

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BUIRO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1771

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1771

**Witness**

Mr Florence Begley,  
32 South Main Street,  
Bandon,  
Co. Cork.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish Volunteers and  
Irish Republican Army, Co. Cork.

**Subject.**

Crossbarry Ambush, 19th March, 1921.

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

Nil

File No S 209.

Form B.S.M. 2



when we moved off towards Crossbarry. We arrived at Crossbarry approx. I or I.30 a.m. to my recollection. We were halted by the column O/c. and he gave orders ~~xxxxxx~~ that in case of alarm we were to mobilise at Beasley's farmyard. This was the customary procedure before men were detailed to billets. We then proceeded to our billets which had been previously provided by the local Coy. officers and men and accompanied thereto by a local scout.

I was billeted with a family named O'Driscolls which overlooks the Quarry road as far as I can recollect. Peter Monohan a Scotchman (probably of Irish Parentage) was in charge of my billet. (Peter by the way was a deserter from the Cameron Highlanders who were stationed in Cove. I understand that he was a Sergt. of the R.E.s. attached to the Camerons). After about a half an hour in billets the alarm was raised. Enemy lorries coming from Bandon direction etc.etc. We tumbled out of our billet and marched to the pre-arranged mobilisation point where we were detailed to take up positions. (I did not see Peter after this as he was killed later in the morning in action. From those who knew him better than I did I was told the he was a fine soldier.) (His He is buried in the Bandon Republican Plot). I would say that around eight o'clock or perhaps half eight nine enemy lorries came along from the Bandon side into the ambush position. Immediately they were attacked at the same time as the firing started I proceeded to play the pipes and continued to do so whilst the firing lasted. If a lull took place in the firing I stopped playing as I felt that I may be giving our position away. On resumption of firing I played away again. The lorries on the roadside were not full of soldiers as they approached our positions as many of them had been dropped along the road leading into where we were. The occupants did not last long but we were very fortunate that a bullet penetrated the drum of an enemy machine gun which was in position on a lorry thereby jamming it. Later a lad Edward White who was a prisoner in one of the lorries (and had been arrested earlier that night at Kilpatrick where he had been with a dispatch) from which he escaped luckily during the ambush carried the machine gun during our retreat. The nine lorries were captured and burned. As the action on the roadside was taking place fighting developed on our rear and flanks.

During the retreat of our column we were rested in a breen at Crow Hill from which could be seen ~~xxxxxx~~ thick smoke coming from the vicinity of Forde's house (Bde.H.Qrs.) at Ballymurphy. Liam Deasy said to me there and then that Forde was on fire on looking closely I said no it is not the house but the Feore of ~~xxxxxx~~ oats and my God Liam I said there are two Mills bombs in it and if they explode ~~xxxx~~ all the Forde family will be shot off hand by Percival and his gang. On investigating the occurrences at Forde's on a later date I learned that Miss Mary Forde seeing the oats on fire and aware that the bombs were hidden therein and seeing that the Tommies had left the farm yard taking her father and brother with them rushed to the ~~oats~~ and pulled out the bombs ~~xxxxxx~~ and took them in her apron down to a well which was a short distance at the back of the house. Whilst looking at the thick smoke coming from



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doubly keen on questioning in detail.

Another point I would like to make in the interests of historical accuracy is that the British operation that morning of 19th. of March 1921 was as a result of information which they had got from a captured I.R.A. man who had been the Coy. Capt. of the Knockavilla or Crosspound Coy. a month earlier. This man was captured or surrendered voluntarily whilst armed with a rifle on the scene of the ambush of the train at Upton Railway Station. It was an unfortunate business for the man concerned and for the safety of many many I.R.A. men. The Column could have been wiped out as a result of this mans betrayal of many vital facts relating to Brigade H.Qrs. and the movements of Senior Bde. Officers. The man in question was tried by the British. He was courtmartialled on a charge of being in possession of a rifle on the scene of an ambush namely -being in the attack on the train at Upton station on the morning of the 16th. of March '21. He was a wanted man by the British before this and he was not available to the I.R.A. to fulfil his obligations as a Coy. Capt. for months prior to the Upton affair. In fact I was dumbfounded when we mobilised at or near Upton station on the morning of the 16th. when I saw him present as one who was to participate in the train attack. At any rate the circumstances of his arrest on the scene of the ambush were investigated by the Brigade O/C. Charlie Hurley (who happened to be in charge of the attack and who was wounded on the job) that very day and it was discovered that this man threw his rifle under the stairs of the house he occupied near the station and never fired a shot but remained there to be arrested (waiting). As I have said he was courtmartialled by the British but he was never sentenced but merely interned in Bere Island after having been in Cork for a time.

Within a week of the arrest of this one time Coy. Capt. we were tipped off by a friendly R.I.C. ~~Sergeant~~ (Sergt.) to be careful as he had given the game away meaning that he had talked quite a lot. At the general release of prisoners from internment camps late in 1921 this gentleman (Coy. Capt) approached a local I.R.A. man on his arrival home and volunteered a statement of what occurred after his arrest at Upton and he clearly stated that he gave certain information whilst under the influence of drugs etc. etc. He was later courtmartialled by Senior I.R.A. officers and sentenced to death subject to G.H.Q. sanction. Sentence was commuted to exile for life it being Truce times.

Now it was undoubtedly as a result of this mans information that the British happened by accident to come in contact with the column at Crossbarry.

It obviously took the British a whole month to formulate certain plans based on the information secured from our friend

the latter admitted at his courtmartial by I.R.A. Senior officers during the Truce or Jan. 1922 that he had told the enemy where Brigade H.Qrs., was situated among other things. In fact he confessed without having been asked on the night after his release from the British internment camp.

The enemy apparently took it that very strong security measures would be in force for the protection of H.Qrs. perhaps they were judging by their own standards on the field hence the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ slow methodical planning before moving to surround the locality of Bde. H.Qrs. The Hampshire Major told Sean Buckley also that his instructions were to arrest every man & boy he came across in their homes or otherwise on that morning. An area of about four miles in circumference was taken in by the enemy troops and then they began to move in tightening the circle searching all the houses as they closed in. It just happened that the column had entered the area during the night neither the column or the enemy knowing anything of the moves or intended moves of the other. That is the position from the historical point of view. It was lucky that the column was so strong numerically. I do not think it was ever before or after so strong numerically. I may add though it is out of sequence that after the Crossbarry affair it came to light that north of Crosspound some nights previously the enemy troops were probing the ground here and there in the hope of making discoveries of I.R.A. activities or sentries having been posted for the protection of H.Qrs. It could any number nights from the time they got the information from their prisoner. This I do know that on a Sat. evg. a fortnight after the capture of the Coy. Capt. at the Upton ambush the enemy troops (I believe they were Auxies) took up ambush positions near Crossbarry village if one may call it so and after sometime they left their positions and searched the local public house of Cronin's holding up and searching the occupants or customers on the premises and asking questions re certain houses and families in the Ballymurphy and Ballinphellig areas, all preparatory to making their major move on the area.

I would like to record that approx. two weeks after the Upton <sup>(FEB 16 1921)</sup> ambush arrangements were made for Dr. Welply of Bandon to come and visit the Brigade O/C. in his capacity as a doctor. The Bde. O/c. was not making a good recovery. I met Dr. Welply at Crossbarry village and accompanied him in his car to BARTERS, OF BALLINPHELLIG, the pre-arranged venue. Dr. Welply was at this time M.O. to the British troops stationed in Bandon. Some few years later I happened to meet Dr. Welply and we discussed the meeting referred to. I mentioned that the man he had attended on that day was killed a few weeks later in Ballymurphy. He replied that he had since heard so but though he attended the British wounded in Bandon Barracks on the morning of the Crossbarry ambush and saw the I.R.A. dead in the Barrack yard he did not recognise and could not recognise any one of them. He then went on to relate the circumstance of the Bde. O/c.'s death as he had got it from the British Officers on that day. Charlie had fired through the front door and then dashed out the back door but just as he got outside the back a ~~gommie~~ hearing the shots came running towards the house with his rifle and took a shot from his hip whilst running and just by fluke blew Charlie's brains out.

15/3/60.

SIGNED. The Bells