

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,708

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1708.

Witness

William Barry,
7, Dunedin Tce.,
Ballinlough Road,
Cork.

Identity.

Capt. 'D' Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Bde.

Subject.

'D' Company, 2nd Battn., Cork No. 1 Brigade, I.R.A,
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY WILLIAM BARRY,

No. 7 Dunedin Terrace, Ballinlough Road,

CORK.

I am a native of Cork and in the year 1917 joined "B" Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork City, Irish Volunteers.

We had only two Companies in the 2nd Battalion at that time. They were known as "A" and "B" Companies. The area covered by "B" Company comprised roughly the districts of Blackrock, Evergreen, Mary Street, Douglas Street and South Infirmary Road, Cork. All this territory lay south of the River Lee.

When I joined up, our Company Captain was Ned Lynch, Paddy Trahey was 1st Lieutenant and Frank McCarthy was 2nd Lieutenant. We had, approximately, eighty men in the Company at that time. We drilled in the open country around the Douglas district and we attended lectures on Military Tactics in a room in North Main Street, Cork.

It would be in the early part of the year 1917, to the best of my recollection, when the 2nd Battalion was divided up into nine Companies. This was due to a big influx of Volunteer recruits about this period. As a result of this reorganisation I found myself in "D" Company of the 2nd Battalion.

The officers of the new Company were :- Captain Ignatius O'Callaghan; 1st Lieutenant, myself (William Barry) and 2nd Lieutenant, Paddy Goulding.

Our new Company area covered Ballinlough Road, Douglas Road, Grange, High Street, Evergreen and the Curragh Road.

The Company strength was, approximately, ninety men. Our drilling and general training was carried out in the Black Ashe district between Evergreen and Douglas.

At the outset there were very few guns in the Company. So far as I can remember we had, at this period, only about four revolvers in all. To augment our meagre supply of arms we started making home-made cement canister bombs. These crude bombs were made in sheds owned by people the name of Neville in Ballinlough, Cork. The brothers Neville were members of "D" Company, 2nd Battalion.

The year 1918 could be described generally as a year of organisation and training. In December of that year a general election was held which resulted in a sweeping victory for the Sinn Féin candidates. In Cork City our Company, in common with the other Volunteer Companies, played an active part in canvassing, stewarding meetings and helping generally the cause of the Sinn Féin candidates.

In the early months of 1919, on instructions from the Brigade, widespread raids for arms were carried out at night by groups of men from our Company. At this period (early 1919) I was Captain of "D" Company and took charge of the raiding parties. These raids were carried out at night time, the houses visited being mostly those of Ex-British Army officers and well-known loyalists in the district. Upwards of fifty houses in all were visited and as a result we got, approximately, fifty guns comprising shot guns, all types of revolvers (some not very serviceable), field glasses and ammunition. We also secured three shot guns, two miniature rifles, 100 rounds of ammunition, slugs, cartridge lead and parts for guns in a night raid on Morton's Gun Shop in Oliver Plunkett Street, Cork. In one armed raid on a house off the Macroom Road, a case belonging to a Major Peglar, a British Army officer, was captured and in it contained the names and

addresses in England of Black & Tan-officers in his command. This information was passed to the Brigade Intelligence Section.

In addition to the raiding for arms, postmen delivering mails were frequently held up during daylight, the mails taken from them and passed on to the Intelligence Branch. These raids on mails were continued right up to the time of the Truce in July, 1921, and very valuable information regarding (in particular) spies and also movements of enemy personnel was obtained.

A feature of the Company and Battalion activities during the years 1919/'21 was the constant raiding of the Cork and Macroom railway stores which were situated in our district. A few unemployed men of the Company watched the railway for the arrival of military supplies of all kinds, the information was passed on to us and the premises raided and the military stores removed. These stores - consisting of boots, bicycles, clothing and a miscellaneous collection of military supplies of all kinds - were conveyed to a dump in the Ashe Grounds at The Marina, Cork. The captured stuff was later sent by us to the Flying Columns in the County. In regard to this dump I have to record that later in the year 1920 the Ashe Grounds at The Marina were surrounded one day by police and military while we were packing some stuff for dispatch to the Flying Column at Crookstown, County Cork. A few of us who were present escaped; but, unfortunately, the contents of the dump - which included a machine gun - were captured. Immediately after the raid I went to Neville's house at Ballinlough Road to tell them what had happened and to warn them to leave. As a matter of fact their house was raided that night but the Neville brothers were not there. Incidentally, they were caretakers at the time of the Ashe Grounds.

During the year 1920, Brigades activities in Cork were stepped-up. The Income Tax Offices at South Terrace, Cork, were raided by about twenty men of "D" Company at night. We scattered petrol around the place, set fire to it, with the result that the premises and its contents were destroyed. We also carried out a raid by day on the Board of Works Office where we captured maps and engineering instruments. A British military lorry carrying about a hundred two-gallon tins of petrol was held up in daylight. The military driver was taken off and the stuff taken to the dump at the Ashe Grounds, Marina.

In July, 1920, I was one of an armed party from "D" Company on duty at Southern Road, Cork, following an I.R.A. attack on King Street (now McCurtain Street) R.I.C. barracks. It was anticipated that the British would carry out reprisals on the house of a man named Steve Riordan, a Town Councillor at that time. Our party was in charge of Mick Murphy, then Commandant of the 2nd Battalion. The anticipated reprisals did not, however, take place.

Barrack Street Ambush.

On the 9th October, 1920, a lorry of military were ambushed during the day at Barrack Street, Cork, by members of the 2nd Battalion. I was one of a revolver party on that occasion.

The night previously, with about twenty other men from the Battalion, I attended the Thomas Ashe Sinn Féin Club Rooms where plans for the attack were explained to us by Commandant Mick Murphy. According to information received from our Intelligence Service, the military lorry to be attacked would leave the Victoria Barracks, Cork, at about 9.30 a.m. to proceed to the Black & Tan Barracks at

Elizabeth Fort, Barrack Street. The plan of attack was that when the lorry reached the corner at Cobh Street at the junction of Barrack Street and at the start of a steep incline which would slow down the lorry, it was to be attacked at this point with grenades. Others of our party who were stationed at strategic points in the vicinity would then open fire on the occupants of the lorry with revolvers. I and Billy Aherne acted as a revolver covering party at Fort Street off Barrack Street.

When the lorry came along at the expected time it was attacked by grenades which, however, did not hold its progress. As it approached our position we opened fire with revolvers on the occupants which, so far as I can recollect, consisted of about ten or twelve soldiers. In spite of the fire concentrated on it the lorry continued and was shortly out of range.

I do know that we inflicted several casualties on the enemy that morning but I cannot now say to what extent. I believe that one soldier was killed and some others wounded. Some of those who were not wounded jumped out of the lorry and took cover in the doorways of houses.

The action was a short one by reason of the fact that military and police garrisons were within a couple of hundred yards of us and were stationed at Elizabeth Fort, Tuckey Street R.I.C. Barracks and Union Quay R.I.C. barracks. We suffered no casualties on that occasion. It may be of interest to record that the arms and ammunition used by us on this occasion were kept in a large box in Hosford's Bakery, South Terrace, Cork, where Commandant Mick Murphy and myself were engaged building the premises.

Explosion at Thomas Ashe Hall.

The Thomas Ashe Sinn Féin Club situated at Father Matthew Quay was the rendezvous for the 2nd Battalion. It was frequently raided by police and military, and late in the month of November, 1920, Commandant Mick Murphy decided to lay a trap-mine inside the halldoor of the club in anticipation of a further raid on the premises. In company with Gerald Daly, O/C., Engineers, Tim Daly and Commandant Mick Murphy, I helped to lay the charge inside the door. The charge consisted of about 300 cwt. weight of gelignite. Electric detonators connected with electric wires were brought to a switch at the inside of the front door and so arranged that when the door opened inwards the switch came into operation and fired the charge of gelignite.

Shortly after midnight on the 30th November, 1920, a party of Black & Tans (about twenty in number) arrived at the hall. They opened the door, the lock of which was loosened by us, and as they entered a terrific explosion occurred, blowing out the front wall of the Club. It is certain that the enemy suffered heavy casualties on this occasion. During that night the military were dragging the River Lee, which runs in front of the Thomas Ashe Hall, for bodies. It was never known how many of the Tans were killed and wounded on that particular occasion.

Shooting of Spies.

As the result of information received by our Brigade Intelligence Service it became known that an organisation run by the Free Masons and The Young Men's Christian Association had been formed in Cork to spy on the movements of I.R.A. men in the City and to report on them to the British Authorities. One of the principal men in this organisation was named Riley, who was Manager (so far as I can recollect) of Thompsons Bakery, Cork, and lived in Rochestown, County Cork. This man was reputed to be the paymaster for the Spies.

Early in February 1921 I received instructions from the Brigade to take into custody Riley and have him executed. On the evening of the 10th February, 1921, as he was returning from work in King Street (now MacCurtain Street) in his pony and trap, four of us, armed with revolvers, got into the trap and drove him to his home at Rochestown. We shot him outside the gate of his house and affixed a card to the body with the words "Spies and Informers Beware" written on it.

In the same month a civilian by the name of William O'Sullivan, who was a paid Spy of the Freemasons etc., was taken into custody by me, on Brigade instructions, in a public-house in Evergreen. He was brought to what is known as Tory Top Lane in the Evergreen district, and shot by a firing party from my Company. A card was put on the body similar to that in the case of Riley.

In the same month a civilian named Finbar O'Sullivan, who was a local man and a member of the British Army home on leave, was reported by our Intelligence Service to be joining the Black & Tans. On instructions from the Battalion Commandant, Mick Murphy, we watched his home for about three weeks. On the 21st February, 1921, I met him walking in civilian dress. I stopped him and told him he was wanted for questioning. I took him away and he was thereupon shot in the vicinity of the Douglas River.

In the month of February, 1921, I received instructions that a local man named McDonald was to be apprehended and executed. Our Intelligence Service reported that McDonald was acting as a 'spotter' for the military. He was well acquainted with members of the local units of the I.R.A. We waited for him night after night even during curfew hours and on the night of 23rd February, 1921, he was seen in the vicinity of Evergreen after curfew. Revolver fire was opened on him from very close range and he fell, apparently dead. The following

day, to our amazement, we learned that he was alive and suffering from one bullet wound only, but with five other bullet marks, skin deep, on him. This extraordinary occurrence was later explained when we discovered that .45 British Army ammunition which came into our possession was defective and we believed it was deliberately done by the British. McDonald was taken to Cork Barracks by the British military and remained there until the Truce of July 1921, when he went to England.

One of the most daring and successful attempts to capture and execute a prominent British Intelligence officer took place in Cork on the 9th May, 1921.

I still remember the day was Sunday when I was told by Bob Aherne, the Brigade Intelligence Officer, that I was to go to the Rob Roy Hotel, Cook Street, Cork, to capture alive an Intelligence Officer named Sterland who was attached to the Auxiliaries in Cork. I was armed with a revolver.

In company with 2nd Lieutenant Jeremiah Coughlan and Lar Neville, who were also armed with revolvers, we went as instructed to the Rob Roy Hotel. It was, so far as I can remember, in the late afternoon.

It should be recorded here that the hotel in question was situated almost in the centre of the city along which passed regular patrols of Black & Tans and Military both by day and by night.

On arriving at the Rob Roy Hotel with my two comrades and Bob Aherne, I went with the latter upstairs where Sterland was pointed out to me. He was in Company with Frankie Mahony who was then O/C. of the Brigade Intelligence Section Service, and Charlie Cogan who was also one of our Intelligence Officers. They were having a drink with Sterland. When Mahony and Cogan saw Bob Aherne and myself

they suggested to Sterland that they should go somewhere else for a drink and the party left the room and came downstairs. Aherne and myself had gone ahead and when Sterland reached the hall we held him up and took a revolver from him. While this was happening there was a knock at the front door which was closed at the time and when Jeremiah Coughlan answered the knock he saw outside a party of armed British military who asked Coughlan if they could get in for a drink. Coughlan told the soldier who spoke to him that if he, the soldier, came back in half an hour they could have all the drink they wanted. One of the 'Tommys' then shook hands with Coughlan; the latter gripping a revolver which he held behind his back while shaking hands with the 'Tommy'. The military party then left. We waited a few minutes to allow the soldiers to move out of the street and I then posted Bob Aherne and Coughlan at either end of Cook Street to give us the "All Clear" signal. Lar. Neville and I took Sterland outside the Rob Roy Hotel on to Cook Street where we decided that, due to the proximity of enemy patrols, it would be practically impossible to take Sterland a prisoner alive. We then shot him dead outside the hotel. Immediately following the shooting, military came along Oliver Plunkett Street which adjoins Cook Street. They opened fire on us as we ran over Parliament Street. Here we jumped on to a horse-drawn sidecar which was with a funeral party leaving the South Parish Church. We drove furiously in the direction of Evergreen where we abandoned the horse and car. As I was returning alone to my home at Ballinlough, I almost ran into the party of military chasing us. However, I got away through fields to safety.

In March, 1921, members of my Company held up and captured the driver of British General Strickland's car. This man was stationed in the military barracks, Cork, and had come into our district dressed in civilian clothes. He was executed by a firing party from "D" Company in the vicinity of the Douglas Road, Cork.

To give any accurate details of armed activities against the enemy during the toughest period of the struggle 1920/'21 would be quite impossible owing to the length of time that has elapsed since these events occurred.

During these years and in particular for the six months prior to the Truce of July 1921, every possible opportunity was availed of to attack enemy personnel and to obstruct the functioning of the military machine in Cork City.

It was customary in the "D" Company area for armed patrols to go out at night in small groups and carry out what might be described as "hit and run" attacks with revolvers and grenades on Military and Black & Tan patrols. We carried out these attacks quite often after curfew which, at one period in Cork, was in force from 6 o'clock in the evening.

Enemy patrols were engaged by us in the Evergreen district when a party of military in a lorry were heavily attacked after curfew. In the Douglas Road district a soldier was shot on the night of the 1st March, 1921. I mention this particular occurrence because on that night armed patrols from everyone of the Cork Companies were out on the city streets on instructions of the Brigade to shoot any uniformed member of the British Forces, whether armed or unarmed. This was done as a reprisal for the brutal murder of I.R.A. men taken prisoner in an ambush at Dripsey, County Cork, a day or two previously.

Land mines were laid at Rochestown Road, at Grange and on the Carrigaline Road. A troop train on its way to Ballincollig barracks was fired on off the railway bridge at Douglas Road, and just before the Truce of 1921 a general "hit and run" attack was carried out, with Bombs and revolvers, by men from all the Cork I.R.A. Companies on barracks and military posts in Cork City and suburbs.

I will refer to one instance of what I might call 'obstructionist tactics' when, in April 1921, I was one of a party of twelve, armed with revolvers, who held up a lorry load of bacon from Lunhans' factory which was proceeding to Cork barracks. We halted the lorry off Douglas Street (which, incidentally, was close to Union Quay barracks) in the day time. Seven unarmed military on the lorry were held up, taken prisoner and locked in a nearby stable. The lorry and its contents were then driven to the Ashe Grounds, dumped, and later distributed to country Flying Columns.

About the middle of June, 1921, I received instructions from the Battalion O/C. at that time, Connie Neenan, to capture a civilian who worked in the Douglas district. This man, whose name I have forgotten, was alleged to have given information to the enemy in connection with the Moarne Abbey ambush, North Cork, in which a number of I.R.A. men were killed in action. I contacted my man, and, having interrogated him, he told me that a friend of his named Sanders had given information to the military as to the whereabouts of the I.R.A. party at Moarne Abbey. However, as a result of our questioning we were satisfied that he was one of the guilty ones. He was shot on instructions of the Brigade and buried in the Douglas district, Cork. This occurred about three weeks before the Truce when, as a result of a very bad wetting, I developed pneumonia and had to be taken away to hospital in Cork. I was in hospital when the Truce came in July 1921.

SIGNED: W. Barry

DATE: 5 December 1957

WITNESS: [Signature]

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