

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 621

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S., 631

Witness

Bernard C. Byrne,  
31 Sycamore Road,  
Mount Merrion Park,  
Blackrock,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'D' Company  
1st Battalion Dublin Brigade, 1916 - ;  
Member of The Squad, 1920-1921.

Subject.

- (a) Activities of 'D' Company, 1st Battalion,  
Dublin Brigade, 1916-1921;
- (b) Intelligence, Easter Week, 1916;
- (c) Military activities, Dublin, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement of Bernard C. Byrne, 31 Sycamore Road,

Mount Merrion Park, Blackrock, Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers on Easter Tuesday, 1916. I had association with them in a general way before that because my brothers, Charlie and Joe, were both active members of the Irish Volunteers.

On Easter Tuesday, 1916, Billy Ashton, John Delahunty and myself went to the Father Mathew Hall in Church Street and offered our services. Ashton and Delahunty were accepted, but I was told to go home, firstly because I was too young, and secondly because they knew that both Charlie and Joe were taking part in the Rising. (Joe served in the Mendicity Institute, was sentenced to death and reprieved). Somebody took pity on me then and decided to use me in some other capacity, and that was actually my first introduction to what we now call Intelligence work.

My Intelligence work during Easter Week consisted mostly of watching enemy movements and concentrations, finding out where new telephone wires were being laid down, etc. I cannot recall to whom I actually conveyed my information, but I think it was to anybody I met in uniform in the vicinity of the Father Mathew Hall.

Following the release of the Volunteers from British prisons and internment camps, "D" Company of the 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, was re-organised. My brothers Joe and Charlie, were officers of "D" Company, and consequently, through their association, I found myself attached to that Company.

Brigade Intelligence.

Some time prior to the Armistice celebrations in 1919 what I believe to have been the first real effort to establish military intelligence, as such, in the I.R.A. was made at 44 Parnell Square under the direction of Dick McKee. Leo Henderson, to the best of my recollection, was his assistant. Our attention was chiefly directed to the necessity for recording the movements and hostile activities of members of the D.M.P. Selected representatives from the various Companies in the Brigade were asked to attend a conference at which Dick McKee presided. He gave us an outline as to where we should direct our energies and activities henceforth, that is, as already stated, to observe the movements of D.M.P. men who had made themselves obnoxious to the Volunteer organisation. He gave us copy-books to take away with us, in which we were to record their movements.

One of my first recollections of activities against British forces was the holding up of an Australian soldier on the Quays and the confiscation of his gun and ammunition, which we handed over to Battalion Headquarters.

No important developments took place as far as Brigade Intelligence work was concerned. It was only when our Intelligence was taken under the control of G.H.Q. that real results were obtained.

Detectives Barton and Gibney.

Shortly after the release of the Easter Week prisoners from Lincoln and other British prisons, Detectives Barton and Gibney began to make regular visits to our house because of the fact that my brother Joe, who was then closely associated with Collins, was attracting their particular attention. It was not unusual even as early as 1917 to have what might

be termed weekly unofficial visits from these two detectives. They invariably timed their arrival for about midnight. The family were always very civil, one might almost say courteous, to them, invariably inviting them to partake of whatever was going in the line of supper, but the two detectives were equally steadfast in their refusal to partake of same.

Barton apparently concluded that because of my youth I would be a useful person to cultivate, hoping thereby to derive some information which would bring him in closer contact with Collins.

When things livened up these visits naturally ceased, but as I had already, through the medium of Dick McKee, made headquarters aware of Barton's interest in me, it was decided that it would be a good idea for me to string along. My association with Barton was maintained to within about two or three months of his death by shooting. The meetings, which took place quite openly, were usually either in the circle of the Gaiety Theatre or the Theatre Royal.

I was not then a member of the Squad, but McKee told me that the official interest in Barton was becoming a bit more serious, and, as I was not known personally to the people who might be detailed to take final action against Barton, it was deemed advisable that I should sever my connection with him. The contact proved of little value either to our side or to Barton, although the trend of his enquiries probably assisted headquarters in determining the actual nature and extent of his activities. One of the benefits from this early association fell to our side, although it took some considerable time for this advantage to materialise, and it did so in a rather amusing manner. The Squad dump in Charles Street had been raided and all our equipment, consisting of revolvers, "Peter the Painters", grenades and I think two motor cars,

had been taken away by the British. The replacing of this equipment was a matter of much importance to us, and we wanted to effect it as speedily as possible. It was during this replacement that Gibney served a very useful purpose.

Gibney was at no time very happy in his political activities, and I had always maintained a nodding acquaintance with him. One day shortly after the raid on our dump Tom Keogh and I were coming along Pearse Street with the intention of crossing down Tara Street to dispose of a cargo of small arms, probably three or four revolvers each, and we found that a cordon had been thrown round the Tara Street area. To retreat back along Pearse Street was out of the question, so we decided to pass down by the police station, pass the Theatre Royal and on to the Quays with a view to crossing whichever appeared the more favourable, Butt Bridge or O'Connell Bridge.

We were about half-way across the road and directly opposite College Street police station when four Auxiliaries emerged from that building. They saw us and had evidently just determined that we were likely suspects when Gibney appeared immediately behind them, apparently in their company and presumably having been called upon to act as guide or some such capacity. As soon as I saw Gibney I shouted to him, "Hullo Bill, any chance of getting out of here without being held up all day?", and he immediately replied, "If you are not afraid to walk along with us everything will be O.K." We walked down by the Royal, Gibney keeping Keogh and myself behind the three Auxiliaries. Then Gibney said to the Auxiliaries, "You go to your right here and I'll see these lads past the corner". He was as good as his word, but when he got Keogh and I away from the immediate vicinity of the three Auxiliaries his language was anything but civil and certainly not fit for recording. My association with Gibney

thus served a good purpose, because were it not for his lucky intervention on that occasion both Tom Keogh and myself would have been taken by the Auxiliaries, complete with our arms.

When the Free State was established I succeeded in having Gibney promoted to the rank of Sergeant, for which he was duly grateful.

Raid on Kingsbridge station.

In July, 1920, a detachment of British military were stationed at Kingsbridge station mainly for the purpose of guarding three wagon-loads of military equipment. I believe that the railwaymen refused to handle military stores, and since they would not take military wagons on their ordinary trains the British authorities had no option but to leave their wagons in the goods-yard and place a guard on them.

When it came to my notice that these wagons and their contents were still being guarded by British military I reported the matter to Dick McKee, and suggested to him that action should be taken to disarm the guard, as I considered it an easy way of procuring arms for my Company. Dick McKee agreed and said to me, "If you feel certain that the job can be done without casualties to either side, go ahead and do it". It was clearly stipulated that there was to be no shooting, and on that account the Vice-Brigadier, Peadar Clancy, was detailed to take command of the original operation, which was to have taken place on a Saturday. On account of the fact that there was no ordinary routine activity taking place in the railway yard on a Saturday afternoon, Peadar decided that the job was impracticable for that day; in fact he was of the opinion that it was not a feasible proposition for any day. I did not agree with this version and argued the point with Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy in the Republican Outfitters in Talbot Street on the Saturday night. Dick was reluctant to go against Peadar's view in this matter, but because of my

insistence that the job would be easy they both reluctantly agreed to make another attempt. Monday was then fixed as the day for the operation, and I was assured of every facility that the Brigade could provide.

The operation was assigned to "D" Company, and my brother Charlie, who was Company Commander, mobilised about twelve to sixteen men for 11 a.m. on Monday. Peadar Clancy was present while the briefing took place and approved of the arrangements that were made.

Amongst those taking part were Frank Bolster, Charlie Byrne, Joe Byrne, myself, W. Ahston, Jack Shanley, Mick O'Donnell, Mick Behan, Gussy Byrne, Stephen Murphy and Pat McCrae (transport).

Bolster and myself were detailed to approach the guard from the St. John's Road entrance. Gus Byrne, who was pretty useful with his hands, was to be attired in dungarees and was to carry a billy-can. When the sentry was near the point from where Bolster and I were instructed to emerge, Gus was to approach him, and when he was satisfied that Bolster and I were sufficiently near to avail of any action which he would take he was to ask the sentry for permission to boil his can at the fire. By this time, we reckoned, Gus should be sufficiently near the sentry to knock him out with a blow to the jaw. This part of the programme went according to plan. Other Volunteers close to us were detailed to take necessary action should any unforeseen occurrence arise, and they had precise instructions, as to what they were to do in the event of everything going according to plan.

With the exception of the sentry and three members of the British party, the remainder of the guard were playing cards in one of the wagons which they were supposed to be guarding.

The handling of this particular group in the initial stages was my job and Bolster's, and it was essential that Gus should make no movement until we were in a position to act without delay.

From the time the sentry got his knock-out blow matters moved rather swiftly. In a sense the situation was amusing rather than serious. Joe Byrne, who is at least 6' tall, was seen striding up the goods-yard with three very small soldiers trotting in front of him, this being his contribution to the round-up.

The other members of our party were equally quick in dealing with the various tasks assigned to them, and in a very short time we had the position entirely in hand. The soldiers in the wagon already referred to must have felt rather silly about the whole performance, because Bolster and I, while waiting for the round-up business to be carried out, did not interfere with their game of cards, nor did they bother to look at us until such time as we told them that we thought it was time to pack up. The packing up was carried out in a very brief manner, because all we did was to remove the soldier personnel to a nearby wagon, in which we locked them up. This action was afterwards interpreted to mean that we had intended burning them in the wagon, which, of course, was not true.

Having relieved the entire guard of their arms and ammunition, which consisted of about twelve rifles and about a thousand rounds of ammunition, we set fire to the wagons containing the British stores. The rifles and ammunition were taken away in his van by Pat McCrae.

Attack on armoured car at Phibsboro'.

On 14th October, 1920, an armoured car was attacked at Phibsboro' by men from "D" Company of the 1st Battalion.

It had been reported to the O.C. of the Company, Captain C. Byrne, that a double-turret armoured car was in the habit of calling at the Munster & Leinster Bank at Doyle's Corner for the purpose of collecting monies to pay the British troops. It had been observed that the crew of the car were always lax in their attention to ordinary security measures while the officer was in the bank transacting business.

When the matter was first reported to the Brigade, there was much opposition on the basis that the operation would be rather risky, and in the event of failure we would be adding further to the already heavy list of casualties which the organisation was suffering round that time. The Brigadier, Dick McKee, eventually decided that the job was worth trying, and after two or three futile efforts we eventually found ourselves on the date mentioned above faced with the actual proposition of performing this task.

The armoured car was invariably at the bank at eleven o'clock sharp on Thursdays. On this particular day, however, for some reason or other, the British military party were late arriving.

The following members of "D" Company took part in the operation: Captain C. Byrne in charge, myself, Gus Byrne, Frank Bolster, Mick O'Donnell, Peter O'Connor, Bill O'Connell, Mick Behan, Jack Shanley and Bill Ashton.

It had been observed that the car crew had never taken the precaution of closing the shutters of the car, and that the machine-gunner invariably perched himself on top of the car while having a smoke or admiring the scene generally. It was believed possible that with average luck we would be able to jam the shutters in such a way that it would be impossible for the crew to close them from the inside. The jamming was to be effected by the simple process of inserting an ordinary book of the same width as the turret

groove, which would prevent the lever from taking effect. This job was to be my particular concern, and until it had been done to my satisfaction no action was to be taken by any member of our party towards the capture of the car.

The various persons mentioned were located as follows: - Peter O'Connor and Gus Byrne at the bank corner, myself slightly further down the road on the same side, so that the armoured car would be in a position at the pavement between myself and O'Connor. On the opposite side of the road Frank Bolster, Bill O'Connell and Mick Behan were stationed, and their particular job was to take care of the machine-gunner on top of the car. Captain C. Byrne and Mick O'Donnell were not assigned to any particular task, but were to leave themselves free to be of assistance when and where required.

At the outset we were somewhat unlucky on account of the armoured car arriving almost half an hour after their usual time. We had begun to disperse when a double-turret car was observed coming from the Phibsboro' direction. This proved to be the car we were interested in and we again took up our positions.

The officer in charge of the military party left the car and entered the bank, and the members of the car crew behaved in their usual lackadaisical way. Having allowed the party time to settle down, I decided that the time was now opportune for putting our plan into operation, and I walked slowly towards the slot at the rear of the car. I had no difficulty in inserting the book, but I had scarcely achieved this when a shot rang out. This was something we had not bargained for because it had been made clear that no shot was to be fired until I fired. The members of our party on the opposite or blind side from me were now in a quandary, because they had no way of knowing whether we were

doing the shooting or were being shot at. If the latter, it was a case of the quicker they could get away the better. Behan, however, who was a particularly cool type of soldier, had been taking particular notice of my movements, and he was satisfied that, as far as I was concerned, nothing to upset my plans had occurred, because, as he said afterwards, he saw me dive hurriedly for my gun. This was the signal for Bolster, O'Connell and himself to move in. Unfortunately that split-second warning had been sufficient to transform the lackadaisical machine-gunner into a very active soldier, and without any hesitation he opened fire on the men he saw rushing towards his car. It was at this stage that Bill O'Connell was shot, straight through the crown of the head. He was dead before he hit the ground. I was not aware of this until about half an hour afterwards, because on my side of the car things were moving fairly rapidly. I had succeeded in getting the book into position to prevent the British from closing the shutter of the car, and I proceeded to open fire on the occupants. In this I was very successful, because later reports showed that with the exception of the officer, about whom I will speak later, none of the occupants of the car were capable of driving it away, nor in fact did any of them even leave the car while it was at the bank. It was subsequently rumoured that all the occupants of the car were seriously wounded and that the majority of them died. A new crew had to be provided to remove the car.

The success of the operation was marred at the outset by one of my colleagues allowing his gun to go off accidentally. Contrary to orders he had the gun cocked in his pocket, and it went off as he withdrew it.

Byrne and O'Connor were not faring quite so well at the front slot. Byrne, in his anxiety to get going, put his gun just a shade too far into the opening and the driver succeeded in wresting it from him. This left them somewhat unbalanced, and they decided it was time for them to move off.

After firing away to the best of my ability I decided that I too should move off. As I was dodging round the corner on to the North Circular Road I collided with the officer as he was leaving the bank. He was small, slightly built fellow with one hand. In his one hand he carried a bag containing the money and what appeared to be a .32 automatic. We looked at each other for maybe seconds and I said to myself, "first in wins here", so I pulled the trigger but all I got was a click. My gun was empty. The British officer realised how lucky he had been and made an effort to raise his gun, but I decided that the best thing to do would be to knock him out with a blow, which I did.

The various members of our party made their way back as well as they could. The men who went in the Phibsboro' direction got very little assistance from anybody and had to force their way through various shops and back gardens until such time as they found themselves on what we would call secure territory. I myself was intercepted by a butcher wielding a knife, but he was easy to talk to.

I overtook Byrne and O'Connor at the Bolton Street Technical Schools, but kept walking five or six yards behind them. Suddenly it dawned on me that smoke was issuing from the pocket of the overcoat carried by Byrne. I called his attention to this, and when he examined the coat he found two perfectly good holes in it, which left no doubt as to where lay the responsibility for the fiasco.

Effort to secure arms.

During the period before Christmas 1920 every effort was being made to secure arms and ammunition from enemy forces, with a view to sending them to our men in country districts.

At about half-past eleven one night I was standing in the vicinity of the school lane, Arbour Hill, when a British soldier asked me the time. He then told me that he was due for a spot of trouble as he had overstayed his pass. After some conversation with him I thought that he would be a likely mark to approach on the question of securing arms or ammunition. After some further conversation I told him that I knew a way into the barracks, by which he would avoid the principal gates, and it was agreed that if he made his return successfully he would meet me at the same place but at an earlier hour two or three nights later.

I discussed the matter with the Company O.C., Charlie Byrne, and he agreed to send Mick O'Donnell in order that we might have a second opinion as to whether the soldier's offer of arms was genuine. The soldier turned up as arranged, and after some discussion we made an arrangement with him, O'Donnell being completely satisfied, as I was, that the soldier was genuine.

We reported back to the O.C., and it was agreed that we should take a chance with the soldier. Our arrangement with him was a fairly simple one. We were to contact him on that portion of the road opposite the clock tower and in line with Arbour Hill church gates. He, in turn, was to have whatever goods he intended giving us, dumped inside the barrack wall but convenient for passing through the railings.

On the night arranged, Bolster, Mick O'Donnell, Shanley and myself went to meet the soldier. Several other

Volunteers were detailed to remain in the near vicinity in order to carry away the stuff as soon as we received it.

Just before we left to meet the soldier the Company O.C. arrived to give us a last check-over, and when he found that the four of us were carrying revolvers he decided that we should not do so and insisted on us leaving them behind. That proved a very fortunate decision for us.

When we were about thirty yards from where we were to meet the soldier we noticed a military patrol in what was then known as the school-house lane. We were reasonably conversant with the military movements and positions in the area, and this particular post struck us as being somewhat unusual, so that instead of four members of the party proceeding to meet the soldier as arranged, it was decided that they would remain on the foot-path near the church and that I would make the actual contact.

The contact worked according to plan. My soldier friend was there, but as soon as I had clearly identified myself to him as the person with whom he was to do business he called the sentry, who immediately turned out the guard. The guard in this case being two special guards, the one already mentioned at school-house lane and a special patrol which had been placed at the main back gate roughly twenty yards further up. Without any hesitation I decided that the game was up as far as we were concerned, and that the only question was how we were to get out of the jam. We immediately broke into two parties, two in each, and walked slowly along towards the school-house lane group. They blocked our route on that side, and in less time than it takes to tell we were completely surrounded by the party coming from the upper gate. In the few seconds before this had happened it was agreed that I should do the talking.

A Major Armstrong was the military officer in charge of the dual party, and he proceeded to question us regarding our presence there. I explained to him that we were on our way home, having been up the Phoenix Park, and that we had no interest in anybody or anything there. We had heard the sentry shouting and had stopped because we thought that was the safest thing to do. My soldier friend was then produced by Major Armstrong and was asked to identify me, but fortunately he was unable to do so. He did make a tentative sign that he knew me, but Major Armstrong said to him, "You told me that the man whom you were to meet would be wearing a badge or something. None of these boys appear to have any such thing". I had taken off the badge at the first sign of danger.

While this was going on two friends of mine, both of them sons of British Army personnel, happened to come along. One of them was Dick Glynn, whose father was on the military staff of the prison, and I called to him, "Dick, will you tell this officer where we live and where we normally spend our evenings". Glynn, like a brick, said, "I don't know where you were this evening, but I know you were in front of me on this road as I was walking along". Major Armstrong asked Glynn who he was, etc., and on being informed of his associations said that while he was not perfectly satisfied as to our identities he was certainly not satisfied with the soldier's story. He then told us we could go our way.

Attempted rescue of Kevin Barry:

Contrary to general belief, Headquarters were very concerned about the position in relation to Kevin Barry and his impending execution. For a considerable time prior to the date fixed for his execution much thought had been given as to the best method to bring about his rescue. Many plans were considered. Finally one was evolved and it was

decided to put it into effect on the Saturday prior to his execution. The plan agreed upon was a somewhat cheeky one, but it was believed that the boldness of it would be in its favour.

For two or three weeks prior to the date fixed for the rescue I had been detailed to look for visits to different members of the I.R.A. who were imprisoned in Mountjoy at the time, the purpose of these visits being mainly to become thoroughly acquainted with the lay-out of the prison, and as far as possible to get some idea as to the duties of the military guards and their reactions generally to people coming and going during visiting hours.

The plan arranged was as follows. It was known that the military guard were normally relieved at four o'clock in the afternoon. The time fixed for the rescue was half-past three, not later than a quarter to four, the idea being that the guard who were to be relieved would be fairly lax and that it would be in our favour to operate then. To the best of my recollection men from "A" and "D" Companies were detailed for the principal part of the work, that is the actual rescue. Men from other Companies were detailed to take up covering positions in the near vicinity, but they were to take no action unless and until we were making our get-away with Barry. Jimmy Conroy from the Squad was, I think, the only other outside man who was detailed for special duty in the prison.

Arrangements had been made that a clergyman, whose name I cannot now recollect, would take a visit with Barry at approximately twenty minutes past three. At that time Kevin Barry's sister, Eileen, who previously would have been collected by Captain C. Byrne and Volunteer W. Ahston at her home in Fleet Street, was to take a visit immediately following the clergyman's departure. The intention here was

that the timing would be so co-ordinated that her visit would, in fact, overlap the clergyman's visit, thus creating the position that Barry, instead of being brought back to his cell from the governor's office where the visit was taking place, would be retained there until his sister's arrival. We hoped that this arrangement would throw the two Auxiliaries who were present slightly off their guard because of the prolonged nature of the interview.

Our plans went slightly amiss on the day fixed for the rescue. When Byrne and Ahston arrived in Fleet Street they found that the Barry family were definitely reluctant to co-operate in the matter, and it was only after much persuasion that Miss Barry was induced to come to the prison gates at all. When eventually she did arrive she approached me and told me that the family had definite information that Kevin would be reprieved during the week-end and that she would take no part in the rescue. I told her that I could carry on without her assistance. I reminded her that the clergyman's visit must now be almost too long drawn out, and that she had better make up her mind quickly, as I would step in to take the visit if she refused. At that stage she told me that if I did so she would create a scene. I asked her if that was her definite intention and she said it was, which left me in a somewhat awkward position, so I told her that the matter was entirely up to herself now. I told her that we were prepared to go ahead with the rescue, but that, if she was considering interfering rather than facilitating us, I had a responsibility for the other men who were there. My point of view was that although Kevin Barry was her brother, to me he was just a Volunteer, and the risking of ten or twelve lives for the possible rescue of one person was somewhat unbalanced.

We had planned that when Miss Barry had taken her visit I would ask for a visit immediately on her heels. I would then be ushered into the room immediately on the right of the main door, where in the ordinary course of events I would be searched by two Auxiliaries. When two or three minutes had elapsed Jimmy Conroy was in turn to look for a visit to some other prisoner. By this time it was hoped that I would have succeeded in silencing the two Auxiliaries. Jimmy was to take possession of the warder in charge of the gate and bring him into the room I was in. It was hoped that between us we would be able to manage the three warders without attracting attention. If this initial step was successful Jimmy, from the cover of the guard-room, was to cover the gate warder, and open the iron grill of the wicket to allow me go through to take my visit as if nothing unusual had occurred. Our men outside were to mingle with the crowd and pose as intending visitors, the idea being to keep people not concerned with the job from seeing the preliminary moves.

We had arranged that no further hostile action was to be taken by our side other than that one or two of our party on the outside were to be admitted at intervals by the gate warder, and they were to take up position in the guard-room in readiness for anything which might transpire. If I succeeded in entering the main building without attracting attention, two of the party who had been allowed to enter were to walk slowly into the main building. By that time I should have arrived in the Governor's office, and, as Kevin Barry was aware of the nature of the rescue, little delay, if any, would take place from the time of my arrival in the Governor's office until I would be coming back along the corridor at top speed.

Conroy's principal task was to act as sharp-shooter in relation to the sentry who passed in front of the main hall and another sentry who was in a position over the main hall.

At this time the question of how many or how few shots were fired meant nothing, as by then the job would have been either a success or a failure.

Our time limit was clearly defined, as the relief guard was due at 3.45 p.m. As a matter of fact, when we were making our get-away from the prison, very annoyed and somewhat dejected, we were only clear of the main gates when the relief guard pulled up there.

When I reported back to Dick McKee at 35 Gardiner Street, he was very distressed and expressed deep regret at having placed me in such an impossible situation.

Attempted attack on Igoe.

Headquarters were very anxious to have Igoe put out of commission and the Squad were equally anxious that his career should be brought to a conclusion, as we were being hurried from pillar to post with all sorts of scare rumours as to his whereabouts in the city.

On one particular morning we were informed that Igoe would be travelling to the Old Men's Home in Kilmainham from Dublin Castle, via Thomas Street and James's Street. The majority of the Squad hurried to take up positions in James's Street, and six or seven of us retired for cover to a public-house which was situated directly opposite James's Street church. Two or three members of the Squad were to act as scouts in the near vicinity. We had arranged that some one of the Intelligence Squad would be doing observation duty at Dublin Castle and would be in a position to let us know of Igoe's departure from that place.

Some considerable time elapsed and whatever about the scouts outside, I think the party inside the licensed premises had almost forgotten the existence of Igoe, when suddenly

one of the scouts, Vinnie Byrne I believe, came dashing in, saying, "Hurry lads and get away. We've been had". It transpired that roughly a half Company of British soldiers were moving along in our direction, having taken possession of every civilian whom they met in their approach, searched them, and in most cases brought them along with them for further examination. Our Intelligence Officer who should have been in front of this group was unfortunately behind them and, of course, was unable to make any further progress. It appears that by some means or other, Igoe had learned that an ambush was being prepared for him and had taken steps accordingly.

We dashed out of the public-house, and with about twenty yards to spare from the leading members of the British patrol succeeded in making our way down Steevens's Lane. We headed for the city along the South Quays, which were practically deserted at that time except for Guinness's workers at the jetty. The main body of our party crossed to the jetty side of the quay. Vinnie Byrne and I continued along by Guinness's wall, and we were approximately half-way between the two bridges when we saw three tender-loads of Auxiliaries coming along at a very fast rate. As soon as we saw them coming Vinny and I decided that we were in a very bad position in the event of any action taking place, as our own men would be firing on us as well as the Auxiliaries. We proceeded to cross the road to the jetty side to join our party, and were approximately half-way across the road when the leading tender, which was almost abreast of us, slowed down. At this stage I could hear Vinnie liltng to himself the words of a song, "Do I want to see my Mammy any more". The tender practically stopped and we were expecting the usual "Halt, hands up", cry, when, for some reason best known to themselves, they set off in top gear and completely ignored us.

The fact that we got out of danger successfully can be attributed to Tom Keogh's leadership. Acting with his usual

coolness he made no move until he saw that it was safe to do so.

The Igoe gang were a party of policemen who had come up from the country and were organised under the leadership of Sergeant Jack Igoe to identify and molest active Volunteers who had come to the city from their areas.

John Ryan, British spy, shot 5th February 1921.

The murder of Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy in Dublin Castle after the Bloody Sunday shootings had been a severe blow to the Volunteers generally, but to the Squad it was a more personal matter, as McKee and Clancy, together with Collins, had always been our most ardent supporters. There was much speculation and keen competition in the Squad as to who would have the honour of dealing with the person alleged to have been responsible for their capture.

After a long period of delay, which caused us serious misgivings, we were finally informed by Headquarters that they had located the man responsible. His name was Ryan and their information was to the effect that he could be found around mid-day practically any day drinking in a public-house in Gloucester Diamond, on the opposite corner to the small church then known as the Tin Chapel.

After some slight discussion as to ways and means it was decided that Tom Keogh and myself should have a look at the premises in Gloucester Diamond with a view to seeing the general lay-out. We had a good description of Ryan, and without further ado we proceeded to the Gloucester Diamond. We were accompanied by Slattery, Eddie Byrne, Vincie Byrne, Frank Bolster, Jimmy Conroy, Stapleton, Leonard, Mick Kennedy and Mick Reilly.

The procedure normally followed on occasions like this was adopted, that is to say, men were posted in various positions to act as a covering off party. Tom Keogh and myself more or less led the party, and we went along to the public-house where we hoped to find Ryan. The two of us entered the public-house by a door on the right-hand side, called for two drinks, and proceeded to talk in general terms about nothing in particular, while at the same time giving the customers the once-over. We eliminated the different people in the shop with the exception of one man who was sitting on our immediate right deeply immersed in a study of "The Early Bird", a racing paper. We were unable to see his features, but believed from his general build that he was the man in whom we were interested. Keogh nudged me to make a move, and I, taking the hint, approached the man and asked him what they were tipping for some particular race, the three o'clock or the 3.30. This brought about the desired result, because he had of necessity to lower the paper. Immediately he did so we knew our search was over. Without any discussion or delay Keogh fired on him, I doing likewise. We made no delay, nor did we make any further examination of our victim, because we were perfectly satisfied from our previous experience that Ryan would betray no more members of our organisation.

An amusing incident occurred while we were on our way to the public-house that morning. Just as we got to the Tin Chapel we saw a funeral party, and a number of hackney cars were parked there. One of the cabmen, scenting new clients, asked Keogh if we were going to the funeral. Keogh answered, "No, but I'm going to arrange for one". This was typical of Keogh's coolness and wit.

Three R.I.C. men shot in Parliament Street, 23/2/1921.

Early in 1921 much uneasiness was being caused because

of the practice then obtaining in police quarters of bringing R.I.C. men to Dublin to identify country Volunteers who would otherwise be unknown to the D.M.P.

Our Intelligence was aware that three of these R.I.C. men were due to visit Dublin Castle on a certain date, and that after their interview they would proceed from the Castle to the Ormond Hotel for lunch. We were asked if we could deal with the position. Our Intelligence people were almost certain that they could identify the three men for us, and there was a danger that if we missed this opportunity the three R.I.C. men would be operating in different sections of the city where it would be practically impossible for us to locate them at any future date.

The members of the Squad were detailed for this job, and a man named Paddy Kelly, a Headquarters driver, was detailed to drive us to the spot selected for the shooting of the three policemen. The Squad took up positions in Essex Street at a point convenient to the Dolphin Hotel and in view of the Intelligence Officer, Ned Kellegher, who had taken up his position at the opposite side of Parliament Street in the vicinity of Honan's tobacconist shop. The members of the Squad detailed to do the actual shooting were Jimmy Conroy, myself and Mick Reilly.

After a lapse of time Kellegher gave us the arranged signal, and the three men in whom we were interested, and of whom we had already had a fairly good description, approached from the direction of the Castle. They were going, as we had been more or less led to expect, in the direction of the Ormond Hotel. Without any further ado, Conroy, myself and O'Reilly descended on the three victims and, in less time than it takes to relate, two of them were lying on the ground dead. The third man, by some extraordinary strength of will, succeeded in rushing across

the road. He had got to the opposite pavement, outside Honan's window, obviously intending to take shelter outside the shop, when the three of us fired at him. Some one of us grazed his spine with a bullet, with the result that he catapulted himself clean through the shop window, but was dead when he landed there. The usual hullabaloo was created then. The Tans let themselves go and enjoyed themselves immensely beating up all and sundry in the various public-houses around.

#### Raids on mails.

It was believed that the Auxiliaries stationed at Gormanstown were, because of their constant visits to town in civilian clothes and the numerous contacts which they were in a position to make, receiving through the mails quite a lot of information, which was being used to our disadvantage. It was decided that the Squad would carry out a raid on the mails after they left the sorting office in Marlboro' Street, which is now, I think, used by Lyons, the tea people, as their principal city depot.

The job was timed to take place at 7.30 a.m., the various members of the Squad providing their own transport to get there. Bill Stapleton was detailed to bring along a Ford touring car, which we had now risen to, in which to carry away the mail bags.

For some unknown reason only four members of the Squad turned up - myself, Keogh, Vincie Byrne and Jim Slattery - and the only transport we had was the bicycle on which I had arrived. We decided, in spite of this, to carry out the hold-up and let circumstances determine whether we would try to carry the mails away or set them on fire.

The horse-drawn post van arrived out of the mist, and Keogh proceeded to talk to the driver in the necessary

language. While Keogh was holding the attention of the driver, we had the back of the van opened and in a very short time had located the Gormanstown bag. As it happened there was only one bag on that particular morning.

Having got the bag our next concern was what to do with it. After a hurried discussion it was agreed that I should carry it down Parnell Street on my bicycle and deposit it for the time being in Paddy Byrne's house in North Richmond Street. On my way through Parnell Street I met a tender of Auxiliaries obviously proceeding to the post office to carry out their escort duties on the mails, which had already disappeared or were in process of disappearing.

Valuable information was obtained as a result of this raid on the mails.

The Squad were informed that headquarters were anxious to intercept mails which were being conveyed from Amiens Street to the Rotunda, Parnell Square side, under heavy police escort. We examined the position with a view to discovering what the chances were of carrying out a raid without casualties to either side, as the margin of time between the arrival of the mails at Parnell Square, being put into the chute for transmission to the sorting room, and the departure of the guard was very small.

The Squad took up positions in the front room of a house directly opposite the main gates of the sorting office. The task of deciding whether the job was to be done on any particular occasion was left to myself. I was to stand as near to the entrance gate as possible, watch the mails in which we were interested, and if they were still in view when the escort drove away I was to take immediate possession of them without attracting undue attention, and hold the fort sufficiently long to allow the other members of the Squad to make their way quietly across the street.

In actual fact we only had one effort to make, because our first venture was completely successful. For some reason best known to themselves, no member of the police escort left the tender, and immediately the horse-drawn post van pulled in to the chute the escort drove away. I followed the horse-drawn vehicle. Bolster was to determine from my movements and from his own observations of the position in relation to the escort when he would call the remaining members of the Squad into action.

Everything went like clock-work, and it is rather difficult to imagine the shock awaiting the escort on their arrival at Fitzgibbon Street station to find a 'phone message there telling them that the mails which they had safely delivered had, in fact, been captured.

The success of this raid was due to split-second timing. The raid had a very beneficial effect, as far as we were concerned, on people who were corresponding with the Dublin Castle authorities.

Attempted attack on two British agents.

Captain Kitten and Colonel Winters were coming over to Dublin with a great record behind them for Intelligence work. Our information was that they were arriving at Kingstown by the evening mail-boat and would proceed to Dublin Castle by army transport. It was decided by our headquarters that a serious effort should be made to get these men on their journey into town on the day of their arrival in Ireland.

After much consideration it was agreed that that section of the road outside Blackrock Park and in line with Merrion Avenue would be the most suitable place for our attack to take place.

As far as I can recollect this was the first time that

the Squad carried hand-grenades with a view to using them against British agents listed for execution. So great was our aversion to grenades that before proceeding on the job we actually drew lots to determine who would carry and throw the grenades. By an odd freak of chance the man least designed for that type of work was the man who drew the ticket, Paddy Griffin. On the way out to take up our positions, Keogh discussed with me the question of leaving the grenade with Griffin, and we finally decided that I would take the grenade, Keogh in turn undertaking the particular duty of covering me during whatever incident might take place.

We arrived at our selected positions, some by tram and others by a small van which carried the bulk of our arms. The van was in a position in Merrion Avenue, with a view to providing us with a quick get-away.

This was another case where we were crediting our enemy with too little intelligence, because, while our attention was concentrated on the Blackrock-Kingstown route, a convoy consisting of two double-turret cars, one whippet and two armoured Lancias, was proceeding from Dublin to meet the boat. Ned Kellegher had by some extraordinary process become aware of the fact that this new feature had entered into the programme, and arrived with all haste to tell us to call off the job. We had barely time to collect our men from their positions when the convoy I have described passed by the bottom of Merrion Avenue. We were then loading ourselves into the van, which was ill-designed to carry so many.

Plan for rescue of Seán MacEoin at Lucan.

The Squad were assembled in the garage in Charles Street, for want of something better to do, when Tom Keogh, who had been visiting the Intelligence Office at Crow Street, arrived and told us that word had been received to the effect

that Sean MacEoin was being conveyed from Longford to Dublin by ambulance. The question of whether or not we should attempt to rescue him was left to our own discretion. After a certain amount of hesitation we decided that it would be worth a try.

Our party proceeded, some by taxi and some by tram, to a point decided on at Lucan. On the journey out, the driver of the taxi became suspicious and told us that he was short of petrol and could go no further. We had very little knowledge of cars and accepted his statement in good faith and allowed him return to Dublin.

We took up our positions at what we deemed to be a suitable point on the road between the Spa and the Salmon Leap, but nearer to the Salmon Leap. We hung around there for an indefinite period, and finally came to the conclusion that even if MacEoin had walked from his starting point he should by then have reached our position.

We were in a quandary then as to how we could get back to Dublin, and we decided that we would hold up the first car we saw going citywards. This proved to be a Ford with a solitary occupant, who drew up without hesitation when signalled to do so. When informed that we wished him to drive us to Dublin he flatly refused to do so, having apparently formed his own opinions about us in the meantime. He told us that we could take the car but he said he would not drive it, that he was an ex-British officer and that he would assist us in no way. We told him that we would shoot him, that we could not leave him there, and he said, "Very well, go ahead and shoot", but we felt that we would not be justified in such an extreme action, and decided that some one of our men should drive. Some of our party elected to walk home via the canal and various other ways, and eventually we succeeded in making contact later in the evening without

any untoward incidents.

Hangman Pierrepoint:

Information had been received at headquarters that the hangman Pierrepoint would not arrive in Dublin until the last minute possible on the day prior to the execution of Bernard Ryan, Frank Flood, Thomas Whelan, Patrick Moran, Thomas Bryan and Patrick Doyle. Our information was to the effect that Pierrepoint would stay in the Gresham Hotel and be collected there about an hour prior to the time fixed for the executions.

Tom Cullen and, I think, Bill Tobin were detailed to cover the position so far as it concerned Pierrepoint's arrival at the hotel, the nature of the guard or escort which he had, what rooms he had and the floor on which they were situated.

It was agreed that on the night of Pierrepoint's arrival we could do very little, and the various members of the Squad who lived outside the immediate city area arranged to stay in town that night and meet at Oriel House early on the following morning, when we would receive our final instructions from Cullen and Tobin.

There was a full muster of the Squad on that morning, as we were all particularly anxious to take part in this particular job, which we felt would be a high-light in our careers, and which we hoped would have a slight deterrent effect on others who might be tempted to fill a similar position. Unfortunately, the British were not quite as simple as we had led ourselves to believe, and the Gresham Hotel story would appear to have been sent out merely as a red herring. Pierrepoint did not stay in a hotel during his visit here, and was, in fact, here two or three days prior to the executions. He stayed in Mountjoy all the time under the protection of the Tans.

Captain Cecil Lees shot on 29th March, 1921.

It was believed that Captain Lees had been on Intelligence work out East and the British Government felt that he would be an excellent man for Intelligence work in Ireland. He came here with a very high reputation, being regarded, I believe, as an ace Intelligence Officer.

Because of his reputation our Headquarters were very anxious that he should be dealt with as soon as possible, and the Intelligence staff had some hectic days and nights endeavouring to locate him. Several times they thought they had him, but, in fact, they had lost him completely for a period of about a fortnight prior to his actual execution. Wherever Lees is now, he is probably aware of the fact that he was most unfortunate. On the Sunday night before he was shot, Tom Keogh and I were in the dress circle of the Scala picture-house, and just prior to the commencement of the programme a lady and gentleman proceeding to their seats were caught in the beam of the projector. Keogh nudged me and said, "I think that is Lees". We decided we would keep a watch on this gentleman, and, whether he was Lees or not, find out where he was living. After the show was over we followed him and found that he was staying in St. Andrew's Temperance Hotel in Wicklow Street.

Without discussing the matter with Intelligence or with any other members of our own Squad, we decided that we would take up our positions on the following morning at about half-past nine, because we were aware that that was the usual time for Lees to report to the Castle. Keogh succeeded in rounding up Bolster and Mick O'Reilly, and the four of us met at the appointed time. Bolster and myself were detailed to do the actual shooting. Lees appeared without any undue delay, and, as he was already known to me, there was no need for any further identification. He was accompanied by a lady, but we had no interest in her. We opened fire on Lees

immediately, and he fell mortally wounded.

The Intelligence people were slightly alarmed when they heard of the shooting in the city. It was only around mid-day when Keogh reported back and told them who the victim was that their peace of mind was restored. Up to that time there had been much speculation lest perhaps some of our people from the country had been fired upon.

As I have already said, Lees was unfortunate, because roughly about three weeks before his actual execution our Intelligence people had given him up as lost as far as they were concerned. They firmly believed that he had left the country, and were it not for our visit to the Scala picture-house he would have escaped.

Lees knew that we were on his track, as the following incident will show. In our earlier efforts to get in touch with Lees we had made several fruitless visits to the vicinity of St. Andrew's Hotel, and it is possible that some suspicion would explain why Lees had disappeared for the period already mentioned.

An incident which would support this belief occurred one morning when Keogh and myself were giving the hotel just a casual once-over in the hope that we might find Lees there. Because of the fact that members of the Squad had been on the scene in comparatively large numbers for more times than was normal, only Keogh and myself were there on this occasion. We had taken up our observation point in the International Bar, and Keogh, by virtue of his tall figure, was in a position to observe what was happening in the street without any undue craning of neck or other activities which might have attracted attention to us in the public-house.

We had been there for some considerable time, and in fact had almost forgotten Lees and our mission, when suddenly,

without any preliminary notice or indication of his intentions, Keogh exclaimed, "Come on quick", and without any further ado he disappeared like the proverbial greyhound through a side door leading into St. Andrew Street. I did not wait to argue, but followed as quickly as I could. My progress was anything but dignified, because Keogh's long legs left me at a very serious disadvantage.

We made our way through Commercial Buildings, over the Metal Bridge and back to base, 100 Seville Place, without any further incident. It was only then that Keogh condescended to explain to me the reason for our hurried departure. He told me that the military had surrounded the area enclosing the St. Andrew's Hotel, but fortunately excluding the International Bar, where we were.

Detective Sergeant Bruton.

A very keen desire to get into close grips with Detective Sergeant Bruton had been displayed by Intelligence, and eventually it became clear that the only reasonable opportunity of catching him off-guard would be when he was attending Mass. It had been ascertained that he was very regular in his attendance at early Mass in Clarendon Street church, and after two or three futile visits to the church in the hope of catching him either entering or leaving, Keogh decided that this early morning Sunday business was not to his liking. He determined that on the next occasion if he missed Bruton entering the church he himself would take up a position in the church in close proximity to Bruton, and give him his pass-out checks at whatever time he deemed most favourable in relation to his own escape. Fortunately, or unfortunately, somebody mentioned this plan to, I think, Collins who put his foot down in a most determined fashion, feeling that the after-effects on public opinion might not, perhaps, be to our advantage.

Bruton escaped his due deserts from our hands, but fate finally intervened and he finished his career as an inmate of Portrane Mental Hospital.

The Squad.

I have never been able to determine whether my first contact with the Squad was because of my I.R.B. association or through the strong friendship which had been established between McKee, Clancy and myself. I am inclined to think it was through my association with McKee, because when I first met Tom Keogh, as O.C. of the Squad, his first comment was something to the effect that, "I was wondering when McKee would send you along, as he has frequently mentioned you".

At that time the Squad consisted of twelve men. This numerical strength gave them the very obvious title of "The Twelve Apostles".

Paddy Daly was then interned in Ballykinlar and Keogh was in charge during his absence.

Our meeting place was 100 Seville Place, North Strand.

The Squad was entirely an independent unit, being completely free from any control from the Dublin Brigade or any other element of the Volunteer organisation. We were directly responsible to Collins and received our orders from him, usually through the medium of Liam Tobin or Tom Cullen, who then had their offices in Crow Street. The procedure in relation to receiving instructions and making reports was quite a simple one, Keogh usually calling to Crow Street in the forenoon of each day, where he would be either given instructions in relation to an immediate task or else forewarned as to some impending event. Making reports following incidents was, in fact, scarcely necessary, as newspapers invariably carried headlines if we were successful, and silence on the matter indicated that no action had taken

place. The question of whether we would or would not carry out a job at any precise time or place was never the subject of discussion or even adverse comment. The decision as to whether we would do a particular task at any particular time was a matter for our own determination. Usually after a successful episode some one or other of us would meet Collins in Kirwans' of Parnell Street round about nine or ten o'clock of that night and give him a more or less personal resumé of the affair. There was no such thing as a written report or instructions.

The fact that we were completely free from the control of the Brigade did not, however, mean that we did not actively participate in quite a number of Brigade jobs. The practice then was that if the A.S.U. were engaged in some task that was slightly beyond their compass, Oscar Traynor, who was then Brigadier, would ask Collins if we could be allowed to assist, and consent was invariably given. I always felt that Traynor somehow resented this liberty of action which we were permitted, and while he was reluctant to avail of our assistance he was nevertheless always slightly obsessed with the idea that if, for lack of asking for our co-operation, a job would prove unsuccessful he was open to rebuke from Collins.

Our association with the Intelligence section was always very cordial and friendly. The procedure adopted was quite simple. We had nothing to do with the initial tracking or locating of enemy spies or agents, this being strictly a matter for Intelligence, who, having determined on the object of their interest, proceeded to get all the necessary information as to movements, whereabouts, times, etc. The selection as to the ultimate location of where the individual was to be eliminated was left to ourselves to determine. It frequently happened that, for reasons which it would be rather difficult to outline and which appeared of little

importance to the casual observer, we found it necessary to call off a job, which in other people's minds should have been a quite simple task to perform, but at no time was our right to do so questioned.

Being fully supplied with the description, etc., of the individual under notice, we were usually safeguarded by the presence of one member of the Intelligence unit who had actual knowledge of the person to be dealt with, whose responsibility it was to clearly define the individual for us. The high standard of work done by the Intelligence section can be gauged by the fact that at no time did we lose a person in whom we had an interest, nor did we at any time eliminate a person in error.

Each member of the Squad carried, without exception, two guns, usually an automatic and a short Webley. The choice of automatic was a matter for each individual, there being, as far as I can recollect, a slight preference for the Colt .45 automatic. Keogh, Vincie Byrne and Jimmy Conroy, however, were staunch supporters of the Peter the Painter. Keogh and Conroy could, in fact, almost have been described as sharp-shooters with that particular gun.

The standard of efficiency in relation to marksmanship was particularly high, despite the fact that we had never been given what one might call specialised training. The only time we ever received a direct lesson in any weapon was when the first Thompson machine guns were secured from the States and we were given instructions by two American gentlemen one of whom was named Dineen. We were very proud of having been given control of two of these weapons.

We had our dumps located in garages on both sides of the Liffey, although in the early stages we were mainly

confined to the North side for facilities in that direction.

Seville Place continued to be our headquarters up to the time an ambush was organised, which did not take place, at the railway bridge running over Seville Place and immediately beside No. 100, which was the clubrooms belonging to the O'Toole Gaelic Football Club. Fortunately we had, prior to this particular incident, started to establish ourselves in headquarters which became known as Morelands and which we fitted up as a carpenters and joiners establishment, having the usual equipment of tools to go with the trade. This particular location succeeded in escaping the notice of the authorities, and survived right through to the end of hostilities.

For transport we were mainly dependent on the ordinary public services then existing, but at a later stage Collins insisted on supplying us with transport of a more suitable nature, and we were always in a position to ask for and obtain the services of any Battalion or Brigade transport required. I always felt somewhat sorry for the drivers of these vehicles, because while we had the active interest to keep us from worrying unduly as to the consequences or results of our activities, the unfortunate driver in each case was perforce left to his own devices, and waiting in suspense for fifteen or thirty minutes under the circumstances was not an enviable position. Actually, as far as I can recollect, three drivers became nerve cases as a result of their work.

The question as to who was, in fact, the first officer in charge of the Squad has unfortunately become a controversial matter, Paddy Daly being of the opinion that he himself had the honour, while others, and I think they are in the majority, are of the opinion that Mick McDonnell was the first to hold that post. To the best of my knowledge Mick McDonnell is the person entitled to the

privilege. Unfortunately, however, Mick McDonnell had to leave Ireland, through reasons of ill-health, and went to California. I think Daly was then for a while nominal O.C. of the Squad, but in fact there was no actual O.C. at the time. When Daly was arrested and interned in Ballykinlar, Tom Keogh became O.C. with Slattery second in command. On Daly's release he was not able to oust Keogh from the position Keogh had held during his, Daly's, internment. It was only after the Custom House when the Squad as such had ceased to exist that Daly and Leonard, by virtue mainly of the fact that they were probably the only members of the Squad free at the time, became accepted as persons fitted to fill the vacancies.

Signed: Bernard C. Byrne  
(Bernard C. Byrne).

Date: 3.1.1952  
3.1.1952.

<sup>W</sup>  
Witness: William Ivory Comd't.  
(William Ivory, Comd't.)

