

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1528

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1528.

Witness

James Sullivan,  
West End,  
Castletownbere,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Bere Island Company, Castletownbere  
Battn., Cork 111 Brigade.  
Member of Bgde. Column, Cork 111 Bgde.,  
I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Bere Island Company and  
Flying Column, Cork 111 Brigade, I.R.A.,  
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2821.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,528

STATEMENT BY JAMES SULLIVAN,

West End, Castletownbere, Co. Cork.

I was born on Bere Island on October 14th 1894. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Bere Island National School until I reached the age of 15 years, when I went to work on my parents' farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Bere Island when a unit was formed there towards the end of 1917. The strength of the unit was about forty. The officers were:-

O/C - Con Lowney  
1st Lt. - Jim Sullivan (witness)  
2nd Lt. - Jerh. Murphy.

Our company (Bere Island) was attached to Castletownbere Battalion, which was organised early in 1918. The companies in the battalion at this time were, I think : - Castletownbere, Bere Island, Eyries, Ardgroom, Adrigole, Inches, Urhan, Ballycrovane. As far as I can recollect, the officers of the battalion (Castletownbere) were:

O/C - Charlie Hurley  
Vice O/C - Seán Driscoll  
Adjt. - Michael Crowley  
Q/M - Dan Sullivan.

The only type of training carried on was ordinary close order foot drill, with occasional public parades and route marches. Training was carried out under our own officers, who acquired their knowledge of military training from British military training manuals obtained from members of the British garrison on Bere Island.

There was a substantial increase in the membership of our company (Bere Island) when the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918. The strength grew to about sixty-five. At this time we had no arms and were mainly engaged in organising the general public to adopt a passive resistance attitude: getting signatures to anti-conscription pledge and collecting subscriptions for the anti-conscription fund.

Our unit (Bere Island) took part in a parade in Castletownbere on St. Patrick's Day, 1918. Other units taking part were Castletownbere and Eyries Companies. Following the parade, the R.I.C. barracks at Eyries was raided by members of that company and four or five carbines were captured. The R.I.C. were very active following the parade and the raid at Eyries. Our Company O/C (Con Lowney) was arrested. I think that he was charged with illegal drilling. He was brought before the Petty Sessions Court. He recognised the court and, for so doing, was removed from the post of Company O/C by the Battalion O/C (Charlie Hurley). It was an order at this time that Volunteers, if arrested and charged in connection with their activities, should refuse to recognise the authority of the enemy courts to try them. This led to a change in the officers of Bere Island unit. I was now appointed O/C, Jerh. Murphy was 1st Lieutenant and Patrick Sullivan was made 2nd Lieutenant.

Early in June, 1918, the members of Bere Island Company, in co-operation with men from Adrigole, seized a large quantity of gun-cotton, primers and detonators from the military stores on the island. The whereabouts of this material was discovered by Eugene Dunne (I/O

Adrigole Company) who was employed by Bantry Bay Steamship Company as a clerk. He reported the position to me and to his own Company (Adrigole) O/C. It was decided to raid the store and remove the explosives.

The raid was carried out on the morning of June 5th 1918. Operations began about 1 a.m. Nearly every member of Bere Island Company was engaged, acting either as scouts, outposts or in the actual removal of the explosives from the store to a boat at the pier. Over fifty boxes, each weighing approximately 56 lbs, had to be carried by hand to the boat, a distance of about 100 yards.

The boat was the property of Tim Moriarty - a member of my company (Bere Island). When the boat had been fully loaded we found that there were still six boxes of gun cotton, some coils of electric cable and other materials in the store, so before moving off we dumped this lot in a store beside the pier owned by John Houlihan. When the store had been cleared of explosives we rowed across the harbour from Bere Island Pier to <sup>N</sup>Burrow where the men from Adrigole were waiting to unload the boat. When the boat had been unloaded we returned to Bere Island some time about 5 a.m. This gun-cotton was dumped in Adrigole area, from where it was removed in small quantities as required.

There was no activity in our area in connection with the general election in December, 1918. The Sinn Féin candidate - Seán Hayes (I think) - was returned unopposed.

When Cork 111 Brigade was formed in January, 1919, Castletownbere Battalion became a unit of this brigade.

The other units were: - Bantry, Bandon, Dunmanway and Clonakilty Battalions. Later on another battalion was organised in Schull area. The first O/C of the new brigade was Tom Hales (Bandon). I cannot recollect who the other officers were.

Beyond normal training there was not very much activity during 1919. All Volunteers were, however, engaged in the collection of the first Dáil Éireann Loan in their areas. About this time also our company obtained two rifles - one (Ross) from a member of the military garrison on the island, and another (Lee Enfield) which was in store for repairs was taken out by a friendly workman.

The first operation of importance in the area in which I took part was the attack on Allihies R.I.C. Barracks on February 12th 1920. Before this operation I crossed from Bere Island on two or three occasions to discuss the plans and make arrangements for the attack. Amongst those who took part in these discussions were; Christy O'Connell (Eyries), Con O'Sullivan, Mick Crowley. On the night of the attack I supplied three rifles and two shotguns to the attacking party. Three other members of Bere Island unit accompanied me on this operation, viz. Michael Sullivan, Florence Sullivan and Tim Harrington. Amongst the men from Castletownbere who took part were: Wm. O'Neill and Chris. McGrath.

The attacking party assembled at Inches - about 1 mile from Eyries and four from Castletownbere - about 8 p.m. There were about forty men in the party. They were armed with eight rifles and about twenty-five shotguns. The others carried a stock of gun-cotton as well as tools

for cutting roads. The whole party moved off for Allihies within a short time. We travelled across country and reached the vicinity of Allihies about 11 p.m.

Scouts and road blocking parties were now sent out, and coming on to midnight the main attacking party moved into Allihies. The strength of this party was about twenty. Sections were allocated to take up positions at the rear and front of the building, which was standing on its own. There was a small yard enclosed by a stone wall at the rear. A section of six - riflemen and shotgunmen interspersed - took up a position behind this wall. A section of similar strength moved into position behind a fence on the opposite side of the road in front of the barrack. I was a member of this latter section and was armed with a rifle. I cannot recollect who were in my section.

When all sections were in position a party got into the yard at the rear of the building and placed a charge of guncotton at the base of the back wall. Having lighted the fuse they withdrew. As far as I know, the men who laid the charge were Con Sullivan and Christy O'Connell. Within a minute there was a loud explosion and a large portion of the rear wall of the building was blown down. The garrison was now called on to surrender, but the reply was a burst of rifle fire.

All sections were now ordered to open fire on the building. Intermittent firing continued for some hours, during which the occupants of the building were called on to surrender on a number of occasions. As there was no hope of taking the building and the members of our units had to get home to their own areas before daylight, the attack was called off after about five hours. All sections then withdrew to their home areas.

As a result of this operation Allihies R.I.C. barracks was evacuated next day.

Numerous raids for arms were carried out throughout the area during the summer of 1920. Early in July of this year we carried out a raid on a military store on

Bere Island. We seized four rifles (.22), field glasses and some Verey Light pistols. Within the month we burned the store from which we had taken the rifles and also the pavilion which was used by the naval and military personnel as a recreation hall. All these buildings were on the outskirts of the military encampment. The majority of the members of the company (Bere Island) were engaged on one job or another in connection with these operations.

At this period I had to leave Bere Island and join up with the units operating on the mainland. There was, however, no activity of any importance beyond normal training until November, 1920, when a party from Castletownbere Battalion was selected to serve with the newly formed Brigade Flying Column. Amongst those to travel from the battalion were: Chris. O'Connell, Liam O'Dwyer, Jim Driscoll, Tim O'Dwyer, <sup>MURT</sup> ~~Jack~~ McCarthy, "Quinlan" Sullivan, Jim Sullivan (witness). About the third Sunday in November we travelled by car from Glengariff to Togher. When we reached Togher we did not find anybody connected with the column. We remained in the area until about noon next day and then returned home after a fruitless search. As far as I can recollect, the assembly point fixed for the column was Clogher near Dunmanway. This was the column which took part in the ambush at Kilmichael on November 28th 1920, but through some misunderstanding we went to the wrong meeting place.

Early in February, 1921, the men from the battalion mentioned in the previous paragraph (Chris. O'Connell, Jim Sullivan, Jim Driscoll, Tim O'Dwyer, "Quinlan" Sullivan, <sup>MURT</sup> ~~Jack~~ McCarthy) joined the column in Bantry area.

The column had been disbanded early in December, 1920, and was now re-assembling. On this occasion we travelled by boat from Adrigole area to Gearhies Pier, taking a supply of guncotton with us. This was, I think, a night or two prior to the attack on Drimoleague R.I.C. Barracks (12/2/1921). On this occasion I was armed with a rifle and was one of a party under cover behind a fence across the road from the front of the barracks. Other sections were in position at the rear while a section were moving into the village with a large mine. The mine was placed in position, but although there was a violent explosion the walls of the barrack were not damaged to any great extent. Following the explosion all sections opened fire, but as there was no prospect of capturing the building the cease fire order was given and all sections were ordered to withdraw.

The column now moved round the area for some days but failed to make contact with the enemy. Towards the end of February I was instructed to return to Castletownbere area to await recall. As far as I can recollect, all the other men from the battalion returned home at the same time.

When the men from the Castletownbere Battalion were next called up during the first days of March, 1921, I was unable to travel as I was ill. Amongst those who travelled this time were:- Christy O'Connell, Dick Spencer, Micheál Óg O'Sullivan, Seán O'Driscoll and, I think, four others whose names I cannot recollect. On this occasion they took with them all available rifles in the battalion. This party took part in the engagement at Crossbarry on March 19th 1921.



At this period the main activities in the Castletownbere Battalion area consisted of trenching roads, demolishing bridges and cutting lines of communication. All members of the various units were regularly engaged on work of this nature day in day out - as trenches and road blocks were put in order by forced labour rounded up as required by large military parties.

The next operation planned in the area took place on May 14th 1921 when a party of about twelve men were mobilised to carry out the general order to shoot up any enemy forces to be seen as a reprisal for the execution of I.R.A. prisoners in Cork. Some members of this party were: - Liam O'Dwyer, Chris. O'Connell, Jim Sullivan (witness), Mick Crowley, Rich. O'Dwyer, <sup>MURT</sup> ~~Jack~~ McCarthy (all from Eyries and Inches Companies), Denis Joe Sullivan, Wm. O'Neill and Pat Sullivan (Castletownbere Company). All were armed with rifles and revolvers.

This party assembled in Inches area. As they were moving into Castletownbere a patrol of Tans and R.I.C. suddenly made its appearance in the fields while a lorry of military drove along the road from Castletownbere. There was an exchange of shots in the vicinity of Toormore on the Eyries road and our party withdrew. As far as I can recollect, there were no casualties on either side.

During the period mid-May to the Truce on July 11th 1921 we were engaged on sniping enemy posts, interrupting enemy lines of communication and generally endeavouring to worry the enemy forces in the area.

Rank at the Truce - O/C Bere Island Company,  
Castletownbere Battalion, Cork ~~IV~~<sup>III</sup> Brigade. The  
strength of the company was about sixty.

Signed: James Sullivan

Date: November 10<sup>th</sup> 1956

Witness: P. J. Donnell  
(Investigator).

