

ORIGINAL

W.S. 1,159

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1, 159

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,159

Witness

Denis J. O'Driscoll,  
1 and 2 West Gate,  
Carrick on-Suir,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Vice C mmandant Charleville Batt'n.;  
Captain 'A' Coy. 8th Btn. 3rd Tipperary  
Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Charleville, 1915-1919,  
and Carrick-on-Suir 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2453

During the year 1915 a recruiting force of British officers, accompanied by a British Army Brass and Reed Band, came to Charleville and made Madden's Imperial Hotel their headquarters for a recruiting campaign. Drink flowed freely and recruits were easily ensnared from outlying districts. The members of the Volunteer Company felt this keenly and a plan was devised to combat the recruiting campaign. Between midnight on a Saturday and Sunday morning, two members of the Company - Michael Motherway and Denis Begley - tarred anti-recruiting slogans on the front wall of the hotel. These slogans attracted the attention of the people going to the various Masses on the Sunday morning. The R.I.C. arrested the three Company officers and sent them to Cork Prison where they were kept for some time. This finished recruiting for the British Army in the Charleville area, as the recruiting party and band left immediately after the arrests.

Whenever the Company paraded through the town they were carefully watched by the R.I.C.

By Easter of 1916 the Company was well-trained and organised. Our supply of arms was, however, limited, consisting of only a few rifles and a small amount of ammunition. We were mobilised for active service on Easter Tuesday of 1916 at 10 a.m. The meeting place was Newtownshandrum Cross, about two miles from Charleville. This mobilisation order was countermanded, although the members of the Company were equipped and ready. The Company was again mobilised for 10 p.m. on that Tuesday night, but were dismissed at 9 a.m. on the following (Wednesday) morning.

On 16th or 17th May, 1916, with about sixteen or seventeen other leading members of the Company, I was arrested by the R.I.C. An R.I.C. constable named Prendergast stated that he was fired at that

evening while he was walking through the fields at the rear of the R.I.C. barracks. He had a bullet hole through his uniform cap. When the cap was inspected by some of his superior officers they were doubtful of his charge, as they considered that the bullet could not pass through that particular part of the cap without his own aid. We were courtmartialled and questioned individually by a British Army Captain and the Co. Inspector of the R.I.C. We were released by the insistence of the Co. Inspector.

In the same month (May 1916) I was appointed Company Captain of the Newtownshandrum Company, and Irish Volunteer organiser for the Charleville, Liscarroll, Ballyhea, Dromina, Churchtown and Effin districts. I organised Volunteer Companies in these areas and instructed them in foot drill, field exercises, and in the use of arms.

From time to time during this year (1916) the Volunteers, especially when on parade, were attacked by ex-British soldiers and the wives of British soldiers then serving with the British Army. We eventually put an end to these outbursts by clearing the attackers off the streets and leaving them to nurse sore heads, ribs and hands.

In July 1917, Denis Begley, Joseph and Richard Nagle, Michael Motherway and myself were arrested by R.I.C. in Charleville and brought to Cork military barracks. I was tried by courtmartial on a charge of illegal drilling. I refused to recognise the Court as having any right to try me. The witness for the prosecution failed to prove that I was the person who gave orders on the occasion of the drilling with which I was being charged and, more or less to my surprise, I was found not guilty and discharged from custody. Denis Begley, the two Nagles and Michael Motherway were charged with being members of an illegal organisation and with rioting. They were tried a few days after my trial, were found not guilty, and they too were released.

Later on in 1917 the Charleville Company, and those Companies associated with it which I had organised in the previous year, were formed into a Battalion which was known as the 4th Battalion, Cork Brigade. James Brislane (now resident in New York) was appointed Battalion Commandant, and I was appointed Battalion Vice-Commandant. Tomas McCurtain, later Lord Mayor of Cork and who was murdered by British forces in 1920, was the Brigade Commandant. At this time too, and for some time subsequently, I acted as dispatch carrier from Charleville to Brigade Headquarters in Cork.

On some of the occasions of my visits to Cork I was sent by the Brigade Commandant to meet a Miss Fennell of Kyrle's Quay, Cork, and to collect from her revolvers and ammunition which by some means or another she was able to procure from the British Military Barracks in Cork. On these occasions I always met Miss Fennell just outside the Victoria Barracks, and collected from her whatever revolvers and ammunition she might have. In turn, I handed over the revolvers and ammunition to Tomas McCurtain in a room over O'Callaghan's butcher's stall in Castle Street, Cork.

During the Conscription threat period we had a big influx of recruits into the Volunteers. Training and organisation were stepped up, and route marches and manoeuvres were held. For some time before I left Charleville, and while Brislane was under arrest I acted as O/C. of the Battalion.

At the time of my marriage in August 1919, I acquired the licensed ~~winters~~ and adjoining drapery premises which I still possess in Carrick-on-Suir and which I opened for business in September of that year. I was a complete stranger coming to live in this town (Carrick-on-Suir) and, needless to remark, I knew none of the Volunteers here. I was not long in residence, however, only about two months, when one day I was given a dispatch by John O'Keefe. The dispatch

was from the late Sean Treacy then Vice-Commandant of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade asking me to meet him on the following Sunday at McGrath's house in Rath, Co. Waterford. At that time it was the practice of Brigade Headquarters in Cork to advise G.H.Q. in Dublin whenever a Volunteer Officer left the Brigade area, at the same time notifying G.H.Q. of the officer's new address. G.H.Q. then advised the Brigade Staff of the officer's new area, and it was in this way that transfers were arranged.

On the Sunday I found Sean Treacy in a field near McGrath's house. He was drilling and instructing a party of 14 or 15 Volunteer Officers which included John O'Keefe of Carrick-on-Suir who had given me the dispatch. After a short chat Sean Treacy mentioned that he understood that I was a good drill instructor and he asked me to take over the party and to give them some extended order drill. This I did. Later in the morning we had tea together in McGrath's house, after which he asked me to get into the Volunteers in Carrick-on-Suir and to do what I could as regards training and organising the Company. I did as he requested and took over the training of the Company. John O'Keefe was then the Company Captain.

The 8th Battalion of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade was formed in April 1920. John O'Keefe was appointed Battalion Commandant and I was elected to succeed him as Captain of the Carrick-on-Suir Company, or, as it was designated, "A" Company. I also took on the work of training the other eight Companies of the 8th Battalion.

Just before Easter of 1920 I received an order to destroy the income tax papers and records in the office of the Excise Officer in Carrick-on-Suir. With a small party of seven or eight Volunteers I approached the office of the Excise Officer on Easter Saturday night, but found that there was a large number of R.I.C. men in the vicinity.

At the time I thought that the game had been given away, but this proved to be incorrect. When it was nice and quiet after the pictures on the following night (i.e., Easter Sunday night of 1920), with about the same party of men, I raided the Excise Officer's office. We took away all the income tax records and burned them in the Brewery premises.

The next item of interest was the destruction of Carrick-Beg R.I.C. barracks in May of 1920. This barracks had been evacuated by the R.I.C., but the Sergeant was still living in apartments there. We kept the Sergeant prisoner while we removed his furniture and then we set fire to the barracks. Although he must have recognised each and every one of us, this Sergeant must have kept his mind to himself for there were no subsequent arrests.. He was an old man and, at the time, he was almost due to retire, and this may account for his silence.

In September 1920, the general raid for arms was carried out in the Battalion area. Here in Carrick-on-Suir we raided shops and private houses in which arms were known to be held. In all, we got about 10 or 12 shot guns and some revolvers of various patterns. All these arms were handed over to the Battalion Quartermaster.

Other activities of the Carrick-on-Suir Company included the destruction of Belfast manufactured goods during the period the Belfast boycott was enforced. On three occasions I was tipped off by railway men, who were friendly, that Belfast goods had arrived at the railway station for various traders in the town. Our practice on these occasions was to go to the railway station at night, break open the goods store, remove the Belfast goods and burn them.

About this time, too, I became acquainted with the Post Office Linesman. He was friendly and sympathetic towards the Volunteer

movement. He instructed me in the use of his testing telephone and suggested that I should send a couple of men to hold him up and take it. This was easily done, and with <sup>the</sup> telephone I often tapped the wires to the R.I.C. barracks, but failed ever to chance on any conversations which were of interest to us.

About the month of January 1921, additional men were required for No. 1 Brigade Flying Column, i.e. Denis Lacey's Flying Column, and the 8th Battalion was asked to get some Volunteers for full time service with the Column. I offered my services but on the grounds that I was a married man, and that I had business interests in the town to attend to; my offer was declined.

Early in 1921 I was called to attend a conference which was held in Power's house at Killinaspic. In Power's I met Denis Lacey, Dan Breen (now T.D.) and George Plunkett, an officer from G.H.Q. who was then in the vicinity. The question under discussion was that of bringing the Flying Column into Carrick-on-Suir to attack a party of 8 or 10 R.I.C. men which regularly patrolled the town at about 8 p.m. each night. I was asked if I considered the project feasible. I considered that it was quite feasible and it was decided to go ahead with the operation. I was asked to supply a map of the town. I drew the map myself and passed it on to Denis Lacey.

On the following Sunday I again met Denis Lacey at McGrath's house at Rath. He told me that he was bringing the Flying Column into Carrick-on-Suir to attack the patrol that night. We made final arrangements as regards scouts etc. His instructions to me were that I was not to be seen near the scene of the attack, as my house was bound to be raided subsequently, and that I was sure to be questioned by the R.I.C.

Under cover of darkness the Column came into the town and took up positions at three points on the Main Street. The patrol left the barracks at about 8 p.m. and its progress was signalled by the scouts. I saw Denis Lacey at his post on the Main Street and reported to him that the patrol was on its way. I then went to the Billiard Rooms, and started to play a game of billiards.

This attack had to be called off at the last minute. The night was fine and an unusually large crowd of civilians were promenading up and down the pathways at both sides of the street. Without endangering the lives of these people it was impossible to attack the patrol and for this reason Lacey called off the attack and withdrew the Column.

One day in the summer of 1921 I received a message from the Waterford Flying Column that two armed men had held up the bank in Kilmacthomas and had got away with a considerable amount of money. The message added that the two men were thought to have gone in the direction of Carrick-on-Suir and instructed me to have them arrested if possible, and if not, to try and have them tracked to their destination. I placed two Volunteers on each of the two bridges spanning the River Suir to watch for the Bank robbers.

Later that same day, which was a Sunday, I got another dispatch, this time from Mooncoin, stating that there had been an ambush the previous night and that some of the men who had taken part in the ambush had crossed the River Suir to the County Waterford side. This dispatch asked me to try and stop any British military who might be using the bridges in Carrick-on-Suir to cross into County Waterford.

I had just placed the Volunteers on the New Bridge and had gone to the County Waterford side when a lorry of British troops came round the

showed him the town clock and pointed out that it was only 9 p.m. He crossed the street to check up on the time at another house and, in a few minutes, he was back again in my bar obstinately maintaining that it was 10 o'clock and ordering me to close the shop. The next thing happened was that he fired a shot. One of the customers in the bar, an ex-British soldier, knocked him down and, while on the floor, he fired four more shots, one of which slightly wounded one of the customers. The revolver then fell out of his hand and was picked up by another customer, also an ex-British soldier, who went away immediately with it. I caught the Sergeant by the shoulders and pulled him outside the door. Knowing what might be expected, I cleared the bar and closed the door.

The Sergeant went back to the military barracks, got his rifle and bayonet and, with a squad of soldiers similarly armed, returned to my place of business. This time they entered the premises by the door leading to the drapery shop. The Sergeant, on looking around him and not seeing any bar, said they were in the wrong house and they left immediately. That night, the soldiers ran amok in the town. They broke windows, pushed civilians off the footpaths and some civilians were brought to the barracks and beaten up there.

At that time, when expecting raids on my own house, I occasionally slept at the nearby residence of a Miss Conway who was then in charge of the telephone exchange in Carrick-on-Suir. On this particular night I went to Miss Conway's and slept there. I knew the man who had got away from the shop with the revolver and, while I was anxious to get in touch with him to get the revolver from him, I was unable to go and look for him that night.

Next morning two lorries of Black and Tans arrived in Carrick-on-Suir and halted their lorries near my house. They let it be known

that if the revolver was not returned by that night they proposed to make a reprisal by blowing up my premises, Dowley's grocery shop and the residence of Dr. Murphy. On hearing this, Mr. Patrick Kirby, the Chairman of the Urban District Council offered a reward of £3 for the return of the revolver. The revolver was returned through Mr. Kirby by 3 o'clock that afternoon.

Just before the Truce in 1921, as a result of a raid on mails by my Company, we discovered the name of a spy in Carrick-on-Suir. He was an old man and an ex-British soldier. No punitive action was, however, taken against him. I believe that the Truce, coming at the time it did, was what saved him.

During the Truce period I took over the training of the Volunteers in Ballinard and Shanakill (Co. Waterford) Camps.

In February 1922, with "A" Company and a party from Denis Lacey's Column, I took over the barracks in Carrick-on-Suir from the R.I.C. who were then being disbanded.

During the subsequent Civil War I took the Republican side.

Signed:

*Denis J. O'Driscoll*  
(Denis J. O'Driscoll)

Date:

*11<sup>th</sup> May 1955.*

11th May 1955.

Witness:

*J. Grace*  
(J. Grace)

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