

W.S. 1,376

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,376

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,376

Witness

John O'Sullivan,
Gleannavigue,
Mallow,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C. Burnfort Company, Mallow Battalion
Cork II Brigade.

Subject.

Mourneabbey Company Mallow Battalion
Cork II Brigade I.R.A. 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY JOHN O'SULLIVAN

Gleannavigue, Mallow, Co.Cork.

I was born at my present address on 25th December 1894, My parents were farmers. I was educated at Burnfort National School until I reached the age of 16 years when I went to work on my parents' farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at Burnfort early in 1915. The name of the unit was Mourneabbey Company. It was composed of members from Burnfort and Analeentha areas. The strength of the company at the time was about 60. Forty members were from Burnfort area and the remainder from Analeentha. The first O/C. of the company was Bill Jones, and I am not sure who the other officers were. Some members of the unit were Mick Nagle, Mick Looney, Thade Looney, Maurice O'Callaghan, Dave Moylan, Denis Mulcahy, Con Mulcahy, Pat Flynn, Mick Flynn, Dick Nagle, Tim O'Connell. All these members were from Burnfort area. As far as I can recollect, the initial steps to organise the Irish Volunteers in the district were taken by Thomas MacCurtain, who was at the time O/C. Cork Brigade. He was a native of Mourneabbey.

The only type of training carried out at this time was ordinary close order foot drill and arms drill with wooden guns. The training was carried out under our own officers who had, I think, been trained by Sean O'Sullivan, Cork City, who was a Volunteer organiser. Normal training - with regular parades one night each week and at weekends - continued up to Easter 1916.

On the morning of Easter Sunday 1916, the Burnfort section of the company mobilised outside Burnfort Church after

8.30 a.m. Mass and marched to Analeentha Church where it was joined by the Analeentha Section. The combined force then marched to Beeing where we met members of the other companies in the area and carried out manoeuvres on Beeing Mountain. All members of our unit were armed with shotguns and a small supply of cartridges. Each man carried two days' rations. The manoeuvres were carried out under the control of Terry McSwiney - later to become Brigade O/C. Cork Brigade, in succession to Tomas MacCurtain. When the training was finished, the parade was dismissed and all partook of refreshments.

Some time about 4 p.m. we were all ordered to 'fall in' again and the parade was addressed by Tomas MacCurtain (Brigade O/C.) I have no recollection of the purport of his address. The parade was then dismissed and all units returned to their home areas. There was no further activity in the area during Easter Week as far as I can recollect.

There was no activity in the area until late in 1917 when the Irish Volunteers were reorganised. On the reorganisation there were a number of new recruits including John O'Keefe, Denis Fitzgerald, John Fitzgerald, Con Hickey, John Barrett, Dan Kenneally, Owen Curtin, Tim Conway, Mick O'Sullivan, Jack O'Connell, Tom O'Brien, Dan Flynn, Michael Curtin. These men, with one or two others, formed a new section of Mourneabbey Company in Beanaskeha area. I was section leader. The usual training in close order drill was carried out in the fields in the area - usually at night. The strength of Mourneabbey Company was now about 60. The company officers, who were elected, were:- O/C. Bill Jones; 1st Lieut. - Mick Hanlon; 2nd Lieut. - Paddy McCarthy.

During 1917, the Volunteers, as well as carrying on their military training, were engaged in organising the political

side of the republican movement - Sinn Fein. This section was mainly composed of Volunteers and the members of their families.

When the enforcement of conscription was threatened by the British in the spring of 1918, there was a large increase in the membership of the Irish Volunteers. The attendance at parades was in the neighbourhood of 120. All available shotguns and arms of every description in the area were now collected by the Volunteers. They were surrendered voluntarily in all cases. All members were engaged in fashioning weapons including pikeheads in the local forge. The armament of the company at this time consisted of about 50 shotguns with a few hundred rounds of ammunition. There was also one long Lee Enfield rifle held by Tadhg Looney, but I do not know where he got same.

During the summer of 1918 the company took part in night manoeuvres in co-operation with other units in the Mallow Battalion which was formed about this time. The officer in charge of the manoeuvres was Sean O'Sullivan, Cork City. The other companies in the battalion were:- Mallow, Lombardstown, Ahadillane, Ballyclough, Twopothouse. The officers of the battalion were:- O/C. Bill Jones; Vice O/C. - Jerh. Buckley; Adjutant - Paddy McCarthy; Q.M. - Mick Hanlon (I think).

Beyond normal training and route marches, there was no great activity during 1918.

In December 1918 I went to Waterford city to take part in protection duty in connection with the general election. The Sinn Fein candidate (Dr. White) and his supporters were subject to many attacks and much abuse by the supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party whose candidate was Major Willie

Redmond. I was accompanied by about 15 other members of Mourneabbey Company and Bill Jones (O/C. Mallow Battalion) was in charge of the party. We remained in Waterford for about five days during which time we acted as guards for canvassers and at election meetings. We were operating in co-operation with the members of the Waterford Brigade, who were also engaged on this duty. The Sinn Fein candidate was defeated in the election.

Cork Brigade, which extended over the whole of Cork county, was by now organised into about 20 battalions. It was divided into three brigades in January 1919. Mallow battalion, to which our company was attached, became a unit of Cork II Bde. This brigade extended from the Waterford boundary at Fermoy to the Kerry boundary at Millstreet and covered the whole northern portion of Cork county. The battalions in the area were:- Mallow, Fermoy, Castletownroche, Kanturk, Charleville, Newmarket and Millstreet. There was no change in the officers of Mallow battalion at this stage. The officers of Cork II Brigade were:- O/C. Liam Lynch, Fermoy; Vice O/C. Dan Hegarty, Mallow; Adjutant - Tom Barry, Glanworth; Q.M. - George Power, Fermoy.

Early in 1919, Mourneabbey Company was divided into two units - Burnfort and Analeentha. The officers elected by the new companies were:-

<u>Analeentha</u>		<u>Burnfort</u>	
O/C.	Jerome Buckley	O/C.	Jack O'Sullivan (witness)
1st Lt.	(Cannot recollect)	1st Lt.	Jack Ronayne.
2nd Lt.	Jack Looney	2nd Lt.	Maurice Walsh.

The usual training continued throughout 1919, but as the year passed, the form of training became more advanced. Companies were taken on night marches across country and were instructed in scouting and the use of cover. When ammunition

was available, there were section parades at which the members had some target practice with .22 rifles and were instructed in the operation and mechanism of the weapon.

At Easter 1920, the members of Burnfort and Analeentha companies took part in the destruction of Blackrock evacuated R.I.C. Barracks. This operation was carried out in accordance with a general order from G.H.Q. for the destruction of all such posts. Practically all members of both companies were engaged on this operation either on outpost duty or in the actual work of destruction. The barrack was completely destroyed - the gable wall being blown down by a charge of gelignite and the remaining portion being set on fire.

Towards the end of April or in early May 1920, several members of our company (Burnfort) formed part of a large force from the Mallow battalion which endeavoured to round up the members of a family named O'Brien from Inchmay in Kanturk battalion area. The men sought were wanted in connection with a hold-up of bank officials in Millstreet area and the seizure of something like £20,000. The 'round up' operation was carried out under the control of the Brigade O/C. (Liam Lynch) The wanted men were not at home on the occasion of the raid. They were, however, captured later by men from Millstreet Battalion and, with a number of others, were tried for the offence by members of the brigade staff. All the prisoners were found guilty and were sentenced to deportation from Ireland. Some of the prisoners were held in Burnfort company area pending deportation and were sent away from here.

When Cork II Brigade Column was formed in September 1920 the members were billeted for some time in the initial stages in Burnfort company area where they underwent a course of

training under Ernie O'Malley as Training Officer. Liam Lynch (Brigade O/C.) was in charge of the party. Some members of this column were:- Dan Shinnick, Jim O'Neill, Mick O'Halloran, Dan Browne, Paddy McCarthy, Paddy O'Brien, Ned Creed, Paddy Healy, Sean Healy, Larry Condon, Jerry Kiely, Dan Vaughan, Dan Daly. The column during this period were billeted at Looney's, Dorgan's, Mahoney's, Conway's and O'Connell's (Island) and at Mulcahy's (Toureen).

About 9 p.m. on the night of 27th September 1920, I visited the home of Tadhg Looney at the Island, Burnfort, where the Brigade O/C. (Liam Lynch) had set up his H.Q. Shortly after my arrival I received instructions from the Brigade O/C. to mobilise 15 members of Burnfort company at Looney's before midnight. I immediately made arrangements to contact the required number of men and the following reported to H.Q. (Looney's) before midnight:- Mick Looney, Tim O'Connell, Mick Nagle, Dick Nagle, Maurice Walsh, Dave Walsh, John Conway, Dave Moylan, Bill Jones, Denis Mulcahy, Tim Mulcahy, Mick Flynn, Jack O'Sullivan (witness). Some short time after midnight this party together with the brigade column under Ernie O'Malley and Liam Lynch moved off on foot towards Mallow, The whole party marched into Mallow where we entered the Town Hall from the rear. It was now about 2.30 a.m.

About 8.30 a.m. on the morning of 28th September 1920, Dick Willis and Jackie Bolster entered the Town Hall. They were handed two revolvers and, accompanied by Paddy McCarthy - a member of the brigade column - they left the Town Hall to proceed to their work in the military barracks.

Shortly after 9 a.m. a party of military from the barracks were seen to pass by the Town Hall on their way to exercise their horses. Immediately they had passed, the I.R.A. party

in the Town Hall left by the back door and proceeded through the Town Park (which adjoined the rear of the Town Hall) to the military barracks. Liam Lynch, Ernie O'Malley, Paddy O'Brien and Wm. O'Regan ('Dorney') moved off ahead of the main body which was now in charge of George Power. Dan Shinnick and Mick O'Halloran - of the brigade column - were left in the Town Hall to cover the R.I.C. Barracks which was situated in a street directly opposite the Town Hall.

When the leading party (Liam Lynch, Ernie O'Malley, Paddy O'Brien and William O'Regan 'Dorney') had forced an entry through the wicket at the main barrack gates, our party under George Power moved at the double into the barracks. We immediately set about collecting all available military stores and loading them into three cars which, in the meantime, had been driven to the gate of the military barracks by Leo O'Callaghan, Paddy Healy and Sean Healy. The stores loaded into the cars included, as far as I can remember, 27 rifles, 2 Hotchkiss guns, some thousands of rounds of ammunition as well as lances, bandoliers and saddlery. The cars were then driven off along the main Mallow-Killarney road and through Dromahane to Ahadillane area.

When the cars had moved off with the booty, our party set fire to the barracks and then withdrew to Brigade H.Q. at Looney's, Island, Burnfort. The members of the local company (Burnfort) then returned to their homes. The members of the brigade column moved into their billets.

About 5 p.m. on the evening of 28th September (day of raid) Tadhg Looney called to inform me that he was arranging transport to remove the column from the area. I made my own pony and trap available for this job and with two or three

other similar modes of conveyance the column was transported to, I think, Ahadillane area.

During the night of 28th September 1920, I was one of a party of six on guard at the home of Bill Jones (former O/C. Mallow Battalion). Other members were:- Michael Nagle, Dick Nagle, John Conway, Dave Moylan, Dave Mulcahy, Jack Sullivan (witness).

I should have mentioned earlier that at this time Tadhg Looney was adjutant, Mallow Battalion. The other officers at this time were:- O/C. Paddy McCarthy (previously adjutant); Vice O/C. - Owen Harold; Q.M. - Mick Nagle.

Towards the end of October 1920 the Battalion O/C. and Vice O/C. (Paddy McCarthy and Owen Harold) were arrested. The Brigade O/C. then made the following appointments to the battalion staff:- O/C. Tadhg Byrne; Vice O/C. Tadhg Looney; Adjutant - Jerry Hanlon; Q.M. - Mick Nagle.

The usual training went on throughout the area, but there was exceptional activity during the remainder of 1920.

The next happening of note was the formation of a Battalion Flying Column in Mallow area in early January 1921. The members of this column were:- Mick Nagle, Denis Mulcahy, Joe Morgan, Tadhg Mullane, 'Congo' Moloney, Jerh. Daly, Tadhg McCarthy, Leo O'Callaghan, Ned Murphy, Ned Waters, Batt Walsh, Denis Horgan, Jack Sullivan (witness) and Jack Cunningham (column leader). This column was first assembled in Laharn area where the members were billeted at Murphy's, Toomey's and in other houses. The members were all armed with rifles and each had about 50 rounds of ammunition. The column underwent a course of training in the care and use of the available arms as well as in the use of cover, for about 10 days. The

training officer was Jack Cunningham (column leader).

Towards the end of January 1921, I went with the column leader (Jack Cunningham) to Mourneabbey area to inspect an ambush position in a district where an enemy patrol was reported to be moving round at night. We were accompanied by the Battalion O/C. (Tadhg Byrne). The column together with about 15 men from Burnfort company, under Jack Ronayne, took up positions that night at the site selected, but although we all remained in position until daybreak, there was no sign of any enemy activity.

The column then withdrew into Gleannavigue area where they took up positions at Beanaskeha to await an enemy convoy but the enemy did not put in an appearance. The column were still in Gleannavigue area on the evening of 14th February 1921, when instructions were issued by the Battalion O/C. (Tadhg Byrne) to mobilise at Jordan's Bridge on the main Cork-Mallow road at 5 a.m. on the morning of 15th February 1921. Selected members of the Burnfort and Analeentha companies received similar instructions. The men from the Burnfort company were in charge of Jack Ronayne.

All sections reported to Jordan's Bridge at 5 a.m. The site selected for the ambush was just north of the bridge and about six miles from Mallow on the main road from Cork. The ambush was arranged in order to attack a convoy which was expected to escort the O/C. of the British forces at Buttevant to a conference at Cork. I took up a position with the other members of the column on high ground to the west of the road and about 150 yards from same. We were under cover of a stone faced fence. There were parties from Analeentha acting as scouts, outposts and signallers at our side of the road. The men from Burnfort Company, to the number of about 20, were on the eastern side of the road. Some were in ambush position

behind a fence about 20 yards from the road at Leary's Rock. The others were acting as scouts, while two (Con. Mulcahy and Dan Sheehan) had been detailed to block the road by pushing two carts into the roadway when the approach of the enemy convoy was signalled. As far as I can recollect, some of the men at Leary's Rock were:- Dave Moylan, Dick Nagle, John O'Connell, Denis Fitzgerald, Dave Walsh, Maurice Walsh, Jack Mullane, Pat Flynn. Other men on duty at the eastern side of the road were:- Paddy Dorgan, Pat Ronayne and Thomas Mulcahy.

Although all units were in position at about 6 a.m. there was nothing to report until some short time after 10 a.m. when I heard some shots and noticed two British soldiers crossing Sheehan's field at the eastern side of the road and to the rear of the party in position at Leary's Rock. At this time, two members of the column ('Congo' Moloney and another) were on their way from Corry's farmhouse - to the rear of the column's position on the western side of the road - with a supply of refreshments. When they heard the shooting they were in a better position to observe what was happening. They dashed immediately to where the column were in position and reported to the O/C. (Jack Cunningham) that we were surrounded. The column was ordered by the O/C. to withdraw in a westerly direction and the whole party west of the road moved off in the direction of Nursetown. We managed to avoid the encircling forces, but some of our scouts were fired on by an enemy from a road some distance from our line of retreat. The members of the column present at Mourneabbey were, as far as I can recollect:- Mick Nagle, Denis Mulcahy, Tadhg Mullane, Tadhg McCarthy, Ned Murphy, 'Congo' Moloney, Joe Morgan, Jerh. Daly, Leo O'Callaghan, Ned Waters, Batt Walsh, Jack Sullivan (witness)

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After having partaken of some food at a house in Nursetown, I returned to Gleannavigue area to find out what had happened at the eastern side of the road where the men of my own company (Burnfort) had been in position under Jack Ronayne (1st Lieut.) I was accompanied by Mick Nagle, Mick Curtin and Jack O'Keefe. We found that the enemy troops had left the area, it was then about 4 p.m., and we learned that the I.R.A. casualties were:- Three men killed (Paddy Dorgan, Pat Flynn, Ned Creedon); two men wounded and taken prisoner:- (Mick Looney and Thomas Mulcahy); two men taken prisoner - (Patrick Ronayne, Mick Creedon).

Thomas Mulcahy and Patrick Ronayne were later tried by drumhead courtmartial on a charge of levying war. They were found guilty and executed. Mick Looney died of wounds. The Creedon brothers were not on duty when taken prisoner.

I returned to the column within a few days and we continued to move around the area seeking a suitable opportunity to attack the enemy, but met with no success.

Early in March 1921, I was ordered by the Brigade O/C. (Liam Lynch) to return to my home area as the disaster at Mourneabbey had disorganised the local I.R.A. forces. I was given the task of reorganising the units and building up morale. I was engaged on this duty as well as arranging for the blocking of roads, the cutting of lines of communication, supplying transport for the columns, as well as brigade and other officers passing through the area. This work involved practically the whole-time attention of all available men until the Truce on 11th July 1921.

Rank at Truce:- O/C. Burnfort Company, Mallow Battalion, Cork II Brigade.

Strength of the company - about 60.

Signed: John O'SullivanDate: 15th March 1956Witness: P. O'Donnell

(P. O'Donnell)

15th March 1956.