

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILITÁIR 1913-21

No. W.S. 1115

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Edward O'Sullivan,
Beaufort,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

O/C. 4th Battalion Kerry 11 Brigade.

Subject.

4th Battalion Kerry No. 2 Brigade
1917-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF EDWARD O'SULLIVAN

Beaufort, Killarney, Co. Kerry.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at the end of 1917 in my native district of Beaufort. The officer who organised the area was Oliver Mason from Killarney. We were attached to the 4th Battalion, Kerry No. 2 Brigade. I was engaged in drilling and training during 1918 and 1919 and, acting on instructions, I joined the Sinn Fein organisation. I took part in the preparations to resist conscription and this was important for our company because, being situate at the foot of the Gap of Dunloe, we held the entrance to what would have been the main hideout in South Kerry if the British had attempted to enforce conscription.

About the end of 1919 many of the Killarney battalion officers were coming to our area when they found it necessary to evade arrest and it was our job to find them billets. At this time they were able to stay in houses because the fight had not got tough.

In 1920 the Killarney battalion officers found it necessary to move out of Killarney 'on the run' and battalion headquarters were established in my area. The establishment of battalion headquarters entailed a lot of work for our company. We were responsible for the provision of guards and sentries and the organisation of communications between the battalion headquarters and the different companies. Together with our work for the battalion we were responsible for the ordinary company duties in our area.

In September 1920 I received a report from one of my men that there were sporting arms stored at the residence of Magills, Churchtown House, and I took 12 or 14 of Beaufort Company and raided the house. We got no arms but some shotgun ammunition. We also removed a British military hut which was

lying there in sections. The hut was brought into the Gap of Dunloe.

By the end of 1920 the number of men on the run in our district had increased, but everyone coming to our district 'on the run' was not performing Volunteer duties. Some of them were just evading arrest. By this time I had been made company captain in charge of Beaufort.

In November 1920 I was in the Gap when a report came from Killarney that a patrol of eight Tans were travelling from Killofglin towards Beaufort. I assembled about 20 of the Beaufort Company armed with shotguns and took them into position at Spidogue Bridge, Beaufort. The Tans came ^{into} ~~along~~ Beaufort Village but returned to Killofglin ^{by} ~~but just missed our ambush position by turning by Churetown~~ ~~House and going by another road.~~
80's ~~Remain Killarney - Killofglin Road~~

In January 1921, I received orders directly from the Brigade O/C. Humphrey Murphy to prepare a brigade headquarters in the Gap of Dunloe. The O/C. of the Killarney Battalion with some others 'on the run' had moved further into the mountains into the Black Valley. The brigade headquarters were sited in the Gap about half a mile beyond Kate Kearney's Cottage. It was in a hut concealed by furze. On the establishment of the H.Q., the exact location of which was to be kept secret, new lines of communication had to be established between Brigade H.Q. and the different battalion areas. In order to avoid any strangers going near the H.Q. it was arranged that all dispatches would be left with Din Cremin of Dunloe or at the publichouse or hotel at Beaufort. My people owned the pub and hotel. The line for dispatches, from one part of the brigade, was across the Lower Lake, and a boat was kept ready at all times to carry dispatches.

In order to hamper the British forces moving through the area, we organised a bridge knocking section. The section was made up of two parties. One party of strong men armed with

crowbars, and another party armed with shotguns to act as guards.

The following stone bridges were knocked with crowbars and made impassable:- Manus Bridge, Giddagh Bridges (2), Blackstream Bridge in the Gap, Cullane Bridge at Toomies, McKay's Bridge and Lo Bridge.

The Brigade staff moved into the Gap in January 1921; they had a full H.Q. typewriters and office equipment. The staff at that time was:- O/C. Humphrey Murphy; Vice O/C. John Joe Rice, Adjutant Thomas Daly, Q.M. Con O'Leary.

In early February 1921, arrangements were made to form a brigade column and it was decided to set up a training camp in the Gap. The column was formed from men who were on the run and active in the different battalion areas. Each battalion O/C. was expected to nominate men for the column and all rifles and revolvers were to be sent to the brigade to arm the column.

My unit had the job of sending out guides to meet the men coming to the column and guide them into the Gap. We also kept a ring of sentries round the area to warn of any enemy approach. This entailed nearly full-time duty for the men of Beaufort and Black Valley companies. The column, when formed, was under Dan Allman, with Thomas McEllistrim second in charge. They remained in the Gap training until early March 1921, when we got orders to scout them out of the gap to Beaufort. Just as they were coming down towards Beaufort a British party came along and it was just a chance that the column did not walk into them. The column had delayed on their way out of the Gap.

As far as I remember, Jim Coffey was the only member of the Beaufort Company to be taken on the column.

The Brigade H.Q. continued in the Gap, but the brigade officers moved round the brigade area.

The O/C. of the Killarney Battalion stayed in the Black Valley and, as far as I know, he did not move out to visit any of the companies from early 1921. He was a shoemaker and carried on his trade in the Valley.

I did not go with the column. My orders were that I should remain in charge of Beaufort area and protect brigade H.Q. The column had one operation after leaving the Gap (Headford) and shortly after that it was disbanded. The men who had been in the column were returned to their battalions and orders were issued to the battalions by the Brigade O/C. for the formation of a column in each battalion area. The order brought up the whole position of the Killarney battalion area which consisted of nine companies:

Ballyhar		O/C. Eugene Moriarty
Beaufort		O/C. Witness (Edward O'Sullivan)
	Later	O/C. Michael Coffey
Black Valley		O/C. D. Tangney
Fossa		Eugene Cronin
Killarney		J. Coffey
Kilcummin		Eugene Moriarty
Lissivigeen		Tim Donoghue
<i>E.S.</i> Muckross	Later	<i>Jim Shea. Knockroagh</i> Maurice Moriarty + <i>Jim Shea</i> <i>Muckross</i>

The staff of the 4th Battalion early in 1921 consisted of O/C. Michael Spillane, Vice O/C. M.J. Sullivan, Adjutant P. O'Shea, Q.M. Michael Devane.

The different companies in the battalion were as active as possible, but it was next to impossible to get directions from the battalion and the company officers were arranging jobs between themselves. The position was known to some of the brigade officers and eventually the brigade O/C. took action. The battalion staff was removed en bloc and a new staff appointed. The new staff were:- O/C. Pat Allman, Listry (deceased), Vice O/C. Ed. O'Sullivan (witness),

Adjutant, Patrick Devane; Quartermaster John Coffey.

When the new staff took over we started getting a column together and were out to make things hot for the enemy. We got some information from John Keogh, porter in the International Hotel in Killarney, regarding enemy movements and, about the beginning of June, we had information regarding a Black and Tan patrol which travelled between Killarney and Kenmare. The strength of the patrol varied, but we decided to take a chance and attack.

The road the Tans travelled is known as the Moll's Gap road and it twists and turns continuously along its whole length. About 10 miles out from Killarney the road travelled through a tunnel cut under the hillside which comes nearly down to the lake shore, and it was at this spot we decided to attack the Tans. On the evening of 9th June 1921, I assembled the men selected for the job and moved them to ~~Mike~~ ^{MIKE} Tangney's house in the Black Valley. ~~Mike~~ ^{MIKE} Tangney was an old Fenian. We had a dance at Tangney's which lasted until next morning and at dawn we moved off ^{from} to Glarhemeen on the Upper Lake where I had arranged for boats to meet us which took us across the lake and landed us just at the tunnel

My party consisted of between 35 and 40 armed with a couple of Lee Enfields, two single shot rifles and the remainder with shotguns. We had no accurate information as to the direction the Tans would come and as our position was well protected on the Killarney side of the position and our line of retreat would lie up the mountain side towards the Moll's Gap side of the position, I decided that if there were more than two lorries coming from the Kenmare side we would allow the convoy to pass until the last two were on the road in front of our position before opening fire. If the convoy came from Killarney, we would open fire on the first two lorries.

I placed the main body of my men along a goat track overlooking the road within shotgun range and scattered parties in twos and threes behind rocks and shrubs to the right and left to cover our flanks. Scouts were placed higher up the mountain to the right and left to keep the roads on both sides under observation. I took up position on the left of the main party, as I am left handed and fire from the left shoulder. We were in position for some time when the scout watching the approach from Killarney shouted down that the Tans were coming. They were in tenders and he counted the tenders as they crossed Five-Mile-Bridge. He counted 12 or 13 tenders. When the first two tenders drove into our position, the rest of the convoy was out of sight round the twists and turns of the road. We opened fire; the first tender swayed and stopped. We saw the occupants of both tenders roll or topple out of the tenders, and heavy fire was opened on us. A machine gun was brought into action and the bullets were flying from a rock face just behind our main party. After firing five or six rounds from our shotguns, I ordered my men back through a gap which was behind and a little above us on the hill. We got through the gap safely, but one of my men, Dan Downey, had been wounded by a splinter just below his eye.

When we got through the gap we entered the bed of a dried-up stream which gave us cover as we moved up the mountain until we reached flat ground near the top of the mountain. We circled across the flat ground moving towards the road again near Ladies View. We crossed the road and, skirting the upper lake, got back to the Black Valley.

I could never get an accurate report as to whether any of the Tans were killed or wounded.

In the middle of June plans were laid to attack a patrol in Killarney. I got orders to lay an ambush on Port Road,

Killarney. I brought three boatloads of my men across the lake from Toomies. We landed near the Victoria Hotel and went by Lord Kenmare's estate to the Port Road where we lay in ambush for some time, but no patrol came out.

Just before 10th July 1921, I was ordered to bring the 4th Battalion column to a point south of the town of Killorglin for an attack on the R.I.C. Barracks in that town. The attack was called off and we returned to our own area.

During the Truce there was intensive training in our area and, as my father had but recently died, I was allowed to return home for a short time. I was recalled to full-time service when the barracks were being taken over and, on the outbreak of the civil war, I was sent to the Kilmallock area where I remained active until August 1922.

I returned to the 4th Battalion, Kerry II area, and took over the column operating there. The Free State troops had taken over Beaufort House where they had a garrison of about 100. My column held the Gap against them and ambushed them every time they appeared. They tried to push us out of the Gap by coming at us from the Kenmare side, but we ambushed them as they came down.

During the civil war two men were killed in my area. One of them - John Kevins - was ^{from Carnahone to De Mountain} ~~coming to the village~~. He was armed with a rifle when he ran into a party of Free State troops at Kissane's shop near Carnahone. When he was challenged, he tried to get his rifle into action, but he was wounded before he could fire. He was removed by car to Killarney. When he was ^{near} ~~passing~~ the Gap cross he was smoking; when he got to Killarney he was dead.

Another of our men - Jeremiah Casey - had been active with the I.R.A. in Clare and he returned home to Dunloe, Beaufort about March 1923. The local C.C., Father Dennehy,

advised Casey to surrender to the Free State troops at Beaufort. Hewent in twice during the day and they sent him away and told him to come back that night. Hewent back that night and his body was found in a field at Beaufort Cross the next morning.

I was not captured during the civil war and remained on the run until 1924.

Signed: Edward O'Sullivan
 (Edward O'Sullivan)
 Date: 10-3-55

Witness: James J. O'Connor
 (James J. O'Connor)

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