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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1297

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1297

Witness

Michael O'Driscoll,
Tonofora,
Dunmanway,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Second Lieutenant Coomhoola Company
5th Battalion 3rd Cork Brigade.

Subject.

Coomhoola Company
5th Battalion, 3rd Cork Brigade, 1917 '21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2580

Form B.S.M. 2

by boat. I joined Ted and his party on the main road near Glengarriff where they were waiting in ambush for some R.I.C. men.

Ted called me to him and asked me if I could use an automatic. I said I could. He picked myself, William Dillon and Michael Lucey and told us that there were three R.I.C. men drinking in O'Shea's public house in Glengarriff and we were to go in and shoot them. I was well known in the village and the owner of the pub knew me well. The three of us went into O'Shea's. Mr. O'Shea saluted me and asked me what I was doing so far from home. I said something about being in about cattle.

There was no sign of the R.I.C. men at the bar, but I found that they were in a small snug at the end of the shop. The snug was too small to get in after the R.I.C.; there would be no room to move and I decided to wait until they came out. We called for a drink and sat down on a form or long stool, against the wall. Some people were moving in and out, and a man came to the door and saluted one of my party. They spoke for a while and, while they were speaking, the three R.I.C. men came out of the snug and walked between us out of the shop.

I called to the others to come on. By this time, the R.I.C. were on the street. We each picked one and opened fire. William Dillon's gun misfired, and the R.I.C. man he was facing pulled the trigger and his gun also missed fire. Before the R.I.C. man could fire again, he was hit and went down. The R.I.C. barracks was only a hundred yards away and, when the three

R.I.C. men were down, we cleared off. One R.I.C. man was shot dead, one died the next day, and the third recovered from his wounds after some time.

We lay in ambush for the R.I.C. on several occasions, but they did not show up.

On one occasion, we were preparing an ambush at Snavel bridge. I think it was early 1920. It was before any Column had been formed. We were to lay a mine on the road and go into ambush. My brother brought the mine in a horse cart and, before we had the mine out of the cart, the British military came on. We just fired some shots and got away, leaving the horse and cart with the mine. The British captured the mine and took the horse and cart into Bantry. My brother went into Bantry and went to the barracks to claim the horse and cart. He told the officer that he was forced to carry the mine, and he only had a loan of the cart. The name, "Murphy", was on the cart. The officer asked him if he knew what was in the cart. He pleaded ignorance and the officer told him he had enough in the cart to blow up the town.

Later in 1920, the Brigade Training Officer held a training camp at Kealkil at which I was present. The training was very stiff. At the end of the camp, we practised going into ambush positions, but no enemy came our way. The Column, formed at the camp, was disbanded and I went back to my own area.

Some time later, I was called to a camp at Coole mountain, north of Dunmanway. As far as I remember, the camp lasted about a week. At the end of the camp, we were divided into sections to form a Column. I was

in a section under Michael McCarthy, Vice O/C of the Dunmanway Battalion. There were about thirty ~~five~~ in the Column. Each of us was armed with a rifle and revolver. We moved towards the Dunmanway-Macroon road, avoiding all roads and houses until we reached the vicinity of Kilmichael. We were paraded and told that we were going to attack the Auxiliaries. We went into ambush on the 28th November, 1920.

The position occupied is now well known. The country round the position was barren and boggy. The only features are outcrops of rock overlooking the road in places. The position of our section was behind and on rocks which overlooked the road, on the right-hand side as one travels from Dunmanway towards Macroon. To our left, as we faced the road, was another section on rocks overlooking the road, about thirty to forty yards from us, and on our right, spread out more, was a further section. Tom Barry and two or three others were on road level at a small boreen which ran off to the left flank of the ambush position.

Two lorries were expected. The Column O/C was to start the job by attacking the first lorry and, if the lorries were spaced on the road as usual, the second lorry should be opposite our position when the attack opened.

Michael McCarthy, with a couple of others, took up position in a group of rocks near the edge of the road, while the remainder of us held positions on higher rocks behind him.

The first lorry drove past our position. The Auxies were singing. When it got to Tom Barry's

position, it slowed up. ~~A bomb was thrown into the front of the lorry and~~. No. 1 section opened fire. The second lorry was just approaching our position and had not quite reached it when the driver stopped and tried to reverse. We opened up. The Auxies jumped out and sought cover, replying to our fire. The fight was general along the road. Jim Sullivan, who was alongside me, was killed. As far as I could judge, a bullet struck his rifle and part of the bolt was driven into his face. Michael McCarthy, our Section Commander, was also killed. Pat Deasy, another of our section, was seriously wounded.

Tom Barry had dealt with the first lorry and he led a party along the grass verge of the road to come up behind the Auxies fighting us. Soon the fighting was over. We were ordered out on the road. I saw an Auxie making off across country. I fired a couple of shots at him before realising that my sights were down. When I had my sights right, he had got into cover among some cattle and I lost him.

There was no attempt made to follow him up. Some of our men were pretty badly shaken. The fight had been short, sharp and very bloody.

When we collected the arms and papers of the Auxies, the lorries were set alight, and we moved off to Granure, eleven or twelve miles away, where we rested.

After an hour or two, we were alerted. The British were reported at Manch Bridge. Tom Barry called myself, Flyer Nyhan and Spud Murphy; he told us that he had a report of three lorries of Tans at the Bridge, and he instructed us to go there and attack the Tans, to

keep moving and firing, and to draw them away from Granure. We were very tired and I did not fancy the job. We got a glass of spirits each and set out. We had three or four miles to travel and, when we got to Manch, there were no Tans there. I never felt happier.

My next job with the Battalion was in March, 1921. A large column had been assembled and we went into ambush at Shippool in the Kinsale direction. I did not know the area well. In any event, there was no ambush and we moved to Ballyhandle. We went to billets at Ballyhandle in the early hours of the 19th March, 1921. We were only a short time in billets, when we were called out and ordered to Crossbarry. When we got to Crossbarry, the Column O/C told us that the British were trying to surround us and we would fight them at Crossbarry. The column was in sections of fourteen men, and every section had a job to do.

We went into position on the Bandon-Cork road (old) at Harold's and Beasley's farmhouses. I was ordered to get the people of the houses away to safety while other men of my section were preparing sandbags. John Lordan was my Section Commander. While I was getting the people away, the lorries were sighted coming on the Bandon-Crossbarry road. We knew that the British were also coming from other directions.

When the first lorry was opposite our position, there was a shout and the lorries stopped. Some soldiers started to get out of the lorries. We got orders to open fire and we gave it to them point blank. We had three lorries in easy reach of our rifles, and another four were stretched back along the road. The

British had jumped from their lorries and any, who were not hit, ran some way into the open country. During all this, Flor Begley, the Assistant Brigade Adjutant, had been playing the pipes in Harold's yard. Flor often played the pipes for us as we marched across country at night. The pipes had a great effect on us. We could have tackled the whole British army.

When the firing ceased at our front, we were ordered out on the road to collect arms and prepare the lorries for burning. The driver of one lorry was jammed in his seat. He had been wounded in the leg and could not move. We had to leave his lorry unharmed. When the lorries were being prepared for burning, firing broke out on our left flank and we were ordered back to our position. The firing was short and sharp but soon died away. Next, firing commenced on our right flank. This too died away. We were just moving back to the high ground at our rear when firing started in that direction. A large party of British troops attempted to come in behind us but they were met by a section under Tom Kelleher. There was some tough fighting before the British took flight. We continued to move back from Crossbarry up the high ground. We were told off as rear guard and, as we moved, a party of British were observed reforming. The O/C ordered the whole Column to line the fence, gave us a range and ordered three rounds rapid. That finished the British reforming; they scattered.

One thing happened during the fight which I'll always remember. There were some of Harold's horses in the yard behind us and also some of Hale's horses. When the firing and the bagpipes started, the horses

went wild and started racing up and down. They made so much noise that it seemed as if a Battalion of British was coming through the yard.

The fight with the lorry-bound troops on the road had lasted about twenty minutes, and I would say the whole action lasted over an hour.

My next operation with the Column was the attack on Rosscarbery barracks on the 31st March, 1921. The plan was, as usual, to explode a mine against the barracks and then make an assault. We were assembled outside Rosscarbery and ordered to remove our boots. Sections were told off. I was selected with four or five others to rush into the barracks when the wall was breached and, with bayonets fixed, rush the stairs, firing from the hip. We went into the village behind the men who were carrying the mine like a coffin on their shoulders, and took cover until the mine went up. We got ready to rush but the explosion had partly blocked the breach with falling rubble and the rubble was continuing to fall. We fell back and opened fire on the windows to give Tom Barry and his party a chance of getting near the breach to throw in bombs to bring down the ceiling. They did not bring down the ceiling, and there was a call for paraffin. This was lashed into the barracks, and soon the barracks was burning. We continued to fire on the barracks and, after some hours, there was no reply. We thought that the whole garrison were dead and burned in the barracks. We heard later that two had been killed and their bodies burned. Some had been wounded but were got out by their comrades. I saw no prisoners taken at the barracks. When we left the village, day was breaking and the barracks was still

burning.

My next operation with the Column concerns a prepared ambush at Gloundaw. On the 28th May, 1921, a large Column went into ambush position at Gloundaw which is between Dunmanway and Drimoleague, about four or five miles each way. I was ordered to go to Drimoleague with Dan Driscoll, Tim Sweeney and Dan Mahony and shoot a Tan who called to the post office each morning for the mail. We were armed with rifles. We went in early in the morning and prepared a position behind a fence, opposite the post office. While making a rest for my rifle on the fence, I discovered a new Mills bomb. The Tans used frequent the place and apparently one of them must have dropped the bomb in the fence.

After waiting for some time, the Tan came along and, as he came to the post office, we let him have it, and he went down. We were near the R.I.C. barracks and, as our shots went off, the garrison reacted. They rushed out in their pyjamas with rifles in their hands as we made for the mountains.

The shooting of the Tan was intended to draw the Auxies from Dunmanway to Drimoleague. The journey would bring them through the ambush position at Gloundaw. They did, in fact, leave Dunmanway and, when about two miles out, turned back and did not reappear for two or three days. It was reported later that a woman, who knew the Column was at Gloundaw, warned them. We rejoined the Column later.

At this time, Percival's Column (a British

military unit which moved about very much) was very active, and Brigade Headquarters was moved from No. 1 Battalion area to Coomhoola where Headquarters were established at the house of Marcella Hurley. Headquarters was then in my company area and I was withdrawn from Column service to organise food and protection for the Brigade Staff.

We had a line of signallers established, covering all approaches to Coomhoola. The line extended from Bantry into Coomhoola Valley. The signallers were provided with bottles, with the ends removed, and if any British party moved, the signallers sounded the alarm, which was taken up by the next man and passed along. I remained on this work until the Truce.

SIGNED: *M. O'Driscoll*
(M. O'Driscoll)

DATE: 25th November 1955.
25th November, 1955.

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WITNESS *P. O'Donnell*
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