

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1542

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1542.

Witness

Richard Collins,  
Rock Island,  
Goleen,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Battalion O/C, Signals, Schull Battalion,  
Cork III Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Schull Battalion, Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Cork, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2853.

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY RICHARD COLLINSRock Island, Goleen, Co.Cork.

I was born at Rock Island, Goleen, on December 8th, 1893. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Goleen National School until I reached the age of 14 years, when I left school to work on my parents' farm. I worked on the farm until 1912 when I got employment as a temporary light-keeper on the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse. I was employed in this capacity until 1918.

I joined the Goleen company of the Irish Volunteers in the Spring of 1918. The strength at the time was 12/15, but as the threat of conscription approached the membership increased to about 30. The O/C. of the unit was James O'Mahoney - a medical student at University College, Cork. He was the prime mover in the formation of the Volunteers in the area and was a member of the University College Company, Cork Brigade. The company in the early stages embraced an area which included Lisagriffin and Goleen, to become, at a later stage, two separate companies. The officers of the unit about the middle of 1918 were:- O/C. James O'Mahoney; 1st Lieutenant - Con O'Reilly; Adjutant - Richard Collins (witness).

The only type of training carried on was ordinary close order footdrill under our own officers. Parades were held in the fields in the district on a couple of nights each week and, occasionally, on Sunday evenings the company went on a route march to neighbouring areas. The only arms held by the unit were about a dozen shotguns which were the property of individual members of the company or their parents.

During the conscription period we were all engaged in organising the general public to resist conscription, obtaining

ORIGINAL

signatures to the anti-conscription pledge, and collecting subscriptions for the anti-conscription fund. Beyond these activities there was no other activity in the area at this stage. When the conscription scare had passed, the majority of the men who joined up while the scare was on continued to serve.

Normal training continued throughout 1918. In addition, several raids for arms were carried out in the area. A number of shotguns as well as a Winchester rifle and a revolver were taken in these raids, which were carried out by the officers of the company. The rifle and revolver were taken from the home of an ex-member of the R.I.C. As well as carrying on the normal training, the members of the company (Goleen) took part in the organisation and collection of the first Dáil Éireann Loan. Approximately £500 was subscribed in the area for which I held the vouchers until the Loan was repaid to all subscribers.

Training continued and the strength of the unit grew slowly until towards the end of 1919 it had reached about 60. The majority of the new recruits had been carefully 'vetted' by the officers before acceptance.

Early in 1920, Sean Lehane came into the area. He was engaged in organising the Volunteers - now the I.R.A. - in the Schull Peninsula. When he had completed the work of organisation there were units in Lisagriffin (Patsy Wilcox O/C.), Goleen (Con O'Reilly), Dunmanus (Mark Lucey), Leamcon (Ml. Donovan), Glaun (Ed. Sullivan), Schull (Jerh. McCarthy), Skehanore (Tim Ryan), Ballydehob (Sean O'Driscoll). These units were now formed into Schull Battalion, Cork III Brigade. The first officers of the battalion were:- O/C. Sean Lehane; V.O/C. Gibbs Ross; Adjutant - Sean McCarthy; Q.M. Jim Hayes.

It was during Sean Lehane's tour of organisation that Goleen Company was divided into two - Goleen and Lisagriffin - units. The officers of Goleen Company at this time were: O/C. Con O'Reilly; 1st Lieut. Tom Barry; 2nd Lieut. Tim Coughlan; Adjutant - Richard Collins (witness). In addition to my duties as adjutant, Goleen, I was also responsible for the organisation and training of signalling units throughout the battalion. I was appointed battalion lieutenant of signalling, Schull Battalion.

On 31st May 1920, a party from Bantry Battalion, under Ted O'Sullivan, acting in cooperation with Sean Lehane, carried out a raid on Mizen Head Fog Station. They seized a large quantity of guncotton, detonators and wireless equipment. The captured material was removed in a lorry owned by Patsy Nugent, Dunbeacon, which travelled the coast road by Dunmanus Bay to Lisagriffin Cross and then on to Mizen Head. I did not take part in this operation.

Prior to the raid on the Mizen Head Fog Station, we had already destroyed by fire the evacuated R.I.C. barrack at Goleen at Easter 1920. We had been assisted by some men from the Schull area.

Within a few days of the raid on the 'Mizen' a convoy of two enemy lorries took another consignment of explosives to the magazine at Rock Island. This was the main magazine from which explosives were supplied to 'Mizen Head' and the 'Fastnet'. The military remained on guard at Rock Island all night. Next morning, when the carter who was to convey the first supply of explosives to Mizen Head had been sent for, the military left for their base. The carter duly arrived, loaded the explosives on to his cart, placed a red flag in the centre of the load to indicate that he was carrying explosives and drove to Mizen Head without an escort. Several members of the

Goleen and Lisagriffin Companies were mobilised. Two horses and carts were procured and we marched to Mizen Head Station where we seized the fresh supply of explosives amounting to about half a ton. These explosives were dumped in the area and later distributed throughout the brigade as required. Patsy Wilcox was in charge of this job.

On the night of 15th August 1920, I took part with members of Lisagriffin, Goleen and Dunmanus companies in the capture of the fortified British post at Brow Head. This post was surrounded by a barbed wire entanglement which tapered to the roof of the building. It was impossible to approach the place in daylight to examine the defences of the post, but entrance to the building was gained with the help of a local schoolboy - Stephen Downey - whose parents supplied milk to the garrison. He was permitted to approach the post through a special entrance and through this he led us. Only seven or eight men took part in the actual operation, but a large number of others were engaged in scouting and outpost duty. Amongst those who took part were:- Patsy Wilcox, Jim O'Mahoney, Jerry Driscoll, Con O'Reilly, Richard Collins, (witness), Tim O'Mahoney, Denis Hegarty and Denis O'Sullivan, as well as Stephen Downey who acted as guide. We got into the post without much difficulty, held up the garrison and removed a small supply of arms, some ammunition, two telescopes, some binoculars and a wireless receiving set. After this raid the garrison was withdrawn from this post and, about three weeks later, we visited the place and destroyed the building.

When the brigade flying column was formed at the end of September or early October 1920, the Brigade Council - made up of representatives from all battalions in the brigade - decided to make a levy on all land-holders and property owners in the

area in order to provide funds to keep the column 'in the field'. The responsibility for the collection of this levy fell on the shoulders of the officers of each company in their own area. The majority of the people in our area were small farmers - many in struggling circumstances - and it was decided to make a minimum levy of one pound (£1) on each householder. The levy in some cases amounted to £5. Many of the people contributed more than the amount levied and often much more than they could afford.

A training camp, which was attended by representatives of all companies in the Schull battalion, was held in Dunmanus area early in November 1920. The representatives from Goleen Company were:- Con O'Reilly (O/C.); Tom Barry (1st Lieut.), Tim Coughlan (2nd Lieut.), and Richard Collins (witness). We went into camp in the evening, trained there next day and moved that night to Dreelomane, north west of Ballydehob, where we remained next day. We moved that night to the mountain district - Mount Kidd - north of Ballydehob, where training was carried on for the remainder of the week. We were trained in the care and use of arms, the use of cover, the selection of ambush positions, and, on the final day, each man fired five rounds from a Service rifle in a musketry practice. As well as undergoing the normal course of training at this camp, I instructed the men engaged in scouting and outpost duty in signalling - both semaphore and Morse. Tom Barry (Brigade O/C. Training) was in charge of this camp.

On the termination of the camp, all men returned to their own units. During the following week an order was received from Brigade H.Q. to send one man from each company to serve with the brigade column. Tom Barry (1st Lieut) left to join the column as representative from our company (Goleen). With

the representatives of other companies from Schull Battalion he went to the Dunmanway area where, it was understood, they could make contact with the column. However, Tom Barry (1st Lt.) and the others returned to the area after a couple of days as they had failed to make contact with the column. Within a few days Gibbs Ross (battalion adjutant) and Jim Hayes (Q.M.) arrived in Goleen area to investigate the failure of our company representative (Tom Barry, 1st Lt.) to report to the column. The company (Goleen) was paraded, but the man who went to the column did not turn out. The Company O/C. (Con O'Reilly) was asked to get the missing man, but he refused. He was summarily dismissed from his position and I was appointed O/C. Goleen Company that night. I carried on this job in addition to my duties as battalion lieutenant of signals. The officers of Goleen Company now were:- O/C. Richard Collins (witness); 1st Lt. - Tim O'Mahoney; 2nd Lt. - Jerome Hegarty; Adjutant - Steve Barry; Q.M. - Wm. McCormack.

The vacancy on the brigade column created by the failure of Tom Barry to report was filled at this parade by John Collins who volunteered for service. He was one of the men referred to in Tom Barry's book "Guerilla Days in Ireland" who drove into the ambush position at Kilmichael just as the convoy of Auxiliaries, which was liquidated there, was approaching.

I think it was about this time that all bicycles in the area were taken up for use by our forces on such duties as scouting, dispatch carrying and a general means of transport. The owners of all bicycles seized were supplied with receipts for same by the officer in charge of each area.

At this stage, enemy forces were becoming very active in the search for members of the I.R.A. They usually moved in

fairly strong forces and, in order to impede their freedom of movement, most of the roads in the area were now trenched, blocked with barricades of stones or felled trees. This work involved continuous service by the members of the local companies. Most of the officers were now on the run and were engaged more or less whole time on the organisation and carrying out of various activities in the area.

In addition to my duties as O/C. Goleen Company I was engaged on the selection and training of signallers in each company in the battalion (Schull). Approximately six men were selected in each company for training. They were trained in semaphore and Morse and became very proficient after quite a short period of training.

During the early part of 1921 it was decided to form battalion columns in each battalion area. The Schull battalion column was composed of representatives - both officers and men - from each company in the battalion. Sean Lehane (Battalion O/C) was in charge. The strength of this column was about 30. It was armed with about 20 rifles and 10 shotguns. Some members of the column were:- Patsy Wilcox, Michael Crowley (later killed in Bantry in attack on Free State forces in 1922); Richard Collins (witness), Goleen; Jack Driscoll (Dunmanus); William Daly (Leamcon); Tom O'Driscoll (Dunmanus); Jack O'Driscoll (Leamcon); Charlie Cotter, Denis O'Mahoney; Tom McCarthy - all from Schull; Ned Sullivan (Glaun), Tom Hickey, Paddy McCarthy (Skehanore); Sean O'Driscoll and Tim Allen (Ballydehob).

The Bank Manager, Provincial Bank Ltd., Schull, and a member of his staff were held up by armed and masked men on their way to the branch at Ballydehob on Holy Thursday 1921. The sum of £500 was taken from them. Having regard to the



general position at the time, it was soon rumoured that this raid had been carried out by the I.R.A. The Battalion O/C. (Sean Lehane) undertook an immediate investigation of the affair and ordered all companies to carry out an investigation in their own areas. Within a couple of days the identity of the raiders was established and, with other representatives from Goleen Company, I took part in the round up of the raiders to the number of four who were captured in the Schull area. They were tried by courtmartial, presided over by the Battalion O/C. (Sean Lehane). Three of the robbers were sentenced to ~~deport~~ deportation, while the fourth, who took part in the organisation of the raid but not in the actual event, was fined £50. The names of the raiders who were deported were:- Sweeney, Sullivan and Cahalane; while a man named Murphy was fined. The stolen money was recovered and returned to the bank.

The maintenance of order in their areas devolved on the members of the I.R.A. at this time. A number of individuals in our area formed themselves into a gang to carry out several robberies. They always operated at night and raided only the homes of Protestant families. To make matters worse, the raiders always informed their victims that they were acting for the I.R.A. threatening dire penalties should the victims inform anybody of their raids. It was some considerable time before a hint of these activities reached me as, naturally, the Protestant families assumed that the raids were the work of my men. However, one of the men - Thomas Love, Crookhaven - whose house had been raided, mentioned the matter to Con O'Reilly who relayed the information to me. In conjunction with the officers of Lisagriffin Company, I undertook an investigation of the report and, within a few days, we had discovered and arrested the culprits. They were tried by courtmartial. Some were deported, while the others were sentenced to terms of hard

labour which they were compelled to serve with farmers in other parts of the area whose sons were on active service.

During the month of April and up to mid-May 1921, I was moving around the area with the battalion column or engaged in organising and training the signal sections throughout the battalion. While with the column we took up positions on numerous occasions but failed to make contact with the enemy. Towards the end of April we went into position at Barry's Mills on the Ballydehob-Bantry road at dawn one morning. We remained in position throughout the day, but the expected enemy convoy did not put in an appearance. Next night, we occupied positions in Ballydehob as darkness set in. We remained in position till daybreak, but the enemy did not arrive, so we withdrew to billets in the area.

Early in May 1921, I was called to a meeting at Coomhola where I met Liam Deasy (Brigade O/C.) He gave me special instructions to return to my area and to establish an "all around the clock" watch along the coast in the district for a ship which was expected to land a supply of arms from Italy. Should the vessel arrive, it was proposed to land the arms in Dunmanus Bay. I was engaged whole time on ensuring that a regular rota of watchers were on this duty in the period from early May to mid-June 1921. The ship did not arrive.

While I was engaged on the organisation of the watch for the arms ship I was asked by the battalion O/C. (Sean Lehane) to prepare a plan of the layout of the lighthouse on the Fastnet Rock as it was proposed to raid it in order to obtain a stock of guncotton which was stored there. I supplied all details including instructions as to landing on the Rock, whereabouts of the material sought and general layout of the

position of the lightkeepers at specified times. The raid was carried out by a party under Sean Lehane and about 30-cwt of guncotton with a supply of detonators was obtained. I did not take part in this operation as I was engaged on the watch for the arms ship.

When the watch for the arms ship was called off, I rejoined the battalion column in Schull area. Within a few days, orders were received from Brigade H.Q. to destroy Schull Workhouse which was due to be occupied by fresh enemy forces which were being drafted into the area. The work of destruction was allocated to the men of Schull Company under Charlie Cotter. In order to divert attention from the operation, the battalion column was to carry out an attack on the Marine Station while the operation was in progress.

The column and the men of the local company assembled at "The Gap" on the Schull-Bantry road about 10 p.m. We were just about to move off to our selected positions when a messenger arrived from Ballydehob Company to say that a strong force of British military were encamped at Drealomane National School. Sean Lehane had been expecting a round-up by the enemy following the Fastnet raid and he decided to send the locals home and to evacuate the column from the area. I withdrew with the column to Dunmanus Pier where boats were available to take us across the bay to Muintrevara. When we landed there we were informed that the whole peninsula - Skibbereen to Mizen Head - had been sealed off by the enemy. We remained across the bay all next day and watched the enemy searching for us, When they had withdrawn, we returned to Schull area that night and attacked the Marine Station while the men of Schull Company, under Charlie Cotter, destroyed the Workhouse. This was, I think, the night of 27th June 1921.

Just before the Truce, Cork III Brigade was reorganised, but I think that the reorganisation did not come into effect until a little later. The western battalions (Bantry, Skibbereen, Castletownbere and Schull) were formed into a new brigade - Cork V. A new battalion, based in Drimoleague, was also included in the new brigade. The officers of the new brigade were: O/C. Gibbs Ross; Vice O/C. Ted O'Sullivan; Adjutant - Michael Crowley; Q.M. - James Hayes.

The formation of the new brigade led to some changes in the area of Schull battalion. Lisheen Company was transferred from Skibbereen battalion to Schull area. The companies in Schull battalion now were:- Schull, Goleen, Dunmanus, Lisagriffin, Dunbeacon, Leamcon, Ballydehob, Skehanore, Lisheen. Sean Lehane was transferred to Dunmanway Battalion as O/C. This led to a change in the officers of Schull Battalion who were now:- O/C. Sean O'Driscoll; Vice O/C. Tom Hickey; Adjutant - Denis O'Mahoney; Q.M. - Edward O'Sullivan.

My rank at the Truce: Battalion Lieutenant of Signalling  
and O/C. Goleen Company, Schull  
Battalion, Cork III Brigade.

The strength of Goleen Company was about 60.

Signed: Richard Leslie

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> December 1956

Witness: P. Dornell

