

W.S. 1,318

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1,318

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.  
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,318

Witness

Denis Murphy,  
Ballincurrig,  
Courtmacsherry,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of  
Cork II Brigade Column I.R.A.

Subject.

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

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2621

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY DENIS MURPHY,

Ballincurrig, Courtmacsherry, Co. Cork.

I was born at Ballincurrig, Courtmacsherry, in January, 1901. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Courtmacsherry national school until I was about 14 years of age. I then went to work on my parent's farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Barryroe towards the end of 1917. The strength of the company was about 60. Pioneer members of the Volunteers, as far as I can recollect, were: Morgan Sheehy, Jerh. O'Brien, Con Calnan, and Michael O'Sullivan, who was the first O/C of the unit. The company was organised by two officers of the Bandon Battalion (Hugh Thornton and Wm. Walsh). The first O/C (Michael O'Sullivan) was appointed by the organisers.

Close order footdrill was the only type of training carried out by the main body of the members. Some members were also being trained in signalling (semaphore) by the Company O/C (Michael O'Sullivan).

Barryroe Company was a unit in Bandon Battalion, Cork Brigade, Irish Volunteers. I cannot recollect the names of the other companies in the battalion at the time or the names of the battalion officers. I know that Tom Hales was Battalion O/C, but I do not know what ranks were held by the officers referred to above (Thornton and Walsh) who acted as organisers of Ballyroe Company.

Parades were usually held on Sunday evenings, with occasional meetings on week nights. The first public parade of the company (Ba<sup>RR</sup>llyroe) took place to Bandon

on the occasion of a big Sinn Féin meeting which was addressed by de Valera. This meeting was held early in December, 1917. Nearly all members of the unit took part in this parade under the Company O/C (Michael O'Sullivan). All the other companies in the battalion (Bandon) were also on parade. Tom Hales was O/C.

In March, 1918, the members of the company were engaged in obtaining signatures for the national plebiscite against conscription. Normal training was being carried on at this time but the threat by the British to enforce conscription led to an increase in the membership of the unit. All the new members continued to serve after the conscription scare had passed. At this stage, owing to the increase in strength, it was found necessary to reorganise the company and to hold an election of officers. The company area was divided into four sections as follows: No. 1, Butlerstown; No. 2, Broad Strand and Lackan<sup>CK</sup>; No. 3, Lislevane; No. 4, Grange. The O/C elected was Michael McCarthy. I cannot remember the names of the other officers. The strength of the company about this time was in the vicinity of 100.

During the spring and summer of 1918 members of all sections of the company were engaged on raiding for arms. Usually members of one section carried out raids outside its own area. All arms were surrendered voluntarily. The armament of the company at this time consisted of about 50 shotguns, with about 30 to 40 rounds of ammunition for each. Some pike heads were also fashioned from the points of spring harrows by a blacksmith named O'Leary from Howes Strand, Kilbriain. The charges of shot in all cartridges were removed and replaced by charges of buckshot, which was manufactured in several houses in the area.

There was a surprise mobilisation of the Barryroe Company about mid June, 1918. The mobilisation point was Lislevane village and the time 12 midnight. All members of the unit reported for duty and the parade was inspected by Hugh Thornton, Adjutant, Bandon Battalion. All men on parade carried 24 hours' rations. The inspecting officer (Hugh Thornton) asked for volunteers to attack Timoleague R.I.C. barracks, and all men on parade volunteered for the job. There was apparently no intention of attacking the barrack but Hugh Thornton wanted to find out what the reaction would be to his appeal. This parade was concluded by dividing the company into two sections and sending them on a bout of skirmishing across the country under night conditions.

Beyond normal training and parades there was no activity in the area during the remainder of 1918.

As the Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed, there was no activity in the district in connection with the general election of December, 1918.

When Cork 111 Brigade was formed in the early part of 1919, Bandon Battalion, to which our company (Barryroe) was attached, became the 1st Battalion in the new brigade. The first O/C of the brigade was Tom Hales, who had been O/C of Bandon Battalion. He was replaced as Battalion O/C by his brother Seán Hales. The other battalions in the brigade were, I think: Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Bantry and Skibbereen.

There was a change in the officers of the Barryroe Company about this time. The O/C (Michael McCarthy) went to work in Cork City, where he joined another unit.

He was replaced by Jim Moloney as O/C and Dan Santry became 1st Lt.

About this time the Battalion O/C (Seán Hales) made a .22 rifle available to the company and all members of the unit got an opportunity of putting in some target practice - usually on Sunday afternoons. Selected men were also being trained in scouting and signalling, while the main body were being trained in the use of cover.

Late in February, 1920, Timoleague R.I.C. barracks was attacked. Seán Hales was in charge of the operation, in which representatives from several companies in the Bandon Battalion took part. The attack was carried on for about 5 hours. It began about midnight. As the garrison refused to surrender, the attack was called off about daybreak. I was one of a party from Barryroe Company who were engaged in blocking the main Timoleague-Clonakilty road within about 400 yards from Timoleague. Other members of the company who were engaged on this job with me were: Tim Crowley, Denis O'Brien, Jerh. O'Hea; Con Calnan was on guard duty. When the attack was called off we returned home to Barryroe area.

With several members of the Barryroe and Timoleague Companies I took part in the destruction of Courtmacsherry evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Easter, 1920. I was engaged on the work of demolition, which was carried out with crowbars and pickaxes. This operation was carried out under Seán Hales (Battalion O/C).

In August, 1920, a military cycle patrol was operating from Timoleague on the Timoleague-Courtmacsherry-

Barryroe-Lislevane road. The strength of the patrol varied from 12 to 20. The patrol was usually accompanied by a member of the R.I.C. The officers of the Barryroe Company decided to attempt to disarm the patrol. About 40 members of the company were mobilised and took up positions behind the roadside fence about 1 mile east of Lislevane village at Curraheen. Although we were in position three nights, the patrol failed to put in an appearance.

Amongst those engaged in this abortive operation were:

Jim Moloney, O/C; Dan Santry, 1st Lt.; Mick Coleman, 2nd Lt.; Con Calnan, Denis Murphy (witness), Wm. McCarthy, Tim Crowley, Denis O'Brien, Morgan Sheehy, Michael McCarthy, John Hayes, Jerh. O'Hea, Jim O'Hea and John Brickley.

All members of the company were engaged on the collection of the arms' fund levy in the autumn of 1920. The levy was based on the Poor Law Valuation of the holding or premises at a rate of 3d. in the £<sup>(I think)</sup>. The levy was collected in all cases, although on a few occasions it was necessary to threaten the occupier or landholder with the seizure of goods or stock before he finally paid up.

Early in October, 1920, I received an order from Battalion H.Q. to arrange for the transport of two brigade officers (Charlie Hurley, O/C, and Mick Crowley) by sea from Harbour View in Kilbrittain area to Barryroe. About 9 a.m. on the day I received the order I left Boat Strand in a rowing boat to row across the bay (Courtmacsherry) to Harbour View. I was accompanied by Jerh. O'Mahoney, John O'Mahony and James O'Driscoll. When we were about 1 mile from the shore we came to the conclusion that owing to the rough sea we could not reach Harbour View. We decided to return and

to land two members of our party (James O'Driscoll and John O'Mahoney) at Quarry Point on the sheltered side of the harbour (Courtmacsherry). These men then walked to Courtmacsherry, where they obtained a more suitable boat which they used to carry out the transfer of the brigade officers. Meantime, I endeavoured to return to Broad Strand with Jerh. O'Mahoney in our boat. The sea was very rough and when about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from shore our boat overturned and we were thrown into the sea. We were in the water for a considerable time before we were eventually rescued by Michael Holland and my brother (William Murphy), who rowed out to us in a larger boat.

I think that it was during the early part of December, 1920, that the members of Barryroe and Timoleague Companies co-operated in the destruction of Timoleague R.I.C. post which had been evacuated. On the same occasion we destroyed Timoleague Castle and the house of Col. Trevers. All houses were destroyed in order to prevent their occupation by enemy forces. While this operation was in progress I was engaged on blocking the main Timoleague-Courtmacsherry road about midway between both places. I was not armed.

There was no great activity in the area until the end of January, 1921, when all members of the Barryroe Company, as well as the other units throughout the brigade, were continuously engaged in cutting enemy lines of communication, digging trenches, demolishing bridges, blocking roads etc. These activities were necessary in order to hinder the movements of enemy troops who were carrying out large-scale raids in strength. While this work was in progress, armed guards were always posted to

cover the working parties. With the other members of the company (Barryroe), I engaged alternately on guard and demolition duties.

On March 13th, 1921, I was summoned to a meeting at Tiernancan near Barryroe Church. The meeting was attended by Michael Coleman (now Coy. O/C), Con Calnan, John Brickley, Wm. McCarthy, Denis O'Brien, Paddy McCarthy, Denis O'Sullivan, Denis Murphy (witness), Dan Santry, John Hurley. We were informed by the O/C (Mick Coleman) that he had been asked to supply some reinforcements for the Brigade Flying Column. With the exception of Dan Santry, John Hurley and Paddy McCarthy, all present volunteered to join the column. The volunteers travelled that evening by pony and trap to a townland near Enniskeane, where we reported to the Column O/C (Tom Barry). I moved with the column that night to Mossgrove near Bandon, where I billeted with a number of others, including Con Calnan, at Jerry Desmond's until the night of March 15th, 1921. We all moved on the night of March 15th to Knockavilla area, where we again went into billets.

On the morning of March 16th, 1921, I was delegated to assist Peter Monahan (who was in charge of this aspect of the work) in the manufacture of three mines and a number of tin canister bombs. The mines were made by filling a wooden box 2'X9"X6" with earth and shrapnel (made by breaking up an old root-cutting machine). They were charged with guncotton and fixed for detonation by means of electric exploders. The canister bombs were made by filling cocoa tins with shrapnel and charging them with a stick of gelnite to which a detonator and fuse was affixed. The fuse protruded through a hole in the cover



of the tin which was firmly fixed.

The column - to the number of about 100 - moved on the night of March 16th, 1921, to Shippool, where on the morning of St. Patrick's Day, 1921, we took up ambush positions on the Innishannon-Kinsale road. The three mines, made on the previous day, 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. All positions were occupied before 9 a.m., but although the column remained in position all day there was no appearance by the enemy convoy which was expected to pass. All sections withdrew to billets at nightfall. I was billeted with several others at Cotter's, Shippool, where we remained until after dark on the 18th March, 1921. We then moved with the column across the main Cork-Bandon road and proceeded to Crossbarry, which was reached early on the morning of March 19th, 1921. The column then moved into billets. Scouts were sent out and sentries were posted at half-hourly intervals from our billet, as it was reported that large enemy raiding parties were in the district.

At daybreak on March 19th, 1921, I left with Con Calnan and a number of others to go to the old Cork-Bandon road which ran east-west just south of our billets. Here we laid two of the mines, which had been taken up at Shippool, at the extreme ends of a straight stretch of the road which had been selected as an ambush site. When the mines had been laid I moved to a position north of the road and slightly to the west of the mine at the eastern end. My instructions were to raise my hand as a signal to Peter Monahan, who was to explode this mine, when the armoured

which was expected to lead the enemy convoy reached my position. The column, which had been divided into a number of sections, was now in position to the west along the road as well as on the flanks and to the rear. It was now about 8 a.m.

While awaiting the arrival of the enemy, the local postman was observed to be entering the ambush position at the eastern end and I was instructed by Peter Monahan to take the postman prisoner and remove him to my position. I moved on to the road, held up the postman and instructed him to cross the fence into the field in which I had been in position. I had only taken the postman across the roadside fence when firing broke out along the road to the west. When the firing ceased I left my position and came on to the road, where I found a number of members of the column who had been manning a position at the bend of the road just east of where I had been in position. The sections which had attacked the lorries to the west had succeeded in dispersing the enemy forces and had also come on to the road opposite their own positions to collect the spoils and destroy the enemy transport.

The party on the road at the eastern end had only moved on to the road when firing broke out from positions south of the road where none of our column had been stationed. This outburst forced us to resume our old positions, where we were joined by the members of a flanking party on the eastern side under Denis Lordan. Peter Monahan had been killed by the opening burst of fire and Denis Lordan now took over control. Firing continued for about 20 minutes and the enemy fire was silenced. At this stage the signal to withdraw was given. I then moved with the members of the

flanking section in a westerly direction behind the roadside fence north of the road until we reached the haggard of Beasley's farmyard. We then changed direction and moved towards the north-west until we eventually were clear of the enemy ring which had been forced to retire on all sides. The fighting had, at this stage, been going on for about 2 hours.

When we had moved about a half mile across country the column was assembled. Casualties were counted and it was found that Peter Monahan, Jerh. O'Leary and Con Daly had been killed. Two others - I cannot now remember the names - were seriously wounded. We had captured a Lewis gun, several rifles and a large quantity of ammunition from the enemy, whose casualties could not be ascertained at the time. It was later learned that several of the enemy had been killed and a large number wounded. Some men were then selected to act as flankers and to cover off the retreat. The column then moved across country to billets in Granure, which was reached early next morning.

On the evening of Monday (March 21st) the column moved to Ahiohill district, where we remained until the night of March 22nd when we travelled to Mounteen. Next night the column travelled to Clogagh, which we reached about 2 a.m. Here we buried Charlie Hurley (Brigade O/C) who had been killed on the morning of Crossbarry ambush. After the burial, at which military honours were rendered, the column returned to billets in Mounteen.

On the morning of March 24th, 1921, the column were called out to attack enemy forces which were reported to be travelling on a train from Courtmacsherry to Ballinascarthy.

I was allocated with four others (Jim Hodnett, Con Murphy and two others from the western end of the brigade area) to take up a position on the Bandon-Timoleague road about midway between the two towns, with instructions to attack any enemy reinforcements which might come from Bandon. As the enemy forces did not travel on the train, the operation did not take place and, with my party, I reported back to column headquarters at Harte's, Mounteen. When all sections had reported back to H.Q., the Column O/C (Tom Barry) issued instructions that all local men should now return to their home areas - they would be replaced by some fresh recruits. I then returned with the other Barryroe men to Barryroe area. Before doing so, however, I accompanied Seán Murphy (Skeaf) to the arms' dump in that company area, where we dumped the surplus rifles not required by the reorganised column. I reached home on Good Friday, 1921.

During the period April to July, 1921, I took part in the normal activities in the company (Barryroe) area. These included the blocking of roads, demolition of bridges, cutting trenches, etc., as well as acting as guards and scouts for the column when operating in or passing through the area. The work of keeping the enemy lines of communication disorganised took up the full time of the majority of the members of the company, as trenches were being continually filled in and bridges temporarily repaired by the enemy forces or by civilians under duress. In addition, Lord Bandon, who had been taken prisoner by the I.R.A., was detained in the area for the greater portion of this period. His detention called for additional scouts and guards and these had, in his case, to be available both night and day.

Towards the end of May, 1921, eight men from the Barryroe Company were instructed to proceed to the dump in Skeaf Company area and to obtain 8 rifles. The men were selected - two from each section. With Con Calnan I represented No. 2 section (Broad Strand and Lackrour). We obtained the rifles at Skeaf and returned across country at night to Barryroe area, where we dumped the rifles. These rifles were, I believe, to be used by guards engaged on outpost duty in connection with a landing of arms which was to take place at <sup>W</sup>Dunmorley (Barryroe Company area). The arms were not landed as far as I know. The rifles were, however, used by men acting as guards for those engaged in blocking roads and cutting trenches and suchlike work.

The officers of the company (Barryroe) at the Truce (11th July, 1921) were:

O/C - Mick Coleman  
 1st Lt. - Dan Santry  
 2nd Lt. - ~~Mick~~ Crowley.  
 TIM.

Just after the Truce, Barryroe Company was transferred from Bandon Battalion (1st) to Clonakilty Battalion (2nd), Cork 111 Brigade.

My rank at the Truce - Volunteer member of Brigade Column. The strength of Barryroe Company - about 120.

Signed: Denis Murphy  
 (Denis Murphy)  
 Date: 16<sup>th</sup> December 1955  
 16th December 1955.

Witness: P. O'Donnell (P. O'Donnell)  
 (Investigator)

