

W. S. 1,133

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. /133

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,133

Witness

Miss Annie Barrett,
Killavullen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Intelligence Agent, Mallow Battalion,
Cork II Brigade.

Subject.

Intelligence work
Mallow Battalion, Cork II Brigade, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MISS ANNIE BARRETT,

Killavullen, County Cork.

I was born at Killavullen, County Cork, on 24th September, 1888. My father was a Fenian. He escorted O'Neill Crowley from his hiding place in Glenagare to Kilclooney Wood in 1867.

I was educated at Killavullen National School where I attended until I was about 16 years of age. I then went to the Munster Civil Service College where I remained for about 1½ years.

I entered the Post Office Service as a telephonist at Killarney in 1906. After about six months I was transferred to Mallow. Early in 1919 I was appointed Supervising Telephonist at Mallow and I continued to serve in this capacity until I was superannuated in 1945.

In the years prior to and following 1916 I took a keen interest in the national cultural organisations in the district. I was a member of the Gaelic League and was Captain of the Thomas Davis Camogie Club in 1914.

My first contact with the Irish Volunteer Organisation was made through my brother who was a wireless operator. This was early in 1918 when he put me in touch with Tom Hunter and Danny Shinnick who were the Volunteer leaders in the Castletownroche-Killavullen area at the time. I should mention that I travelled to my home at Killavullen from my work in Mallow Post Office each evening, usually by cycle. Having contacted the Volunteers in my home area, arrangements were made for me to meet Dan Hegarty and Owen Harold of Mallow. I arranged with the latter to relay all military and

police messages passing through Mallow during my spells of duty to the Mallow Intelligence Section of the Irish Volunteers. At this time I made copies of all such messages and handed them in to the house of Bill Hayes, who was a railway porter. He usually handed the messages to Jack Barrett (no relation) who was Communications Officer. If, at any time, Hayes was not available I took the messages to Jack Barrett myself. This was the usual procedure followed but in the case of information requiring urgent attention I utilised the services of a Post Office messenger to deliver the message. In such cases I wrote the message on a telegram form, enclosed it in the appropriate envelope and gave it to the messenger for delivery to my contact.

My first recollection of dealings with the Mallow Intelligence Section refer to the Conscription period in the spring of 1918. I remember that I transmitted a record of a telephone message from the British Headquarters at Cork instructing all units to arrange for the collection of arms in the area. As a result of this information the Volunteers staged a general raid for arms throughout the Cork Brigade area before the enemy moved. At this time also I passed on details of a telephonic conversation between the British Headquarters at Cork and O/C., British Forces, Mallow, in which instructions were given to erect a camp at Mallow to intern suspected persons, including women and children, and also to erect a series of blockhouses between Mallow and Shanballymore. I also learned at this time that the code word to be used if Conscription was to be enforced was "TURKEY".

I should have pointed out the Mallow Post Office was a key centre as all messages passing between Divisional Headquarters at Cork or G.H.Q. at Dublin and the large military posts at Mallow, Cork, Fermoy, Tralee, Killarney, Charleville, Buttevant, Limerick and Ballyvonare, were switched through Mallow.

Following the termination of the Conscription scare and the 1914-1918 war, I continued my activities relating to the local Intelligence Unit details of enemy messages. About this time I was associated with Cumann na mBan activities in a minor way, but early in 1919 I was instructed by Liam Lynch, through Dan Hegarty who was then Brigade Vice-Commandant, Cork II. Brigade, to discontinue my activities in this connection.

In May, 1919 I obtained particulars of a telephone message from Dublin to the British Forces at Fermoy informing them that some men who had been wounded in the rescue of Seán Hogan at Knocklong, were being accommodated in a house in the Mitchelstown area. Instructions were issued to raid this house. I immediately passed this information by means of telegraph messenger to the local Intelligence Officer who relayed it to Battalion and Brigade Headquarters. The wounded men were removed before the British raided the house in Mitchelstown district.

At the time of the attack on the Church party of British Forces at the Wesleyan Church, Fermoy, on 7th September, 1919, (this is known as the Wesleyan raid) I passed on several messages regarding enemy plans and intentions including information regarding the enemy proposals to arrest Owen Harold and several others. This enabled those concerned to avoid arrest by going 'on the run'.

Information regarding the enemy's intention to carry out arrests was more or less a general feature throughout late 1919 and 1920. I remember that on one occasion I overheard a conversation between Cork and Mallow R.I.C. regarding the whereabouts of Danny Shinnick who was 'on the run' at the time. He was alleged to be staying in a house in Ballydeague in the neighbourhood of

Killavullen and was to be arrested by the R.I.C. I telephoned the information to my sister through Killavullen Post Office. The message was taken by my brother (wireless operator home on leave) to Dan Shinnick who cleared out before the raid. At this time I think that Dan Shinnick was Adjutant, Castletownroche Battalion, I.R.A.

The next event of major importance with which I was connected was the capture of Mallow Military barracks. On this occasion, although all telephone wires in the area were supposed to have been cut, the wire connecting the barracks to the Post Office was left intact through some mischance. As the attack on the post was opened the operator there 'phoned the Post Office, "Get me Buttevant quick also Fermoy. We are being raided". I took the message and replied "I can't hear you". The telephone number of the Military Barrack was "Mallow 17".

When the raid was over the military came to the Post Office and with Post Office engineers had the lines repaired. When the lines were again in order the British were sending urgent messages to Fermoy, Buttevant, Ballyvonare and Cork, but I delayed the messages giving the excuse, "The lines must still be faulty". In this way I helped to delay the arrival of enemy forces and so helped the I.R.A. to get away with the captured arms. While the military were in the Post Office, following the raid, I heard the Officer-in-charge say "Willis must be got at all costs - we found a plan of the barracks - he must be the ringleader". I immediately passed this information to Jack Barrett (I.O.),

During the remainder of 1920 and 1921 I continued to relay to the Intelligence Branch particulars of all enemy information passing through including enemy cipher messages of as many as four hundred

words. Amongst the operations in respect of which I was able to pass on information were :-

(a) Cloonbanin Ambush: In this case I heard General Cummings speak to Killarney a few days before his trip to Tralee asking them to make arrangements for lunch and dinner. On the day before his return he 'phoned from Killarney to Buttevant and gave the approximate time of his return. This information was forwarded to the local Intelligence Officer immediately. It was written on a telegram form, enclosed in a telegram envelope and sent by Post Office messenger.

(b) Ballyvourney Ambush: British Forces at Cork 'phoned Mallow Military barracks to inform them of the ambush. Instructions were issued to get in touch with posts in Mallow area as the I.R.A. Column was understood to be retreating towards Mallow. When Mallow Barracks called me I told them that the lines were out of order and so delayed enemy action.

(c) Rathcoole Ambush: I knew that the Tans and "Auxies" stationed in Millstreet went each Friday to Kanturk to wire money to their relatives in England. The wires in the Millstreet area were being cut continually at this time and the nearest Money Order Post Office was Kanturk, hence the trip to the latter town. I was taking a message from Kanturk when the line went dead. I then tried to get Kanturk but failed. I then got the idea into my head that the enemy party had been ambushed so I did not report the line out of order for some hours. This enabled the I.R.A. party to withdraw before the enemy could obtain reinforcements.

(d) Sometimes in the spring of 1921 I overheard a telephone message from Headquarters, British Military at Cork in which instructions were issued to surround a Cork Column which was "resting" in the ^{EAST} ~~Coast~~ Kerry area. Arrangements were being made for troops from Limerick, Tralee, Killarney, Buttevant and Fermoy to surround the area.

I immediately passed on this information. The Column withdrew from its billets and so avoided the round-up. Following this incident there was a telephone message from Mallow to Cork Headquarters, "Birds have flown". During the course of this conversation it was stated, "Moylan must have tapped the lines".

(e) About the time of the incident referred in the previous paragraph I also obtained information that the British Military Authorities proposed to issue an order to seize all bicycles in the Southern area. I passed this information on to Intelligence Branch and as a result a General Order was issued by the O/C., 1st Southern Division I.R.A. to commandeered all bikes in the area. I held a permit from the British to use my own bicycle.

I was never, at any time, as far as I can recollect under suspicion by the British Forces. While not showing myself as too sympathetic towards them I always managed to maintain friendly relations with them, otherwise I do not think I could have been so successful in my activities as Intelligence Agent for the I.R.A. while a servant of the Post-Master General.

At the Truce I was officially attached to the Intelligence Staff, 1st Southern Division, I.R.A. I was allocated a cipher but I cannot recollect the number.

Signed: Annie Barrett
(Annie Barrett)
Date: 16th March 1955

Witness: P. O'onnell
(P. O'onnell)

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