

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,689

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,689.

Witness

Michael Mullane,
Newcastle,
Blarney,
Co. CORK.

Identity.

O/C, Inniscarra Coy., Donoughmore Battn.,
Cork 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Inniscarra Company, Donoughmore Battalion,
Cork 1 Brigade, I.R.A., 1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 3009.

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No. W.S. 1.689

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL MULLANE,

Newcastle, Blarney, Co. Cork.

I was born at Inniscarra, Co. Cork, in November, 1890. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Cloghroe National School until I was about 15 years of age, when I left school to go to work on the farm at home.

Tomás MacCurtain and Terry MacSwiney visited Cloghroe one Sunday evening in the summer of 1914. They addressed a meeting which was attended by a good number of people in the district, and invited those present, especially the young men, to join the Irish Volunteers. At the close of the meeting, I was one of nine recruits. Some others were: Denis O'Sullivan, Michael Donovan, Tim Horgan, Con Mullane (my brother). We held together for a short time, during which we trained at 'forming fours', but the unit fell through after about two months.

My next connection with the Volunteer movement occurred about the autumn of 1917, when a company was organised at Inniscarra. This unit was organised by Richard O'Mahoney, Berrings. It was divided into two half companies based on Cloghroe and Dripsey areas. The strength of this company in the early stages was about 30. We had no arms, except a few shotguns which were the property of the members or their families. The company was an independent unit of Cork Brigade, Irish Volunteers. The only type of training carried out in the early stages was ordinary close order foot drill, with occasional route marches on Sunday evenings. The first officers of Inniscarra Company were:-

O/C - Richard O'Mahoney
 1st Lt. - Tim Twomey
 2nd Lt. - Michael Mullane (witness).

The usual training continued throughout 1917 and early 1918. Members were paying weekly subscriptions of 3d each towards the provision of arms and equipment. When the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918, there was a big increase in membership. The strength of the company at this time was about 120. All the young men, and many not so young, joined up. There was no change in officers at this time. We were busy training the new recruits, improvising weapons, making bombs, and collecting all available arms in the district. We made buckshot and bayonets in the local forge at Inniscarra with the help of the local blacksmith - O'Donoghue. At this period, everybody was organised to fight the British, and the general public were prepared to co-operate wholeheartedly with the Volunteers throughout the country. As the conscription scare passed, there was a certain amount of laxity and a small number of the new recruits dropped out. However, as things began to get 'hot' again towards the end of 1919 and early 1920, the strength of our company again reached the conscription period figure - 120.

I think that it was early in 1918 when the district was organised on a battalion basis. The battalion was based on Donoughmore and was known as Donoughmore Battalion (14th), Cork Brigade. The companies in the battalion were: Blarney, Courtbrack, Donoughmore, Rylane, Inniscarra, Grenagh. The officers of the battalion were:

O/C - "Pa" Twomey
 Vice O/C - Thos. J. Golden.
 Adjt. - Denis McCarthy (I think)
 Q/M - Jim Barrett (I think).

Beyond the ordinary training, there was little activity during the autumn of 1918. Training was, however, becoming more advanced and several week-ends were spent on field training in which nearly all companies in the battalion took part. During these operations we learned much about scouting and the use of cover.

About twenty-five members of the company (Inniscarra) moved into Cork on protection and other duties in connection with the general election in December, 1918. All the other companies in Donoughmore Battalion sent similar contingents. We were all billeted in W.L. Kelleher's yard in Drinan St., Cork. We remained in the City for about three days.

Early in 1919, Cork Brigade, which had now about twenty battalions, was divided into three brigades. The new brigades, with their approximate areas, were:

Cork City, Mid and East Cork - No. 1 Brigade.
North Cork - Fermoy to Kerry border - No. 2 Brigade.
West Cork - No. 3 Brigade.

Our battalion (Donoughmore) now became the 6th Battalion in Cork 1 Brigade. The other battalions in this brigade were: Cork City (1st and 2nd), Ovens (3rd), Cobh (4th), Whitechurch (5th), Macroom (7th), Ballyvourney (8th).

Training continued throughout 1919, becoming more intensive as time went on. Arms were now becoming more plentiful, and miniature rifles (.22), with supplies of ammunition, were now available in most company areas. It was customary to spend Sunday evening parades engaged in target practice. Any arms which had not been collected during the conscription period were now taken up. Several raids were carried out by selected members of the company, and the arms, which were all surrendered

voluntarily, were mainly shotguns. We had now about 30 shotguns.

Beyond normal training, there was no activity in the area until Easter, 1920, when the general order for the destruction of evacuated enemy posts was received. The only evacuated post in our area was Dripsey R.I.C. barracks, and this was destroyed by fire on Easter Saturday night, 1920. All members of the company -about 80 - were engaged in this operation, either as scouts, guards, roadblocking parties or in the party which actually set fire to the building.

When Blarney R.I.C. barracks was attacked on the night of June 1st 1920, all companies in Donoughmore Battalion were engaged on road blocking and outpost duty. I was in charge of the Cloghroe half of Inniscarra Company - to the number of about 40 - which was engaged in blocking the road at Leemount. We blocked the road by felling several trees across the road over a distance of about 100 yards. The second half of the company, under the O/C (Tim Twomey), was detailed to block the Inniscarra road and adopted a similar plan. The company 'fell in' in the vicinity of my home about 4 p.m. and marched through Cloghroe to the allocated positions. When all roads to Ballincollig had been blocked, we withdrew to our home area.

I should have mentioned that there was a change in the officers of Inniscarra Company in November, 1918, as the O/C (Richard O'Mahoney) was appointed Battalion Vice O/C, Donoughmore Battalion, about this time. The company officers now were: -

O/C - Tim Twomey
1st Lt. - Michael Mullane (witness)
2nd Lt. - Con Byrnes.

Carrigadrohid R.I.C. barracks was attacked by the men of Macroom Battalion, in co-operation with some men from Cork City, about a week after the attack on Blarney. On this occasion, about twenty men from Inniscarra Company under Tim Twomey (O/C) and myself were engaged in blocking the Dripsey-Carrigadrohid road at Faha by felling a number of trees. We were on outpost duty in the vicinity of the roadblock until about 4 a.m., when we withdrew to our homes as day was dawning.

On or about the same date, the majority of the members of the company took part in the burning of two houses at Dripsey to prevent their occupation by enemy forces. The houses were the property of Miss Bowen-Colthurst. The operation was carried out under Tim Twomey and myself.

Sometime in July, 1920, about a dozen members of Inniscarra Company took up a position at Clonmoyle on the Donoughmore-Coachford road to await an enemy patrol. The ambush party also included representatives from the other companies in Donoughmore Battalion. The strength of the combined forces was about 30. All were armed with shotguns. We took up our position behind the roadside fence and in the ruins of an old house about 4 p.m. We remained there for about 3 hours, and as the expected enemy party did not appear we withdrew to our home districts. Some of the Inniscarra men who were present on this occasion were - John O'Brien, John Hartnett, Dan Healy, Tim Twomey, Dan Mahoney, Michael Mahoney, and Ml. Mullane (witness). The Battalion O/C (Jackie O'Leary) was in charge.

Training went on as usual about this time, and selected men were trained as scouts, engineers, despatch riders, intelligence officers in each company. The intelligence work was now a very important aspect of activities and, to a certain extent, every member of the company reported on the movements of enemy forces in the district. Records were kept of such enemy movements to endeavour to establish whether there was any regularity in their movements along any particular road. It was on the basis of the information gleaned and recorded in this way that the battalion officers were able to make plans to ambush the enemy.

On September 1st 1920, about twelve men from Inniscarra Company, in conjunction with about twenty men drawn from the other companies in the battalion, took up an ambush position on the Inniscarra-Ballincollig road about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Ballincollig. The party were armed with rifles and shotguns. The Battalion O/C (Jackie O'Leary) was in charge. The main body were extended behind the roadside fence south of the road, while a few men were in a similar position on the opposite side. I was detailed to block the road by pushing a prepared tree trunk, which had been transported to the spot, off a high rock on the northern side of the road at the western flank of our position. The tree trunk, which, it was anticipated, would fall across the road when pushed off the rock, fell back against the side of the rock instead of overbalancing and falling across the road. I was to push off the tree when the lorry came into view, but, despite my best endeavours, I failed to get the tree trunk to overbalance. The enemy lorry was driven through at speed while fire was opened on it by our men in position on both sides of the road. The lorry got through and continued on towards Macroom.

It was never ascertained what casualties, if any, the enemy had, but our men escaped unscathed. As we were within a short distance of a strong enemy garrison at Ballincollig, we had now to withdraw hurriedly to our home areas.

About this time there was a rumour that Dripsey Woollen Mills were to be burned as a reprisal for the destruction of the Bowen-Colthurst houses earlier in the year. An armed guard of I.R.A. was placed in position in the vicinity of the mills in order to deal with any force which might undertake the reprisal job. Nearly all companies in the battalion (Donoughmore) were represented on this guard, at one time or another, during a period of about eight days.

Several raids on the mails, both local and district, were carried out at this period, but no information of military value was obtained. All letters were censored by members of the battalion staff and then reposted in the local post offices.

Early in December, 1920, General Strickland - O/C British troops in the Southern Command - was reported to be on a tour of inspection in the district. Ambush positions were taken up on several roads, but the I.R.A. parties failed to make contact with the enemy party. On this occasion, about a dozen members of Inniscarra Company from Dripsey area were in position for the greater portion of a day in their own district before it was learned that the enemy G.O.C. had travelled by another route. The Company O/C (Tim Twomey) was in charge.

A Flying Column was formed in Donoughmore Battalion early in January, 1921. The Battalion O/C (Jackie O'Leary)

was in charge. The column was composed of the battalion officers, with representatives of nearly all companies in the battalion. Our company (Inniscarra) was not represented on the column, as volunteers for it were instructed to remain in their home area and to ensure that detailed reports of enemy movements through the area were reported to Column H.Q. each evening. In addition, we were held responsible for ensuring that, with the exception of the Cork-Macroon road, all other roads in the area were kept closed.

On the evening of January 27th 1921, I received written instructions from the Battalion O/C (Jack O'Leary) to have about twenty men at Peake, near Coachford, at 6 p.m. The Battalion Column were billeted here when I arrived with my men. About 10 p.m. I moved off with my party to the position selected for the ambush next day.

We were accompanied by the Battalion O/C (~~Paddy Collins~~ ^{Jack O'Leary})

When we reached the selected position in the vicinity of Dripsey on the main Cork-Macroon road, we were instructed to dig a trench on the side of a hill about 30 yards from the road and overlooking same. We were also to prepare a tree for the blocking of the road at the right moment, by sawing it practically the whole way through and tying it with a rope to ensure that it did not fall before the proper time. When all this work had been completed, it was about 5 a.m. on January 28th 1921.

At this stage, about a dozen members of my party were ordered to proceed to a point about one mile to the east (Ballincollig) side of the ambush site and to prepare a tree for roadblocking at that point. This roadblock was not to be set up until the enemy party had passed on to the west and were under fire at the main position.

*vice op. (Frank Burtess)
and adj. (Paddy Collins)*

GRK

GRK

It was intended to prevent the possible return of any enemy transport to Cork or Ballincollig for reinforcements after the engagement had opened. Alternatively, it would impede the approaches of such help while the engagement was going on.

The road-blocking party now moved off to the east as the column arrived to take up their positions. With about six other members of my party, I fell in with the column. We were armed with shotguns. We took up our position on the eastern flank of the main body. On the approach of the leading enemy lorry, I was detailed to cut the rope which was holding the tree to block the road.

Everybody was in position about 6 a.m. and we remained there throughout the day until about 4 p.m. At this stage the Battalion O/C (Jack O'Leary) was thinking of withdrawing from the position. He moved along the line to our flank (eastern) and was instructing me to ensure that the tree for the roadblock was knocked before we withdrew, in case it would fall on anybody later. Before he had completed his instructions to me, he glanced to the east and observed some soldiers advancing towards us in a field to the east. As it was now obvious that the enemy were aware of our position, orders to withdraw were given. All men in the main position moved up the hill to our rear and away from the road. As we withdrew, we came under fire from an enemy party which had come in on our rear. We were now forced to move back in haste towards the main road. Having reached the road, we travelled under cover of the fence for about 100 yards in a westerly direction, where we entered a laneway leading north. We moved along this laneway under cover, and after travelling about 40/50 yards we lost contact with the enemy. The majority of the ambush

party withdrew towards Coachford and on to Rylane. I took cover in a furze brake near Coachford and remained there until darkness set in, when I moved across country to my home area. In this engagement, six of our men - one of whom, Jim Barrett (Battn. Q/M), was wounded - were taken prisoners. Two of them - Dan O'Callaghan and Tom O'Brien - were members of Dripsey section of Inniscarra Company. They were later tried by courtmartial and executed, as were the other prisoners - Tadhg McCarthy, Patk. Mahoney, and John Lyons. The wounded prisoner - Jim Barrett - died of his wounds.

The column was disbanded for about a month some days after the Dripsey engagement. All members returned to their own company areas, taking their arms with them. These men were engaged at this time in training the men in the local companies.

There was considerable activity in the cutting of enemy lines of communication - blocking roads, digging trenches, demolishing bridges, etc. - throughout the spring and early summer of 1921. This work engaged the attention of every available man in the company (Inniscarra) during the period, as the enemy were daily compelling civilians, at the point of the gun, to close trenches or remove road-blocks. It was necessary to re-open the same trench or dig a new one at some other spot next night. All this work was carried out under armed guards. The fact that the brigade and battalion staff, as well as the respective columns, were regularly in the area at this time made it essential that every possible loophole through which the strong enemy forces at Ballincollig and Cork could get into the district, should be sealed off. As my company (Inniscarra) was the nearest in the battalion to these posts, my men were

continually engaged on protection work up to the Truce.

The officers of Inniscarra Company in the period 1917 to July 11th 1921 were:

1917.

O/C - Richard O'Mahoney
1st Lt. - Tadhg Twomey
2nd Lt. - Michael Mullane.

November, 1918.

O/C - Tadhg Twomey
1st Lt. - Michael Mullane
2nd Lt. - Con Byrnes.

May, 1920.

O/C - Michael Mullane (witness)
1st Lt. - James Mahoney.
2nd Lt. - Con Byrnes.

My rank at the Truce was O/C, Inniscarra Company, Donoughmore Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade.

The strength of the company was about 120.

Signed: Michael Mullane

Date: 30-10-1954

Witness: P. L. Donnell
(Investigator).

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