

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1518

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1518.....

Witness

Seán O'Driscoll,
Cork Road,
Skibbereen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

C/C, Schull Battn., Cork 111 Bde., I.R.A.
Member of Flying Column, Cork 111 Bde., I.R.A.

Subject.

Ballydehob Coy. & Schull Battn., I.V.,
Co. Cork, 1916-1924.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2823.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,518

STATEMENT BY SEÁN O'DRISCOLL,

Cork Road, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.

I was born at Ballydehob on June 24th 1899. I was one of a family of nine. My father was a joiner and contractor. I was educated at Ballydehob National School until I reached the age of 17 years - having reached Seventh Standard. I was still at school at Easter, 1916.

I was always keenly interested in Irish history and the Irish language. My parents were descended from staunch Irish families - a grand uncle of my mother being shot by the Red Coats.

About the middle of Easter Week 1916, when news of the Rising had reached our district, I unearthed a stick of gelignite with detonator and fuse. With two or three others, including one of my brothers, I put it in a hole in the wall of the railway bridge near my home and exploded it. No damage was done.

My home was raided by a party of British military which was camped in Ballydehob area in the spring of 1917.

In September, 1917, I really began to take an active part in the national movement when I organised the Pádraig Pearse Sinn Féin Club in Ballydehob. The officers of the club were: - Chairman - Seán O'Driscoll (witness), Vice Chairman - Jerh. Sullivan, Coolach, Secretary and Treasurer - Kathleen O'Driscoll (sister). About the same time a branch of the Gaelic League was

formed in the district. Irish language and dancing classes were held twice weekly. The teachers were two men named Begley and O'Shea. They did not receive any payment for their services; but if and when there was any profit from concerts or aeriochts we gave them a small contribution to enable them to carry on.

When the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918 there was no Volunteer organisation in the area. The general public were, however, organised to hold protest meetings and to sign the anti-conscription pledge. About this time - in May, 1918 - the barytes mines at Dreelomane were raided by men from Lisheen and Skeham^Nore areas. The men who carried out the raid were members of Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League and had not been organised into Volunteer units at the time. A large quantity of gelignite and detonators was taken from the magazine at the mines and was dumped in Lisheen area. The R.I.C. raided my home for me next day but I was not at home, and from that day to the Truce on July 11th 1921 I was "on the run".

I now set about organising and training Irish Volunteer units in the area. Amongst the units organised by me were those at Schull, Skeham^Nore and Lisheen. I was now engaged more or less wholetime training these units, which I visited a couple of nights each week in turn. While engaged on this work I also collected, in co-operation with the members of the units, all shotguns, stray arms and explosives in the area.

Early in 1919 the R.I.C. post at Ballydehob was evacuated. It was destroyed within a few days by the men from Skeham^Nore and Lisheen units under my control.

Beyond the Sinn Féin and Gaelic League units at Skehanore,^N Lisheen and Schull, there was no organisation in Schull Peninsula at this time. However, I continued to train these sections and when the first Dáil Éireann Loan was floated in 1919 we collected subscriptions to the amount of £300 (approximately) in the district.

At the beginning of 1920 I was in touch with Seán Lehane who was a member of Bantry Battalion Staff. On my invitation he came into Schull area and we set about setting up an I.R.A. organisation in the district. The organisation work was completed by March, 1920, companies having been organised in Lisagriffin, Goleen, Dunmanus, Glaun, Lemcon, Schull, Dunbeacon, Ballydehob and Skehanore.^N These companies were now formed into Schull Battalion, Cork 111 Brigade. The first officers of the battalion were:

O/C - Seán Lehane
 Vice O/C - Denis Murphy
 Adjt. - Gibbs Ross
 Q/M - Jim Hayes.

I was now O/C, Ballydehob Company. The other officers were: - Jim Harte (1st Lieut.), Denis Daly (2nd Lieut.), Denis O'Mahoney (Adjt.), Tom McCarthy (Q/M). The strength of the unit at the time was about fifty. The armament consisted of about twenty shotguns and a small supply of ammunition for same.

The first operation carried out by my company (Ballydehob) was the demolition of the local Courthouse about May, 1920. The building could not be burned as it was attached to a shop, so we were forced to demolish the building stone by stone with picks and bars until it was levelled to the ground. In this operation

we were assisted by some men from Skehan^Nmore Company. All documents found in the Courthouse were burned, as well as a stock of English newspapers which we seized from a local shopkeeper.

Intensive raids for arms were now carried out in the district as well as in the islands off the coast. Approximately twenty shotguns were obtained in these raids, in which the majority of the men of the unit took part at one time or another. The armament held by Ballydehob Company was now about forty shotguns.

In addition to raiding for arms, the members of the company were also engaged on raiding the mails - both local and district - at irregular intervals, as well as cutting telephone wires in order to disrupt enemy lines of communication. No information of military value came to light in these raids.

Some time in August, 1920, I received information that there was a stock of arms in the house of R.J. Wood - a Protestant landlord - who resided about two miles from Ballydehob on the Bantry road. Enquiries revealed that the house was always kept locked and barricaded so that the normal procedure of calling on the occupier and demanding the surrender of arms could not be followed with safety. I decided to raid the house and took about twenty members of the Ballydehob Company with me. All were armed with shotguns, while I carried a revolver. Early one Sunday morning we took up positions behind the fences surrounding the yard of the house. We remained there until 3 p.m. without observing any movement by the occupants. Shortly after this the back door of the house was opened and Mr. Wood emerged with

his wife. They moved away towards the garden. When they had gone a short distance I left my position - having instructed the other members of the party to keep me covered - and approached Mr. and Mrs. Wood - calling on them to put up their hands. Mr. Wood had been walking with his hands in the pockets of his coat. When he raised his hands I found that there was a fully loaded .38 revolver in each pocket. I took these guns and then compelled him to open up the house, withdrawing some of my men to assist in the search of the building. When we entered we found that the windows were sandbagged, while a shotgun or rifle (.22) with a supply of ammunition was laid close by each window. We then removed all the arms and ammunition and told the owner to inform anybody he wished that this was an I.R.A. raid. In this raid we obtained four shotguns, two revolvers and two .22 rifles with an assorted supply of ammunition. Amongst those who took part in this raid were: - Tom Hickey (O/C Skehamore Coy.) and Cornelius Whoolley of same unit.

It was customary for an R.I.C. patrol to pay frequent visits to Mr. Wood - presumably in connection with his stock of arms and ammunition. On the Thursday following the raid a patrol of five Black and Tans from Skibbereen were reported to me to have gone to visit Wood. I immediately got my Q.M. (Tom McCarthy) and his brother, John, to transport a bag of shotguns and ammunition to Skeham^Nore in order to ambush this patrol on its way back to Skibbereen. I proceeded in advance to Skeham^Nore to arrange for the mobilisation of six or seven men from Skeham^Nore unit and to select an ambush position. Before the mobilisation was completed the patrol passed back through the selected ambush position where I was

under cover behind the roadside fence awaiting the arrival of the others.

When the patrol had passed I moved back from the roadside fence to find that the Skehan^Nore men had just arrived in the next field. They were accompanied by a dispatch rider who had a message for me from the Battalion O/C (Seán Lehane). The latter happened to be in the area further east and had learned of the departure of the patrol from Skibbereen. Anticipating the possibility that the patrol might be attacked in my area, he had sent the dispatch rider with a message instructing me to take no action as plans for an attack on Schull R.I.C. Barracks were being made. In view of the success of the proposed attack on Schull at a later stage, it was probably lucky that I failed to get the Skehan^Nore men mobilised in time.

There was now a considerable number of men 'on the run' throughout the brigade area and the question of establishing "Flying Columns" was under consideration. To keep these men in the "field" and to supply them with arms and equipment it was decided to establish an arms fund. To finance this fund a levy was fixed on all property owners. In the case of farmers the amount of the levy in each case was based on the number of stock carried on the farm. The levy on other property owners was based on the Poor Law Valuation of the premises. The work of collecting this levy fell on the shoulders of the officers and men of the units in each area. The majority of the landholders in my company area (Ballydehob) were Protestants and pro British, but all paid up their quota. In a few cases

threats to seize stock to the value of the levy assessed were necessary before payment was made. Approximately £500 was collected by my unit. These activities were carried on, in addition to normal training, in the autumn of 1920.

The next operation undertaken in the area was the attack on and capture of Schull R.I.C. Barracks on October 4th 1920. The barracks was occupied by a Sergeant, twelve Black and Tans and a wireless operator. The building stood on its own ground in a field about a quarter mile from and overlooking the village at Meenvane. It was an isolated building and there was no cover within a reasonable distance. It was surrounded by barbed wire entanglements extending over a distance of about twenty feet from the walls. A narrow passage led through the entanglements to the back door and this was the only way by which the building could be approached.

By virtue of its commanding position, the task of capturing the barracks by assault was considered impracticable because it would inevitably result in heavy casualties for our attacking force. For that reason other means of taking the building had to be planned.

Every evening about 7.30 p.m. five of the garrison left the barracks for about half an hour. They went to the local railway station where the train arrived about that time and collected newspapers and mail. For weeks their every movement was watched and it was discovered that they regained admission by giving a password. From observation, on the actual spot almost, it was further learned that a password operated for

forty-eight hours. The local Company O/C (Jerry McCarthy) was responsible for this discovery - as he was for the password which we later used to capture the barracks. Seán Lehane planned to approach the barracks when the five of its occupants were absent. He was to knock loudly on the back door and, when challenged, give the current password. Should the door be opened, he and his men, armed with revolvers, would be ready to deal with any situation which might arise inside the building. The days went by. The local men watched; the leaders planned. At last the local O/C (Jerry McCarthy) intimated that the evening of October 4th 1920 was an opportune time to strike. He had overheard the password. It was KILMALLOCK. Seán Lehane decided to act. He selected his men for the main attacking party. They were: - Gibbs Ross (Battn. Adjutant), Seán O'Driscoll (O/C Ballydehob) - witness, Denis Wholey (Schull), Jim Hayes (Battn. Q/M), Jerh. McCarthy (O/C Schull), Tim Murphy (Schull), Paddy O'Neill (Schull), Tom Hickey (O/C Skehan^Nore), Denis Murphy (Schull) Charlie Cotter (Schull), Jack McCarthy (Durris)). Representatives of all companies in the battalion were engaged on outpost, road blocking and various other duties in connection with this operation.

The plan was simple but pregnant with danger. Like all simply planned things, it worked successfully. The twelve men left Cotter's house at Ardmanagh on the evening of October 4th 1920. We went across country to a boreen at Meenvane which led to the rear of the barracks. We delayed there for some time and then walked down the boreen. Seán Lehane knocked at the back door of the barracks. He was challenged. "Kilmallock"

he said in a clear, steady voice. Would the door open or would there be a hail of gunfire from the windows? Seconds went by. We all stood rigid, hardly daring to breathe. Here, now, entered another factor that, though anticipated, could spell disaster. It was the habit of attaching chains to all barrack doors so that they could not be rushed and forced fully open from outside. To deal with this, Charlie Cotter was armed with a 14 lbs sledge - his sole armour - and it was felt that no door or chain would withstand him. His known prowess was not, however, put to the test, for the door opened. Framed in it was Constable Michael Gleeson. Before he realised what was happening, we were all in the day-room shouting "hands up" and covering Sergeant Lorgan and the remaining eight men of the garrison with our guns. The R.I.C. and Tans were sitting around a table. They had been playing cards. Some of them still held cards in their hands, staring fatuously at us. The element of surprise was complete.

All the garrison were now ordered to stand up, holding their hands above their heads. Five of them wore arms, which were taken from them. All nine men were now herded into a room and I was placed in charge of them. Seán Lehane and the others then sallied out, anticipating the return of the five men who had gone to the train. They had timed it perfectly. They surprised the enemy party as they returned, disarmed them and brought them into the barracks, which was now searched for arms and ammunition.

That evening we took from the barracks thirteen rifles, twenty-six revolvers and Colt automatics, one hundred shotguns and revolvers collected from people in

the district, hundreds of rounds of ammunition and a number of Verey lights. Some of these rifles and ammunition were later used at Kilmichael ambush.

With the exception of the shotguns, which were given to the local companies, all the captured weapons were put into two cars - Dick Dempsey's Model T Ford car belonging to Duggan's Hotel, and Patsy Collins's car which he drove himself. They were then taken to Lynch's Hotel, Kilcrohane. The barracks was then set on fire. The members of the garrison were removed to Duggan's Hotel where they were forced to remain. Next day the captured arms were removed across Dunmanus Bay and placed in a dump.

We all got a real "kick" out of the success of this operation, but none more so than Seán Lehane (O/C). Some time previously Sergt. Lorgan, who was in charge of the barracks, had been responsible for sending Seán to gaol for making a speech in Irish outside Ballydehob Church. Giving evidence, he said, "Mr. Lehane spoke in a Hottentot language". Seán had now turned the tables. Next day when all the booty had been examined and stored away, a test showed that a number of the weapons we had obtained were useless. These were some of the weapons which had been taken up from the public. My souvenir of the operation was an American bulldog revolver which refused to bark on any of its six cylinders.

Towards the end of October, 1920, there were some changes in the Schull Battalion Staff as Denis Murphy, Vice O/C, who was a medical student, went back to college. The officers of the battalion now were:

O/C - Seán Lehane
 Vice O/C - Gibbs Ross
 Adj. - Jim Hayes
 Q/M - Seán McCarthy.

Early in November, 1920, a training camp was set up at Dunmanus. All companies in the battalion were represented by their officers at this camp. Tom Barry (Brigade O/C Training) was in charge of the camp, which continued at Dunmanus for two days and two nights. Those present at the camp then moved across country at night to Drealomane in Ballydehob area, where a similar period was spent in training until we moved on to Coosane where we finished training at the end of the week. An intensive course of training went on throughout the week. All were trained in the use and care of the rifle and small arms, the use of cover, the selection of ambush positions.

A Brigade Flying Column was now formed from selected men from the various battalions. Schull Battalion was represented on the first column by Paddy McCarthy (Kilcor), Tom McCarthy (Schull) and Tom O'Driscoll (Dunmanus). The rifles, ammunition and bombs captured in Schull R.I.C. Barracks were assembled at my home and taken by lorry and car by Seán Lehane and myself to beyond Kealkil where they were handed over to another section for transmission to Brigade H.Q. I recollect that on this occasion we left my home at 2 a.m. and the house was raided by British military at 6 a.m. Having delivered the arms at Kealkil we returned to Schull Battalion area.

About the end of 1920 the Battalion Q/M (Seán McCarthy) was courtmartialled and removed from the

Battalion Staff for failure to disclose information regarding an unauthorised raid which took place in the area and in which some relations of his took part. I was now appointed Battalion Q/M.

About a week after the ambush of the Auxiliary convoy at Kilmichael on November 28th 1920 I joined the column in Ballineen area. I was accompanied by Seán Lehane (Battalion O/C). Except for short spells during which we both returned to Schull area to attend to organisation matters, or to carry out other operations, we both continued to serve with the column until the Truce on July 11th 1921. Amongst the engagements in which I took part were:

- (1) Attack on British forces in Bandon on 24th January, 1921.
(pages 71-72)
- (2) Attack on Innishannon R.I.C. Barracks, 26th January, 1921.
(page 74).
- (3) Occupation of Skibbereen by I.R.A. on 9th February, 1921.
(pages 87 - 93).
- (4) Attack on Drimoleague R.I.C. Barracks on 12th February, 1921.
(page 93).
- (5) Invasion of Bandon by I.R.A. on 23rd February, 1921.
(pages 99 - 104).
- (6) Abortive ambush at Shippool on 17th March, 1921.
(page 123).
- (7) Fight at Crossbarry on March 19th 1921.
(Chapter 18).
- (8) Capture of Roscarbery R.I.C. Barracks on 31st March, 1921.
(Chapter 20).
- (9) Abortive ambush at Gloundaw on 28th May, 1921.
(Pages 199-200).

All these engagements are described in Tom Barry's book "Guerilla Days in Ireland" and I agree with

the description of these activities as recorded therein.

The O/C Schull Company (Jerh. McCarthy) was arrested by a Corporal of the Marines stationed at Schull at the end of January or early February, 1921. Following the arrest, the Corporal was transferred to Rock Island Marine Station. As this man had been extremely officious it was decided to shoot him, and, posing as a commercial traveller, I went to Crookhaven to carry out the job with two revolvers and a Mills bomb in my case. I was at the time back in the area from the column. It was necessary to remain in Crookhaven for a few days as the Marines on Rock Island only rowed across from the island to Crookhaven occasionally. They were usually in search of a few drinks at the local publichouse. I got accommodation in the publichouse (Byrne's) and remained there for three days. During this period the wanted man did not put in an appearance, so I had to return to Battalion H.Q., and later to the column, without completing the assignment.

On my return to the column I recollect that I accompanied Tom Barry (Column O/C) and Seán Lehane (Battn. O/C) into Rosscarbery in a pony and trap one night. We were armed with revolvers and were seeking any members of the R.I.C. garrison in the town who might be on patrol. We searched the town but found no enemy forces, so we took up a position in a laneway across the road from the barrack. We had only been in this position for a short time when a man dressed as a civilian passed. It was only when he turned into the barrack gate that we realised he was one of the garrison.

We waited until he got to the door, and when it was opened to admit him we opened fire. He dived in the door and it was rumoured later that both himself and the man who opened the door had been wounded. We withdrew from the town following this incident.

On Holy Thursday, 1921, it was about the end of March, the Bank Manager, Provincial Bank, Schull, and one of his assistants were taking cash to the branch of the bank at Ballydehob when they were held up by a party of masked and armed men who seized £500. The Battalion O/C (Seán Lehane) was in the area at the time and we decided to investigate the robbery as it was likely that the affair would be blamed on the I.R.A. On Good Friday we began investigations and by 3 p.m. I had arrested the main culprit. The other members of the raiding party were arrested within a week. The arms which the raiders used and the cash taken by them were found. The cash was returned to the bank. The raiders were courtmartialled and sentenced to deportation. The courtmartial was held on the Saturday week following the raid. I was now Battalion Vice O/C Schull, as Gibbs Ross had been appointed Brigade Adjutant to replace Liam Deasy who had become Brigade O/C.

While the raiders were awaiting trial they were held prisoners in the area between Durrus and Ballydehob. On the morning of the courtmartial some of our men, who were acting as armed guards over the prisoners, were observed by a lady member of a Protestant family named Daly. She went in to the Tans in Bantry and reported our presence in the area. A message was received from a member of Bantry Cumann na mBan that

this information had been given to the Tans. We immediately vacated the area with our prisoners and the district was raided by military from Bantry about 3 p.m. on the same evening.

Arising out of this matter, it was decided some weeks later to burn Daly's home at Lisheencreagh, Ballydehob, as a reprisal. I selected a number of men from Ballydehob Company and moved in on the Daly homestead one night towards the middle of May, 1921, I think. I informed the family that the house was being burned as a reprisal for the action of the daughter in supplying information to the enemy forces at Bantry. I gave them twenty minutes to remove any money or objects of sentimental value and then set the house on fire.

Within a week the Tans from Skibbereen arrived in the same area and burned the house of Mrs. O'Sullivan, Coolagh, as a counter reprisal. Mrs. O'Sullivan was a supporter of the I.R.A.

Following Gloundaw, on 28th May, 1921, a dispatch was received at Column H.Q. indicating that the District Inspector R.I.C. in Bandon had received instructions to watch the coast for a possible landing of arms. I was immediately detailed by the Brigade O/C (Liam Deasy) to proceed to Dublin to inform Mick Collins of this fact. I travelled from Kealkil to Cork on horseback. I then took the train to Dublin where I made contact with Mick Collins through "Christy" - the "boots" in Barry's Hotel, Gardiner's Row. I passed on the information regarding the enemy knowledge of the landing of arms to Collins and then took a course

of instruction in the maintenance and handling of the Thompson gun from two Yanks for one week. Having completed this course I returned to Cork by train.

Leaving Cork, I travelled by train to Crookstown where I proposed to leave the train and travel across country to my home area. As the train entered Crookstown railway station it was surrounded by a large force of Auxiliaries from Macroom. All passengers were questioned. I explained that I was a cow-testing supervisor and was going to work in Macroom. Having answered several other questions, I apparently convinced those in charge that my story was true and they passed on to the next carriage. Eventually when the interrogation of the passengers had been completed, a number of them were taken away under escort as, apparently, their answers were not satisfactory. In order to obviate the possibility of further questioning, I slipped down between two carriages and crossed to the other side of the train where I entered another carriage and lay down, feigning sleep.

The train pulled out from Crookstown and I left it at the next station - Dooniskey. I had then decided to go to Joe O'Sullivan's, Gurraneleigh, to leave Tom Barry's suit, which I had worn on the trip to Dublin, there. I was within about a half mile of O'Sullivan's house when I was stopped by an old woman who was going to the well for water. She informed me that I was walking into the headquarters of Major Percival's column, which was operating in the district and had set up H.Q. at O'Sullivan's. After obtaining some refreshments from the woman, I changed direction

and proceeded across country towards Kealkil, which I reached that night. Eventually, after travelling for three days across country on foot, I reached Column H.Q. which was in a dug-out in Schull Battalion area. I then furnished a report on my trip to Dublin.

As the enemy forces in West Cork were being reinforced about this time, instructions were received to burn Schull Workhouse which was suitable for occupation by a fairly strong garrison. This job was allocated to the members of Schull and Glaun Companies, while at the same time the Battalion Column, under Seán Lehane and myself, carried out an attack on the Marine Station, Schull. The combined force was assembled at "The Gap" on the Bantry-Schull road about 10 p.m. We were just ready to move off to our selected positions when a dispatch rider arrived from Ballydehob Company. He informed us that there was a strong force of military encamped at Drealomane School. After a short discussion we decided (Seán Lehane and I) to call off the operation in view of the information conveyed by the messenger. The men from the local companies were then sent home. The column was withdrawn to Dunmanus Pier, where we found boats to take us across the bay to Muintrevara. When we landed at the other side of the bay the local scouts informed us that the British had sealed off the area between Skibbereen, Mizen Head and the sea. We had escaped encirclement. We remained in Muintrevara while the enemy forces were searching our home area, and when they had withdrawn next evening we returned to Schull. We opened an attack on the Marine Station that night to keep the garrison busy while the men of the local companies were burning the Workhouse.

Within a few days the Schull Battalion Column, under Seán Lehane and myself - we were now both back from the Brigade Column - took up a position at Barry's Mills on the Ballydehob-Bantry road. We were expecting a convoy of two lorries of military to pass through as they had been making occasional raids in the district. Although we remained in position from dawn to dark there was no appearance by the enemy.

We repeated similar tactics in the town of Ballydehob within the week, when we took up positions in the evening and remained all night. Again the expected enemy patrol did not turn up.

Our next major operation took place about mid June when we raided the Fastnet Lighthouse and removed about a ton of gun-cotton. This explosive was badly needed at the time for the manufacture of mines. It was difficult to obtain as the British were storing their supplies in lighthouses along the coast as a precaution against seizure. However, the local fishermen kept us informed as to the quantities and times that gun-cotton was stored in the Fastnet. Seán Lehane (O/C) decided that the lighthouse must be raided and a supply of explosives obtained. With the co-operation of the Schull and Cape Clear fishermen, we (Seán Lehane, Jim Hayes and I) planned an invasion of the lighthouse, which stands about three miles south west of Cape Clear and some twelve miles from the mainland.

We planned to carry out the raid on a Saturday night or early Sunday morning. John O'Regan, the proprietor of the Pier Road Hotel, Schull, who knew most of the south west coast like the palm of his hand, was to

operate the boat and effect a landing. It may be said that due to his skill and daring the raid proved a success. About 5 p.m. one Saturday evening in mid June, he (John O'Regan) with Wm. Daly, in a motor boat owned by William Cadogan, picked up Seán Lehane, Jim Hayes and myself at Long Island point and set out for Cape Clear. It was obvious to these men that the famous - or should it be infamous - Fastnet swill would not permit a boat to approach the rock that night. The operation was postponed. O'Regan and Daly returned to Leamcon near Schull while we (Lehane, Hayes and myself) went ashore on Cape Clear island. About the same time on Sunday evening John O'Regan, Wm. Daly, Michael Murphy (Gunpoint), Tim Murphy (Colla) and Charlie Cotter (Schull) landed on Cape Clear. A British destroyer stationed at Crookhaven was circling the Fastnet. It was decided that, if challenged, we would pretend that we were fishermen. Indeed, of the eleven men who were to undertake the job, seven were actually fishermen. The mail boat, named the Máire Cáit, belonging to Tadhg O'Regan, Cape Clear, was commandeered for the job. On the island (Cape Clear) this party were joined by Seán Lehane, Jim Hayes, Seán O'Driscoll - witness - and three islanders - Dan O'Driscoll, Dan Leonard and Dan Daly.

As the June sun tipped the rim of the horizon, O'Regan took the Máire Cáit out of the North Harbour, swung her north west, then westwards, steering into a flaring sunset. Up from the south came the destroyer, her grey bulkheads plunging through a golden sea, a plume of white foam in her wake.

The destroyer passed, heading for Crookhaven and soon disappearing into the half light that followed the sinking of the sun. The sea took on a greyish tint, became fretful, as a sundown breeze rippled its surface. Not far away, towards the Fastnet, its light streaked miles out to sea. After midnight our boat approached the Fastnet. Moonlight flooded the sea. An oily swell lazily heaved itself up and down, sucking at small cavities in the rocks, plopping with a dull thud on the bulwarks of the lighthouse. Our boat came nearer, rising and falling with the heaving of the sea. Poised on the bow was John O'Regan, a rope tied to his waist, a revolver in his pocket. It was his job to jump on to the landing platform. He had to time his leap to a nicety. As a lazy wave erupted its strength from the fathoms deep foundations of the rock, our boat rose high over the landing place. O'Regan jumped, the rope trailing behind him, and landed on the concrete space before the huge door of the lighthouse. In a split second he was pulling at the rope, bringing the boat into the rock. When the boat reached the rock we all got on to the platform. The steel door of the lighthouse was open. O'Regan led the way up the circular stairway to the light-room, where we held up the lighthousekeeper on duty and informed him that we had come for the gun-cotton. The other two keepers were then rounded up and we removed the gun-cotton and detonators from the stores. In all, we took away seventeen boxes of gun-cotton and three boxes of detonators. They were all swung from the lighthouse on to the boat below. In about half an hour we were making our way in the Máire Cáit to Leamcon near Schull Harbour. As we entered Long Island channel the lights

of the British destroyer appeared astern. There was a momentary flutter of excitement. The lights disappeared and fifteen minutes later the spoils from the Fastnet were safe on shore. Next day the gun-cotton was being distributed to I.R.A. units throughout the Cork brigades.

It was now decided that further reprisals were necessary on our part to offset the enemy's counter reprisal of burning the house of Mrs. O'Sullivan, Coolagh, some days earlier. The houses of two British loyalists were selected for destruction - those of - Daly, Lisheencreagh and R.J. Wood, Fort View, Ballydehob. It should be noted that this was a second house of Daly's, in which they had been living since the destruction of their original home in the circumstances described on page 15. These houses were burned on the night of June 28th 1921 by men from Ballydehob Company under my command.

I had only completed the burning of these houses when I was informed that Wm. O'Regan - a native of Kilcor and a member of the I.R.A. in Cork City - had died and that his remains had reached Kilcor Church that evening. I decided to give him a military funeral. Next morning I rode on horseback to Kilcor Church, placed a tricolour on the coffin and accompanied the funeral on horseback to Skibbereen Abbey within a mile of the military H.Q. at Skibbereen. When the grave had been closed I fired three volleys over it with two revolvers and then withdrew across country.

Between the end of June and the Truce on July 11th 1921 there was no appearance by enemy forces of any kind in Schull Battalion area.

Shortly prior to the Truce on July 11th 1921 Cork 111 Brigade area was reorganised. As the area extended from Innishannon to Castletownbere - a distance of approximately 80 miles - it was decided to divide it into two brigades - Cork 111 and Cork V. The battalions at the western end of the area - Bantry, Castletownbere, Schull, Skibbereen, and a new battalion, Drimoleague - were formed into Cork V Brigade. The first officers of this brigade were: -

O/C - Gibbs Ross
 Vice O/C - Ted O'Sullivan
 Adjt. - Mick Crowley
 Q/M - Jim Hayes.

At this time the officers of Schull Battalion were:

O/C - Seán Lehane
 Vice O/C - Seán O'Driscoll (witness)
 Adjt. - Seán Murphy
 Q/M - Edward O'Sullivan.

A few days prior to the Truce, Seán Lehane, O/C, and Seán Murphy, Adjt., were transferred to Dunmanway Battalion in Cork 111 Brigade and the Schull Battalion officers now were: -

O/C - Seán O'Driscoll (witness)
 Vice O/C - Tom Hickey
 Adjt. - Denis O'Mahoney
 Q/M - Edward O'Sullivan.

My rank at the Truce - O/C Schull Battalion, Cork V Brigade, I.R.A. The strength of the battalion was about 600.

On the termination of hostilities I set up Battalion H.Q. at my home in Ballydehob, from where the administrative work of the battalion was carried on.

Training camps, at which the members were put through an intensive course of training in all aspects of military operations, were now established in each company area. Each camp continued for 14 days and at the end of three months every I.R.A. man in the area had undergone a thorough course of training.

About October, 1921, I took over a vacant house in Schull to which H.Q. was transferred. As there were no cooking utensils or bedding in the house, the staff were billeted on the town - so many to each house for a week at a time. We continued to administer the affairs of the battalion from ^{this} the H.Q. until February, 1922, when I took over, on behalf of the Provisional Government, the Marine Station at Schull and Rock Island base from the British. Rock Island was now closed down and Battalion H.Q. was set up in the Marine Station with a garrison of about forty men.

Normal training went on throughout the battalion until the attack by Provisional Government forces on the I.R.A. H.Q. in the Four Courts, Dublin, on June 28th 1922. I then decided to stand by the Republic and fight against the Provisional Government forces. I continued to do so until I was wounded and captured on Easter Sunday, 1923. I was tried by courtmartial at Bantry and sentenced to death. The carrying out of the sentence on May 1st 1923 was prevented by the coming into force of the Cease Fire order issued from I.R.A. Headquarters which came into effect on April 30th, 1923.

I was removed to Cork Gaol in June, 1923, my sentence having been commuted to 21 years' penal servitude. Later I was transferred to Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, where I underwent a forty-one day hunger-strike. I was released under the general amnesty in July, 1924.

Signed:

Seán O'Driscoll

Date:

25/10/56

Witness:

P. L. Donnell.
(Investigator).

BUREAU C	BY 1913-21
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