

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 703

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 703

**Witness**

Nicholas Laffan,  
8 Huxley Crescent,  
Cork St.,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Captain 'G' Company, 1st Battalion,  
Dublin Brigade, 1916 - .

**Subject.**

National activities ,Dublin.  
1916-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No S.209.

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT OF MR. NICHOLAS LAFFAN,  
8 Huxley Crescent, Cork Street,  
Dublin.

(Former Officer Commanding, G Company,  
1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade,  
Irish Republican Army.)

About June, 1916, Liam Archer (who was later Chief of Staff of our Army) summoned me to attend a meeting of the officers of the Dublin Brigade who had escaped arrest at the surrender and who were on the run at the time. The meeting was held in Cathal Brugha's house in Fitzwilliam Terrace, Upper Rathmines. Cathal Brugha, who was very ill at the time, having received fourteen bullets from a machine-gun during the Rising, presided at the meeting.

During the course of the discussion he made a statement to all present which he emphasised was to be taken as an order, the gist of which was that "we were not to think that the fight was over - it was only beginning - and we were to get in touch immediately with any members of our Companies and Battalions who were free; we were to organise them into units and keep them together until all our comrades had been released from prison which, he hoped, would be soon". He further instructed that, in order to hold them together, we should start Irish classes as, he said, "they were too good to lose at this stage".

Acting on this instruction, I got in touch with a few members of my Company who had escaped arrest. Among them were Seán McNamara, James Flanagan, James Saunders and Joseph McCarthy. Some of these men who had been out in the Rising were told on the Sunday morning prior to the surrender that, if they wished, they could try and get away during the armistice which lasted until 10 a.m. that day.

They did so and hid in the North Dublin Union grounds until after dark when they made their way along the railway line to Cabra.

In accordance with Cathal Brugha's instructions, we formed an Irish class at our old headquarters in the Columcille Hall, 5 Blackhall Street, and continued as such until the best part of "G" Company was released in July, 1916. It was some time before we got them all back, as the health of some of them had broken down and they required a rest, but by the commencement of 1917 we had about 80 men of the Company meeting weekly.

In September, 1917, five members of the Company, namely, Louis McEvatt, P. Kelly, J. Dodd, T. Burke and T. O'Reilly, were detailed for duty at the Mater Hospital over the remains of the late Tomás Ashe who died on hunger strike as the result of forcible feeding in Mountjoy Prison. The brothers Jack and George Plunkett were in charge of the guard.

Prior to the removal of Ashe's remains to the City Hall for the public lying-in-state, Michael Lynch and Seán McMahon selected P. Kelly, L. McEvatt and four other picked men to go there and take it over from the British soldiers who were on guard. They were told to enter by the side door of the City Hall and hold the main vestibule until Mick Lynch got in touch with British Army Headquarters. On arrival, P. Kelly was posted at the main door, outside of which a British soldier was marching up and down on guard. Mick Lynch got in touch with the British Army Headquarters and, after some time, General French and his Staff officers arrived at the main door where they were held up by Kelly, whose instructions were that no one was to be allowed to pass. The General and his staff were very surprised but, on the arrival of Mick Lynch, they were allowed in and

arrangements were made to withdraw the British guard to the basement of the City Hall. Our men, with others, then formed the guard of honour during the lying-in-state and my Company supplied the rifles for the firing party at the funeral.

About a week later we were instructed to collect rifles from a house in Lower Baggot Street, the men selected for the job being Joe O'Reilly, Tom Burke, P. Kelly and Joe Dodd, prior arrangements having been made with the 3rd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade in whose area the house was located. When the rifles were being collected, the house was surrounded by 15 D.M.P. men and 2 detectives, but the men selected for the collection of the rifles had entered the house by the back. In order to get the rifles safely away, it was decided that Dodd and Burke would put the rifles in two sacks while the other two men would leave by the rear and walk into the main thoroughfare, thereby attracting the attention of the police. The ruse succeeded. Burke and Dodd walked out with the rifles, the other men keeping between the police and the men carrying the weapons. The two detectives followed as far as Michael's Lane, off Winetavern Street, where they stopped. As the lane was so narrow, the men with the rifles were too far ahead for the police to get near them and they succeeded in taking them to Tom Burke's house in Mountrath Street, off Chancery Place.

In April, 1918, the Company succeeded in getting 4 rifles and about 150 rounds of .303 ammunition from Islandbridge Barracks. The rifles were hid in a military car coming out one at a time, for which the driver was paid £3.

In June, 1918, Brigadier Dick McKee and Vice Brigadier Peadar Clancy instructed me not to appear on

public parades with my Company as they were going to give me other important work to do. Owing to my position in the Dublin Alliance Gas Company as a District Inspector, I could always get into any house, institution, barracks or prison for the purpose of inspecting the installations, the property of my firm. My principal assignment was to take messages in code into Mountjoy prison and place them near the gas meter where they were collected <sup>by another contact for</sup> ~~by~~ those for whom they were intended, principally for Thomas Walsh. The only method of identification was a number on the envelope.

During the time I was on this work I took Peadar Clancy through a number of houses in the city, including three houses in the Mount Street area which were raided for Secret Service men from Scotland Yard.

On one occasion, Peadar Clancy informed me that he wanted to visit Arbour Hill Barracks. I arranged with a fitter from the Gas Company, named Robert Oman, who was a member of my Company, to test the gas meter in Arbour Hill, and I brought Peadar Clancy along with me. While we were testing the meter a military policeman who was sent with us on the job called me aside and asked me who was in charge. I told him I was. He then advised me to get Clancy out of Arbour Hill as quickly as possible before someone else recognised him. We took his friendly tip and left, Peadar commenting that it was a narrow shave.

Some time later I took him into Islandbridge and Portobello Barracks dressed as a gas fitter.

On another occasion Peadar came to me at 5 o'clock in the evening and stated that he wanted a message delivered to Tom Walsh in Mountjoy prison. He said he must get it into Walsh and I was his only hope. I told him I had no

reasonable excuse for seeking admission at such an hour but he insisted and I tried a new stunt. Taking an elderly fitter, named Hynes, with me, I went to the prison gate and was met with the remark, "What the hell do you want at this hour?" I said I wanted to see Mr. Faulkner, the Governor. Before being admitted, the gateman 'phoned the Governor who ordered that I and the fitter be brought to his office. Here I was severely cross-examined over the lateness of the hour and in the end the Governor 'phoned to the Castle for permission for us to enter. He gave our names and the reason for our visit which I said was to test the gas supply for pressure. Before, however, he allowed us to enter A. and B. wings of the prison, which at this time was full of our men, he said there were two conditions with which we must comply, first, that we allow ourselves to be searched and second, that we agree to leave behind us any pipes, tobacco and cigarettes in his office until our return. We agreed to this and we were then sent off under a guard of two military police. When we reached A. and B. wings, all the boys gathered around us and I had to keep a straight face and not recognise anyone until I got a chance of slipping my message to Tom Walsh. During the time we were going around one of the military police slipped a small packet of cigarettes to one of the prisoners and this gave me the chance I was waiting for, as I had 40 cigarettes inside my waistcoat which I gave to one of our lads who whispered, "God send you safe out of here!"

On another occasion Peadar sent me a note to meet him at Kingsbridge railway station and to bring a sandwich which, in effect, meant that I was to bring my gun with me. On arrival at the station I met Peadar who had an old Ford car with him. We went into the railway station and met a British Army Captain who had two large cases which he put

in the car. He accompanied us to Islandbridge Barracks where we were stopped at the gate. The Captain produced some papers and we were admitted. He told the driver to drive to one of the stores where he took the two cases. We remained in the car and Peadar remarked, "We're now in, but we may have to fight our way out. Get your gun ready!" The Captain then appeared with a soldier carrying his two cases and put them into the car. On arrival at the gate the same military policeman came over and, looking into our car, remarked, "These are yours, Captain?" The Captain said, "Yes". The military policeman then said, "Pass on!", and off we went. We drove to the Grosvenor Hotel, Westland Row, where we parted with the officer. We took the two cases which were put in the car at Islandbridge Barracks to our dump in Rutland Place. The cases contained revolvers ~~rifles~~ and ammunition of .38 calibre.

In October, 1918, I had six men on guard at a Volunteer Convention held in the Columcille Hall, 5 Blackhall Street, our principal duty being to watch the Royal Barracks for any movement of troops and report to the Battalion Commander.

I assisted the Company in procuring arms from time to time. On one occasion a deserter from the British Army, known as "Mouse", told us that he could buy the rifles off the soldiers in Portobello Barracks and get them out through the railings after dark at the back of the Barracks. This he did. I had a bicycle with two six-foot lengths of timber tied on to it and I put the rifle between the timber so that it could not be seen. We also wore our overcoats with slit pockets, so that we could get a grip on the rifle when carrying it away. In this way, we got about 15 Lee Enfield rifles, 6 .38 revolvers and about 1,000 rounds of rifle ammunition in small lots. We paid



"Mouse" £3 each for the rifles and revolvers.

At the time of the conscription crisis in 1918 I assisted the Battalion Commander, Commandant Tom Byrne, to make out a block system of defence for the whole Battalion area, which was to be put into effect in the case of an attempt by the British to impose conscription. This system of defence was so arranged that it provided for the defence of each block of buildings or houses by any Volunteers who might live in the particular block with the aid of all available man-power within the block. We were instructed to invite all males to help, as it was anticipated that some morning we might find ourselves cut off by the British whose army would hold the streets and not allow a general mobilisation of the Companies or Battalions to be effected. The houses were to be barricaded and the walls holed to allow communication right through from the commencement to the end of each block, the senior officer, non-commissioned officer or volunteer in each block to be in charge and responsible for the defence of the area. We had the names and addresses of each Volunteer and it did not matter what Company or Battalion he was a member of, it having been agreed that all Volunteers would comply with any orders issued, if found necessary. This system of defence, which took some months of hard work to prepare, was worked out in detail for the Brigade Council.

In November 1918 my Company were engaged on a raid on the College of Surgeons, Stephen's Green, where the rifles for the Officers' Training Corps of the College were kept. We had a key made for the side door but, when we arrived, we found that the rifles had been removed by the British Army to Ship Street Barracks.

In the latter part of 1919 or early 1920 I took part in two raids on mail vans, my duty being to take a post at the corner of North King Street and Green Street with a bicycle to watch the police barracks at Green Street for any movement of police towards Dominick Street.

At the general escape of the prisoners from Mountjoy Prison in March, 1919, I was posted at Binns Bridge, Drumcondra, to watch police or military activity and, if I noticed any, I was to proceed up Whitworth Road and give four sharp blasts on a special whistle supplied by Peadar Clancy. This signal was to be given outside the hospital on Whitworth Road and it was to be repeated after an interval of two minutes if I thought I was not under observation.

Some time in 1920, the exact date of which I cannot recollect, myself and Peadar Clancy went to 15 North Circular Road, which was occupied by a British military officer who was stationed in Marlborough (now McKee) Barracks. Later we raided this house from the rear and got a quantity of rifles, bayonets, one sword, one .38 bore rifle and a number of bomb cases which we removed to our dump in Rutland Place. This was done at about 11.30 p.m. as at that time curfew started at midnight.

In or about this time we removed some rifles, revolvers and ammunition from Harding's shop in Christchurch Place to Paddy Corless' house in De Courcy Square. This was done several times, as Harding was Brigade Quartermaster and handled a considerable amount of material. Later we had to clear it out of Corless' house to a dump of waste land at Botanic Road where some of it was dumped near the back wall of the cemetery.

Early in 1921 the Company was engaged for about

four months tracking down and arresting bank robbers known as the McNally gang. This gang consisted of an ex British Air Force officer and some British Army deserters led by a Charles Rennee, an ex C.I.D. man from Scotland Yard, and a Claude Gunner, ex Air Force officer. With them were two brothers named Merry from Balbriggan, a man named Collins who was General Boyd's driver, Spiers, a jockey, and Kenny, a 'bus owner. We raided two houses for Rennee in Springarden Street and/the Westbrook Hotel in Harcourt Street. We tracked them down to the North Strand Road where Rennee and Merry put up a fight and used their revolvers from a tram as we followed them. / On a second occasion a running fight continued from Harcourt Street/until their ammunition ran out and they surrendered in a lane off Montague Street. After their arrest we detained them in the Columcille Hall, Blackhall Street, where we had a night and day guard placed over them until we handed them over to the police.

We had several ambushes on military cage lorries in the North King Street-Halston Street area. During these raids we had arranged a retreat through the Egg Market in Halston Street, where the gates were ready to open to admit our men and from where they had at least three exits into Mary's Lane and Little Green Street.

I may add I was in touch with my Company all the time and assisted them when and where I could without attending parades as ordered. I could not attend our drill hall in Blackhall Street as it was watched by D.M.P. and detectives.

A attach a brief summary setting out the major activities of "G" Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin

Brigade, during the period 1917 to July, 1921.

SIGNED: Nicholas Laffan  
(Nicholas Laffan)

DATE: 1<sup>st</sup> July 1952.  
1st July 1952.

WITNESS: Mr. F. Ryan Connell.  
(M.F. Ryan). Comd't.

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"G" Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade.

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Early in 1918 - The Company became active in procuring arms.

September, 1917 - On duty at Mater Hospital. Death of Thomas Ashe. The following members were present: Joe Dodd, Tom Burke, Tom O'Reilly, Robert Oman, L. McEvatt, P. Kelly, Seán Brunswick.

October, 1917 - On guard at Volunteer Convention, Jones Road. Joe Dodd, Tom Burke, Tom O'Reilly, R. Oman, L. McEvatt, P. Kelly.

1918 - South Armagh and Cavan Elections: Sean Brunswick and Patrick Garland. Volunteer Convention, Blackhall Place: armed guard: the whole company were on duty.

November 13th, 1918 - The Company assisted in defence of 6 Harcourt Street.

December 9th, 1918 - Company on parade for Dick Coleman's funeral.

January 7th & 21st, 1919 - Members on duty at Sinn Féin and Dáil meetings.

March 16th, 1919 - Barton's escape from Mountjoy Prison: the following took part and were on duty in Glengariffe Parade and canal bank, some on opposite side of canal: P. Kelly, R. Oman, Joe Dodd, P. O'Toole, N. O'Toole, M. Sanders, S. Brunswick, P. Gilsenan. Mick Downes, "G" Company, threw rope over the wall. The

car was supplied by Corrigan, Camden Street,  
to take Barton to house in Donnybrook.

Raid on 'Independent' office, Mid. Abbey St. - Dick McKee  
& Peadar Clancy in charge. P. Kelly, R.  
Oman, Joe Dodd, S. Brunswick were on this job.

"Ryan's" Publichouse, Bridgefoot St. raided and two  
revolvers taken off a man who was paid £2 by  
Sean Brunswick.

March 4th - Emmett Concert, Mansion House: "G"  
Company formed armed guard for Seán McGarry  
after his escape from English prison.

March 6th Company paraded for Pierce McCann's funeral.

Company carried out two raids on mail vans in Lower Dominick  
Street. Joe Dodd, P. Kelly, T. Reilly, J.  
McGealy, J. Grace, S. Brunswick and R. Oman  
were on these raids.

April 1st, 3rd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 10th & 11th - During Dáil  
meetings held in the Mansion House, members of  
"G" Company were on duty to resist possible  
raids.

Raid on publichouse, Ellis Quay - Seán Brunswick, Joe Grace  
and Johnny Byrne took a revolver off  
Government agent.

November, 1919 - Peadar Clancy and P. Kelly raided a  
District Officer of the R.I.C. on the Back  
Road at Inchicore and took 1 rifle, 1 bayonet  
and 50 rounds .303.

February, 1920 - Raided British & Irish Steam Packet Coy.,  
South Wall. Got 2 cases of ammunition.

June, 1920 - Raid on King's Inns. Present: R. Oman,  
J. McGealy and M. Douglas.

- Income Tax offices - The whole Company were on this.
- August - Raid on mails, Westland Row Station: P. Hyland, Joe Grace and Seán Brunswick. P. Hyland had a bread vanthere to take away the mails.
- October 11th - Sean Brunswick & P. Kelly were there to help in Dan Breen's escape from Mater Hospital. He was removed to O'Donnell's Nursing Home, Eccles Street.
- September, 1920 - Held up and burned a military lorry in Nth. King Street.
- October 31st - Attempted rescue of Kevin Barry: whole Company on parade; they were to barricade Berkeley Street with a hand-cart and a long ladder on it; this was to be put across the street to block police van; this was called off by Headquarters.
- Raided 34 Fitzwilliam Street for arms - Got 2 revolvers, 8 bayonets and 1 rifle.
- Raided ~~Walden~~ Army Canteen Board Stores in Bow Lane, Mercer Street - Cars and equipment captured. Cameras taken from press photographers after Lord French's Review and dumped into the Liffey.
- About March, 1920 - Attacked troop train at Newcomen Bridge, with bombs and revolvers. Peadar Clancy in charge, with P. Kelly, R. Oman, S. Brunswick, J. McGealy and Joe Dodd.
- June, 1920 - Raid on King's Inns - J. McGeely, M. Douglas and R. Oman.
- July, 1920 - Raid on Rotunda Rink for mails going to Dublin Castle: Joe Dodd, R. Oman, Seán Brunswick.
- April 17th, 18th & 19th - Guard duty, Fleming's Hotel, Gt. Denmark Street: Dáil Session.

- 1921 - Raid for mails at Ranelagh railway station - assisted in removal of mails to motor van.
- 1921, May 25th - "G" Company transported and stored 15 tins of petrol for raid on Custom House. The following participated in raid on Custom House: R. Oman, W. Oman, P. O'Toole, N. O'Toole, T. Cowley, P. McEnroe, P. Gilsenan, T. Lillis, S. McInerney.
- 1921 - Removal of dump at P.J. Corless' house in De Courcy Sq. to Joe Grace's house in Lr. Dominick St.
- Truce Period - Attacks on British personnel by mobs in Ormond Quay and Smithfield areas. Suppressed by "G" Company patrols.
- Company engaged in police work and captured gang of robbers known as the "Sons of Dawn" and McNally gang, also in the destruction of machines in the 'Freeman's Journal', Townsend Street.

The Company had arms dumps at the following places:-

Rutland Place, off Nth. Charles Street.  
Richmond Asylum.  
Botanic Road (on waste ground).  
R.C. Church, Merchant's Quay.  
Henshaw's, Christchurch Place,  
P.J. Corless' house, De Courcy Square.  
Joe Grace's house, Lr. Dominick Street.  
McCaffrey's shop, Francis Street.  
Flanagan's shop, Halston Street.

During most of the raids and ambushes carried out by "G" Company, we got a member of the Company, P. Hyland, who drove a bread van to bring it along and have it convenient. We could always dump our guns in the bread van and get away. This saved many of the Company if searched on the way home.