley.
Jim Donovan.
James Coakley.
Jeremiah Deasy.
John Joe Coakley.
Jeremiah Crowley.

Bahagh Section.

(13)

Patrick O'Brien.
James McCarthy.
Michael Sullivan.
James Driscoll.
Thomas O'Keefe.
Patrick McCarthy.
Michael Crowley.
Patrick Coakley.
John Hurley.

Ballinacarriga Section.

(9)

James Delaney and Michael Dooley did not go to Inchigeela. We had no arms for them. They were bakers who had to go to work at 3 o'clock that day and would lose their employment if absent. I excused them from the parade and sent them home before we left Dunmanway.

The arms which we had on Easter Sunday were:-

Two German Mauser Rifles with 20 rounds.
One Martini Henry Rifle with 50 rounds .303.
Two Service Rifles with 40 rounds .303.
Two .32 Pistols with 50 rounds.
One .32 Revolver with 20 rounds. *b.a*
Twenty-eight Shot Guns with about 300 rounds.

There were only two men who had not either a rifle or a shot gun. Michael McCarthy and I had a rifle and a pistol each, and

We gave the rifles to two of the men. We had no pikes or explosives.

The Lyre Company under Jim Walsh joined us at Dunmanway before we started the 13 mile march to Inchigeela. It was agreed between Jim Walsh and myself that I would take charge of both Companies on the march. Advance and rear guards were detailed.

Some distance South of Inchigeela Peadar O'Hourihan on a motor cycle met us. He had come from the Inchigeela direction. He did not bring any message and the only information he looked for from me was the number of men on parade. Having got this, he preceded us into Inchigeela. We were a little ahead of time and a short halt was called at the Rook, South of the village.

We marched in at 3 o'clock, scouts and advance guards leading. Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney arrived in a motor car at the same time. Tomás congratulated me on our punctuality. He told me that the exercises had been cancelled and that we were to return to our own areas. He did not give me any further information. We marched back to Dunmanway in a downpour of rain. R.I.C. men from Dunmanway had gone with us and they came back with us. Two policemen from Inchigeela had come out to meet us.

Many of the men from Lyre Company stayed in Dunmanway that night, and some of them for some days afterwards. On Easter Monday no orders or communications of any kind came to the Company, but late that night we heard vague rumours that something was on in Dublin. On Tuesday the news of the Rising was more definite and the police started barricading their barracks in the town. That night we decided we would send Michael McCarthy to Tom Hales next morning to see if he had any definite news or instructions for us. Michael McCarthy went by an early train to Bandon on Wednesday morning. He returned the same night. His report was that Tom Hales had told him the Cork men were completely surrounded and could not move. Tom Hales proposed that if Dunmanway and the Companies in the Macroom area would join forces with him we would move in from the North and relieve the Cork City men. Liam Duggan, Tadhg O'Shea and myself were waiting for Michael McCarthy when he came back on Wednesday night. The four of us discussed the matter and decided to send Tadhg O'Shea North in an effort to get the Macroom men to agree to Tom Hales' proposal. I have no recollection of Paddy O'Brien being in.

Tadhg O'Shea left late that night, but it was to Ballingeary he went. He was to be back at mid-day on Thursday but he did not arrive until late on Thursday night. He had been avoiding the main roads. The reply he brought was that the men North were not willing to move without orders from the Brigade Officers. Michael McCarthy went East to Tom Hales with the reply on Friday. He went by train to Bandon. They decided there it was then too late to take any action.

We had no contact with the Bantry Company except that we had established a despatch route to them.

We had kept the Company on the alert and ready for action during the week. There was nothing we could do now except to safeguard the arms. This was done, but afterwards one Mauser rifle and one old pin fire revolver were surrendered. These were the only arms surrendered or captured in the Company area.

Raiding started in the following week and many members of the Company went on the run. I was arrested and so was Dan McCarthy (Michael's father), although he was too old to be in the Volunteers. *ba* also *Jas. Shea Liam Duggan and Tom O'Sullivan. ba* Apart from the survivors of the old I.R.B. group previously referred to, there was no I.R.B. organisation in the district before 1916. There was no Fianna organisation in the area before the Rising.

SIGNED: Tom O'Sullivan

DATE: 13th October 1947

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WITNESS: Florence Donohue