

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1714

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1714.

Witness

Leo Buckley,
89, Raphoe Road,
Crumlin,
Dublin.

Identity.

Staff Officer (Intelligence), Cork No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

1st Battn., Cork No. 1 Bgde., I.R.A.,
1918 - 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,714

STATEMENT BY LEO BUCKLEY,

89, Raphoe Road, Crumlin, Dublin.

This account of my activities is vague as regards dates, for the reason that a lapse of some 36 or 37 years has occurred since the events referred to herein took place.

I, Leo Buckley (alias Jim Buckley) joined 'G' Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Cork Brigade, at some time in 1918. I participated in the Sinn Féin elections of that year and, for this reason, I am able to pinpoint the time I enrolled in the Irish Volunteers. I was enrolled in the Sinn Féin Rooms, North Main St., Cork, and I was issued with a card of membership of the Irish Volunteers entailing a subscription by me of 3d per week. At the time, I was employed in the Post Office, Cork, as a trainee telegraphist. I participated in drilling at Cart Shea's Lane, Bishopstown, under the direction of Company Captain Dick Murphy, up to 1919, when I was sent for training in signalling by a Dublin man then resident in Cork under the name of McKiernan. I recollect the explosion in Grattan St., Cork, on or about the 14th May, 1919, when Micheál Tobin was killed and Dan Madden badly burned. In a room on the ground floor behind a shoe repair shop, we were engaged in what we called at the time "tin can bombs" work. This entailed the manufacture of a tin can bomb from ingredients comprising a powder called, I think, "green cheddar" and shrapnel packed in a tin can, plus some form of gun cotton. I had left the premises some hours previous to the explosion, and our conclusion

at the time was that the accidental creation of a spark gave rise to the explosion. I took part in the removal of Dan Madden from the North Infirmary on 17th May, 1919, as it was believed that he would be arrested as soon as he was fit to be removed. He was badly burned in the face and hands. He eventually recovered his health, although his face and hands were permanently scarred.

Tom Healy and myself introduced the practice of taking cycles from British army personnel. At the time (around July, 1920), we watched soldiers travelling into Cork from Ballincollig Military Barracks, and we came to the conclusion that if they wished to come into the city, they would have to do it on foot - a journey of four or more miles. We gave the bicycles away or threw them into the River Lee, and on occasions we went as far as Carrigrohane Railway Station (now extinct) to hold up military cyclists. We never at any time met with resistance from them, although on occasions we had quite a number of them held up at gun point. Our motive in taking the bicycles was that of discouraging the military from entering Cork City, as it was known that on occasions they picked up useful information from girls with whom they became friendly. Tom Healy, I should have said, was a member of 'G' Company.

While this idea of seizing bicycles was developed by Tom Healy and myself, the fact that it was happening became known to our Headquarters. It was decided then to develop it still more, and eventually a British soldier cycling in Cork City became such a novelty that the practice ceased altogether.

Our company was called out one night to put an end to British military walking into Cork on furlough from Ballincollig. As the soldiers reached the Western Road, they were beaten up and driven out of the city. They later made several sorties in force towards the city, but retreated when attacked and eventually stayed in barracks, or, at least, did not travel beyond Ballincollig.

We considered that this limitation of activity would sap their morale, and it did a good turn for ourselves in as much as we had greater freedom of movement. I remember at the time, young girls from Cork going out to Ballincollig to meet the British soldiers. We curbed this by bobbing the hair of persistent offenders. Short hair was completely out of fashion at the period, and the appearance of a girl with "bobbed" hair clearly denoted her way of life.

There are so many things that I could write about in those early years of the "troubled times" if I could recollect dates. For example: the night Blarney R.I.C. Barracks was attacked and burned down, I was one of a party of twelve whose duty it was to guard the road from Ballincollig Military Barracks to Blarney via Leemount. The road from Cork swings left at Carrigrohane for Ballincollig, while the straight road leads on to Blarney. Eight of us took up position inside a ditch at Carrigrohane which faced directly up the Ballincollig road. Four of the party were engaged at felling a tree across the road at the junction. We had one Lee Enfield rifle and an assortment of shotguns. At about 9 p.m. we heard the

noise of a lorry coming towards our position.

When it approached nearer, we found that there were two British army Leyland lorries containing some 90 troops, obviously on their way to relieve Blarney Police Barracks. We waited until they were about 150 yards away, when we fired one round apiece.

To our great surprise, we saw the officer and Sergeant jump from the front seat of the first lorry and run back along the road, followed by the troops in the body of the lorries. We expected that they were taking up position to attack us, but it subsequently transpired that they ran all the way back to barracks. We did not see them again that night. We were withdrawn later in the night and instructed to proceed through Dunscombes Wood to the Blarney road at Clogheen, for the purpose of covering the retreat of the personnel engaged in the attack on Blarney Barracks.

By 1920 I had become a skilled telegraphist in the G.P.O., Cork. At some time early in that year, I was called before a meeting of the Headquarters Staff of Cork No. 1 Brigade. I was informed that the Brigade was anxious to obtain copies of all coded telegrams passing through Cork Post Office to and from British Army and R.I.C. sources. The key to the codes used was obtained, and, accordingly, from 1920 onwards, I supplied the Brigade (with the assistance of Miss Scannel, who was also a Post Office employee) with copies of all coded telegrams passing through the Post Office. When I was arrested, Miss Scannell carried on the work, assisted by Henry Mahony, who later became Postmaster, Skibbereen. I made a daily delivery of coded telegrams

to Florrie O'Donoghue or Geo. Buckley of the Brigade Staff, and when they were not available I left the copies with Nora Wallace, who then conducted a newsagent's shop in Brunswick St., Cork. If a priority telegram came through, it was copied and handed over immediately to the Brigade Staff.

The British Authorities made fairly frequent changes in the key to the codes, but any changes made were notified in one of the coded telegrams. On one occasion, however, it was arranged that a change in the code key would be sent through the post. The soldier who collected the post at the G.P.O., Cork, on the morning involved, was held up, however, and all mails seized. As far as I can recollect, the British Authorities attached no particular significance to the hold-up, as they did not immediately change the code.

In the 'Irish Press' of 20th November, 1957, I saw a reference to the erection of a plaque in memory of a Fianna boy named Patrick Hanley. I was a witness of his shooting. At the time, I was sleeping in a top back room of an apartment house in Sheare's St., Cork. A side window in the room I occupied permitted of my dropping some 8 or 10 feet into a gully of a building which was then a Veterinary Surgeon's premises. His name, I recollect, was MacSweeney, and he had lost his right arm in a hold-up. Some hours prior to young Hanley's death, an R.I.C. Sergeant had been shot by Tommy Healy and Willie Joe O'Brien of 'G' Company. I met them both shortly after the shooting, and, as reprisals by the military or Black and Tans were anticipated, we decided to keep out of harm's way. About

midnight on the night of the R.I.C. Sergeant's death, I heard the noise of military lorries pulling up at the corner of Sheare's St. near the Courthouse. In a short time, the entire area from North Main St. to the Mardyke was cordoned off by British soldiers. I immediately dressed myself, smoothed my bed to give it the appearance of not having been slept in, and awaited developments. If battering came to the hall door of the house I was in, it was my intention to drop out the side window and get away over the roofs of the Vet's premises and drop to the ground by way of a telegraph pole which abutted the end of the block, or else lie quiet in between the roofs. I heard the battering in of a door at the rear of where I was. Broad St. and Sheare's St. ran parallel to each other, and it was a door in Broad St. which was being battered in.

By peering out my back window I was able to look into the back rooms of a house in Broad St., and I saw two men mounting the stairs. They wore R.I.C. caps and great coats, and they had motor goggles on their faces. They entered the room on the first floor, and I saw both of them open fire on the people in bed. I heard a woman scream. They then mounted to the second floor, and the flash lamps they used as they climbed the stairs gave me a good picture of them. They entered the back room on the second floor, and I distinctly heard a boy's voice saying, "Oh God, Sir, don't shoot me". Both men opened fire and several bullets were sent into young Hanley's body. The people fired on who lived on the first floor had a miraculous escape according to a report I heard next day. A short time later, I heard further shooting. Next day I heard that Patrick Hanley and an ex-British army soldier who lived in Broad Lane had been

shot dead. A young brother of O'Brien was badly wounded.

These shootings gave food for thought. The ex-soldier who was shot lived in the home of Willie Joe O'Brien and was his brother-in-law. When O'Brien, Healy and myself met next night, we came to the conclusion that the R.I.C. had got information from some source in relation to the shooting of the R.I.C. Sergeant. Hanley had been shot in mistake for Healy, while the shooting of O'Brien's brother-in-law and brother clearly had significance. We proceeded to worry out who the police spy could be. Only four people knew who participated in the shooting of the R.I.C. Sergeant, viz. Healy, O'Brien, the Company Captain (Dick Murphy), and myself. At the time, Dick Murphy was on very intimate terms with a man named Denis Donovan, Barrack St., Cork. Barrack St. was in the 2nd Battalion area, while we were in the 1st Battalion, Cork No. 1. We had all got to know Donovan well, and we had a nickname on him - "Din Din" - for the reason that he was ever and always suggesting ways and means of shooting up the military and R.I.C. I remember asking Dick Murphy whether he had mentioned the R.I.C. shooting to "Din Din". He pooh-poohed any suggestion that anything was wrong with "Din Din", and we allowed the matter to rest. Some time later, there was a round-up by the British military, and members of the Brigade Staff - Dan Donovan, Tom Crofts, and others, including myself, were arrested and lodged in a barbed wire surround erected in the centre of the Barrack Square of Victoria (now Collins) Barracks, Cork. We were on display in this cage for a week or so and were vetted daily by wounded Tans, R.I.C. and military. We were all under wrong names. I was Jim Buckley, Tom Crofts

was Tom Flavin, Dan Donovan was Dan Duggan, and so on.

I was then removed to Cork Jail, where I took part in a hunger-strike. I next found myself in Spike Island, and later I was removed by a destroyer to Bere Island. I remember that when we landed at Lawrence Cove, Bere Island, the British Army officer in charge of our escort instructed us to carry the soldiers' kit bags up to the prison. We were some 20 or so of a party of prisoners. We refused to facilitate him, and after listening to a tirade of abuse, he ordered his soldiers to carry their own kit bags.

After a time on the island I got a notion of escaping. The prison comprised two compounds. The inner compound contained the huts in which we ate and slept, while the outer compound, which was available to us only in daylight, allowed us to play football. Both compounds were heavily guarded with barbed wire some 10 feet high by 6 feet thick. When we were in the outer compound, sentries were posted in sentry boxes erected on platforms above and outside the barbed wire. When the outer compound was closed, the sentries moved in and took up positions around the inner compound, and a sentry was posted at 50 yards distance from the next the whole way around the inner compound. In addition, there was a main guard room at the entrance to the prison. I formed the idea of tunnelling my way out. A carpenter prisoner cut out the bottom section of a wooden cupboard located in the hut in which I lived. Batterns were placed under the cut out section so that it could easily be slipped back into position, and pots and pans were stored on top of it to distract attention. A number of us went down through the opening and started a tunnel.

The earth coming from the tunnel was packed under the hut. After working for some weeks, the tunnel had reached to almost the outer fringe of the barbed wires when we struck rock. We turned the tunnel in the hope of finding a way around the rock, but it turned out to be wasted effort as we could not locate a soft spot. The tunnel had then to be abandoned. A second tunnel made in a different direction to the previous one met with a similar fate. We then turned our attention to the barbed wire as a means of escape.

The only apparently vulnerable spot was a barbed wire gate placed midway in the barbed wire entanglements surrounding the inner compound. This gate gave entry from the inner to the outer compound. For a period we sat at this gate playing cards, while at the same time we were softening up the ground under the gate. The earth we removed was replaced by a few large stones, over which a skin of soil was laid. The soil was hardened to give it a normal appearance. At the time, there was a prisoner in the camp named Very Rev. Canon Kennedy, St. Flannan's College, Ennis. He conducted evening Devotions in one of the huts, and all prisoners attended at the Devotions. Within seven or eight yards of the barbed wire gate already referred to, the military had erected a small hut within the inner compound which we used for drying and airing our laundry. On one particular evening, the weather turned stormy and wet. While the prisoners were congregating for the evening Devotions, seven of us slid around the back of the drying shed and crawled underneath. It was built on concrete posts about two feet high, and there was an open space under the flooring of the shed. We had

noted that while Devotions were in progress, the sentries became somewhat casual, and that when the weather was bad they very rarely left the sentry boxes to patrol their beats. One of the seven prisoners began to whimper about his wife and family, and after quietening him down another prisoner offered to slip back to the camp with him. We then crawled through the slush in single file, about six yards apart, towards the barbed wire gate. In a short time, the underneath entry was opened and all five slid through.

The last man out had to close the hole. We then made for the far corner of the outer compound, where it was arranged we would all meet. As there were no sentries on the outer compound, it was simply a matter of lying on our stomachs and forcing our way through the barbed wire regardless of the consequences.

At the time, the British military issue to us comprised a cap, sports (or Martin Henry) coat, and a corduroy pants or trousers. One leg of my trousers became caught in the barbed wire, and when I eventually pulled my way through, the trouser leg was gone. Apart from this, I had got some bad tears on my thigh and knee.

After getting out, we had to cross the main road on our stomachs, crawl over the ditch and drop over. I dropped into a boghole. We then headed in the direction of Lawrence Cove, Bere Island, where we had seen small boats anchored when we arrived there as prisoners. We eventually reached this point, and within an hour or two we reached a point I heard after was known as Rossmacowen, Castletownbere. There were two destroyers

located between the mainland and Bere Island.

We had just reached the mainland when we saw both destroyers come to life. They headed in opposite directions around Bere Island, while at the same time they swept the sea and the island with searchlights. We made in the direction of Hungry Hill mountain, and after a time we saw a house light. We knocked at the door of the house, and, to our pleasant surprise, we learned that the son of the house was the local 1st Lieutenant of the I.R.A. His father was a school teacher named McCarthy. We got hot milk and cake, and I had my damaged leg dressed. We were then moved to Glengarriff, and in the early morning we reached the Headquarters of the 5th Brigade outside Bantry, where we were welcomed by the Brigade Staff. The Headquarters at the time were located in a large residence owned by an old gentleman who appeared to be a retired British army officer. By afternoon we were transported to Cork. We were rigged out with clothes by the 5th Brigade. The five people concerned in the escape were Peter Hegarty, Garryroe, Castlemartyr, (his brother was killed in Clonmult), Martin Keeffe, Tallow, Co. Waterford, Bill Hartnett, Crossbarry, Upton, Dan Lordan, Newcestown, Enniskeane, and myself. There could have been a sixth person who escaped with us, but I have now a recollection of only four others and myself.

Immediately I reached Cork City, I reported to Brigade Headquarters and I was instructed to proceed to Birch Hill, Grenagh, Co. Cork, to take over command of the "T" Station located in that area. This station comprised a dug-out some 15' square cut into a high

railway embankment at Kilmona, Rathduff. This dug-out was concealed by large enamel signs (advertising) to which grass sods were braced. A small enamel sign covered the exit to the dug-out. I had a staff of eight men, some of whose names I can recollect - Bernard Looney, Blarney; Jacky McDonnell, Tim Shine, Jacky Higgins, Con Healy (known later as the "one-eyed gunner").

Our duties comprised the tapping of all main telephone lines into, and out from, Cork City. All military and police conversations were listened to and noted. If information of importance was picked up, it was immediately sent to Brigade Headquarters in Cork. On a number of occasions, British military walked the railway line between Blarney and Rathduff, apparently on the look-out for tapped lines. Our scouts were always able to warn us in time to permit of the telephone pole being climbed and the tapping wires removed until the military had passed.

This was a 24 hours day service, and a good deal of the success attained by the 1st Southern Division was in some measure due to the information gleaned from telephone conversations. On one occasion we were in the dug-out while military immediately overhead of us were examining marks on the telephone pole. Any suspicions aroused were apparently settled to their own satisfaction, as they moved on without making a thorough examination.

I should have mentioned earlier that Denis Donovan ("Din Din"), already referred to in this account, was shot as a spy on Brigade instructions. He was shot in Ballygarvan on 14th April, 1921, and a label "spies and informers beware" placed on his chest.

I remember the capture of the British Admiralty vessel "Upnor" on 3rd April, 1922. My function in that event was to control Roche's Point Coastguard Station while the vessel was being unloaded at Ballycotton. In the early morning of 3rd April, 1922, I was driven by a member of the Brigade Staff to Roche's Point, where three members of the local I.R.A. company awaited my arrival. At the time, the Coastguards sent weather reports morning and evening, in code, to the British Admiralty, London. My assignment was to control the station, ensure that the code messages were no more than ordinary routine, and take possession of the telegraph instrument by which the reports were sent to London. In short, no one but myself had access to the instrument while the unloading of the ship was in progress, and I had to send and receive telegraph messages until word came at 5 p.m. for our withdrawal by way of the Brigade officer who had brought me out in the morning.

Signed: Leo Buckley

Date: 16th Dec. 1957

Witness:

J. Sorman
(Investigator).

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