

W. S. 748
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 948

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 948

Witness

John Winters,
Drumdowney,
Ballyclough,
Mallow,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Bawnmore Company (Co. Cork)
Irish Volunteers, 1918 - ;

Vice-Comd't. Kanturk Battalion, 1921.

Subject.

Kanturk Battalion, Irish Volunteers,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY JOHN WINTERS

DRUMDOWNEY, BALLYCLOUGH, MALLOW, CO. CORK

I was born at Coolageela, Kanturk, on 12th August 1900.
My parents were farmers.

The Volunteers started in my home district in 1917 when they were being organised throughout the country after Easter Week. I have no clear recollection of who organised them, but I think it was somebody from Kanturk where there was a company of Volunteers since 1914. I joined the local company (Bawnmore) early in 1918. The strength of the company at the time was about 60 and this figure remained constant to the Truce in July 1921. When I joined the company captain was John Kearney. He left the district sometime about the end of 1918 and was replaced by Paddy O'Connor. The officers then were:

Captain	Paddy O'Connor
1st Lieut.	Ben Clifford
2nd Lieut.	Con Aherne

When the company captain, Paddy O'Connor, was arrested in May 1921, he was replaced by Patrick O'Sullivan. All officers were elected.

The Kanturk Battalion was organised during 1918 and comprised the following companies in the area:- Kanturk, Banteer, Lacklawn, Nadd, Castlemagner, Droumtarriffe, Kilbrin, Bawnmore, Boherbue, Derrgallon. The strength of these units varied between 20 and 60. The battalion officers were:-

O/C.	Denis Lyons
V.O/C.	Denis Murphy
Adjt.	Thomas Riordan
Q.M.	Mick Courtney

I do not know what number the battalion was in Cork Brigade.

There were hardly any arms in the Bawnmore Company when I joined, but during a number of raids for arms carried out at the end of 1918 and early 1919 we collected 20 to 25 shotguns and almost 200 cartridges for same. These raids were carried

out by Paddy O'Connor, O/C., Con Aherne, Ben Clifford, Jack Winters (witness), Bob Winters, and about ten or twelve other members of the company.

All Volunteers helped in the organisation of Sinn Fein in the area and co-operated in every way with the political side. During the General Election in December 1918 we were busy canvassing, checking voters' lists and guarding polling stations on the day of the election.

During this period and up to 1920, the Volunteers in Bawnmore held regular drills and parades. They co-operated in every possible way with other Irish Ireland organisations. The drilling was mainly foot-drill with some scouting and, occasionally, there would be a few practice shots with a .22 rifle.

An aeriocht was organised in Newmarket in June 1919, but the military and police prevented the people from assembling there and the venue was transferred to our company area where a very successful function was held. About this time too the battalion O/C., Denis Lyons, was arrested for "illegal drilling" and posting seditious literature and was sentenced to three months in prison. On his release he went "on the run" and I think he went to Scotland to some relatives.

Following Denis Lyons's departure Jack O'Connell, Derrygallon, was appointed Battalion O/C. He was killed in action in a round-up by the British, following an attack on an aeroplane at Drominagh when the military opened fire on himself and Paddy Clancy when they tried to escape capture. Denis Murphy was then appointed Battalion O/C.

The General Order for the destruction of evacuated R.I.C. posts and Income Tax offices did not result in any activity in the area as there were no posts or offices in the district.

Ballydrohane Ambush. The brigade column which had been formed (I think) in September 1920 was in the battalion area early in October. It was decided to attack a convoy of military - usually two or three lorries each carrying about fifteen soldiers - which transported supplies from Buttevant to Kanturk and Newmarket posts. These lorries usually travelled on Monday morning. The date fixed for the attack was October 11th, 1920, and the site of the ambush was at Ballydrohane about a mile from Kanturk on the Kanturk-Newmarket road. I scouted the area for the column and led them to their positions which had been selected in advance by the Column O/C. Liam Lynch after consultation with Ernie O'Malley, Sean Moylan, George Power and other members of the column. As three lorries were expected, the column together with selected members of the Bawnmore, Derrygallon, Kilbrin and Kanturk companies divided into three sections and arranged to cover the estimated position of the lorries when they would reach the ambush site.

With six members of the column and about six others I was placed in the position nearest Kanturk. This section was in charge of Denis Murphy, O/C. Kanturk Battalion. The first lorry which passed through our position was attacked when it reached the farthest section. As only one lorry came and as the sections on our left were able to deal with the enemy no action was necessary on our part. The driver of the lorry was killed by the first volley and a number of others wounded. The remainder of the party surrendered and 14 rifles (I think) with a few hundred rounds of ammunition were captured. When the action was over - after about 10 minutes - the whole party withdrew to Drouminarrigle, Newmarket area where the parties of local Volunteers were disbanded and with the other members of Bawnmore Company I returned to the home area. Members of the Bawnmore Company who took part in this engagement were Bob Winters, Jack Winters, John McLoughlin, Patrick Kearney, Dan Hayes, Maurice Hayes, Paddy O'Connor, Ben Clifford, Con Aherne.

This was the first ambush in which the Hotchkiss guns' and other weapons captured at Mallow Barracks on 28th September 1920, were used. The Hotchkiss guns were operated satisfactorily by Dick Willis and Jackie Bolster.

Between October 1920 and January 1921, the members of my company were engaged on routine activities, e.g., raiding mails, cutting wires, blocking roads, as well as doing guard duty and scouting for the brigade column which were often in the area. All members of the company took part in these activities.

The brigade column was disbanded about December 1920, and the members returned to their own units. The Brigade O/C. (Liam Lynch) then ordered the formation of battalion columns. As a result of this order, Kanturk Column was formed at the end of January 1921, with the following members: Mick Courney, Thomas Riordan, Jim Hayes, Jack Winters (witness), Martin McGrath, Eugene Duggan, Ned Donoghue (now a priest), Dan Fitzgerald, Denis Mulchinock, Jack Hummerston, Jack McCarthy, Sean Kennedy, Andy Murphy, Mick Keating, Denis Lyons and Denis Murphy, O/C.

The column was armed with 12 rifles and 4 shotguns. Some of the members - about six or eight - had revolvers. Each rifleman had about 50 rounds of ammunition and the shotgun men had about twenty five. The column was billeted in different parts of the area, but mainly around Nadd, for some weeks. We were given training in the use of ground and cover but, owing to scarcity of ammunition, we were only allowed an occasional shot with the rifle. The training was in charge of column O/C. Denis Murphy who afterwards became O/C. Training, Cork IV Brigade. About this time the column was joined by the members of the Mallow Battalion Column under Jack Cunningham. Members of this unit, as far as I can recollect, were:-

Leo Callaghan, Joe Morgan, Jack Moloney (Congo), Tadhg McCarthy, Ned Murphy, Ned Waters, Batt Walsh - there were also three or four others. Both columns engaged in combined training.

Early in March 1921, the column received information that a patrol of R.I.C. passed regularly by Fr. Murphy's Bridge on the Banteer-Nadd road. It was decided to ambush this party which consisted of a sergeant and three constables. Some members of the combined columns (about fourteen in charge of Denis Murphy) took up a position in the vicinity of the Bridge about one mile from Banteer. They lined up inside the roadside fence which gave good cover. When the police entered the ambush position they were fired on. One R.I.C. man was killed and one wounded. The two remaining members of the party surrendered and were allowed to go free. Four revolvers and about 20/30 rounds of ammunition were captured. The column then withdrew to their billets in Nadd area about three miles away. This ambush is known locally as Father Murphy's Bridge ambush. This engagement took place about 11 a.m. Those who took part were - as far as I can remember - Denis Murphy, Mick Courtney, Thomas Riordan, Jim Hayes, Jack Winters (witness), Ned Donoghue, Tadhg McCarthy, Jack Cunningham, Leo Callaghan, Jack Hummerston, Jack McCarthy.

Brigade H.Q. was at this time in McCarthy's farmhouse at Nadd. Liam Lynch and his staff including Mossie Walsh, George Power, were billeted there. This necessitated constant rounds of guard duty by the column as well as by members of the Volunteer companies in the area.

On the morning of 10th March 1921, large parties of enemy troops endeavoured to surround this area, but owing to the thorough manner in which the roads in Charleville and Mallow Battalion areas had been blocked, the enemy were unable to close the "ring" until practically all I.R.A. forces had

had escaped. The Mallow and Kanturk Battalion Columns, as well as the brigade staff, were inside the enemy encircling movement for some time.

With Mick Courtney and Jim Hayes I was billeted in Riordan's house at Nadd. We were roused from our beds by the servant girl in the house who informed us that she thought she heard shots in the valley. This was about 7.30 a.m. We immediately dragged on our clothes, seized our rifles and equipment and proceeded in the direction of McCarthy's house (Brigade Headquarters). These were the standing instructions issued by the Brigade O/C. in the event of an alarm of this nature. We had only travelled about a field from O'Riordan's house (our billet) when we heard someone calling us. We went in the direction of the sound and ^{found} friend Jack Moloney ("Congo"), a member of the Mallow Column. He was seriously wounded. He told us that with four others - Joe Morgan, Ned Waters, ... Herlihy and ... Kiely - he was in "The Barracks" (this was the name given to Herlihy's house where they had been billeted) when the enemy troops rushed into the house and caught them all in bed. The British party first lined them all up in the yard and told them to prepare to die as they were to be shot out of hand. The officer in charge apparently changed his mind and told them that he would give them an opportunity to escape. He advised them to "run for it" when he gave the signal but that at the same time his troops would open fire. Morgan and Moloney anticipated the signal to run and so took the firing party by surprise. They both managed to escape with wounds (Moloney in the liver) and Morgan (in the arm). The other three Volunteers were shot dead on the spot.

The meeting with the wounded man ("Congo") forced us to change our plans and instead of proceeding towards McCarthy's (Brigade H.Q.) we decided, in order to ensure early attention for our wounded comrade - to go to Mrs. Cahill's, Kilmacraige,

about two miles west of Nadd (our position at the time). We turned due west, but as Jim Hayes's rifle went off accidentally and we thought the shot might attract the enemy in our direction, we again turned due south. We continued in this direction for some 500 yards helping "Congo" along (we were then on the side of the mountain). At this point we resumed our way in a westerly direction and, having travelled about three-quarters of a mile, we crossed a mountain road and descended into a glen.

At this stage we were lost (the visibility had been very poor all the time owing to fog and mist) as we could find no landmark to guide us. It was then decided that one member of the party should move off and try to establish our position. I was selected for this job. I left my rifle and equipment with the others (Mick Courtney, Jim Hayes and the wounded man "Congo" Moloney) and while they remained in the glen, I proceeded in a westerly direction (this meant that I had to climb the opposite side of the glen which ran north to south). This was about 10 a.m. About ten minutes after leaving my colleagues I reached the edge of the glen on the other side. I looked in the direction of the road which we had previously crossed on the other side and saw three lorries of military there a short distance south of the spot at which we had crossed the road. This party was only about $35\frac{0}{4}00$ yards south of the spot in which my comrades were hiding in the glen. The party of military left their lorries and began to move north in open order on their side of the glen. I immediately took cover and crawled away in a southerly direction on my side of the glen in order to ensure that, if seen, I would lead the enemy away from the others. The military had, however, only gone a short distance when a whistle was blown and they returned to their lorries. They then travelled in a southerly direction. Shortly after this I reached the home of a local Volunteer (Philpot) who arranged to send out scouts to ascertain the enemy position.

It was then discovered that we were outside the "round up" area and the wounded man ("Congo") with the other members of the party proceeded to Cahill's, Kilmacraigne as originally intended and I joined them there. "Congo" was kept in Cahill's for some days and was then removed to hospital in Cork (dressed as a woman).

The Kanturk Column then moved into Millstreet area where it was billeted with the local column. The joint column underwent a course of training on the lines already indicated and, after about ten days, Kanturk Column returned to its home area where it was billeted in Bawnmore. During this period the column, with the help of the Volunteers in the local companies destroyed Coolagulla Bridge on the main Kanturk-Charleville road about two and a half miles from Kanturk. In addition, several roads in the area were trenched.

During April and May 1921, the column were engaged with members of the local companies in the construction of dugouts in each company area. These dugouts were built to accommodate at least 10 men and equipment in each. In most cases they were constructed by building up dummy walls in outhouses so that the internal length of the house was shortened. Entrance to the dugouts in such cases was usually by the removal of loose sheeting from the roof which could be easily replaced after entry and then fastened on the inside. Other dugouts were made in the corners of fields where two extra wide banks, generally stonefaced, met. The centre of the banks was tunneled through from the top and the earth removed. The excavated portion was then braced and boarded to prevent collapse, while the entrance, which was from the top of the fence, was generally concealed by furze ^{or} blackthorn bushes.

On the 15th June 1921, with the other members of Kanturk Column, I went to Rathcoole Wood where we found the columns from Mallow, Millstreet, Charleville and Newmarket Battalions already assembled. This mobilisation was undertaken on the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Paddy O'Brien. We were informed that arrangements were being made to attack a convoy of three or four lorries of Auxiliaries which usually travelled between the Kanturk and Millstreet. These fellows had, we heard, been boasting that they could not be attacked. Our column arrived at Rathcoole Wood about midnight. Early on the morning of June 16th, 1921, six mines were laid in the road between Rathcoole and Drishanebeg. They were distributed over an area of about 1,000 yards and were so spaced that their positions were estimated to coincide with those of the enemy lorries when passing through the ambush. The combined columns numbered about 120 men and there were, in addition, about 30 Volunteers from local companies. The column members had about 80 rifles and the remainder of the party carried shotguns. All the riflemen had about 50 rounds of ammunition each, while the shotgun men had varying amounts between ten and twenty-five rounds. Most of the shotgun cartridges were loaded with buckshot. There was also one Hotchkiss gun. The party was divided into sections - one section being allotted to cover the position of each mine - while there were also sections to cover each flank. With eight or ten others of the Kanturk Column I was sent, about 3 p.m., to cover the second mine from the eastern end of the position. This mine was not exploded as there was no lorry over the mine when the last lorry in the convoy reached the eastern mine about 4 p.m. This mine was exploded and effectively disposed of that lorry. Fire was immediately opened on the remaining lorries ^{inside} ~~outside~~ the ambush position. (our section was about 75/100 yards from the nearest lorry).

None of the other lorries - there were three - were over the mines at this time. The two lorries in the middle of the convoy halted while the lorry at the western end (the first lorry to enter the ambush position) did not go as far as the mine at the western end. It was, in fact, between the fifth and sixth (last) mines from the east, but its driver reversed it to a position over the fifth mine which was then exploded. This lorry was blown up with the result that both ends of the ambush position were blocked by the enemy lorries. However, the survivors from the two lorries which were blown up, together with the Auxiliaries in the two armoured lorries in the centre, continued to fight. As they were armed with automatic weapons and had plenty of ammunition, the O/C., Paddy O'Brien, called off the engagement. We then withdrew in a southerly direction - the fight having lasted about one hour or so - and returned to our billets at Nadd in our home area. We had no casualties, but it was reported at the time that the enemy had 15 to 20 killed and several wounded.

At the end of June 1921, a party of two R.I.C. patrolling the railway station at Banteer were sniped by Denis Murphy, James Horgan and Jack Winters (witness). There were no casualties.

Cork IV Brigade was formed on July 10th 1921, being comprised of Kanturk, Millstreet, Mallow, Charleville and Newmarket Battalions of Cork II Brigade. The battalions in the latter brigade at this date were:- Fermoy, Castletown-roche, Glanworth and Lismore. The officers of Cork IV Brigade were:

O/C.	Paddy O'Brien	-	Liscarroll
V.O/C.	Ned Murphy	-	Lombardstown
Q.M.	Mick O'Connell	-	Lombardstown
Adjt.	Eugene McCarthy	-	Charleville

My rank at the Truce was Vice O/C. Kanturk Battalion.
I was appointed to this rank in March or early April 1921,
when Denny Lyons was suspended as Battalion O/C. and
replaced by Denis Murphy, who at the time was Vice O/C.

The strength of the battalion at the time was about
600.

Signed: John Winters
Date: 26th May 1954 $\frac{26}{5/54}$ JW

Witness: Phil O'Donnell (John Winters)
(Phil O'Donnell) 26th May 1 954.

