

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21

No. W.S. 1578

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1578 . . .

Witness

John J. O'Sullivan,
Ballylickey,
Bantry,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Communications, Bantry Battalion,
Cork III Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Bantry Battalion, Cork III Brigade,
I.R.A., 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No . . . S. 2898.

Form B S.M. 2

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No. W.S. 1578

STATEMENT BY JOHN J. O'SULLIVAN

Ballylickey, Bantry, Co.Cork.

I was born in Bantry in 1891. My father was a building contractor. I was educated at Coomleagh National School until I was 15 years of age when I went to serve my time as a mason and plasterer with my father.

I joined Bantry Company of the Irish Volunteers in the late summer of 1914. The pioneers in the Volunteer movement in the area were: Michael O'Donovan, Michael O'Sullivan, Michael Murray and James O'Callaghan. The strength of the unit was about 120. The only type of training carried on was close order foot drill. The training officer was a man named Gordon, who was an officer on the reserve of the British Marines.

When John Redmond, M.P., leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, appealed for recruits for the British army in a speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, a split occurred in the Irish Volunteer organisation throughout the country. In Bantry, the Volunteer followers of John Redmond joined the new organisation which arose out of the split - the Irish National Volunteers. They numbered about thirty. They trained in the Redmondite Hall under Denis O'Shea. The majority of the original company continued to serve in the Irish Volunteers and trained in the Town Hall. The men who continued to serve in the Irish Volunteers were nearly all supporters of the All-for-Ireland Party led by William O'Brien, M.P. The O/C. of this unit was Michael O'Donovan, while other officers were: Michael Murray and Ralph Keyes. This was September 1914.

Parades of the Irish Volunteers unit were carried on at regular intervals and after a short period the new organisation - Irish National Volunteers - fell through as

many of the members took their leader's advice and joined the British Army to fight for the alleged freedom of small nations. The main activities in which we of the Irish Volunteers were engaged were the holding of route marches and parades at which we were instructed in close order foot drill.

Instruction was also given in arms drill with wooden guns and a few shotguns. The only other arms held by the company were, as far as I can recollect, three or four revolvers (.32).

Training continued along these lines throughout 1915 and up to Easter 1916. On Easter Sunday morning, about nine members of the Bantry unit cycled to Kealkil where we met some men from Ballingearry Company. After waiting in Kealkil district all day, we cycled back home to Bantry in the evening as we did not receive any further instructions. Apparently we were to have made contact with an arms convoy at Kealkil if the arms, as anticipated, had been landed in Kerry. As far as I can recollect, some of the men from Bantry, who travelled to Kealkil on Easter Sunday 1916, were: Michael Murray, Mark Sullivan, Ralph Keyes, Dan Regan, Dan Mahoney, Sean Cotter, John J. O'Sullivan (witness). There were two others whose names I cannot remember. There was no further activity in Bantry at Easter 1916.

Following Easter Week 1916, the Volunteer organisation continued to operate in the area. Parades were, however, not held at regular intervals but took the form of meetings at which the general situation was discussed amongst the members from a national viewpoint.

Towards the end of the summer, activities began to assume normal proportions and a certain amount of organising work was carried on. New recruits were invited to join and many of those who had joined the now defunct National Volunteers rejoined the Irish Volunteers. Eventually, when the Manchester

Martyrs Anniversary celebrations fell due in November 1916, we were in a position to hold a big parade on 23rd November. The O/C. of this parade was Michael O'Donovan.

Early in 1917, Ralph Keyes was elected O/C. Bantry Company and his appointment led to increased activity. Within a short time selected members of the unit carried out two raids for arms - one on the Barytes Mines, and the second on Kelly's hardware shop. A supply of explosives was obtained at the mines and some cartridges at Kelly's. The captured stores were dumped in Baurgorm area. I did not take part in these raids and cannot recollect the names of those who did.

Normal training continued throughout 1917. When the British threatened to enforce conscription in the Spring of 1918, there was a big influx of new recruits in all areas. Public parades were held. The Volunteers attended in force at meetings organised to protest against the enforcement of conscription. They helped to organise the general public. They collected all available arms - mainly shotguns - in the area. Pikeheads were manufactured in the local forge by the blacksmith, Tom Connors, and shafts for same were fashioned by the members of the company. In addition, all available shotgun cartridges were loaded with buckshot and a supply of home-made bombs made. The latter were made by filling paint tins, cocoa tins and suchlike containers with scrap metal and charging them with gelignite, detonator and a length of fuze which protruded through a hole in the cover of the container.

The Irish Volunteer organisation had been growing steadily in strength throughout 1917 and early 1918. Units were now operating in Bantry, Coomhola, Kealkil, Glengariff, Durrus, Caheragh, Kilcrohane and Droumsullivan. I had assisted Ernest Blythe in the organisation of Coomhola and Kealkil companies. These units were now organised into a battalion to become

14th Battalion, Cork Brigade. The first officers of this battalion were, I think: O/C. Dan O'Mahoney; Vice O/C. Michael Murray; Adjutant, Ted O'Sullivan; Q.M. - I cannot recollect.

The organisation of companies at Durrus Road, Inchingeragh and Drimoleague at a later stage completed the Volunteer organisation in the area.

Normal training and parades continued when the threat of conscription had passed. Every opportunity was now being availed of to secure arms and, on 23rd September 1918, Ralph Keyes (O/C. Bantry Company) with three or four men disarmed an R.I.C. patrol in the neighbourhood of the town. They seized a carbine and a .45 revolver with a small supply of ammunition for each. These arms were immediately passed to a dump at Baurgorm in the company area.

Early in December 1918, about 40 members of Bantry Coy. mobilised on two occasions to ambush a military patrol at Sadler's Cross on the Bantry-Durrus road. The enemy patrol did not put in an appearance.

There was no contest in the area in the General Election in December 1918. The Sinn Féin candidate - Sean Hayes (I think) - was returned unopposed.

Cork Brigade, which embraced the entire county, was now organised into about 20 battalions. It was decided to divide it into three brigades, in the areas approximating to Cork City and Mid Cork (1st), North Cork (2nd) and West Cork (3rd). Under the new scheme of organisation Bantry Battalion became a unit of Cork III Brigade. There were five other battalions in this ~~company~~^{brigade}, viz: Bandon, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Skibbereen, Castletown~~bridge~~^{bridge}. The new brigade was established on 6th January 1919. The first officers were: O/C. Tom Hales, Vice O/C. Sean Hayes; Adjutant, Denis O'Connell; Q.M. Denis O'Shea.

Early in 1919 I took part in a raid on Newtown House, Bantry, in which we expected to get two rifles and a shotgun which were reported to be kept there. Although we searched the house thoroughly, we failed to find the guns. The Battalion Adjutant (Ted O'Sullivan) was in charge of this raid. Others who took part were: Ralph Keyes, "Mossy" Donegan and Paddy O'Sullivan.

Normal training continued about this time, but during the summer of 1919, all Volunteers were mainly engaged on the collection of the subscriptions for the first loan floated by the Government of the Irish Republic - Dáil Éireann. The vast majority of the people in the area subscribed to this loan.

The establishment of a training camp at Glandore in August 1919 was the next event of importance. This camp was attended by representatives from all battalions in the brigade and was carried on under the supervision of Dick McKee (O/C. Dublin Brigade). I was not present at this camp, but, as far as I can recollect, the representatives from Bantry Battalion were:- Ted O'Sullivan, "Mossy" Donegan, Ralph Keyes, Sean Lehane and Sean Cotter. The camp was carried on for about a week.

Immediately following the camp at Glandore about mid-August 1919, some changes took place in the staff of Bantry Battalion. The Battalion Adjutant (Ted O'Sullivan) was appointed O/C. and the members of the staff now were: O/C. Ted O'Sullivan; Vice O/C. Sean Lehane; Adjutant Sean Cotter; Q.M. Ml. O'Callaghan

At this time, I was moving around the country working on contracts and was not in the Bantry area, when the raid on the British M.L. boat was carried out on the night of 17th November 1919. This raid was planned and carried out by the officers of the Bantry Company in co-operation with Maurice Donegan, Sean Cotter and Michael O'Callaghan of the battalion staff. This operation led to the capture of six Ross Canadian rifles, three revolvers, a supply of ammunition, some Verey pistols and other military equipment.

Training now became more intensive and members of all units began to realise that we were going to fight. All members of the I.R.A. - we had now sworn allegiance to the Government of the Irish Republic established following the General Election in December 1918 and had so become the army of the Irish Republic - were taking a keen interest in the activities of enemy forces, both military and R.I.C. They were reporting regularly on the movements of enemy patrols and on the layout of enemy posts.

Early in 1920 a number of R.I.C. barracks were attacked throughout the country including those at Mountpleasant and Timoleague on the night of 25th February 1920. Both these posts were in the Bandon Battalion area. Plans were now made to attack Durrus R.I.C. post in Bantry area. The rifles captured in the raid on the M.L. boat were used in this attack. The men selected to take part numbered about 60 and were drawn from Bantry, Caheragh and Durrus units. The Battalion O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) was in charge.

The barracks was the last house in a terrace. It was a two-storey building with a small garden in front and a yard at the rear. The garden was filled with barbed wire and tin cans. All the windows were steel-shuttered. It was planned to get into the house next door to the barracks, to break a hole through the roof of this house and so be able to get on to the roof of the barrack which was about two feet higher than the roof of the adjoining house. The roof of the barrack was then to be smashed in and some mines and home-made bombs thrown through the hole in the roof. The attacking party was divided into four sections:

- (a) storming party to enter house next door, get on roof, smash in roof of barracks and operate mines etc. This party consisted of Ted O'Sullivan O/C., Tom Ward, Sean Lehane and John J. O'Sullivan (witness).

- (b) Covering party on street under John O'Sullivan - one rifleman and 4 or 5 shotgun men.
- (c) Covering party in the yard of Ross's stables directly opposite the front of the barrack on the other side of the street. This party, which consisted of 3 riflemen and 6 or 7 shotgun men, was in charge of "Mossy" Donegan.
- (d) Covering party at rear of barrack under Dan O'Mahoney - 3 riflemen and 5 or 6 shotgun men.

There were, in addition, several men engaged on scouting, road blocking and outpost activities. All roads leading to Durrus from Bantry and Skibbereen were held by strong sections armed mainly with shotguns.

When the covering sections were in position, the storming party at (a) approached the house adjoining the barrack. It was occupied by three sisters. I smashed in the door with a sledge and with other members of the storming party dashed upstairs to the room nearest to the gable of the barracks. Our sudden appearance alarmed the three women in the house and they created a bit of a scene, which must have helped to alert the garrison next door. However, using the sledge again, I broke a hole in the roof and, with the assistance of Tom Ward and Sean Lehane, pushed Ted O'Sullivan between the rafters on to the roof which was about two feet lower than that of the barrack. Sean Lehane and I followed and, by the time we had got through, we were almost naked as our clothes were torn off by the nails in the rafters. In the meantime, Ted O'Sullivan had broken a hole in the barrack roof and Tom Ward now handed up one of the mines which I had carried from Bantry where they had been made. Ted lighted the fuse of the mine and dropped it through the hole in the roof. There was a deafening explosion and it seemed as if the interior of the barrack had been demolished. The covering parties at front and rear now opened fire. However, the garrison returned this fire and, although we dropped in another mine which failed to explode, also a number

of home-made canister bombs, the garrison refused to surrender when called upon. It was now decided to set the building on fire and a supply of petrol was poured through the hole in the roof. This was ignited, and we continued to feed small quantities of petrol to the fire until daylight intervened when we were forced to abandon our attempt to capture the post. The barracks was now ablaze, but as it was necessary that many of our attacking party should be back in time for work in Bantry, we were forced to call off the engagement.

Shortly after we had withdrawn, the garrison was forced to evacuate the building. Enemy casualties were two men seriously wounded. I.R.A. casualties were nil. This operation took place on 31st March 1920. The attack opened about 1 a.m. and terminated about 7 a.m.

At Easter 1920, the following posts, which had been evacuated by the R.I.C., were destroyed in response to a general order from G.H.Q. - Kilcrohane, Durrus and Kealkil R.I.C. Barracks. These posts were destroyed by the local units in each area.

After these operations, enemy activities were intensified. The military and R.I.C. were constantly raiding the houses of known I.R.A. men and of their friends. As a result, a number of men were forced to go on the run. The men included, amongst others, Ted O'Sullivan, O/C., Sean Lehane, "Mossy" Donegan, Sean Cotter, Tom Ward, Ralph Keyes, Con O'Sullivan, and numbered about a dozen. These men formed into a column which was divided into two sections - one operating north of Bantry and the other to the south. As a large force of military - about 2000 - landed at Bantry about this time and were billeted in the Workhouse there, the men in these sections were mainly engaged in sniping enemy posts, raiding mails and evading arrest.

Being working away from the home area around this time I had not come under suspicion and, being more or less free to travel around the district on my father's business as contractor, I was now appointed Battalion O/C. Communications and Dispatches. I was responsible for organising a system of dispatch carrying throughout the area ensuring that suitable transport - such as bicycles in good condition, horses or, where considered necessary, suitable boats - were available in each company area.

On 6th May 1920, I received instructions from the Battalion O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) to arrange for the destruction of the Income Tax offices in Bantry. The office was situated on the square directly opposite the R.I.C. Barracks. Accompanied by Ned Cotter and Paddy Connolly, I approached the office from the rear about 11.30 p.m. We forced an entry through a window at the back. Having collected all available records into the centre of a room on the ground floor, we saturated them with paraffin oil and set them on fire. We then withdrew taking with us the Income Tax collector's bicycle which I handed over to the Battalion O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) next morning. The income tax office and contents were totally destroyed.

Towards the end of May 1920, Sean Lehane, who had been Vice O/C. Bantry Battalion, was allocated to the job of organising the Schull Peninsula area which up to now had been controlled from Bantry. This area later became the 7th Battalion, Cork III Brigade, Sean Lehane becoming its first O/C. He was replaced as Vice O/C. Bantry Battalion by "Mossy" Donegan. The officers of our battalion (Bantry) now were: O/C. Ted O'Sullivan; Vice O/C. "Mossy" Donegan; Adjutant, Sean Cotter; Q.M. Michael O'Callaghan; I.O. Tom Reidy; Communications and Dispatches, John J. O'Sullivan (witness).

Early in June 1920, I joined the men on the run operating north of Bantry for a week during which we lay in ambush near Glengarriff. We took up positions behind the roadside fence on the Bantry-Glengarriff road about two miles from the latter village. We were waiting for a patrol of R.I.C. which normally operated in the area, but the patrol never came as far as our position, which was the only suitable ambush site in the vicinity. We were still in position on Saturday morning when a single R.I.C. man passed through, about 11 a.m., in the direction of Bantry. He was allowed to proceed on his way as we were expecting a stronger party to follow. As there was no appearance by a further section by 4 p.m. we withdrew from our position and moved towards Bantry in the hope of meeting the R.I.C. man who had passed through in the morning. This man was named Constable King and he had come into the area with the reputation of having taken part in the murder of a family of I.R.A. men named, I think, Dwyer, near The Ragg in Co. Tipperary. We met Constable King in the vicinity of Snavel and held him up. He was being taken from the roadway into a field when he endeavoured to escape and was shot.

Amongst the ambush party through the week were: Ted O'Sullivan (O/C), John Wryne, Denis O'Sullivan, Michael O'Driscoll, Dan O'Mahoney and John J. O'Sullivan (witness). With the exception of Dan O'Mahoney and Denis O'Sullivan, who returned to their homes, the remainder of this party went into billets in Bantry area.

At the Local Government elections in June 1920, I was elected a member of ^{Cork County} ~~Bantry Rural District~~ Council, while the Battalion O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) who had also been elected, was elected chairman of the ^{Bantry Rural District} Council at its first meeting.

The normal training and organisation now became

intensified and all units were, more or less, on a war footing. Selected men were being trained in the use of the rifle and small arms as well as in the manufacture of mines and bombs. Every opportunity was being availed of to harass the enemy by sniping and suchlike activities. Several raids on the mails, both local and provincial, were carried out, but no information of military value was obtained. After censoring, all mails were returned to the nearest post office marked "Censored by I.R.A."

It was now about mid-July 1920, and the main Bantry-Glengarriff road had been under observation for some days to check on the routine of an enemy convoy. Eventually, it was decided to take up an ambush position at Snavo, about 5 miles from Bantry on this road. Our column of men on the run were now billeted at Connolly's, Holly Hill, where we made a mine by filling a 12 inch sewer pipe with shrapnel and concrete. This mine was charged with about $\frac{3}{4}$ -cwt. of gun-cotton suitably detonated. While the mine was being prepared our scouts reported that two lorries of military had passed through towards Glengarriff. It was now about 11 a.m.

The men of the local company (Coomhola) were now mobilised by the battalion adjutant (Sean Cotter) and the mine was removed to O'Driscoll's, Snavo, from where Denis O'Driscoll took it on a horse and cart towards Snavo Bridge which he reached about 1.30 p.m. He was accompanied by Florence O'Sullivan of the Coomhola Company. Just as O'Driscoll and his companion were approaching Snavo Bridge where the members of the ambush party were being placed in position, the enemy convoy were heard approaching from Glengarriff direction at a fast rate. They were firing as they travelled along and were at least $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours ahead of the normal schedule. Hearing the shooting, Denis O'Driscoll drove the horse and cart with the mine up a side road beside Snavo Bridge leading

to Coomhola. We were taken completely by surprise and, as the men had not taken up ambush positions, we all dispersed. The military dismounted from their lorries and endeavoured to round up the ambush party but, with the exception of Denis O'Driscoll and his colleague Florence O'Sullivan with the mine, all escaped. The men of the local companies, Glengarriff and Coomhola, returned to their home areas, while the men on the run withdrew to the vicinity of Bantry where they went into billets. I moved into Coomhola with John Keohane.

In this case it was obvious that the enemy had been advised of our presence in the area, otherwise it was most unlikely that they would have deviated from their normal procedure and returned through the ambush position at least two hours ahead of time. The fact that they began firing when approaching the site of the ambush appears as further confirmation of their prior knowledge.

The Brigade O/C. (Tom Hales) and Brigade Q.M. (Pat Harte) were taken prisoners by the enemy towards the end of July 1920. These arrests led to changes in the personnel of the brigade and battalion staffs. The brigade staff now became: O/C. Charlie Hurley; Vice O/C. Ted O'Sullivan (late O/C. Bantry Battalion); Adjutant Liam Deasy; Q.M. Dick Barrett. The officers of the Bantry Battalion now were: O/C. "Moss" Donegan; Vice O/C. Tom Ward; Adjutant Sean Cotter; Q.M. John J. O'Sullivan (witness).

During the month of August 1920, I was moving around the area inspecting dumps, examining the stocks of arms and ammunition held by the companies and instructing the various Q.Ms. on the care and maintenance of the stores.

Towards the end of the month I was in touch with the Battalion O/C. ("Mossy" Donegan) who informed me that it was

proposed to ambush a lorry of military which travelled from Bantry to Castletownbere each week. The date fixed for the operation was 24th August 1920. I was to contact John Wryne (Coomhola Company) and travel with him to Fircaol, about 2½ miles from Glengarriff on the Castletownbere road, where we would meet the remainder of the ambush party. With John Wryne I cycled to Fircaol on the night of 23rd August 1920. Here we met early next morning "Mossy" Donegan (Battalion O/C.), Tom Ward (V.O/C), Sean Cotter (adjutant), Con Sullivan, Sean Lehane (O/C. Schull Battalion), Dan Mahoney, Mick Driscoll, Mick Lucey, Bill Dillon and a number of other men from Kealkil and Coomhola companies. In all, there were about 20 men present.

About 8 a.m. we took up a position north of the road about 2½ miles from Glengarriff. We were extended over about 80 yards behind the roadside fence and some rocks on high ground overlooking the road. We remained in position until after 3 p.m. by which time there did not appear to be any prospect of the expected convoy putting in an appearance as it normally passed between 11 a.m. and 12 noon. We then withdrew from the position.

As the ambush had not taken place, it was then decided by the O/C. ("Mossy" Donegan) to visit Glengarriff in the hope of making contact with a patrol of R.I.C. In any event, we intended to snipe the enemy post there in an endeavour to draw them out should we fail to meet a patrol. This garrison had wrecked the home of the local company O/C. (Jack Downey) on the previous night and were due to be taught a lesson. About 4 p.m. we proceeded towards the village (Glengarriff). On reaching the outskirts we made contact with a couple of members of the local company who were sent into the village to find out whether there were any enemy forces

in any of the shops or on the street. In a short time these scouts reported that there were three R.I.C. men drinking in O'Shea's publichouse. It was then decided to send three men, armed with revolvers, into O'Shea's to shoot the R.I.C. men there, while the remainder of the column - six armed with rifles and the remainder with shotguns - took up positions behind the wall of the graveyard at the western end of the street to act as cover for the three men (Bill Dillon (Kealkil), Mick Lucey and Mick Driscoll (Coomhola) who were going into the village. The party in the graveyard would also deal with the garrison of the R.I.C. post which we hoped would venture out when the shooting started.

The covering party took up positions about 4 p.m. and the section allocated to visit O'Shea's moved into the village. This party entered O'Shea's and dealt with the R.I.C. men. One (McNamara) was shot dead, another (Cleary) was wounded. The third member of the R.I.C. party dashed upstairs and escaped through a window at the back. We were still in position in the graveyard awaiting the return of the three men who had gone into O'Shea's, and expecting the R.I.C. garrison to dash from the barracks, but there was no appearance by the enemy, or, at least, so we thought. However, we soon discovered that some of the garrison had made their way from the rear of the building and were endeavouring to make their way to the rear of our position. In the meantime, our revolver men had returned to our position. We now opened fire on the enemy party which was endeavouring to cut us off and after an exchange of shots over a period of about ten minutes, we withdrew across the mountains to Comhola.

On the day following the shooting in Glengarriff, three members of the Gentry Company (Ralph Keyes, O/C., John Keohane and Con Sullivan) attacked an R.I.C. patrol on the

outskirts of Bantry. One R.I.C. man (Constable Hough) was killed. There were no I.R.A. casualties.

During September and October 1920, I was moving around the area inspecting the various units and their armaments - occasionally taking up ambush positions with the men of the column. Towards the end of this period, the Brigade Council decided to put a permanent flying column in the 'field' and, in order to ensure that this column was properly equipped and clothed, it was decided to impose a levy on farming and business communities throughout the brigade. The amount of this levy was fixed on the basis of the Poor Law valuation of business premises and on the number of stock carried on farms. The amounts varied from £1 to £50. The duty of arranging for the collection of this levy was delegated to me by the Battalion O/C. ('Moss' Donegan) and necessitated visits to all company areas to arrange with the officers for the collection in each area. The collection of this levy was carried out during October and November 1920.

Early in November 1920, a training camp for the officers of the Skibbereen and Bantry battalions was held at Kealkil. Tom Barry (O/C. Brigade Column) was in charge of the camp which continued for about 5 or 6 days. I think it assembled on Tuesday and disbanded on Sunday night. The camp was attended by the battalion staffs of the two battalions and the officers of the various companies. While at the camp, all present were instructed in the use and care of arms, use of cover, selection of ambush positions, instruction in scouting and outpost duty, as well as undergoing a course of drill in close and extended order. Lectures were given at night on various aspects of military operations. When the camp had concluded, a column - selected from those who had undergone the course of training - took up ambush positions

in the area on three or four occasions, but failed to make contact with any enemy force.

Between the termination of Kealkil Camp and Christmas 1920, I was moving around the area with the column of men on the run sniping enemy posts and generally endeavouring to keep the enemy forces 'on their toes'. At this time it was only in very exceptional cases that enemy patrols would move outside the urban areas except in superior strength.

When the brigade column was assembled for its first engagement at Kilmichael on 28th November 1920, the representatives of Bantry Battalion on the column were, as far as I can recollect, Mick Driscoll (Snave), John Sullivan (Baurgorm), Denis Cronin (Gurteenrue), and Jack Sullivan (Kealkil).

The Battalion O/C. ('Moss' Donegan), Battalion Adjutant (Sean Cotter), O/C. Bantry (Ralph Keyes) and Con Sullivan were arrested in the vicinity of Bantry on 28th November 1920. The battalion officers were replaced at the next Battalion Council meeting and the staff now were: O/C. Tom Ward; Vice O/C. Denis Keohane; Adjutant, Michael Harrington; Q.M. John J. O'Sullivan (witness); I.O. Tom Reidy.

The brigade column was disbanded just before Christmas 1920, and the representatives from Bantry Battalion returned to their home area. They moved around the area visiting the various companies until the column was reassembled about mid-January 1921.

Sniping of enemy posts was carried on at irregular intervals during January and early February 1921. The Brigade O/C. (Charlie Hurley) now issued a directive that activities should be speeded up in all areas. The Brigade Vice O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) visited the area early in February in

connection with this instruction and discussed the matter with the Battalion O/C. (Tom Ward) and staff. As a result our sniping activities were immediately intensified and enemy posts were sniped nightly.

A meeting of Bantry Battalion Council was held at Colomane Wood on 10th February 1921. All battalion officers were in attendance, while all companies in the battalion were represented at the meeting. While the meeting was in progress the Brigade Adjutant (Liam Deasy) and O/C. Brigade Column (Tom Barry) came into the room. The brigade column was billeted in the neighbourhood. Tom Barry asked for a report on the layout, defences and other available details of Drimoleague R.I.C. Barracks. This information was furnished by Dan O'Driscoll (O/C. Drimoleague Company), who was present at the meeting. It was decided to attack this post next night. The Column O/C. (Tom Barry) then expressed a desire to see the building for himself. It was then arranged by Denis Keohane (Battalion Vice O/C.) that Miss Bridie Manning, Colomane - a member of Cumann na mBan - would pick up Tom Barry next day and drive him in a horse and trap through Drimoleague so that he could inspect the barracks. This trip passed off without incident and Tom Barry, having discussed the plans for the attack, the arrangement of road blocks and the general scouting position with Dan O'Driscoll (O/C. Drimoleague Company), returned to the column at Durravahalla, about one mile from Drimoleague.

While the column O/C. (Tom Barry) had been on the visit of inspection, the members of the column were getting ready for the engagement that night. A large mine, for which I made the wooden case, was assembled by Peter Monahan of the engineers - he was later killed at Crossbarry on 19th March 1921 - which weighed between three and four hundredweight,

was mounted on a wooden frame so that it could be carried by six men. As it had to be carried about one mile, six strong men were selected for the job. These men were: Jack Corkerry, Sean Lehane, Liam Deasy, Tom O'Donoghue, Denis Lordan and myself.

Towards midnight on 11th February 1921, the column, with a number of local scouts, was assembled. Parties were selected to take up outpost duty while scouting and road-blocking sections were detailed. The main attacking party to the number of about 30 moved into the village about midnight. They took up positions across the road from the front of the R.I.C. post - a small section taking up a similar position at the rear. Our section, walking in our stockinged feet, now moved into the village accompanied by Tom Barry who carried the wiring attached to the mine. We laid the mine and its frame on the barbed wire entanglements surrounding the barrack and tried to push it towards the wall of the building to make contact. While so engaged, a shot was fired from inside the barrack and Tom Barry gave instructions to explode the mine while we all threw ourselves on the ground. The mine exploded with a deafening roar and blew away a portion of the roof, but did not breach the wall of the enemy post. Following the explosion, fire was opened on the building to which the garrison replied. After ten minutes the order to withdraw was given as there was no prospect of capturing the post. In connection with this operation, I would like to record that Tom Barry's instructions were: "If the wall is breached and the first man in falls, step on his corpse and do your duty".

While the attack on the barrack was taking place, a section of the column under the Brigade Vice O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) was in position on the Bantry road at Inchingeragh

to intercept enemy reinforcements from Bantry. This section was about 20 strong and all armed with rifles, as were the members of the main attacking party. When the attack on the barrack was called off, all sections of the column retired to Castledonovan area where they were inspected by the O/C. (Tom Barry) and then went into billets. The members of the Battalion staff and men from the local companies, who had been engaged on scouting and other duties, returned to their own areas.

The main activities in Bantry area in the period to May 1921, were the blocking of roads, demolition of bridges, cutting trenches and hindering in every way enemy administration and activities. The work of keeping enemy lines of communication cut was practically a wholetime job for all available men not doing service with the column, as roadblocks made at night were often cleared by forced civilian labour next day. In the circumstances, trenches had to be re-opened or new obstacles provided at another site within twenty-four hours. In addition to these activities, enemy posts were sniped at every available opportunity. A few shots fired at a post by our snipers around midnight often kept the garrison shooting until daybreak.

I was present at a Battalion Council meeting held in the vicinity of Bantry during the second week in May 1921. The Battalion O/C. (Tom Ward) presided. While the meeting was in progress, word was received that the garrison of Auxiliaries stationed at the Eccles Hotel in Glengarriff were to evacuate the post next day. They were supposed to travel by train from Bantry. It was decided to ambush this train in Inchingeragh Company area next morning. All present at the meeting moved to Inchingeragh that night and went into billets. Meantime, the officers of the local company collected

all arms dumped in the district. Early next morning the main body, to the number of about 20, took up a position on the high railway embankment north of the line. All were armed with rifles. They were extended over a distance of about 150 yards. The O/C. of the Inchingeragh Company (Con Keane) had taken a number of his men and had removed a section of the railway line at a point just inside the eastern end of our position. It was now about 8 a.m. When we had been in position about three hours, information was received that the enemy party were not travelling, so our ambush party withdrew to billets in Colomane. The date was, I believe, 13th May 1921

Later on the same day, about 4 p.m., while we were billeted in Colomane area, we received word from some local men that a patrol of six R.I.C. men were in the district. They had moved out into the area from Drimoleague. Six members of our party set out immediately to intercept the patrol on its way back to its base (Drimoleague). On our way we met Dan O'Driscoll (O/C. Drimoleague Company) who was on his way to advise us of the presence of the patrol in the area. While ^{he} we sought further information from a man working in a field nearby, our party, under Denis Keohane (Battalion Vice O/C.), took up a position at a point through which we expected the R.I.C. patrol to pass. Before Dan O'Driscoll returned, the R.I.C. patrol were observed to have passed through our position before we had moved in, so we fired a few shots at them. They took cover and returned our fire. After an exchange lasting about 30 minutes we decided to withdraw. Our party on this occasion was composed of: Denis Keohane, Denis Cadogan Cornelius O'Driscoll, Denis O'Sullivan, Dan O'Driscoll and myself (John J. O'Sullivan).

The general order to shoot up all enemy forces on sight as a reprisal for the execution of I.R.A. prisoners of war was to be carried out on 14th May 1921. So, following the incidents in Drimoleague area on the evening of 13th May,

the party moved to the vicinity of Bantry that night. Next day we took up positions covering the streets of the town, but there were no enemy forces to be seen, so we sniped the R.I.C. and military posts for about 20 minutes and then withdrew.

When plans were made for an attack on Drimoleague R.I.C. post, or an enemy patrol there, on 28th May 1921, two members of Kealkil Company (Bill Dillon and Dan Mahoney) travelled to Drimoleague to take part in the attack. They were armed with rifles. This attack was intended to induce the Auxiliary force stationed at Dunmanway to come to the aid of their colleagues in Drimoleague while the brigade column under Tom Barry was lying in ambush for them at Gloundaw on the Dunmanway-Drimoleague road. The attack on the patrol took place about 8.30 a.m. and one R.I.C. man was wounded. However, the Auxiliaries at Dunmanway did not take the bait and the column at Gloundaw had to withdraw without a scrap.

During the month of June, I was mainly engaged in moving around the area to ensure that all enemy garrisons were kept on the alert by regular sniping - a few shots at a time. In addition, lines of communication were cut regularly and the enemy were harassed at every available opportunity.

On 14th June a small convoy (two lorries) of military, on the way from Bantry to Glengarriff, were sniped at Ballylickey by some members of the column who were passing through the area at the time. Two members of the enemy party were reported to have been wounded.

The British Resident Magistrate, Mr. P. Brady, who resided at Ballylickey, was arrested on 6th July 1921, by the members of the Comhola Company and removed to an 'unknown destination'. It later transpired that this man was friendly to our side and he was released within a couple of days.

As far as I can recollect, the officers of Bantry Battalion, Cork III Brigade, between 1918 and the Truce on 11th July 1921, were:

March 1918	O/C.	Dan O'Mahoney
	V.O/C.	Michael Murray
	Adjt.	Ted O'Sullivan
	Q.M.	..
August 1919	O/C.	Ted O'Sullivan
	V.O/C.	Sean Lehane (To organise Schull, May 1920)
	Adjt.	Sean Cotter
	Q.M.	Michael O'Callaghan
May 1920	O/C.	Ted O'Sullivan (To Bde. V.C. July 1920)
	V.O/C.	"Mossy" Donegan
	Adjt.	Sean Cotter
	Q.M.	Michael O'Callaghan
	I.O.	Tom Reidy
	Commns.	John J. O'Sullivan
July 1920	O/C.	"Mossy" Donegan (arrested Nov. 1920)
	V.O/C.	Tom Ward
	Adjt.	Sean Cotter (arrested Nov. 1920)
	Q.M.	John J. O'Sullivan
	I.O.	Tom Reidy
Novr. 1920	O/C.	Tom Ward
	V.O/C.	Denis Keohane
	Adjt.	Michael Harrington
	Q.M.	John J. O'Sullivan
	I.O.	Tom Reidy

My rank at the Truce: Q.M. Bantry Battalion,
Cork III Brigade, I.R.A.

Strength of the battalion at the Truce - Approx. 1000

Signed: John J. O'Sullivan

Date: 16th February 1954

Witness: P. O'Connell

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No. W.S. 1,578