

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRF MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1501

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1501.

Witness

Edward O'Sullivan,
Lissane, Lower,
Drimoleague,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Glann Company, Schull Battalion, Cork IV
Brigade, I.R.A.

Quartermaster, Schull Battalion, Cork V. Brigade,
I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Glann and Schull Companies,
Irish Volunteers, Schull Battalions,
Cork III & V Brigades, 1918-1921, and
Brigade Flying Column, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2815.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,501

STATEMENT BY EDWARD O'SULLIVAN,

Lissane Lower, Drimoleague, Co. Cork.

I was born at Glaun, Schull, on November 5th 1898. My parents were farmers. I was educated at the local national school. When I left school I went to work on my parents' farm.

When the Irish Volunteers were formed in Schull in April, 1918, I joined the local unit. This was the conscription period and the strength of the company was about one hundred. The company embraced the area of the parish of Schull. The officers of the company were:

O/C - Jerh. McCarthy
1st Lt. - Jim Roycroft
2nd Lt. - Jim Hayes.

The only type of training carried on was close order foot drill under our own officers. We were visited a couple of times each month by Seán O'Driscoll, Ballydehob, who took charge of training on the occasion of his visits. Parades and drills were held on two nights each week in the fields in the vicinity of the town. During the summer of 1918 the company was engaged on this training and in organising the general public to resist conscription. The arms held at this time consisted of about twenty shotguns, which were, in most cases, the personal property of Volunteers or their parents. When the conscription scare passed, the strength of the unit fell to about twenty and remained at this figure until Seán Eehane came into the area in the spring of 1920 when he organised Schull Battalion, Cork 111 Brigade. There was no change in the officers of Schull Company at this period.

I should have mentioned that during 1919 the company continued its training, while the members also engaged in organising and collecting the first Dáil Éireann Loan. Beyond this there was no other activity.

When Seán Lehane had completed the organisation of the Schull peninsula in the spring of 1920 there were companies of Volunteers in Dough, Goleen, Dunmanus, Leamcon, Glaun, Schull, Ballydehob, Skehanore. These units were now formed into Schull Battalion. The first officers of the battalion were, as far as I can recollect,

O/C - Seán Lehane
 Vice O/C - Gibbs Ross
 Adjt. - Seán McCarthy
 Q/M - Jim Hayes.

The first major operation was carried out in the area on May 31st 1920 when Mizen Head Fog Station was raided. A large quantity of gun-cotton, detonators and wireless equipment were seized in this raid, which was carried out by some men from Bantry Battalion in co-operation with Seán Lehane and some selected men from Schull Battalion. I did not take part in this operation, but some of the material seized was dumped in Glaun Company area of which I was now 1st Lieut. It was dumped in a disused mine shaft in the vicinity of my home.

At Easter, 1920, I took part, with a number of men from Glaun and Schull Companies, in the destruction of a house which had been evacuated by the R.I.C. The Courthouse in Schull was demolished about this time.

All Volunteers were active in connection with the County Council and Rural District Council elections in June, 1920.

As far as I can recollect, Jerh. McCarthy (Schull Coy. O/C) and Tom Hickey (O/C Skehanore Coy.) were elected to membership of Schull Rural District Council.

Normal training went on throughout the summer of 1920. About this time selected men were trained in scouting, engineering, first-aid, while the units as a whole were becoming more military minded.

The next major engagement in the area took place on October 4th 1920 when Schull R.I.C. barracks was captured by I.R.A. forces. This operation was planned at a Battalion Council meeting held in my home at Glaun, Schull. While the operation was in progress I was on outpost duty at Glaun Cross - about two miles from Schull - with Steve Sullivan, O/C; my brother Jim, 2nd Lt.; and Tim Gallagher, Q/M; all from Glaun Company. When the operation had been successfully completed we received instructions to withdraw to our own area and to ensure that all arms were safely dumped.

Early in November, 1920, a Battalion Training Camp was held at Dunmanus. This camp was attended by three officers from each company in the battalion. The O/C (Steve Sullivan) Glaun Company did not attend and never took any part in the activities of the I.R.A. afterwards. I was then appointed O/C. The officers of Glaun Company now were:

O/C - Edw. O'Sullivan (witness)
1st Lt. - Jim O'Sullivan
2nd Lt. - Dan O'Sullivan.

All attended the Training Camp at Dunmanus. Tom Barry (Brigade O/C Training) was in charge of this camp. The camp was carried out at Dunmanus for two days and two nights. It was then moved across country at night to Drealomane, Ballydehob, where training was carried on for two days and night

before moving to Coosane where we finished at the end of the week. Intensive training went on at the camp, where we were trained in the use of rifle and small arms, drilled in extended order and trained to make the best use of cover.

A Brigade Column was now formed. Selected men from each company were sent to join the column at Coolmountain, Dunmanway. Tim Gallagher (Q/M) was selected to represent Glaun Company on the column. When the selected men from Schull Battalion reached Coolmountain they billeted in an unoccupied house, where they remained for a couple of days without receiving further instructions. At this stage the representatives of some companies in Schull Battalion returned home. Amongst those who remained at Coolmountain was Paddy McCarthy (nick-named "Kilmallock") from Skehanore Company. The men who returned from Coolmountain were replaced by Volunteers from their respective companies. These Volunteers reached the column just as the fight at Kilmichael was about to begin on November 28th 1920. They were driving into Kilmichael position in a horse and side-car when they were informed that the convoy of Auxiliaries was coming. They drove down a side-road and made contact with the column when the fight was over. Two of this party were Con Sheehan (Glaun Company) and Michael McLean (Leamcon Company). McLean was later killed at Gaggin on December 8th 1920.

Towards the end of 1920 the house of a man named Daly, Lisheencreagh, Ballydehob, was burned as he was a suspected spy. He left the area later on.

Sometime prior to Christmas 1920 the Brigade Column was disbanded and the representatives from Schull Battalion returned to the area. The members of the various companies were engaged

at this time on the blocking of roads, cutting trenches, demolishing bridges and disrupting enemy lines of communication. This job meant a continuous round of duty for all units, as trenches and road blocks made to-night were generally filled in next day by forced labour, squads of civilians rounded up by the military. It was then necessary to re-open the trench or to make a fresh one next night. This was dangerous work as the enemy forces were at this time laying trap mines in some of the trenches filled in by forced labour. The danger of the trap mine was first noticed in the area by the officers of Skehanore Company. This company was responsible for the demolition of the Crooked Bridge on the Skibbereen-Ballydehob road. On one occasion the bridge was filled in by enemy forces who buried a trap mine made from two Mills bombs in a small timber box. The box, with mines inside, was placed in a hole in the bridge. The cover of the box was kept in place by a large stone flag, while, before being covered with clay and road material, the pins were drawn from the Mills bombs through two holes in the side of the box. The springs of the bombs were now held in position by the loose cover of the box. The removal of the stone flag from the cover of the box would allow the springs to fly loose and the bombs to explode.

When the men from Skehamore Company arrived later to again demolish the bridge, one of them noticed the flag laid on top of the box and immediately became suspicious. Further examination revealed the true position. The box was carefully removed. Two nails were inserted through the holes in the side of the box to replace the pins which had been withdrawn from the bombs by the enemy forces. The bombs were now removed from the box, which was sent by post to Major Percival who was in charge of a column of military operating in

Skibbereen area at the time. A note thanking him for the two Mills bombs was enclosed. It was now in the early spring of 1921.

The O/C Schull Company (Jerh. McCarthy) was arrested by the unit of Marines stationed in Schull early in 1921. On the night of his arrest I went into Schull with Seán Lehane and Seán McCarthy to kidnap as hostages two Marines who used to frequent a publichouse in the village. We were armed with revolvers. Although we remained in the village for about four hours the Marines did not put in an appearance so we withdrew.

When the column was being assembled in January, 1921, the Volunteers from Schull Battalion assembled at my home before moving off. The Volunteers on this occasion were: Denis Bowen (Glaun), Tom O'Driscoll (Dunmanus), Jack O'Driscoll (Leamcon), Tom McCarthy (Schull), Tim Allen (Ballydehob), Paddy McCarthy (Skehanore), Seán O'Driscoll (Battalion Q/M). When I volunteered for service with the column on this occasion I would not be accepted by the Battalion O/C (Seán Lehane) as he considered it essential that I should remain in the home area to maintain the local organisation.

There was a perfect system of intelligence and communications in operation in the area throughout the whole period. As an example of its efficiency I would refer to the arrival of seventeen lorries of Black and Tans and Auxiliaries in Ballydehob one morning in the spring of 1921. A member of the Cumann na mBan in Ballydehob - having observed their departure in the direction of Schull - sent a telegram in code to Schull P.O. for the local Company O/C. He was aware that a number of brigade and battalion officers, including Seán Lehane, Tom Barry, Gibbs Ross and Seán O'Driscoll, were due to reach the area that day. He immediately made contact with me

at Glaun. I travelled across a mountain on horseback to Dunbacon where I found the officers just as they were about to leave for Schull. My timely arrival enabled them to evade the raiding party.

About this time columns were formed in each battalion area. Seán Lehane (Battalion O/C) took charge of the Schull Column composed of officers and men from each company in the area. Some members of this column were: Charlie Cotter (Schull), Tim Allen (Ballydehob), Seán O'Driscoll (Battn. Q/M), Tom McCarthy (Schull), Ed. O'Sullivan - witness - (Glaun), Tom Hickey (Skehanore), Paddy McCarthy (Skehanore), Denis O'Mahoney. The full strength of this column was about forty. It was armed with twenty rifles and twenty shotguns while a number carried revolvers.

The first operation undertaken by this column was an attack on the Marine Station at Schull and the burning of Schull Workhouse. All members of Schull and Glaun Companies were mobilised at nightfall for the burning of the workhouse at "The Gap" at the foot of Mount Gabriel on the Schull-Bantry road. The column, under Seán Lehane, were ready to move off to attack the Marine Station when a dispatch rider arrived from Drealomane section, Ballydehob Company, on a bicycle. He reported that a strong force of military were camped at Drealomane School with mules, field kitchens and full equipment. In view of this information, Seán Lehane decided to call off the attack. He sent the men of the local companies home and withdrew the column to Dunmanus Pier where boats were always available to take us across the bay to Muintravara, where we arrived at 4 a.m. next day. We then learned that the British had cut off the whole area between Skibbereen, Mizen Head and the sea. They made a thorough search of this area but failed to find one of our men

as we were across the bay looking on. We remained in Muintravara that day and next night. When the British had withdrawn we returned and carried out the attack on the Marine Station while the ^{Workhouse} Courthouse was being burned.

Some nights after the attack on the Marine Station the column moved into Ballydehob and took up positions in the village, as it was rumoured that a party of Black and Tans was expected to pay it a visit. Although we remained in position throughout the night, there was no appearance by the enemy. We withdrew from the positions at dawn. Several other positions were taken up at various points throughout the area about this time, but we failed to make contact with the expected enemy patrols or convoys.

On Holy Thursday, 1921, the Bank Manager, Provincial Bank, Schull, and the bank porter were taking cash to the branch of the bank at Ballydehob when they were held up by three armed and masked men who seized £500. The general public were of the opinion that the job had been done by the I.R.A. However, arrangements were made by the Battalion O/C (Seán Lehane) to investigate the case and within a few days the culprits, who were not members of the I.R.A., were arrested by us. They were paraded for identification before the bank officials, who failed to identify anyone. The prisoners were, however, detained^N for a little while longer and eventually admitted having committed the robbery. They were tried by courtmartial. Three of the raiders were sentenced to deportation, and another, who took part in the organisation of the robbery but not in the actual hold-up, was fined £60. The money was recovered and returned to the Provincial Bank.

During the spring of 1921 several company training camps were held throughout the area. Selected men were trained in special services, engineering, signalling, first-aid.

Early in June, 1921, the Fastnet Lighthouse was raided by a party from Schull Battalion under Seán Lehane and about two tons of gun-cotton was seized. The greater portion of this explosive was dumped in Glaun Company area. I did not take part in the raid on "The Fastnet".

Shortly before the Truce on July 11th 1921 a reorganisation took place in Cork 111 Brigade area which was now divided in two brigades - Cork 111 and Cork V. Cork V Brigade, which embraced the western portion of Cork 111, was composed of the following battalions: - Schull, Skibbereen, Drimoleague, Bantry and Castletownbere. The officers of the new brigade were: -

O/C - Gibbs Ross
 Vice O/C - Ted O'Sullivan
 Adjt. - Mick Crowley
 Q/M - Jim Hayes.

The reorganisation led to some changes in the area controlled by Schull Battalion which now embraced the following companies: - Lisagriffin, Goleen, Dunmanus, Dunbeacon, Leamcon, Schull, Ballydehob, Skehanore and Lisheen (transferred from Skibbereen Battalion). The officers of the reorganised battalion were: -

O/C - Seán O'Driscoll
 Vice O/C - Tom Hickey
 Adjt. - Denis O'Mahoney
 Q/M - Edw. O'Sullivan (witness).

After the change to Cork V Brigade, Glaun Company was amalgamated with Dunmanus to become Dunmanus Company.

The officers were:

O/C - Mark Lucey
 1st Lt. - Manus McCarthy
 2nd Lt. - Mort O'Sullivan (I think).

After the Truce, Battalion H.Q. was established in a house in Schull. Within a few weeks a Battalion Training Camp was set up at Leamcon with Seán O'Driscoll (Battalion O/C) in charge. All companies in the battalion were represented at this camp and those present were put through an intensive course of training in all aspects of military affairs. This camp was followed by the establishment of camps in each company area at which the members were trained on the same lines as those at the battalion camp. This work went on throughout the summer and autumn of 1921.

Towards the end of the year, Battalion H.Q. was moved to the Marine Station which had been evacuated by enemy forces. Here normal military routine was followed by the maintenance party installed there. In addition, the Republican Police Force which had been set up, under Michael McCarthy (Battn. Lieut. of Police), was engaged on normal police duties and operated from the Marine Station.

Signed:

Edward O'Sullivan

Date:

15th September 1957

Witness:

P. Donnell

(Investigator).

