

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 623

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 623.....

Witness

Edmond O'Brien,
Staff, Central Asylum,
Dundrum Road,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company, 4th Battalion,
Cork I Brigade, 1917-1921.

Subject.

Shanagarry Company, 4th Battalion,
Cork I Brigade, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1899.....

Form B.S.M. 2

CRIGINAL

Central Registry
Dunham Rd
Dublin

To

approx 19. 10. 51

The Bureau of Military History
1913-21

Sir:

Re your communication of the 13th inst. on the organization and history of the original J.R.A. Boy from 1917 to 1921.

I am very pleased to be able to assist you on the above subject and I have done my best to give a truthful and accurate account of events during that period, as far as I can remember I was the youngest member of that boy, and as my first duties were as a scout I had a pretty good knowledge of all the important things that were happening or about to happen, of course there may be other details that are omitted or that have escaped my memory, but conscientiously except a few minor details it is the best we can do for the present.

Thanking you in anticipation

I am Sir your obedient servant

Res. Sgt. B. C. Brown

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS-MILEATA 1913-21

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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SHANAGARRY I.R.A.

The Shanagarry Company was organised in the Spring of 1917 by the late Tomas MacCurtain, Lord Mayor of Cork, and was known as 'C' Company, 4th Battalion, 1st Cork Brigade. The first meeting was held on January 4th in or around the vicinity of Shanagarry Castle and approximately twenty-two members were enrolled and the usual enrolment fee was paid to Brigade Staff.

The Company Officers were: James Garde (deceased), Ballinamona, Shanagarry; Michael Fennessy (deceased), Shanagarry (Castle), and Michael Walsh, Ballinamona, Shanagarry. J. Garde was Company Commander.

The training at that period consisted of foot drill, field exercises, tactical training and organising. The training was carried out by Seán O'Shea (deceased), Midleton Battalion Headquarters, and afterwards by the Company Officers. After the death of J. Garde, Company O.C. towards the end of 1917 or the start of 1918 the Company was reorganised and Robert Walsh, Ballybraher, Ballycotton, was appointed O.C. He was a great asset to the Company as he had served with the Munster Fusiliers in France.

In 1918 the Company became more active and the numbers increased to 32 (thirty-two) and training became more intensified. There was an increase in the ranks during the threatened Conscription period but a big number of these were not let into the secrets of the Company proper; they were attached to the Sinn Féin Club as they could not be trusted, and sure enough when the Conscription scare was over they were gone. Money was collected for the purpose of purchasing arms, etc., and each Volunteer was paying a levy of 3d per week in this respect. Subscriptions were also collected for the first Dail Loan.

Shanagarry is situated on the main road from Cloyne to Ballycotton. The R.I.C. were in occupation at Cloyne and Ballycotton. About this time the R.I.C. at both these places became interested in the activities of the Company and carried out a lot of patrolling. In the start of 1919 an order was issued from Brigade Headquarters that all firearms in the Company area were to be collected. Some people handed them over voluntarily and in some cases houses had to be raided. In all about 20 shot-guns were collected.

Six revolvers and a few obsolete rifles were also collected. Two revolvers were got from a retired British Officer - Captain Buckley Jones - who lived at Ballymaloe Cottage, Cloyne - a Webley 45 and 6 rounds of ammunition, and also a smaller type of revolver with no ammunition. Both were surrendered willingly and a receipt given and three more were got from ex Naval Officers in the Ballycotton district and another was smuggled out of the Coast-guard Station at Ballycotton.

In August, 1919, an incident happened in Shanagarry. After Mass one Sunday a meeting was about to be held by the local Sinn Féin Club. Mr. J. Madden, Organiser, was the principal speaker and a warrant was issued for his arrest some time previously by

the R.I.C. The meeting was opened by David Morrison, Shanagarry, and when he introduced Mr. Madden the local R.I.C. Sergeant (Donaldson) and Constable Hughes tried to place him under arrest. The local Volunteers intervened and seized and held the R.I.C. while Mr. Madden was delivering his address. On the termination of the meeting Mr. Madden made good his escape.

As a result of this action the identity of some of the Volunteers became known to the R.I.C. and their homes were frequently raided, with the result that they had to be very careful of their movements.

At the start of 1920 the district was frequently raided by Cameron Highlanders in lorries, accompanied by members of the R.I.C. and M. Fennessy, D. Morrison and a few others had to go "on the run".

On the 8th May, 1920, about a dozen men of the Company were detailed to assist the Flying Column in the attack on Cloyne R.I.C. Barracks. Some of them were employed cutting trees for road blocks on the Barnabrow and Wood roads to prevent the military from approaching the town from that direction: the remainder took part in the attack and capture of the Barracks.

About two nights afterwards the Company burned Cloyne Courthouse. A short time later the Signal tower in the Coast-guard Station in Ballycotton was raided. Some very pistols, one revolver and some useful signal apparatus were captured. This was more or less a surprise raid as the village was held by the R.I.C. and a considerable amount of activity was carried out by the latter as a result of this raid.

About this period raids were carried out night and day by the British Forces and the greatest caution had to be exercised by the Volunteers.

The establishment of Republican Courts in the district was the next step in wiping out English Law. A Court was held in Shanagarry every month and that was for the whole parish :

M. Fennessy, Shanagarry - President.
M. Wall, Meelshane, Cloyne.
W. Lane, Maytown, Churchtown, South, Cloyne.

Mr. Wall represented Cloyne on behalf of law and order and Mr. Lane represented Ballycotton and Churchtown South. This also threw a certain amount of work on the Company as they had to serve summonses in some places, do night patrols and, furthermore, the Court had to be guarded and scouts sent out about a mile radius.

A few months after Cloyne Barracks was captured Ballycotton was reinforced by Black and Tans and some of the Gordon Highlanders. The strength of the whole garrison was about sixteen. The idea behind the Ballylanguane Ambush was to try and capture the lorry with as little damage as possible, change into the uniforms of the personnel of the lorry, drive to Ballycotton and surprise the garrison there and capture the Barracks, but the plan failed as hereafter stated.

Sports and a Feis were held that Summer in Ballycotton for the purpose of raising funds for the I.R.A. The field was surrounded by British Military during the events, but nothing unusual happened. A short time afterwards Ballycotton Barracks was evacuated and the Barracks was burned by the Company.

In August, 1920, an ambush took place at Ballylanguane, Shanagarry, which was unsuccessful. The attack was planned by some members of the Flying Column and some of the Ballymacoda Company: the lorry was travelling from Youghal to Ballycotton. However, the boys did not get sufficient time to dig the trench deep enough as the lorry came sooner than expected, with the result that it succeeded in getting out of the trench and after a few shots were fired it got away.

Towards the end of 1920 an order was issued from Brigade that a 'dug-out' would have to be completed in the district for the purpose of storing arms, ammo. etc. This was no easy task as all the work had to be done at night. Pretty elaborate instructions were issued re dimensions of these 'dug-outs' re size, depth, camouflage, dry ground, etc. The Company completed one on Mr. William Dunne's land at Ballylanguane, Shanagarry. Materials for the purpose of lining those 'dug-outs' and making them water-tight were very expensive at the time, so the Company decided to raid Ballyquirk. Ballyquirk, Killeagh, was a partly built aerodrome between Castlemartyr and Killeagh and night-watchmen were on duty there by night and they had communications with Killeagh and Castlemartyr R.I.C. Barracks. A raid was carried out by the Company, assisted by Ballymacoda and Ladysbridge Companies. The watchmen were overpowered and placed under arrest without alarming the R.I.C. and cement, corrugated iron, etc., were removed for the purpose of completing the 'dug-outs' in each of the above-mentioned districts.

In 1921, a further order was issued to the effect that road-blocks would have to be placed in the district. Bridges had to be destroyed in some cases, trenches had to be dug in such a way as to prevent military lorries from getting through, but small vehicles were able to get by as the trenches were cut zig-zag. This caused the Tans a lot of trouble as it slowed up their movements to a great extent. In some cases they had to commandeer any persons they could lay their hands on and make them fill them up at the point of the gun.

One Sunday they were entering Ballycotton. They were that furious on account of being delayed by the road block that they started shooting indiscriminately and one man was shot dead - Maurice Cusack, a Navy pensioner, and Michael Whelan was seriously wounded.

In February, 1921, we lost our Company O.C. and another member, Robert Walsh, O.C. and William Garde, Ballinamona: both were captured at the Battle of Clonmult. They were tried by Courtmartial and probably would have been sentenced to death but the Truce saved them. Michael Garde, Ballinamona, was Company O.C. after the capture of R. Walsh.

In addition to the activities already mentioned the Company on several occasions had to supply night guards for the Flying

Column as they frequently stayed at Garde's and Walsh's in Ballinamona, Harty's, Kilmacahill and Harty's, Ballyroe. Several arrests were made in the district but none of the Company was detained for a very long period. Michael Fennessy was one of the Officers of the Company who were arrested: he got a severe beating up from the Tans and was subsequently released and got into bad health shortly afterwards and died; R.I.P. There were no activities of any importance on the part of the Company from that until the Truce, and when the Truce was signed all Officers and N.C.Os. went on two weeks' special training at the Brigade Training Camp at Glenbower, Killeagh, under Sean Murray, Brigade Instructor.

The following are the names of the Volunteers who were in the Company at the time the Truce was called :-

Robert Walsh, Ballybraher, Ballycotton, (then in Jail).
Michael Garde, Ballinamona, Acting O.C. (in U.S.A.)
Michael Fennessy, Shanagarry, 1st Lieut. (deceased).
John Healy, Ballinamona: 2nd Lieut. (in U.S.A.)
John Morrison, Adjutant. (Curragh Command: C.Q.M.S.)
Thos. Walsh, Ballinamona. Q.M., (in U.S.A.)
Martin Hennessy, Ballybane. Section Commander, (deceased)
Maurice Stack, Ballymaloe. Section Commander.
David Morrison, Ballylanguane. " "
Paul Grogan, Monagurra. " "
Volunteer John Stack, Ballymaloe.
" Pat Geary, "
" Moss Kenneally, "
" E. O'Brien, Kilmacahill: Signals.
" John Ahern, "
" John C. Power, Shanagarry. Signals Section
Commander.
" Coleman Geary, Ballybane, (Army N.C.O.)
" Wm. Higgins, Ballingrane. Asst. Q.M.
" Pat Hennessy, Ballybane. Asst. Adjutant.
" Phil O'Neill, Monagurra.
" Michael Walsh, Ballinamona.

Volunteer William Garde, Ballinamona. (then in Jail).
" Denis Driscoll, Shanagarry.
" Thomas Hayes, "
" Richard Kenefick, "
" Wm. Fennessy. "
" Maurice McNamara. "
" Tim O'Brien, Ballylanguane.
" John Barry, "
" William Crotty, " (deceased).
" William Twomey, Shanagarry.
" William Lynch, " Police Officer.
" T. Walsh, Ballingrane. (Garda Siochana).
" M. Walsh, Ballinamona. (deceased).

As far as I know the Company never had any associations with the I.R.B.

Signed:

Edmond O'Brien

(Edmond O'Brien)

7th December 1951.

