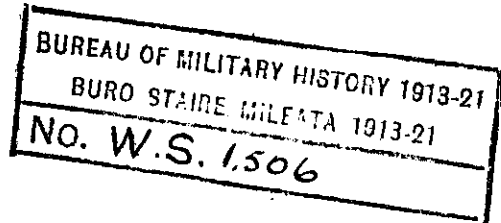


ORIGINAL



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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1506.

Witness

Henry O'Mahony,
The Glen,
Monkstown,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Company Captain, Passage West.

Battalion Adjutant.

Battalion Vice O/C.

Subject.

Activities of Passage West Company, 9th
Battalion, Cork No.I Brigade, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2840.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1506

STATEMENT BY HENRY O'MAHONY

The Glen, Monkstown, Co.Cork.

I was born in Passage West in August 1895. I attended the local national school until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I entered Haulbowline Dockyard through a competitive examination as an apprentice fitter.

A company of the Irish National Volunteers was formed in Passage West early in 1914. I became a member. The organiser and officer of the company was a Captain Roberts, an ex-British army man. The strength of the company was about 200 and we were drilled by ex-British soldiers. After Redmond's famous speech advising the Volunteers to join the British army, about 50 members of the company left as they did not agree with Redmond's suggestion. The remainder of the company continued to meet for a while but, after a short while, they too fell away and the company ceased to exist.

It was not until about a month after the rebellion that the Volunteers were reorganised in the area. Micheal Lynch, whose brother Diarmuid had fought in the rebellion and was later arrested and transported, Joseph Stuart and myself reorganised the company. Our strength at first was only 20 and our drill instructor was a Limerick man named Michael Wall from Drumcollogher. No officers were elected for some time as Michael Wall acted as officer and instructor at the same time. Early in 1917 the officers were elected. I became company captain and Joe Stuart 1st Lieutenant. Our strength was now about 40. In the meantime, companies were formed in Monkstown, Rochestown and Ringaskiddy. In Passage West we drilled, trained and carried out route marches till the end

of the year. Soon after my appointment as captain, I attended a course of lectures on the use of explosives and the manufacture of home-made mines and bombs at the Volunteer rooms at Grand Parade, Cork, and, subsequently, with other Volunteers employed at Passage West dockyard, made a number of cases for mines and bombs at the dockyard from 3" to 6" steel pipes.

Early in 1918, it was decided to form a separate battalion of the four companies in the area - Monkstown, Rochestown, Passage West and Ringaskiddy. Michael Lynch became Battalion O/C. I became vice-O/C. I don't remember the name of the adjutant. Jack Barrett became Q.M. The strength of the battalion was then 200.

Then came the threat of conscription when the battalion strength went up to 350. When the threat had passed, our strength dwindled to 250, most of the older men left. Drilling was intensified during the period. From then to the end of the year, approaching the general election, we carried out routine parading and drilling.

For this area Diarmuid Lynch - Micheal's brother, was nominated Sinn Fein candidate to oppose the Nationalist candidate. With the other Volunteers in the area I canvassed and spoke on public platforms on behalf of our candidate who was elected.

Routine drilling continued throughout 1919. In the summer of this year the battalion O/C., Micheal Lynch, became involved in agrarian trouble in Rochestown which led to a split among the Volunteers of the battalion. At this time, a ban had been imposed on hunting in the area by the Sinn Fein Executive. Micheal Lynch was a member of the Hunt - South Union and attended their meetings in his red coat in spite of the ban, with the result that he was dismissed from his post as battalion

O/C. by the Brigade O/C., Terence McSwiney.

The activities of Lynch in this respect and the agrarian trouble resulted in the disorganisation of the battalion. I was then asked by the brigade O/C. to reorganise the area. After a lot of trouble, especially in the Rochestown area, I got the four companies going again, but it was some time before they functioned as a battalion. The companies worked as separate units, however.

From the end of 1919, the Passage West Company were actively engaged in raiding ships in dock and in the harbour - both merchant boats and sloops - from which we seized rockets, wireless equipment and, in several cases, arms. In the case of the sloops which were manned by naval men, we usually went out in a small boat in the guise of fishermen and waited until we saw the personnel move off to shore for a night's drinking, leaving usually only one man on guard. From the sloops, in all I would say, we collected about 20 revolvers, Verey light pistols and rockets. The rockets were later dismantled for their powder. In each of the four company areas, routine activities consisted of raiding the mails. By this time, drilling in the open had ceased.

In about August 1920, the brigade staff decided to form a new battalion for the area, which became known as the 9th Battalion. The battalion was formed at a meeting in Sean Prior's house in Carrigaline. Members of the brigade staff present included Florrie O'Donoghue, the brigade adjutant. The battalion which was formed then included nine companies as follow: Passage West, Rochestown, Carrigaline, Monkstown, Ringaskiddy, Tracton, Ballygarvin, Ballinhassig and Kinsale. The three latter companies had previously been attached to Cork No. 3 Brigade. On the recommendation of the brigade staff, Richard O'Mahony - a newcomer to the district and a

native of Berrings - was appointed Battalion O/C. Denis Lordan Ballinhassig area, Vice O/C.; I became a djutant, and Jack Barrett, Q.M. This staff worked well for a month or two, when Lordan left the area, after which I took over his job as Vice O/C. in addition to my own as battalion adjutant.

Around this time, the area was overrun by the Cameron Highlanders stationed at Belmont Huts, Cobh. They were continuously raiding for known I.R.A. men, and several of them had been picked up in these raids. My home was subjected to constant raids. I could not sleep there and had to go on the run. The dockyard in Passage West where I worked then was also raided continuously. One of the duties of Passage West Company around this time was to collect arms off the boats arriving from Liverpool and elsewhere. The boats were the property of the Moore McCormack Line. After landing their cargoes at Cork docks, they usually called for repairs to Passage dockyard where the arms could be got ashore more easily.

In the month of November, in charge of about 12 members of Passage West Company, I attacked an R.I.C. patrol of six men in the town. I placed three sections of four men each in the alley-ways and doorways of the town. My intention was to attack the patrol as they returned to the barracks. We had about two revolvers to each group of four men. I had the attacking party in position at about 8.30 p.m. and had instructed them to let the patrol leave the barracks as usual for their regular nightly patrol to the end of the town and to attack them on the way back. The patrol usually left about 9 p.m. and were generally back in the barracks at 10 p.m. Unfortunately, one of our men opened the attack prematurely before the full patrol had left the vicinity of the barracks. One R.I.C. man was badly wounded, while the others dashed back

to the safety of the barracks. Our men went over to examine the wounded man and pronounced him dead, but we subsequently heard that he survived. The reprisals which we expected and for which we were prepared did not materialise, through the efforts of the local parish priest - Canon Barrett - who spoke to the local District Inspector.

Among other preparations which we had made for reprisals was one which would have done a lot of damage to the enemy speeding to the scene of the ambush. We had managed to secure several lengths of wire hawsers used at the shipyard, which we stretched across the road leading from Cork to Passage West, and fastened at intervals from trees on one side of the road to trees on the other side about six feet off the ground. The wires had been placed at a very dark bend in the road and would have torn the military or Tans out of their lorries if they had come along.

Around the Christmas of 1920, I was still on the run. In January 1921, with members of Passage West Company, I planned to rush the local R.I.C. barracks. We knew at a certain hour of the night that most of the local garrison left to have a drink in a nearby publichouse. On this particular night, Daniel Spillane and I approached the barracks door as they were about to leave. We were armed with a revolver each while other members of the company stood by to follow. Unfortunately, we moved a second or two too soon before the R.I.C. had actually come through the door. An R.I.C. man on duty saw us approach and shut the door in our faces.

On February 8th I was arrested in Monkstown on my way to a Battalion Council meeting at about 9 p.m. When asked my name I replied Jordan. I was arrested by the Camerons and taken to Cobh by launch - under that name. After three days

there, they discovered my identity and, two days later, I was transferred to Cork Military Barracks. After a week I was then transferred to Spike Island and treated as an internee. After a time, I was elected O/C. of the camp. Bill Quirke was elected Vice O/C. and Phil O'Donnell was elected Adjutant.

In November, during the Truce, with six others - Dick Barrett, Tom Crofts, Bill Quirke, .. Leddy, .. Buckley and Moss Twomey, I escaped from Spike. We tunneled through a wall surrounding the prison which was the inside of a moat. We then scaled the outside wall by means of a timber ladder - made from the joists of the flooring of the prison which we had by then wrecked. We made our way to the coast and eventually to the pier where we saw a guard on duty. When the guard left, Leddy waded out and brought to the pier a boat into which we tumbled and, with the aid of a storm, succeeded in reaching Cobh and safety.

Signed: H. J. O'Donnell

Date: 2-10-56

Witness: John J. Lally

