

ORIGINAL

W.S. 1,351

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,351

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,351

Witness

Humphrey O'Donoghue,
Cullen,
Millstreet,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Lieutenant Cullen Company
Millstreet Battalion, Cork IV Brigade;
Member of Brigade Column.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Millstreet,
Co. Cork, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any. Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2610

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY HUMPHREY O'DONOGHUE

Cullen, Millstreet, Co.Cork.

I was born in November 1894, at Cullen. My parents were teachers. I was educated at Cullen National School until I reached the age of 15 years. I then went to work on my aunt's farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Millstreet in 1914. Padraig Pearse and Terry McSwiney were the principal speakers at an Aeriocht there on the day I joined. Others who joined on that day were Denis O'Leary, Tim Condon, Dan T. O'Riordan and Humphrey Lynch and William Ring. These formed the nucleus of a Volunteer unit in Cullen. The strength of the unit was about ten. We were drilled in the initial stages by Jimmie Hickey and Jerry Twomey from Millstreet. When things settled down Denis J. O'Leary was elected O/C. Weekly parades were held in the fields at night and on Sunday evenings. This type of activity continued up to Easter 1916, but we did not receive any orders in connection with Easter Week. However, when some of the Volunteers in Millstreet were arrested after the Rising, Humphrey Lynch, Denis O'Leary and I did not sleep at home for about three months. There was no activity in the area at Easter 1916.

When the Irish Volunteers were reorganised in the summer of 1917, all the old members joined up as well as a small number of others. As 1917 advanced, the company grew in strength until the membership reached about 50. At this time the officers of the company (elected) were:- O/C. Dan T. O'Riordan; 1st Lieut. Humphrey O'Donoghue (witness); 2nd Lieut. Dan Moynihan.

Although the members of our company resided in Co. Cork, our unit was attached, at the time, to Rathmore Battalion, Kerry

Brigade. All the other companies in the battalion were in Kerry.

The only type of training carried out was close order foot drill under our own officers. Training usually took place in the fields in the vicinity of Cullen.

When the British threatened to introduce conscription in early 1918 there was a big influx of recruits to the Volunteers. Nearly every man of military age in the area joined up and the strength of the company increased to about 130. About this time our company was detached from Rathmore Battalion and became a unit of Millstreet Battalion, Cork Brigade. During the conscription period all shotguns not already held by Volunteers were collected together with any available ammunition; The guns were surrendered voluntarily in every case. We now had between 30 and 40 shotguns and about 400 rounds of ammunition. All who could not be armed with shotguns were provided with croppy pikes which were made in the local forges. The ordinary charges of shot in the cartridges were replaced by buckshot. The activities in connection with the manufacture of arms, in addition to the work of watching and reporting on the movements of the R.I.C. and other enemy forces, helped to make the work of the Volunteers more interesting and turned their minds towards military affairs in many cases for the first time. When the conscription scare had passed, a small number of members drifted away, but the main body continued to serve up to the Truce.

When the threat of conscription had passed, activities became somewhat slack, but the approach of the General Election in December 1918 gave the Volunteers an opportunity to work for the political wing of the republican movement - Sinn Féin. However, there was no exceptional activity in our area as the

Sinn Fein candidate - Paudeen O'Keefe - was returned unopposed

When Cork II Brigade was formed in January 1919, our battalion (Millstreet) became the 7th Battalion in the new brigade. The companies in the battalion were:- Millstreet, Rathduane, Cullen, Drishane, Dooneen, Rathcoole, Derrynagree, Kilcorney, Musherah. The officers of the battalion were:- O/C. Con J. Meany; Vice O/C. Denis O'Brien; Adjutant - Jerh. Crowley; Q.M. - Denis Galvin.

The officers of the new brigade were:- O/C. Liam Lynch; ^{Fermoy} / Vice O/C. Dan Hegarty, Mallow; Adjutant - Tom Barry, Glanworth; Q.M. - George Power, Fermoy.

There were seven battalions in Cork II Brigade:- Fermoy, Castletownroche, Mallow, Kanturk, Charleville, Newmarket and Millstreet.

The usual training went on at this time and there was occasionally a little target practice with .22 rifle when ammunition could be procured. About this time, the various companies in the battalion occasionally assembled on Sunday evenings for combined exercises - moving across country in extended order, scouting. Units were often called out at night and sent on cross country exercises.

About mid-November 1919, officials of the Munster and Leinster Bank in Millstreet were held up on their way to Knocknagree Fair and a large amount of money was taken from them. The R.I.C. when investigating the hold-up confined the questioning to members of the I.R.A. and, as a result, everybody outside the I.R.A. began to suspect that they were responsible. When the attitude of the general public in the area was brought to the notice of the Brigade O/C., he ordered an investigation into the whole affair. Arising out of the investigation by the brigade and battalion intelligence sections

the hold-up was traced to a number of individuals from Millstreet area. Eventually, about eight men from the Millstreet battalion area - all non-members of the I.R.A. - were rounded up. They were tried by the brigade staff and sentenced to be deported from the country. They were, I think, deported in May 1920, but one of them returned later and considerable difficulty was experienced before he was again captured and deported.

At Easter 1920, an order was received to destroy the evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Cullen. This was in connection with a G.H.Q. order for a general action on these lines throughout the country. When the order was received, arrangements were made to obtain a mine from Rathmore. I went to Rathmore to prepare the mine with Fred Crowley. We made the mine, using the metal box of a cart wheel as a container. We filled the box with gelignite, closed the ends with two iron plates held in position by three bolts - one passing through the centre of the box. The charge of gelignite was then fitted with a detonator and fuse which was passed through a hole in one of the end plates. When I arrived in Cullen with the mine I found the company O/C. (Dan T. O'Riordan), Liam Lynch (Brigade O/C.), Jerh. Crowley (battalion adjutant), and Con Murphy at the rear of Lislehane School. There was also a big muster of members of the local company. The Coy. O/C. was opposed to the destruction of the barracks because the building was owned by a supporter of the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin. Eventually it was suggested that the owner - Jerry Singleton, who lived in another house close by - would occupy the barracks and evacuate his own home. Singleton agreed to the suggestion and the I.R.A. moved his household and chattels to the evacuated barracks.

I think that it was some short time after the barrack incident referred to in the previous paragraph that we decided to hold up the local J.P. (Justice of the Peace), Wm. C. Casey, who was hostile to the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin. He had been asked to relinquish his post as J.P. under the British regime, but he refused. He was held up on his way from Knocknagree fair by a few members of the Cullen Company including Matt Murphy, David Ring, Dan T. O'Riordan, Dan Moynihan, John O'Connor, Tim Lynch and Humphrey O'Donoghue (witness). He was found to be in possession of a revolver and a box of ammunition for same and these were taken by us. We also held him prisoner in a house nearby while some of the party searched his home for any more arms, but none were found. On reconsideration, I think, that this incident must have happened in the summer of 1919.

The local mails in the area were raided on a number of occasions during the summer of 1920, but no information of any military value was obtained. After censorship by the officers of the company, the mails were usually re-posted in a neighbouring post office.

Some members of our company (Cullen) were mobilised when a British army aeroplane crashed in the vicinity of Drominagh in August 1920, but we only reached the area just as the local I.R.A. with some men from the neighbouring Kanturk Battalion were withdrawing after having unsuccessfully attacked the guard on the plane. The members of our company, who were on duty on this occasion were:- Denis Galvin, Dan T. O'Riordan, Matt Murphy and Humphrey O'Donoghue (witness).

There was nothing beyond the usual training activities until 14th August 1920, when the company O/C. (Dan T. O'Riordan) received word that a British military plane had made a forced landing at Drominagh. He immediately mobilised a party of about

five or six to go to the scene of the crash which was just across the border of our company area in Kanturk Battalion. When our party, which included Dan T. O'Riordan, Denis Galvin, Matt Murphy and Humphrey O'Donoghue (witness) reached the vicinity of Dromnagh, we found that the guard on the plane had already been attacked and the I.R.A. attacking party were withdrawing. This attack was a failure. The party from Cullen Company now returned home. It was about 3 a.m.

Within a few days of the death of Paddy McCarthy, Q.M. of Newmarket Battalion and a member of the Brigade column, in an attack on the Tans in Millstreet, I joined the brigade column at Kilcaskin. The British endeavoured to round up the column on the evening of the day on which I joined and it was only with great difficulty that the column evaded the encircling ring. I then withdrew with the column to Ballygiblin in Kanturk Battalion area. We then moved on to Nadd in which district we remained until close to Xmas 1920 when the column was disbanded and most of the members returned to their home areas.

While I was with the column at this stage, Dick Willis and Leo O'Callaghan - both of Mallow Battalion - left for Castletownroche Battalion area where they operated a Hotchkiss gun in an ambush at Glenacurrane, about mid-December 1920. Amongst the members of the brigade column at this time were: Bill Moylan, Sean Healy, Denis Galvin, Dick Willis, Denis Lyons, Charlie Reilly, Leo O'Callaghan, Ned Creed, Jim O'Neill, Denis Murphy, 'Congo' Moloney, Joe Morgan and Paddy Healy. When disbanding the column, Liam Lynch (Brigade O/C.) instructed us to go home to our own areas and to establish battalion columns. When leaving, I took back two Lee Enfield rifles to Cullen area.

When the Newmarket Battalion column, under Sean Moylan,

took up positions at Tureengarrive on the Kingwilliamstown-Castleisland road on 27th January 1921, I received instructions from Sean Moylan to report with 3 or 4 men from Cullen Company at Clonbanin where I would meet the Millstreet and Kanturk columns. We were to take up a position at Clonbanin in case the British officer party, for which he was waiting at Tureengarrive on the Tralee road, should travel via Killarney. With Dan T. O'Riordan, Matt Murphy and Jack O'Leary, I went to Clonbanin where we met the Kanturk column. We took up positions north of Mallow-Killarney road, about half a mile west of Clonbanin Cross. It rained heavily all day and no enemy convoy passed. About 4 p.m. a messenger arrived from Sean Moylan with instructions that we were to return to our home areas. We then retired to Cullen and the Kanturk men went home. Shiels, who was later accepted as a spy and responsible for giving information to the enemy which led to incidents at Nadd and Mourneabbey where I.R.A. columns were surrounded, was with the Kanturk column on this occasion.

In the early days of March 1921, the battalion columns from Newmarket and Charleville were in Kerry II Brigade area in the neighbourhood of Killarney. They were lying in ambush at the Bower on Mallow-Killarney road and were accompanied by a Kerry brigade column. They were in position for two days when they decided to move to the east into North Cork, as they had been told that the British were aware of their position. When withdrawing from this position, the columns passed through Cullen area. They were on their way to Clonbanin where an ambush position had been selected on the Mallow-Killarney road. Several members of the Cullen Company travelled with the columns in order to prepare the road for the laying of mines. I accompanied Wm. L. O'Keefe (Newmarket), "Free" Murphy (Kerry), and another, whose name I cannot recollect, in the last car to

leave Cullen. When our party arrived at Clonbanin, the mines had already been laid in the road. It was about 9.30 a.m. Sean Moylan, who was in charge of the operation, asked me to send two of the Cullen men to Drominagh from where they could signal the approach of any enemy convoy from the east (Mallow). I selected Matt Murphy and Jack O'Riordan (I think) for this job. They had hardly begun their journey when a convoy of two lorries drove into the ambush position from the east. Paddy ^{O'BRIEN} ~~O'Brigade~~, Brigade Q.M., who was standing beside me, raised his rifle to fire a shot which was to be the signal to open the attack. The safety catch was on and there was no shot, so the lorries passed through unmolested.

This ambush position extended over a distance of about 400 yards. The Charleville and Newmarket columns were north of the road and in position at distances varying from 50 to 60 yards from same. I was at the extreme western end of the positions occupied by these columns. The Millstreet and Kerry Columns were south of the road and extended from Shaughnessy's haggard behind a stone fence about 100 to 150 yards from the road.

When the lorries from the east had passed through about 10 a.m., there was no further activity until about 2 p.m. when the scouts to the west signalled the approach of a convoy from Killarney direction. This convoy consisted of two lorries, a touring car, an armoured car and a lorry in this order. The leading lorries, touring car and armoured car drove into the ambush position. The last lorry in the convoy had not reached the western end of the position before fire was opened on all sections of the convoy. The mines failed to explode and the last lorry was stopped by the fire from our section about 150 yards outside the western end of the ambush site. The occupants of the armoured car continued to reply to the fire of the I.R.A.

party with their machine guns. All the occupants of the other lorries who had not been killed or wounded by the opening burst took cover behind the roadside fences. Fighting continued for about 2 hours and as we were unable to silence the guns in the armoured car, the engagement was broken off. The I.R.A. had no casualties. The enemy losses were not definitely known, but amongst those killed were General Cummings and Major Manning

When the engagement was being broken off, I was instructed by Paddy O'Brien to contact Dan Vaughan, Mick D. Sullivan and Jim Riordan, who were in position on the fence of the field to the east of where I was, and to instruct them to withdraw. I did so, and then withdrew to Hanlon's at the rear of the position to the north. Here I again met Paddy O'Brien, but Dan Vaughan and the others had not arrived. Matt Murphy was then sent by Paddy O'Brien to Dan Vaughan's position to tell the men there to withdraw. Matt Murphy then moved off to again contact Dan Vaughan and his party, and within a short time all sections north of the road had reported to their base. I then withdrew with the members of the Cullen company to our home area. The Charleville and Newmarket columns made their way in the direction of their home districts. The date of this engagement was 6th March 1921.

Following Clonbanin, I was engaged with the members of the local company in blocking roads, cutting enemy lines of communication and generally doing anything that would impede enemy troops movements.

When a strong force of military from Kanturk arrived in the area in the early morning of 11th June 1921, I was rounded up with a number of others including Roger Kiely, Sean O'Leary, Dan J. O'Riordan. We were taken to Kanturk

and later to Cork - Spike Island - and Maryborough.

I was released on 8th December 1921.

My rank at the Truce:- 1st Lieutenant, Cullen Company,
Millstreet Battalion, Cork IV
Brigade.

The strength of the company was about 130.

Signed: Humphrey O'Donoghue

Date: 8th February 1956

(Humphrey O'Donoghue)

8th February, 1956.

Witness: P. O'Donnell.

(P. O'Donnell)

