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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S. 1,523**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1523.

Witness

Daniel Cashman,
12, Cliftonville Road,
Glasnevin,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'B' Company, 4th Battn.,
and member of E. Cork Flying Column.

Subject.

Activities of East Cork Flying Column,
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S.2835.**

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY DANIEL CASHMAN

12, Cliftonville Road, Glasnevin, Dublin.

I am a native of Midleton, County Cork, where I joined the local Volunteer Company in 1917. The Company Captain at the time was a man named John Brady. There were about twenty-five men in the Company then, and, so far as I can remember, there seemed very little arms, perhaps a few revolvers and a few shotguns.

I was one of the first members of the East Cork Flying Column which was started in October, 1920, with Diarmuid Hurley of Midleton in charge.

The Column at first comprised about ten or twelve men. Names of some of the first members were Joseph Aherne and Jack Aherne, T. Buckley, Richard Hegarty, Mick Murnane, Paddy Whelan, Michael and Daniel Desmond and Michael Hallahan. Most of these men were from the Midleton district. The Column was fairly well armed with revolvers, police carbines and rifles, which had been captured on the occasion of the successful attack on Carrigtwohill R.I.C. barracks on 3rd January, 1920, and from the Cameron Highlanders at Mile Bush near Midleton, County Cork, on 5th June, 1920.

Ambush of Military at Churchtown North.

On 26th August, 1920, I took part, with other members of the Midleton Company, in an attack on a lorry of soldiers of the Cameron Highland Regiment in the district of Churchtown North, at a point on the main Cork-Midleton-Youghal road, about two miles east of the town of Midleton. Joseph Aherne was in charge of the attacking party, in the absence of Diarmuid Hurley who had returned to his home in West Cork for a few days.

It was customary for the military in Middleton to patrol the district around, in lorries, with about ten soldiers or so in each lorry. It was one of these patrols that Joseph Aherne planned to ambush.

On the forenoon of the day in question I went to Churchtown with about seven or eight others from the Middleton Company. I was armed with a revolver. Previous to our arrival a Volunteer named Mick Kearney had half cut a tree alongside the road at the point of attack. A wedge had been inserted in the cut, and ropes attached to the tree which was to be pulled across the road on the approach of the military lorry. When the lorry was forced to stop, fire would be opened by us on the occupants with a view to their capture.

One of our men, Sean Kelleher of Middleton, was instructed to remain in Middleton to watch the military lorry leaving the town. He was then to report the route of the lorry, and strength of the enemy, to Joseph Aherne at Churchtown. Kelleher was on a motor bicycle.

Some time after midday when we were in position, Kelleher came along on his motor bicycle and reported that two lorries (instead of the one we anticipated) had left Middleton and had proceeded in a more southerly direction towards Ballycotton via the village of Cloyne. This information resulted in a slight change of plans by Joseph Aherne as he had now to deal with two lorries instead of one and, instead of approaching our position from the west, the enemy would now come along from the east. The positions of our attacking force inside the hedges on the roadside were altered to meet the new situation.

Here I should mention that one of our party that day was Phil Hyde of Ballinacurra near Middleton. Hyde was an ex-British Army man who had been recently demobbed and had joined the

Ballinacurra Company of Volunteers. He was reputed to be a crack shot with a rifle and, for that reason, he was stationed at a point about fifty yards on the Churchtown road side (east) of the tree giving him a clear view of the approaching enemy lorries. His job was to shoot the drivers of the lorries. Hyde was armed with a rifle.

My particular job was to pull on the ropes attached to the half-cut tree immediately a shot rang out from Hyde. There were two other Volunteers on the ropes with me.

Sometime about 4 p.m. we heard the noise of a lorry in the distance and one of our scouts signalled its approach from the east. One lorry only came along and Hyde fired. Immediately the three of us detailed for the job pulled on the tree. It moved very slowly down. Meanwhile, the lorry approached rapidly, the soldiers firing and being fired on by our lads. We strained on the rope; we actually jumped on it to try and get the tree down across the road in front of the lorry. The tree eventually did crash down but, unfortunately, only to brush the end of the lorry as it tore by. Firing was intense on both sides as the military drove rapidly out of range.

I, and the three lads who had pulled down the tree, now found ourselves in an awkward predicament. We heard the lorry stop about two hundred yards up the road and we three of us were almost buried by the branches of the tree which had fallen on us, making it very difficult for us to extricate ourselves. When we heard the lorry pull up we were positive that the military were getting out to continue the fight and we were trapped. However, things turned out alright. What apparently happened was that Phil Hyde

either killed or badly wounded the military driver and the lorry pulled up to change drivers. Shortly afterwards we heard it re-start, the military driving away rapidly to their barracks at Midleton.

I cannot say with any certainty what casualties our lads inflicted on the enemy that day, apart from killing or wounding the driver of the lorry.

Those who took part in the engagement at Churchtown, whose names I remember, were :- Joseph Aherne (in charge), Paddy Whelan, Mick Murnane, Jim Denny, Michael Desmond, Daniel Desmond, Mick Kearney and Phil Hyde. Joseph Aherne brought the rifles and shotguns used in the attack away in a car, whilst I went south towards Ballycotton with some others.

Ambush laid for General Strickland.

It was in the month of September, 1920, when, one day, I noticed a British staff car with officers at the chemist's shop next door to my home in Midleton. The party was headed for Youghal. On hearing that the British General Strickland was one of the officers in the car, I immediately contacted Joseph Aherne and told him what I had seen and heard. He decided that we should collect some of our lads to ambush Strickland on his way back from Youghal. Armed with revolvers, Joseph Aherne, myself, Jer. Aherne and one of the brothers Desmond, all from the Midleton Company, proceeded westwards towards Carrigtwohill and at a laneway called "the Dark Road", about 400 yards east of Carrigtwohill, we prepared to wait for Strickland. We had a donkey and cart in the laneway: this was to be pulled out on to the main road to halt, or, at least, slow up, Strickland's car when it came up to our position. We waited a few hours but no sign of our

quarry. Joe Aherne, having made up his mind that Strickland had returned to Cork by another route, decided that we should return to Midleton. On the road back we met a man with a jennet and crib (creel). We all piled into the crib and were within about two miles from Midleton (at the Mile Bush) when we met two or three lorry loads of military coming out from Midleton. We immediately jumped out of the crib, through a gate into the house of the Protestant Minister, through a grove and out into the fields. We were heavily fired on as we crossed a broad field and were compelled to take cover in a 'brake'. The military followed up and into the field where we had taken cover. The soldiers were so close to me that I could hear one of them talking to the officer in charge of the party. However, none of us was spotted, the soldiers moved off and after some time we got out of our hiding place and made our way safely back to Midleton.

We learned later that Strickland had, in fact, returned to Cork that same evening by another road to that on which we lay in ambush.

Column surrounded by military in Cloyne.

During late November and the early part of December, 1920, the Column lay in various ambush positions in the Aghada area south of Cloyne with the idea of engaging enemy forces from Fort Carlisle at the southern approach to Cobh harbour. We failed to make contact and, on the night of 7th December, 1920, we moved into the village of Cloyne and billeted in the house of a man named Walsh who was, himself, a member of the Cloyne Company and 'on the run'. There were about a dozen of us in Walsh's that night all armed with rifles. Diarmuid Hurley was the officer in charge. Joseph Aherne, who was second in command, had left us on the 7th and gone to rest up near Midleton as he was ill at the time.

On the morning of 8th December some of us were still in bed and some were up and dressed when Hurley's attention was directed to a window across the road where a woman was shaking the window blind in an effort to attract the attention of some of us in Walsh's house. It was obvious that the woman was trying to convey a warning of some kind. Hurley looked out of a window cautiously and noticed British troops positioned outside and in front of the house. It was clear then that a raid was intended.

We were told what was happening and ordered by Hurley to keep absolute silence until the soldiers tried to effect an entry. Hurley then was on the landing within view of the hall door; Paddy Whelan was with him and I stood behind them. The soldiers started to smash in the door panels and got into the hall. As they did, Hurley opened fire on them from the top of the stairs, as did another of our men named Jack Ahern who happened to be sleeping in the kitchen downstairs which was on a level with the hall door. The soldiers beat a hasty retreat and retired to positions covering the house front and rear. One soldier, at least, was wounded in this first exchange of shots. Neither Paddy Whelan or myself fired from the landing, as Hurley was standing right in front of us and we couldn't get in a shot for fear of hitting him.

We were then instructed to get into the yard at the back of the house which was surrounded by a fairly high wall. From the firing which came from all points we knew that the house was encircled by enemy forces and Hurley's problem now was to get us out of the trap. There was a large gate which led into the yard of Walsh's house, from the main road. Directly across the main road was an opening gateway which led to the back of the village of Cloyne. Hurley decided that the Column should rush across the road in ones and twos

to the gateway opposite under covering fire by Paddy Whelan. The latter got into position at Walshe's gate and opened rifle fire on the soldiers who were on the roadway of the village. Under this covering fire all the Column got safely to the other side. When Jack Aherne, who was one of the first across the street, got to the gateway, he, too, opened fire on the military from his position and facilitated the crossing of the rest of his comrades. When all the Column had got over, Paddy Whelan then crossed to safety under fire from the enemy. We suffered no casualties on the occasion and eventually got away into the fields to safety.

While all this was happening word was sent by some local Volunteer to Ballinacurra, three miles distant, that the Column was surrounded in Cloyne. Tom Hyde, (later killed in Spain) a brother of Phil's previously mentioned in connection with the Churchtown ambush, hurriedly got together a party of Volunteers and they were actually on their way to Cloyne to help us when word was received that we were safe and sound.

Attack on Black and Tans in Midleton.

So far as I can recollect now, the date was 28th September, 1920, when the following engagement took place in the town of Midleton.

It was learned that the Black and Tans patrolled Main Street, Midleton, each night at about 8 o'clock and Diarmuid Hurley decided that the Column should move in to Midleton and attack this patrol.

The day before the attack took place the Column moved to the outskirts of Midleton and, under cover of darkness, went into the town and took up quarters in a sawmills off Charles Street.

There were about ten of us altogether. We were armed with revolvers and rifles. So far as I can remember, some Middleton men, not regular members of the Column, also took part in the action which followed.

Paddy Whelan and one other Volunteer were instructed to go on to the Main Street and report back as to the strength and disposition of the Black and Tan patrol. They did so, and told Diarmuid that the patrol operated on either side of the street, four on one side in pairs with the same distance between each pair; the remainder, numbering eight to ten, on the other side. Jack Aherne and I were instructed to get in between the two pairs on the eastern side of the street and to get the leading pair: the pair behind were to be looked after by other Volunteers.

We got into the doorway of Paul McCarthy's at the lower end of the town (this house was subsequently razed to the ground as an official reprisal) and slipped in about fifteen yards behind the first pair and, pretending to be inebriated, we sang our way up the town gradually getting near our objective.

At Charles Street corner we were within two yards of the two Tans and we immediately opened fire, getting both of them. (This was the signal for the action to begin).

Jack Aherne then turned on the pair behind us, killing one and capturing the other. . . Turning quickly Jack Aherne saw the next two Tans close behind; he opened fire on them and one fell. He followed up the other who had run away and fired at him. Meanwhile, shooting broke out up and down the street and I saw a Tan at Church Lane corner firing towards the main street. As he ran I fired on him with what result I cannot say but I was hit in the chest by a bullet

from him and was providentially saved by a cigarette case which I carried in my breast pocket.

The engagement lasted about a quarter of an hour or so. The enemy patrol was wiped out, the lot numbering about a dozen being either killed or wounded. I can certainly vouch for the fact that Jack Aherne and I killed three of them. Revolvers and ammunition were taken from the dead and wounded Tans after which the Column moved southwards to avoid contact with reinforcing enemy troops, much superior to us both in numbers and equipment.

Column attacked at Clonmult.

In the month of January, 1921, it was after the engagement at Midleton to which I have referred, the Column, under Diarmuid Hurley, moved to a disused farmhouse outside the village of Clonmult about three miles north of Midleton. We were billeted there until the surprise attack by the military on 20th February, 1921, when we suffered heavy casualties in killed and prisoners.

By way of explanation for the Column's long stay at Clonmult, it should be recorded that the farmhouse in which we stayed was used as a headquarters for collections for the Dáil Loan which were being carried out in the surrounding districts at that time. The collectors brought the subscriptions to our billet; the monies were then checked by Diarmuid Hurley and sent on to the house of a man named Cronin in the village of Clonmult. To my certain knowledge Diarmuid Hurley objected to the Column being kept so long in Clonmult during this work, as, he maintained it was not part of their duty or his. I would like to stress this point, as, undoubtedly, the lengthy stay of the Column for five or six weeks in the one place was, in a great measure, responsible for the tragic events of Sunday 20th February, 1921.

On the Friday before the fateful Sunday, I had left the Column for the week-end in company with Jack Aherne. We were replaced, as was usual, by two other Volunteers. On Sunday, 20th February, 1921, Jack and I were in Ballinacurra drilling and training the local Company. We were to return to the Column on the next day (Monday). On Sunday night we came into Midleton and saw lorries with military and Black and Tans drawn up outside Midleton Barracks. Jack suggested that we would go out on the Cork road and ambush them. We collected another Volunteer named Joe Kinsella, went out the road about a mile and a half and hurriedly built a barricade of stones on the road. We then got inside the hedge and waited for the lorries. When the military came along we blazed into them with revolvers. They burst through the barricade firing as they went and continued on to Cork. We had no idea then (about 9 p.m.) that the lorries contained some of our boys captured in Clonmult a few hours previously, nor had we any idea that the Column had been practically wiped out. That night we stayed at a farmer's house at Ballinacurra and it was there we learned what had happened at Clonmult, from the woman of the house.

Following the disaster at Clonmult, Diarmuid Hurley, Joseph Aherne, Paddy Whelan, Jack Aherne, Jack O'Connell, Phil Hyde and myself kept together as a party and carried out what might be termed nuisance attacks on the enemy from time to time.

At this period the manufacture of land mines was begun in the Ballinacurra district. Shells discharged by the British at target practice from Forts Carlisle and Camden at the entrance to Cobh Harbour were picked up by fishermen in their nets and used as ballast in their boats. Some of these empty shell cases were collected

and filled with explosives by the Ballinacurra Volunteers. Maurice Heaphy, a motor mechanic in Midleton, made effective electric detonators. One of these mines was exploded under a lorry carrying military at Ballyedekin, Churchtown, on 10th April, 1921, causing some British casualties. As a reprisal, the British shot up the town of Midleton that same night and, early the following morning, bombed my home in the town.

Early in May, 1921, with six or eight other men some from the Column and some from Ballinacurra, I took part in a night attack on Midleton Barracks. The attack was undertaken more for its nuisance value than with any idea of capturing the place. It was situated at the eastern end of the town on the main street; the defences were strengthened with barbed wire entanglements at a distance in front and at the rear of the building, in addition to the customary steel-shuttered windows with which enemy barracks were fitted.

On the occasion in question, two Ballinacurra men brought one of the land mines, already referred to, as close to the barracks as possible under cover of darkness. We were in position in houses opposite the barracks. When the mine exploded we saw that it had been placed too far away from the barracks wall to cause a breach. It had proved impossible to lay the mine closer because of the barbed wire defences. Windows in the barracks and nearby houses were shattered but, apart from that, no damage was done to the barracks building. However, we kept up continuous rifle fire on the building for a quarter of an hour or so. No police or military ventured out although they did reply vigorously with rifles and machine gun from inside the barracks. We then withdrew from the town.

In the middle of May, 1921, an order was received from Brigade Headquarters that all British military personnel in uniform should be shot at sight whether they were armed or unarmed. The date, so far as I can recollect was 14th May, 1921. In compliance with this order, Phil Hyde and I met with two British Marines in the neighbourhood of Ramhill, Ballinacurra. We fired on them, killing both.

On 28th May, 1921, Diarmuid Hurley, O/C. of the Column, was shot dead in an encounter with a patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans. Hurley was proceeding on foot alone from the district of Middleton to Carrigtwohill when he suddenly encountered the patrol. He fired and dashed into the fields and had got about four hundred yards from the enemy, who had opened fire on him, when he was hit by a bullet.

Diarmuid Hurley, better known as "The Gaffer", was a fearless leader. He was a strict disciplinarian, particularly as regards drink. When planning an attack on the enemy he never worried about the odds against him, believing that a surprise attack with a very much inferior force, would sway the balance in his favour. His death was a very great loss to the Column and to the 'Movement' generally in East Cork. After his death Paddy Whelan was appointed to take his place.

From the time "The Gaffer" was killed up to the Truce of 11th July, 1921, we were mainly engaged in carrying out harassing attacks on the enemy, sniping at barracks and military patrols, felling trees to block roads and suchlike. I happened to be in the Ballycotton district when news of the Truce on 11th July, 1921, came and hostilities against the British ceased.

SIGNED:

Shackman

DATE:

30 October 1956

WITNESS:

D. Gorman

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