

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 97



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ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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(Dublin).

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On: Easter Week Questionnaire
and supplementary statement
on 5th Fingal Battalion.

Activities in North County
Dublin, Easter Week, 1916.

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I write down here my impressions and recollections of events and activities in connection with the Irish Volunteers in North County Dublin before and ^{after} ~~at~~ the Rising of Easter Week 1916.

After the split in the Volunteer Organisation, due to Redmond's attitude towards the War, the Irish Volunteers (more often at the time known as the Sinn Fein Volunteers ^{of N. Co Dublin}) were formed into the Fifth (Fingal) Battalion of the Dublin Brigade. About the middle of 1915 this battalion numbered less than one hundred men (the number varying but averaging about eighty). It comprised 4 companies which with its staff and officers were as follows :---

Commandant..... Dr. Richard Hayes
Adjutant Thomas Ashe
Quartermaster Frank Lawless

Swords company Captain... Richard Coleman
Lusk ,, ,, ... Edward Rooney
Skerries ,, ,, ... Joseph Thornton
Saint Margarets ,, ... James V. Lawless

During the second half of the year 1915 and up to April 1916 the Battalion had regular rifle practice, occasional lectures from an organiser (the late Eimar O'Duffy who had been at Sandhurst military college), drill exercise and manoeuvres on a small scale --this last sometimes in conjunction with a city battalion.

In the first week of April 1916 Ashe, who was at this time very intimate with James Connolly and much in touch with the the I.R.B. Supreme Council (he himself was local centre), was officially informed (verbally) by Connolly that the Rising was fixed to take place on Easter Sunday. He

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was permitted to impart this to Frank Lawless (Quartermaster) and myself. I immediately had a long conversation with Ashe regarding preparations &c, and, as he was at the time almost every day in Dublin and in close touch with things, he agreed to my suggestion that he should take over the function of Batt. Commandant while I would take on his duties of Adjutant. And in view of the nearness of the Rising we did not think it necessary to acquaint H.Q. of this. But I think (though not quite sure) that he informed Connolly.

On Good Friday, I think, Ashe got an order ~~from Connolly~~ (verbal) from Connolly that operations should begin at 7 P.M. on Easter Sunday night. An order was accordingly sent out on Saturday to the 4 companies of the Batt. to mobilise with a day's rations at 12 o'clock (mid-day) on Easter Sunday at Rathbeal Cross, a few miles north of Swords, and it was arranged that we would begin activities at 7 P.M. on that day with the blowing up of the G.M.R. Railway viaduct between Malahide and Donabate. Under the belief that the work for the day was ordinary manoeuvres, the 4 companies mobilised in almost full strength. By that time most of the men had heard of Eoin MacNeill's counter-manding order, which gave rise to some discussion among them, none of whom knew that the Rising was fixed for that evening. We of the Staff were a little non-plussed, and in the afternoon Ashe sent Joe Lawless (now Colonel Lawless of the Army) to Liberty Hall to Connolly for instructions regarding activities. L. returned with a message that everything was 'off' for the moment but that the men were not to be disbanded till further orders.

The evening passed and night came, but no order arrived. A little after midnight Frank Lawless and myself drove to Dublin. We called at several prominent and friendly houses but could get no response to knocking and bellringing. At last we were admitted to a house in North Richmond Street where we found Michael O'Hanrahan and Tom Weafer (the former executed, the latter killed in

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the Rising). They seemed as confused as ourselves, telling us that things were postponed and that the best thing to do would probably be to disband the men who, however, were to be informed that they could expect to be mobilised at any moment. On getting back to the men about 2 A.M. this was carried out. Ashe and Coleman returned with me to my house at Lusk, and about 7 A.M. we were roused from sleep by Joe Lawless who handed Ashe a despatch from P.H. Pearse to his father (Frank Lawless) with (as well as I can remember) the words --"Strike at one o'clock to-day".

Orders were at once issued to the 4 companies to mobilise at 12 o'clock ^{mid-day} at Knocksedan, a few miles from Swords. The companies arrived fairly to time but in lesser strength than on the previous day---I should say approx. sixty.

[Here I should like to make a digression to mention a matter of some importance perhaps. On my way to Knocksedan a little before mid-day I called at the Post Office in Lusk for stamps. The postmistress, whom I knew very well, asked me to accompany her to her sitting room. There she told me that she had just delivered a wire in code from Dublin Castle ^{to the Lusk police sergeant}. She was familiar with the code from frequent messages. This particular one to the police sergeant was to the effect that he was to make immediate arrangements ~~that~~ for the arrest of Ashe and myself! (I mention this incident because I think that similar messages were sent to various ^{Vol.} centres in the country, and because it tends to show that the Rising leaders were right in their view that there was to be a general swoop by Dublin Castle on that day).]

To resume. A little after 1 O'clock ^{P.M.} two men were detailed to blow ~~up~~ up the railway viaduct between Malahide and Donabate. This operation was only partially successful. The immediate orders from H.Q. were that we were to move to Finglas, hold the main road there and ambush or fire on any enemy officers returning by that route from Fairyhouse Races. (None did return so).

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At Finglas the Batt. camped and bivouacked for Monday night. On Monday about mid-day Richard Mulcahy in Vol. uniform joined us -- he was unable to join his own company (of which he was a lieutenant) in the city. On that night (Monday) he set out at 12 o'clock with a dozen men to wreck the railway line and signal cabin at Blanchardstown (to impede ^{enemy} troops coming to city from Athlone). This operation not entirely successful.

On Tuesday morning a despatch arrived from H.Q. (G.P.O.) with an order to send twenty of our men to Dublin. (I should like to say that I was very disappointed on the arrival of this order. I deduced from it that the city Volunteers had not turned out in full strength; and again I had hoped before the Rising that, when hostilities began, H.Q. would, on account of the fewness in numbers of our Batt., send us a few hundred men out of the 3 or 4 thousand in the city Batts.). The order was carried out and Richard Coleman, captain of Swords company led them in.

The Batt. was thus left with about 45 men. One result of the diminution was an arrangement to divide the force left into four sections of equal numbers.

On Tuesday evening we left Finglas and ~~man~~ proceeded to ~~the~~ Knocksedan, camping for the night at Killeek near by. On that day a half dozen stragglers from a city Batt., cut off at Phibsboro', joined us. It was arranged on Wednesday night that we would attack the police barracks at Swords and Donabate on the following morning.

On Wednesday between 9 and 10 o'clock A.M. we set out for Swords and halted at the verge of that village. Ashe and myself drove up to the barracks in the main street and, entering the barracks, demanded its surrender from the sergeant-in-charge. He complied immediately, handing up to us the arms and ammunition. Mulcahy at the same time entered the Post

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was approached.
—Slane road. The barracks was about 100 yards from the Cross (on Dublin side) on the main road. Inside a hedge on the side road we were travelling a police-fully accoutred was discovered lying -- he was presumably on his way to the barracks from some other station. Immediately afterwards two Volunteer scouts came hurrying back from the Cross Roads to report that a barricade was being erected in front of the barracks. The advance guard accordingly moved cautiously towards the Cross and, sweeping down on the two policemen at the barricade, made them prisoners. Ashe, arriving with Mulcahy and a small squad of men in front of the barracks, called on the occupants to surrender. The reply was a volley from inside. The little squad of Volunteers was then ordered to occupy the ditch opposite the barracks and to open fire. It was replied to from within. This continued for half an hour, at the end of which the police waved a white cloth through a window. I remember that just then I was with two Volunteers at the Cross Roads where we were watching the main road, but we were more interested in the barrack operations. Turning away from the barracks momentarily one of the Volunteers cried out--"Look", "Look" -- and we saw a long line of motor cars from the direction of Slane slowing up, the nearest stopping some hundred yards from where we were at the Cross. The two Volunteers at once dropped on their knees and were about to open fire when I shouted at them to stop. I thought (wishful thinking I suppose!) that the cars contained the Dun-boyne Volunteers who, we heard all during the week, were seeking to join us. But an immediate volley from the cars quickly disillusioned me. Simultaneously with this ~~the~~ the police in the barracks, observing the assistance (expected I presume) coming to them, changed their minds and resumed their offensive.

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Office where he destroyed the telegraph instruments &c. The next objective was Donabate ~~prohinn~~ barracks where the police refused to surrender at Ashe's demand to do so. Fire was accordingly opened and returned. At the end of ten minutes, on one of the besieged policemen being wounded, the remainder surrendered and handed over rifles and ammunition. Early in the afternoon our little force went north again and camped near Oldtown. Some time before midnight it was arranged to attack the police barracks at Garristown. A small advance party set out under my charge for ~~the~~ it accordingly. As some of the party created a lot of noise on arriving beside the barracks, I thought it better not to wait for the arrival of our main body. After much knocking the door was opened by the sergeant from whom I demanded the barrack's rifles and ammunition. He replied that all rifles &c had been taken away during the day by the Balbriggan head constable. Thinking he was bluffing we searched the barracks thoroughly but found nothing. (By the way this sergeant swore the most atrocious lies against me at my courtmartial).

On Thursday there were no special activities except that we moved ~~south~~
-wards ~~west~~, camping in the evening at Borranstown between Garristown and Ashbourne.

(I should mention here — what I haven't done before now --that all the men of the batt. had cycles in the movements from place to place).

On Friday morning Ashe made arrangements to carry out an order from H.Q., viz.- to destroy the M.G.R. line at Batterstown some ten miles away and generally to create any diversion that might ^{impede} enemy troops from moving on the city. As a detail it was arranged, too, that the Ashbourne police barracks, which lay on the route to Batterstown, should be attacked. At 11 A.M. thirty five men set out, leaving about a dozen behind in the camp for foraging duty. I remember these being told that we would be back for dinner about 3 P.M. An hour and a half after starting, Rath Cross Roads on the main Dublin—Ashbourne--

Leaving the cars, some of the police lined the hedges while others took cover behind the cars, and from these positions opened fire on the Cross.

It was at this stage that Mulcahy, in consultation with Ashe, began to show the tactical knowledge that was hours later to bring victory. Little squads of Volunteers were so arranged inside the hedges that the police on the roadway were to a large extent gradually surrounded -- and the barrack equally so. My knowledge of these arrangements and accompanying activities is very limited, as I was with a Volunteer placed by Mulcahy in a position behind a hedge, some hundred yards at the rear of the barrack and told to keep its backdoor covered (to prevent its occupants leaving and forming a fresh attacking force on our south). I remained in this position almost all during the fighting -- except to leave it a few times to attend our wounded men. I could however partly see and hear Ashe and Mulcahy moving from group to group where they had placed them. I could observe that lack of numbers was one of their difficulties, and there was some relief half-way through the fighting when Frank Lawless (who had been left behind in charge of the camp), in response to a message, arrived with half a dozen men. They were placed by Mulcahy in a position at the extreme north side of the police position. Here the police attack was being directed by a District Inspector Smyth, an exArmy officer. At the other (southern or Cross Roads) end a County Inspector Gray was directing operations. Gray was severely wounded early in the fighting, leaving Smyth in sole command. Soon after Frank Lawless's arrival an intermittent duel began between his and Smyth's squad. Smyth was eventually mortally wounded by a shot from Lawless. This left the police without a leader with the result that they lost morale. Very soon after Smyth was being knocked out, Lawless and his Volunteer squad came out on the roadway and, firing intermittently, moved at the double towards the motor cars. On seeing them some of the police appeared from under cover of the cars with their hands up. This was seen and

imitated by the rest all the way down towards the Cross. Becoming aware of it those in the barracks under a District Inspector MacCormack came out with their hands up.

And so the five hours' fighting ended.

At the request of Dist. Inspector MacCormack I attended Inspector Gray and the wounded policemen.

As regards the numbers engaged on both sides, thirty five Volunteers were engaged for the first half of the fight, and for the remainder of the time forty one (35 plus 6)

It was a little difficult to estimate precisely the number of police. As far as I could judge about sixty came in the seventeen motor cars, and this with fourteen in the barracks would leave the number at about 75.

Regarding casualties, two Volunteers (Thomas Rafferty of Lusk and John Crinigan of Swords) were killed and five were slightly wounded.

As far as I could observe in the confusion eight policemen were killed, while Inspector Gray and a certain number of policemen, I heard, died within a week or two of their wounds. As well as I remember about fifteen were wounded.

Perhaps I should mention here that after the surrender one of the policemen stated that on leaving in the morning the orders were that "no rebels were to be taken prisoners but that all were to be shot at sight.

An hour or so after the surrender our force returned to the camp

at Barnstown for the night and on Saturday moved to Newbarry near Olltown. In the forenoon of Sunday two policemen in mufti motored into the camp with the information that a general surrender had taken place in Dublin. They suggested that a Volunteer might accompany one of them to see Mr Pearse who was a prisoner. Richard Mulcahy did so, saw Pearse and corroborated the surrender. The policemen then informed us that a cavalry squad would come later to take our surrender. After the police left a few of the Volunteers did not favour the idea of our waiting for this -- they would prefer our "going on the run". A meeting of the Staff officers and Mulcahy unanimously decided in favour of formally surrendering -- a few youthful Volunteers in their teens were ordered to go home. In the evening a cavalry squad arrived who conveyed us to Dublin after formally surrendering.

And that was the end.

Richard Hayes

*Woodlands
Kill o' Frange
Co Dublin
18 February 1948*

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Longpoint: 2 SRÁID DÁSHIN,

ÁC CLIAIC.

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NO. C. D. 46

Mr. Thomas Ash,

Corduff,

L U S K.

A Chára,

In reply to your letter of the 5th inst. regarding the
Officers for the Fingal Battalion for the Staff I have to inform you that the
Staff I have to inform you that the
ratified as Commandant of the Battalion
other Officers will be held over for

Yours faithfully


Hon.

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