

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1568

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1568.

**Witness**

Jerome Coughlan,  
Floraview,  
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Cork.

**Identity.**

1st Lieutenant, D. Company, 2nd Battalion,  
Cork No. I Brigade.

**Subject.**

Activities of D. Company, 2nd Battalion,  
Cork No. I Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1916-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

File No S.2895.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,568

STATEMENT BY JEROME COUGHLAN,

8, Floraview, Boreenmanna Road, Cork.

I am a native of Cork City. From my youth I have been a member of the G.A.A., and when the Irish Volunteers were reorganised in Cork late in the year 1916, I joined 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade.

The Battalion O/C was Paddy Trahey, who was killed with two other Cork Volunteers as a result of a bomb explosion in November, 1920. Our Company Captain was Ned Lynch, and the 1st Lieutenant was Frank McCarthy. I cannot remember the names of other officers.

At this period, the 2nd Battalion comprised four companies - 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D'. As the result of a general increase in the numbers of those who joined the Volunteers about the middle of 1918, the battalion was divided up into eight companies, 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H'.

When I first joined up we had about forty men in 'B' Company. We drilled once a week at that time in the Stonecutters' Hall, Douglas, Cork. Occasionally on Sundays we paraded at Black Ash, a mile out the country from the city on its south side. We usually carried a day's rations going to Black Ash, where drilling and general training was carried out. It should be noted that in November, 1916, all drilling was prohibited by the British military authorities in Cork. Notwithstanding this order, we succeeded in carrying on our training activities without interference by the police or military. This was due, mainly, to the fact that scouts were posted in suitable positions to give warning of the approach of police or military.

The year 1917 was taken up mostly with general training activities and parades. Public parades of all Cork City Volunteers took place as follows during that year: in June, on the occasion of the victory of Eamon de Valera in the Clare parliamentary by-election; in September, 1917, on the death of Tom Ashe, who died from forcible feeding while a prisoner in Mountjoy Jail, Dublin; in October, 1917, to celebrate the release of Cork hunger-strikers from Cork Jail; and in December, 1917, when de Valera addressed a public meeting in the Grand Parade, Cork.

In 1917, recruiting for the British army, then at war with Germany, was in full blast. Recruiting meetings were held in the city and suburbs at which young men were exhorted to join the British army to fight for the freedom of small nations. I am glad to say that our company did its part in helping to smash up these meetings, tearing down recruiting posters from walls and hoardings and generally making the task of the British recruiting officers an unenviable one. Following one of these clashes between unarmed Volunteers and the police and military, a baton and bayonet charge was ordered on an evening in June, 1917, as a result of which a Volunteer named Allen was killed by a bayonet thrust, and upwards of eight civilians were wounded by gun-fire from the military.

During the early months of the year 1918, when the British threatened to enforce conscription in Ireland, large numbers joined the Volunteers and it was found necessary to create four new companies in our battalion. Following this reorganisation I found myself in 'D' Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade.

At this stage it might be advisable to record the various officers of 'D' Company from the period of the company's inception to July, 1921, so far as I can remember them.

Company Captains:

1917 - Ignatius O'Callaghan, replaced by Jas. Walsh  
 1918 - Denis Lyons  
 1919 - Ignatius O'Callaghan, " " Denis Lyons  
 1920 - Denis Lyons  
 1921 - Denis Lyons to 31/3/'21, " " Dick O'Leary  
 1921 - Dick O'Leary to 13/7/'21 " " Wm. Barry.

1st Lieutenants:

1917 - Patrick Goulding, replaced during year by Wm. Barry  
 1918 to 13/7/'21 - Wm. Barry, replaced by myself.

2nd Lieutenants:

1917 - Tom Noonan  
 1918 - ditto.  
 1919 - Paul Vignoles, replaced during the year by  
 Wm. Morrow.  
 1920 - Tom Noonan, replaced during year by Geo. Sisk.  
 1921 (to April) - George Sisk resigned owing to  
 ill-health, replaced by myself.  
 I acted as 2nd Lieut. until 13/7/'21,  
 when I was appointed 1st Lieut.

Adjutants:

1917 - 1920 - Charlie Daly  
 1921 to June - Charlie Daly, replaced by Denis Manly.

Charlie Daly went on the Brigade Flying Column in June, 1921, and was captured and shot by British troops the same month.

Quartermaster:

1917 - 1920 - Wm. Aherne (transferred to the Battn. Staff in 1920).  
 1920 - 1921 - Tim Daly  
 1921 - Michael Scanlan, replaced by Tim Daly on the latter's death early in 1921.

In 'D' Company we had at first about sixty men. This number increased in mid 1918 to about eighty or ninety, and from that time until June, 1921, the average strength of the company was about eighty. We had very little arms and ammunition in the earlier days. Perhaps there were about four revolvers and a rifle or two. We did have a .22 rifle, and with this the company practised every week during 1918-1919. These rifle practices were usually held in the Vernonmount estate, situated about a mile and a half from the city on its south side.

In 1919, raids for arms became a frequent feature of the company activities. These raids were made at night on houses of people usually known as the Ascendancy class, many of whom had British army connections. As a general rule, about eight of us took part in these raids, led by one of the company officers. The latter would carry a revolver but the remainder of the party would be unarmed. Some shotguns, revolvers and obsolete sporting guns were got as a result of these raids. The guns were placed in a dump constructed in the grounds of the Cork Agricultural Society at The Marina, Cork.

Some time early in 1919 - the date I cannot remember with any accuracy - men from 'D' Company were engaged making home-made bombs. These bombs comprised tin canisters filled with pieces of metal and explosive, to which a fuse was attached. Connolly's yard in Ballinlough Road was the site of the bomb factory. I cannot say whether these bombs were used successfully or otherwise. I do know that 'D' Company never used any.

In February, 1919, we were informed of the arrival by rail at Glanmire Station, Cork, of a consignment of boots for the warders in Cork jail. The boots were in wooden cases. In the evening-time, William Barry, 1st Lieut., and other Volunteers named Fitzgibbons and Owens, together with my brother and myself, went to the railway station in a small motor lorry driven by Volunteer Frank Kelleher. We removed the cases of boots and passed them on to the Company Quartermaster.

While insignificant enough in its own way, this raid was but the forerunner of many such efforts to embarrass and hamper the enemy in every possible manner. The articles taken on this and subsequent occasions were eventually used to equip the Brigade Flying Columns, which, by reason of the nature of the countryside in which they operated, found it difficult to obtain supplies of clothing, footwear and suchlike.

In or about mid March, 1919, an ambush position was taken up by eleven men of 'D' Company in charge of William Barry at Ballinrea on the main Cork-Crosshaven road and about four miles south east of the city. It was the occasion of the annual point-to-point race meeting at Ballinrea. It was usual that a party of armed policemen, two or three in number, would attend the meeting to shoot any horses which might fall and be badly injured in the course of racing. It was intended to hold up and disarm these R.I.C. returning from the races.

Four men of 'D' Company were posted as scouts on the occasion. As the evening wore on, there was no sign of the police returning. It was later ascertained that they had returned by a different route to that taken on the outward

journey, with the result that the planned attack had to be called off.

During 1919, local postmen carrying mails were frequently held up and their postbags taken. The correspondence was examined for letters which might contain information of value to the Brigade Intelligence Officers. Such information was, in fact, obtained as a result of these raids, and many spies were discovered and dealt with subsequently.

The premises of the Cork and Macroom railway at Summerhill South, Cork, were often the target for raids by our company during 1919-1920. From this station, military supplies in the nature of clothing, boots, socks, foodstuffs and bicycles were despatched to the large British army barracks at Ballincollig, Co. Cork, and other centres. Armed raids were repeatedly carried out by us both by day and night, and large quantities of military stores (not including arms and ammunition) were taken away either by lorry or horse and carts. These stores were handed over to the Brigade Quartermaster, who, in turn, passed them to the columns operating in country districts in Co. Cork. Invariably about twelve to twenty of the company men took part in these raids, of whom about three or four only were armed with revolvers. In addition to raiding the station, we occasionally stopped the train a mile or so outside the city and unloaded the military stores on it. This was done by arrangement with men employed on the railway and with the drivers and firemen of trains, almost all of whom were in the Volunteer movement, or, if not, were sympathisers.

Late in the month of November, 1919, an armed raid was carried out by about eight of us on Murray's gun shop which was situated in Patrick St., Cork. The raid took place at night-time, and a quantity of gun fittings (and two or three shotguns) was taken away in a pony trap which we brought along for the purpose. Two or three of us were armed with revolvers on that occasion..

On 12th March, 1920, the Thomas Ashe Hall, Charlotte Quay, Cork, was raided by police and military at night. This hall was used as Battalion Headquarters and was much frequented by Volunteers. Gaelic League classes were also held there.

On the occasion of the raid, I happened to be in the hall and was held up and searched by the police and military. About a dozen more of our lads were present and, when questioned, said we were attending an Irish class. Three Volunteers - Charlie Daly, Paul Vignoles and Dan Owens - were arrested. The two latter were imprisoned for six months. (Vignoles had a copy of the official Volunteer newspaper, An tÓglach, with him). Daly was caught with a revolver in his possession. He also was sentenced to a term in gaol.

With reference to the raids on the mails previously mentioned, I should state that the four sections which comprised our company dealt with a particular area in the company district. My section - No. 1 - operated in the Ballinlough district. No. 2 Section was in the Evergreen district, No. 3 in the main Douglas Road and South Douglas Road, and No. 4 in Douglas. The raids took place, as a rule, about 7.30 a.m., when the postmen were beginning their rounds of delivery.



On 5th April, 1920, a party from our company entered the Income Tax office at South Terrace and, having evacuated the family who lived on the premises, sprinkled the place with petrol and set fire to it, destroying all the official books and papers relating to Income Tax. This was part of a concerted attack on all Income Tax offices in Cork timed for that particular night.

William Barry and I were armed with revolvers on this occasion. About a dozen others from our company acted as scouts and helped in the burning of the premises.

In September, 1920, the company carried out extensive raids for arms on houses of loyalists in the district. These raids were continued for about a week. They were carried out at night, during curfew, which commenced at 10 p.m., by small groups of Volunteers (numbering about half a dozen), one or two only of the raiding party being armed. As a result of the raids, quite a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition was secured. Six revolvers, twenty-six shotguns, two sporting rifles, two miniature rifles, field glasses and a range finder were taken by us. Thirty-seven houses in all were raided by our company during that week.

I have already referred to the fact of the Thomas Ashe Club, Charlotte Quay, Cork, being raided by enemy forces. In the month of November, 1920, the Black and Tans and military began an intensive raiding and wrecking of Sinn Féin Clubs in Cork City and suburbs. Anticipating that the Thomas Ashe Club would almost

certainly be an enemy target, Mick Murphy, Commandant of our battalion, decided to construct a trap mine inside the door of the club. This was done, and armed guards were placed by day and night up to the curfew hour to warn those who might try to enter the hall not to do so. I was one of those detailed for this duty, which was an unpleasant job, as I had to prevent access to the club by men whom I knew to be Volunteers but who were not aware of the danger which lay inside the door. The fact of the trap mine being laid was known only to a few trusted men.

On the 30th November, 1920, after the curfew hour, a party of Black and Tans approached the Club and proceeded to break down the door. As they were so engaged, a terrific explosion occurred; the trap mine had gone off. The Tans were blown all over the place, some of them into the River Lee about twenty yards away. They suffered heavy casualties, but to what extent I cannot say.

On frequent occasions during the latter part of 1920 and early 1921, about a dozen of us lay in ambush positions at night in the company area, hoping to get a crack at enemy patrols. They had become very wary by this time and rarely ventured into the outlying parts of the city except in large numbers and in Crossley motor tenders. We did not succeed in contacting any patrols on the occasions we lay in ambush. All our party were armed with revolvers or shotguns.

In the month of February, 1921, I, with five others of our company, were warned by the Battalion O/C to keep a sharp look-out for a man named William O'Sullivan

who was known to be acting as a spy for the enemy. This man, O'Sullivan, had been seen leaving the R.I.C. barracks at Empress Place, Cork, on several occasions after curfew. He had been told that, if he continued his association with the enemy, the consequences for him would be serious. He ignored these warnings and, as a result, we were instructed by the Battalion O/C to pick him up and execute him. It was difficult to locate O'Sullivan, as he seldom came home except during curfew.

On 15th February, 1921, we received information that the man for whom we were searching was in a publichouse on Sullivan's Quay, Cork. A party of six of us, with William Barry, Company Captain, in charge, picked him up in the publichouse and took him by car to a spot on the Curragh Road, where he was shot.

On 22nd February, 1921, I was one of an armed party who arrested a spy named Finbar O'Sullivan, a tailor by trade. We were watching for this man for about three weeks and, on the night in question, we located him in a publichouse in High St., Cork. We handed him over for execution, which was carried out that night.

On 23rd February, 1921, a well known spy in our district named "Monkey" McDonald was tracked down and shot. This man was frequently seen in the company of Black and Tans and he made no secret of his hostility to us. In McDonald's case, he was not killed as a result of the shooting, but he was badly wounded. The bullets used in shooting him turned out to be faulty.

On 1st March, 1921, I was on armed patrol at night with other sections of "D" Company. Our instructions were to shoot at sight any soldier or policeman met with, whether they were armed or not. This order, I believe, extended to the whole Cork Brigade for that particular night and was in the nature of a reprisal for the brutal murder of Volunteers captured by Tans a short time previously while they, the Volunteers, lay in an ambush position near Dripsey, Co. Cork. Our company patrolled its area by sections, each of the four sections dealing with its own particular district. A definite time was fixed on instructions from the battalion, during which our patrols went on and came off duty that night. I was on duty with No. 1 Section, comprising about ten men. We met with no member of the enemy forces during our patrol, neither did Section 2 or Section 4 of the Company. Section 3 did meet with one soldier, who was fired on and killed.

Sometime early in 1921, as a result of information received from a member of our company named T. Philpott, who was a railway employee, seven of us, armed with revolvers, raided the premises of the Macroom railway at Summerhill South, Cork. This raid took place during daylight. The object was to take possession of a travelling case left in the station by a British army officer named Major Peglar.

We located the case, searched it and found two revolvers and ammunition, together with a list of the names and addresses of Black and Tan officers. Just as the search concluded, a party of Black and Tans arrived and surrounded the railway premises. As we made our

getaway, the Tans opened fire on us and we replied. We succeeded in making our escape without suffering any casualties or losing any men as prisoners.

During the same period (early 1921) we were instructed to visit all the houses in our area on one particular night, to remove the lists of occupants which, by order of the British military authorities, were required to be affixed inside the door of each house by the householder.

About twenty men from the company were engaged on this task, some being armed with revolvers while others were unarmed. Whilst carrying out the job, we were fired on by military and police who came on the scene unexpectedly. Those of us who were armed returned the fire and escaped, but four or five of our lads, unarmed, were arrested. They claimed they were innocent passers-by at the time of the occurrence and were released from custody after a few days.

A special section, of from fifteen to twenty men, was now formed in the company. These men were unemployed. They held a kind of roving commission, mostly in the nature of intelligence officers, watching and reporting movements of enemy forces, supplies to barracks, movements of suspected spies and suchlike. Some of these Volunteers carried revolvers and they frequently raided railway stations and goods stores for supplies of all kinds being consigned to military or naval stations in Cork City and County. Daylight raids on mails were also a feature of their activities.

Much of the military stores captured as a result of these raids were kept in premises at Cork Show Grounds, The Marina, Cork.

Sometime early in May, 1921, five of us, with William Barry in charge, had gone one day to the show grounds to pack some of these supplies for despatch to Flying Columns in the county. We were armed with revolvers. There was a company arms dump there also, under a ceiling of one of the buildings.

I was engaged on the job of packing, when I chanced to look out a window and saw tenders of Black and Tans approaching. The cars pulled up at the show grounds and the Tans spread out and proceeded to enter the place. I immediately warned my comrades of the danger, and very quickly we made our way through the grounds towards a point where we hoped to escape. We were seen and fired on, However, having a good knowledge of the terrain, we made our escape out of the grounds and away to the Blackrock district. The Tans followed up in their cars and conducted an intensive search in the neighbourhood, without any result so far as our party was concerned.

On Sunday evening, 9th May, 1921, Wm. Barry, Captain of "D" Company, L. Neville, R. Ahern and myself were instructed by the Brigade Intelligence Officer, Bob Aherne, to go armed with revolvers to the vicinity of the Rob Roy Hotel, Cook St., Cork, to shoot a British intelligence officer named Sterland.

When we arrived at the hotel, which, incidentally, is in the centre of the city between the South Mall and Patrick St., in both of which streets were military patrols that evening, Wm. Barry went upstairs to the lounge

while the other three of us remained in the hallway. Prior to our arrival Sterland had been met by three of the Brigade Intelligence Officers named Ahern, O'Mahony and Seán Cogan. They had got into friendly conversation with him and had invited him to the Rob Roy Hotel for a drink, which invitation he had accepted. Wood was then sent to us to come along. It was arranged that Wm. Barry would go upstairs alone when we arrived, and show himself to the others as an indication that our party had arrived and was waiting down below in the hall. Having shown himself, Barry rejoined us in the hall. After a lapse of about five minutes or so, Sterland came downstairs accompanied by Ahern, O'Mahony and Cogan, and when they reached us we drew our revolvers and gave them "Hands up". Pretending not to recognise our three lads, we searched them and also Sterland. From the latter we took a .45 Colt revolver. I was now sent to Patrick St. corner to watch for the military patrol at that end (the north) of Cook St., and Aherne went to the corner of Cook St. and the South Mall (the southern end of Cook St.) to keep an eye on the military party who were patrolling the South Mall. By an arranged signal, we both gave the "all clear" to Barry. Sterland was then shot dead and we made our way back safely to our district through the military patrols, who were quickly on the scene after the shooting. Sterland was one of the most active and cleverest of the British Intelligence Staff in Cork. He was an Englishman.

In June, 1921, instructions were issued by the brigade that all military and police barracks would be attacked by rifle, revolver and grenades on a certain night at a particular time. The idea was to convey the impression that we were strong both numerically and from

the point of view of weapons, notwithstanding the losses suffered by Volunteers being captured and imprisoned as well as losses of arms and ammunition taken by the enemy in raids. The attacks on barracks on the night in question were, therefore, more of a propaganda value to us and a gesture of defiance rather than a serious attempt on our part to capture any of the positions.

Our target on the night was Douglas R.I.C. barracks, when about twenty-eight men of 'D' Company took part. Of these, seventeen were armed with revolvers, shotguns and bombs and acted as the attacking party. I was one of this group. The remaining eleven were placed at strategic points in the district to give warning of the approach of enemy lorries. Douglas R.I.C. barracks was situated on the main road from Cork to Crosshaven and about two miles from the city on its south side. It had a garrison of about ten men.

At the appointed time, we opened up on the barracks. The garrison replied with rifles and machine-guns. We kept up intermittent firing for about a quarter of an hour, when orders were given to withdraw. We moved out the country to the Ballygarvan area, where we remained for a few days, returning later in ones and twos to the city.

When the Truce came in July, 1921, I was in my company area. At the time of the Truce we had organised within 'D' Company special services covering intelligence (5 men), engineering (6 men) and signalling. Our special dispatch carrier was T. Philpott, who was a guard on the Great Southern Railway.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

I.O. W.S. 1,568

Witness:

*T. Gorman*  
(Investigator).

Signed:

*J. Loughlan*

Date:

*31-1-1957*