

W.S. 1,317.
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,317

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,317.....

Witness

Cornelius (Con) Calnan,
Meelmane,
Courtmacsherry,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of

Cork III Brigade Column, I.R.A.

Subject.

Barryroe Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Cork, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S.2603.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,317

STATEMENT BY CORNELIUS CALMAN

Meelmane, Courtmacsherry, Co. Cork.

I was born at Lackrour, Butlerstown, Timoleague, in October 1898. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Batterstown National School until I reached the age of 14 years. I then went to work on my parents' farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at Barryroe in July 1917. The strength of the unit in the early stages was about forty. Pioneer members were:- Michael O'Sullivan, Denis Murphy, Jeremiah O'Brien, Morgan Sheehy. The unit was organised by William Walsh and Hugh Thornton, who were Q.M. and adjutant respectively of the Bandon Battalion. The company was attached to the Bandon Battalion, Cork Brigade. I cannot recollect the names of the other companies in the battalion or the names of the battalion officers except those already mentioned.

The first O/C. of the Barryroe Company was Michael O'Sullivan. He was the only officer in the initial stages and he was appointed by the battalion officers who organised the company.

The only type of training carried out was close-order foot-drill under the O/C. (Michael O'Sullivan). After a short time the O/C. selected a number of men for a signalling class (semaphore) for which he also acted as instructor. I do not know whether the instructor (O/C. Michael O'Sullivan) attended a signalling course with others from the battalion, but I remember that he had a Signalling Handbook from which he apparently learned the code.

Beyond the ordinary training in foot-drill and signalling there was no activity of a military nature. Parades were usually held on Sunday afternoons with occasional meetings on week nights. This procedure continued until the British

threatened to enforce conscription in the Spring of 1918. There was, however, a big parade of all Volunteers in the Bandon battalion at a meeting (Sinn Fein) which was addressed by de Valera in December 1917. Barryroe Company was strongly represented at this parade under the O/C. (Michael O'Sullivan)

Normal training continued during the Spring and Summer of 1918. The threat of conscription led to a small increase in membership. The new members continued to serve after the conscription scare had passed. At this stage, owing to the increase in strength, the company was reorganised and divided into four sections, viz: Butlerstown (No. 1); Eastern section (Broad Strand and Lackrour) (No. 2); Lislevane (No. 3); Grange (No.4). As a result of the reorganisation, an election of officers was held with the following result:- O/C., Michael McCarthy; 1st Lieut. Jim Moloney; 2nd Lieutenant Dan Santry.

About this time general raids for arms took place throughout the company area. Members of all sections were engaged in these activities. The arms held by the company at this time were: about 50/60 shotguns and a number of pike-heads. The latter had been fashioned by the blacksmith (... O'Leary) at Howes Strand, Kilbrittain. All cartridges, which had been seized in the arms raids or obtained by other means (such as purchase through friendly traders), were re-filled with buckshot by selected men.

A surprise mobilisation of the Barryroe company took place about mid-June 1918. The mobilisation point was Lislevane village and the hour fixed for assembly was 12 midnight. There was a big muster on parade and, as far as I can recollect, all members reported for duty. The parade was inspected by Hugh Thornton (Battalion Adjutant, Bandon

Battalion) who asked for volunteers to attack Timoleague R.I.C. Barracks. This was intended to be a test of the Volunteers on parade. All present volunteered for the job. The company was then divided into two sections and were sent on a trek across country to help them to become acclimatised to travelling under such conditions.

When the conscription scare had passed towards the end of the summer of 1918, normal training continued.

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

Early in 1919, Cork Brigade was divided into three units. The Bandon Battalion to which my company (Barryroe) was attached became a unit of the new Cork III Brigade. I do not know what other battalions were in the brigade at this time, but the area controlled by it covered all West Cork. I suppose that the battalions were the same as those at a later stage:- Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Bantry, Skibbereen. The first O/C. of Cork III Brigade was Tom Hales, Bandon Battalion.

About this time there was a change in the officers of the company (Barryroe). Michael McCarthy (O/C.) left the area and went to work in Cork city. He was replaced as O/C. by Jim Moloney. The new 1st Lieut. was Dan Santry.

Training at this stage became more advanced and selected men were trained in signalling and scouting. About this time also nearly all members got some musketry practice with .22 rifle.

Towards the end of February 1920, the R.I.C. barracks at Timoleague was attacked. This was a battalion operation

under Sean Hales, who had replaced his brother, Tom, as Battalion O/C. Tom Hales was now O/C. of the Brigade (Cork III). With John Brickley I was on guard duty for a party of our Company (Barryroe) who were blocking the main Timoleague-Clonakilty road within about 400 yards of Timoleague. Several other members of the company were engaged on various duties in connection with this attack. The attack continued for about four hours, but the R.I.C. garrison refused to surrender. About daybreak, our section got instructions to withdraw. We then returned home. I was armed with a shotgun on this occasion.

At Easter 1920, I took part with the members of the Barryroe and Timoleague Companies in the destruction of Courtmacsherry R.I.C. Barracks (evacuated). I was one of a number of parties engaged on the work of demolition. The work was carried out with crowbars and pickaxes. Sean Hales was on charge of the job.

During August 1920, several members of the company (Barryroe) under the company officers lay in ambush on three or four occasions on the Courtmacsherry-Lislevane road for a cycle patrol of military. This patrol operated from Timoleague on the Timoleague-Courtmacsherry-Barryroe-Lislevane-Timoleague road. It usually consisted of one R.I.C. man and 12 soldiers. It was proposed to rush the party and disarm them and, with this in view, the ambush party took up positions behind the roadside fence at Curraheen - about one mile east of Lislevane village. Our party were extended over a distance of about 100 yards and were unarmed. Although our party were in position at night on three separate occasions, the enemy patrol did not put in an appearance. About 30 members of the company (Barryroe) were engaged in this abortive operation. Amongst them were: Jim Moloney (O/C.); Dan Santry (1st Lt.); Mick Coleman (2nd Lt.); Con Calnan (witness); Denis Murphy, William

McCarthy, Tim Crowley, Denis O'Brien, Morgan Sheehy, Michael McCarthy, John Hayes, Jerh. O'Hea, Jim O'Hea, John Brickley.

All members of the unit were engaged on the collection of the Arms Fund levy in the autumn of 1920. This levy was based on the Poor Law Valuation of the holding or premises and the occupier had to pay a levy at the rate of 3d in the £. In some cases the land-holders refused to pay and it was necessary to threaten to seize goods or stock to the estimated value of the amount of the levy. In most cases when a seizure was threatened the land-holder paid up.

When the Republican Courts were established in the area in the summer or autumn of 1920, they threw additional work on the Volunteers (now I.R.A., since the establishment of Dáil Éireann). Scouts and guards had to be provided for the Courts while in session and the orders of the Courts had to be enforced by the I.R.A. In some cases prisoners charged with offences were sentenced to terms of detention and, while serving their sentence, the members of the I.R.A. in the area were responsible for guarding the prisoners.

Early in December 1920, the members of the Barryroe and Timoleague companies took part in the destruction of Timoleague R.I.C. Barracks which had been evacuated. On the same occasion they destroyed Timoleague Castle and the house of Colonel Travers, as it was anticipated that these premises would be occupied by enemy forces. While this operation was in progress I was on outpost duty on the Timoleague-Courtmacsherry road about quarter of a mile from the scene of the operations. I was accompanied by 4 or 5 others whose names I cannot recollect. We were armed with shotguns.

Large enemy forces were operating in the brigade area in

the early part of 1921. They were endeavouring to round up all I.R.A. men as well as the flying column which was moving around through the various battalions. In order to hinder the movements of enemy transport, wholesale destruction of lines of communication was undertaken. Every company in the battalion was engaged in the demolition of bridges, cutting trenches, blocking roads. This work was carried on night after night by members of the local company and practically all members were engaged in the work either as guards, scouts or demolition workers. In Barryroe area the members of the local unit were also engaged in removing the goods of loyalists shot as spies, as well as in building dumps and dugouts for the safe keeping of arms and the sheltering of the I.R.A. respectively.

On 13th March 1921, I was summoned to a meeting at Tiernanean, close to Barryroe Church. When I got there I found the Company O/C. (Michael Coleman). Others present were:- John Brickley, Denis O'Brien, Con Calnan (witness), William McCarthy, Denis O'Sullivan, Denis Murphy, John Hurley, Paddy McCarthy, Dan Santry. The O/C. informed those present that he was seeking reinforcements for the brigade flying column. With the exception of the latter three, all the others volunteered for service. We travelled by pony and trap to a point north west of Enniskeane where we reported to the Column O/C. (Tom Barry). On the night of March 13th I moved with the column to Mossgrove, a few miles north west of Bandon, where we billeted at Jerry Desmond's. We remained here until the night of 15th March 1921, when we moved across country to Knockavilla (I think) where, with others, I billeted at the home of the teacher (Regan).

During the night of 16th March 1921, the column moved to Shippool on the Kinsale-Innishannon road and midway between

these two places. In the early morning of March 17th (St. Patrick's Day) 1921, the column to the number of about 100, took up positions on the Innishannon-Kinsale road. Three mines were laid in the road at intervals of more than 100 yards. The column armed with rifles were extended over a distance of about 350-400 yards inside a wall adjoining the road. Although we remained in position all day, there was no appearance by the enemy. All sections were withdrawn to billets at nightfall. I was billeted at Cotter's, Shippool, where we remained until after dark on 18th March 1921, when we moved across the Cork-Bandon road to Crossbarry area. The column reached Crossbarry area in the early morning of 19th March 1921 when we all moved into billets. I remember that scouts were sent out and sentries posted at half-hourly intervals from my billet.

Just as day was dawning on 19th March 1921, I left my billet with Denis Murphy and a number of others and proceeded to the old Cork-Bandon road where we laid two of the mines which had been taken up at Shippool. The mines were laid at the extreme ends of the site selected for the ambush. I then returned to Denis Lordan's section to which I was attached. The column had been divided into a number of sections and the section to which I was attached (Denis Lordan's) was in position at the northern side of the road at the eastern end of the position. We were behind a fence on which we had placed stones to form loopholes and from our position could cover Crossbarry crossroads which was to the south and east of our position.

When we had been in position for about two hours or maybe more, heavy firing broke out to the west and continued for some time. There was then a lull. Suddenly, firing broke out from the direction of Crossbarry crossroads and as none of the

I.R.A. party were south of the road, we realised that the enemy were moving in to attack from the south east towards our position. We immediately opened fire on the enemy party and after about 20 minutes the signal to withdraw was given. Our section then withdrew in a westerly direction by the roadside fence north of the road until we reached the haggard of a farmyard. We then changed direction and, moving in a north westerly direction, eventually got outside the encircling ring of enemy forces after an engagement lasting nearly two hours.

The whole column were then assembled. Casualties were counted and it was found that three of the I.R.A. column - Peter Monahan, Jerh. O'Leary and Con Daly - had been killed while two others were seriously wounded. Some men were then selected to cover off the retreat and the remainder of the column moved away to billets which were eventually reached in Gurraneigh early next morning.

On the evening of Monday, 21st March 1921, the column moved to Ahiohill district where we billeted until the following night. We then moved to Mounteen and, on the night of 23rd March 1921, we travelled to Clogagh, which we reached about 2 a.m. and where we buried the Brigade O/C. (Charlie Hurley) who had been killed on the morning of Crossbarry ambush in an endeavour to break through a ring of enemy forces which surrounded the house in which he was billeted.

Following the burial of Charlie Hurley, the column returned to billets in Mounteen. On the morning of March 24th 1921, we were called out to attack enemy forces which were reported to be travelling on a train from Courtmacsherry to Ballinascorthy. With Mick Coleman, Sonny Donovan and about 20 others, I was allocated to a position on the railway embankment in the vicinity of Timoleague railway station.

As the enemy forces did not travel on the train, all sections were withdrawn to H.Q. (Harte's, Mounteen). When all sections had reported back, the column O/C. (Tom Barry) ordered all local men to return to their own company areas, so I then left the column and came back to Barryroe.

Between the end of March 1921 and the Truce (11th July '21) I was regularly engaged on the destruction of enemy lines of communication - demolishing bridges, cutting trenches, blocking roads. In addition, I acted as dispatch rider on occasions and when the brigade columns were operating in or passing through the area I was on scouting and guard duty. During this period Lord Bandon, who was kidnapped by I.R.A. forces in May 1921, was held prisoner in Barryroe Company area for a considerable portion of the time. Scouts and guards had to be posted regularly 'round the clock' during the period of his detention.

Late in May 1921, two men from each of the four sections of Barryroe Company were selected to take eight rifles (one per man) from an arms dump at Skeaf to the company area. These rifles were to be used by men engaged on outpost duty in connection with a proposed landing of arms in Dunworley. The arms were not landed as far as I know. With Denis Murphy I was selected to transfer these rifles to No. 2 section (Broad Strand and Lackrour). These rifles were also used by the men engaged on guard duty for parties taking part in the cutting of enemy lines of communication. I was engaged on this duty (guard) on several occasions about this time.

There were a number of changes in the officers of the Barryroe Company in the four or five months prior to the Truce. About May 1921, the officers were:- O/C. Mick Coleman; 1st Lieut. Dan Santry; 2nd Lieut. Denis O'Brien.

On 11th July 1921, the officers of the company were, as far as I can recollect:- O/C. Mick Coleman; 1st Lieut. Dan Santry; 2nd Lieut. Tim Crowley.

Immediately following the Truce (11th July 1921), Barryroe Company was transferred from Bandon (1st) Battalion to Clonakilty (2nd) Battalion, Cork III Brigade.

My rank at the Truce:- Volunteer - Member of Brigade Column.

Strength of Barryroe Company - about 120.

Signed: Con Calnan
(Con Calnan)
Date: 16th December 1955
16th December 1955.

Witness: P. O'Donnell
P. O'Donnell

