

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 535

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 535

Witness

James Francis Hughes,  
12 Oaklands Terrace,  
Terenure,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Company, 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade,  
1917 - ;

Company Intelligence Officer, 1918 - .

Subject.

- (a) Disarming of British Military Policemen,  
Dublin;
- (b) Destruction of Income Tax documents,  
Holy Saturday, 1920;
- (c) G.H.Q. Intelligence 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No . S. 1763

Form BSM 2

C E R T I F I C A T E

The late James Francis Hughes had given me two instalments of his statement but, due to his sudden death on 29th May, 1951, his narrative must remain incomplete.

William Ivory Comdt.,  
(W. Ivory)

5.6.51.

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STATEMENT OF JAMES FRANCIS HUGHES,  
12 Oaklands Terrace, Terenure, Dublin.

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I joined "A" Company of the 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, towards the end of 1917. My battalion was then commanded by Commandant Joe O'Connor and our company was commanded by the late Sean Guilfoyle. Sean Goulding was one of the company lieutenants. For some time after I joined the Volunteers the company activities were confined to drills and parades. Our parade hall at that time was at 41 York Street. Occasionally manoeuvres were held in the Dublin mountains, day and night. During the Conscription Crisis the ranks of the company were considerably increased by new recruits coming in. No arms were available that time and drill parades usually took place with the aid of wooden poles which were a substitute for rifles and bayonets. In fact, some casualties were caused as a result of the vigorous use of these improvised arms. On the passing of the Conscription Crisis, the company numbers began to dwindle again and those who were left remained staunch to the end.

#### Company Intelligence work.

On the ending of World War I, 11th November 1918, and the declaring of an armistice, British garrison troops stationed in the city ran amok and many violent scenes were witnessed throughout the city as a result of clashes with the citizens generally, due to the display of the Union Jack emblem on an extensive scale. The premises at No. 6 Harcourt Street, which was the old Sinn Fein Bank, was subject to an attack by these British troops with the result that A/Company fortified the place and awaited the return of the British troops who did not come. The late Harry Boland was a prominent figure in these activities. At that time I became Intelligence Officer for the company and my duties consisted of ascertaining the strength of

the different garrison troops in the battalion area and their activities.

British Military Policemen disarmed.

In my capacity as Company Intelligence Officer I was detailed by my company captain to watch the movements of British military police who usually patrolled the city between 6 p.m. and midnight daily to control their own men who were on local leave. These military policemen were armed with revolvers openly exposed in holsters. They were dismissed each night in a body at about 11.30 o'clock under the portico of the Bank of Ireland. Prior to falling-in for dismissal, I observed that they congregated in batches of twos in the vicinity of the Bank of Ireland, ~~waiting~~<sup>waiting</sup> for a whistle to call them together. I reported in full my observations to the company captain. As a result, it was decided that these men should be relieved of their arms prior to their falling-in in a body and that the capture of these arms would help to equip the Volunteers, and at the same time raise the prestige of whatever company would carry out the hold-up and reduce the prestige of the British military. On a night a short time later, a selected number of Volunteers from the 3rd Battalion took up positions adjacent to each pair of military police assembled for dismissal. I blew a whistle which was the signal to commence the hold-up. The Volunteers swung around on each pair of military police and ordered them to put their hands up. The police were completely taken by surprise, with the result that the taking of their arms was a comparatively easy matter and, as far as I can recollect, one military policeman offered a certain amount of resistance and was fired on and wounded. In all, about 20 revolvers and ammunition were collected.

Proposed raid for arms on Trinity College O.T.C.

Shortly after this it was learned that a company of Officers Training Corps stationed in Trinity College were to receive a considerable amount of arms for the purpose of proceeding to the Curragh, or some such place, for training. Through intelligence work it was learned where these arms were to be placed in Trinity College, and the grounds inside Trinity College were well reviewed by us, the location of the guardroom, etc. ascertained, and an operation was to be carried out for the purpose of seizing these arms on the night prior to the departure of this corps for training. The Trinity O.T.C. had a guardroom adjacent to Lincoln Place entrance, and sentries were posted at points around the ground. "A" and "B" Companies of the 3rd Battalion were detailed to disarm the guard and capture the arms. Provision was made to fight a rearguard action if necessary, retreating towards Pearse St., making an exit in the laneway opposite Luke's Church in Pearse St., where a section of the company was in readiness with hand-grenades to cover the retreat. My particular job was to climb the wall running parallel to Westland Row, take the sentry by surprise by jumping swiftly on his back. No sooner had the Volunteers moved into a position of readiness when the whole operation was called off temporarily. I believe last-minute intelligence reported that the arms for the O.T.C. had not been delivered. However, in the event of their being delivered, the Volunteers were told to 'stand-to' which they did at 144 Pearse Street, which was a headquarters for the company. At the time this raid was contemplated, the company was becoming fairly well equipped, with the result that it was necessary for each man to become thoroughly conversant in the use of arms and the throwing of grenades. For this purpose, Sunday mornings were devoted to dummy grenade practice at the Greenhills, Crumlin. To avoid undue attention, bicycles, where possessed, could not be used

by the Volunteers. They had, therefore, to make their way on foot to the practice venue, no modern transport being available.

41 York St. and 144 Pearse St. were subjected to many surprise raids by military.

Shotguns seized.

I remember an occasion when it was learned that a number of shotguns were available for seizure. They were in a solicitor's office in Molesworth St. Dublin. With my company captain and a few selected members, we went to this solicitor's office at 8 o'clock one morning, gained admission and seized, I think, about two or three shotguns. When about to leave the house, there was a violent ring at the halldoor and we peeped through the letterbox and saw two uniformed D.M.P. men standing outside the house. It was a lady who was ringing the bell and we decided not to sacrifice our seizure anyhow. We opened the halldoor and calmly said "good morning" to the policemen and walked away with the guns on our arms. The policemen did not interfere with us.

Income Tax documents destroyed.

Documents in the Income Tax Offices in Dublin were by order to be destroyed on the night of Holy Saturday 1920. A section of A/Company were detailed to destroy documents at 63 Dawson St. I was one of the section. Entrance to the building was gained by a subterfuge, that is, pretending to get the porter to sign for a parcel. While engaged in doing so, he was held up and brought to a lower portion of the house. The remaining Volunteers were admitted gradually. They then took into their charge other persons in the Building, holding them all in one room and some of the Volunteers then went to the Income Tax offices in the building where they procured the Income Tax documents from cupboards. It was found necessary to tear the

books in parts as they were heavy ledgers which would not burn otherwise. They, therefore, made a pile of the documents which they sprinkled with petrol and set alight. The destruction of Income Tax documents on that particular night was a serious blow to British administration. The operation was general throughout the city and was successfully carried out in spite of the fact that the British military were unusually active, it being the Easter Week 1916 anniversary. In fact, barricades were thrown up at various points throughout the city, fearing another rising.

G.H.Q. Intelligence work.

In 1920 I was employed in the Physics Department, University College, and some time in that year I was asked by Commandant Joseph O'Connor, O/C. 3rd Battalion, if I would be prepared to take up full time work with G.H.Q. Intelligence Department. I agreed to this, which meant that I had to leave the employment at the University College and pretend to the people there that I was taking up other employment without giving the nature of it. My first contact with the G.H.Q. Intelligence Department was when I went to a place at, I think, 6 Crow Street, where I met Liam Tobin, who was in charge, Tom Cullen (deceased), Frank Thornton, Joe Guilfoyle, Frank Saurin and Charlie Dalton. I was deputed to observe the movements of suspect enemy agents and officers. I subsequently met a man named Ned Kelleher, also Dan McDonnell. We kept constant patrols around Dublin Castle along to the quays and in the vicinity of military barracks. We noted the movements and the general appearance of persons entering and leaving these places, and also the movements of persons around town who, apparently, had nothing to do. This was constant work and very trying, because one was always subject to holds-up, questioning, etc. Any observations made were reported back to Charlie Dalton. I remember the shooting of a man named Howley, a native of



Galway, at Broadstone railway station. This murder was believed to be the work of a man named Igoe. Igoe, as far as I can recollect, was an ex-sergeant of the R.I.C. who had been dismissed, but, I believe, on writing to General Tudor offering his services to do any 'dirty work' that might be required of him, he was reinstated. I believe the letter so offering his services was captured in the mail by our Intelligence agents. Charlie Dalton, Kelleher and myself were sent to the Broadstone on a subsequent date to the murder of Howley to try, if possible, to get Igoe. We went there about 5 p.m. when the Galway train was due to arrive. We took up a position in a publichouse opposite the station and, to our surprise, we saw that Igoe was accompanied by about twelve other accomplices in plain clothes who were closely scrutinising each passenger leaving the train. Being so small in number, we thought it more prudent to do nothing. From then on, Igoe and his gang, as they were called, were subjected to constant attention by the Intelligence Department and every effort was made to suitably ambush them.

An ambush on Igoe was arranged on a particular morning in the vicinity of James's St. and the A.S.U. Squad were in fixed positions in James's St. My duty was to watch Igoe's departure from the depot in the Phoenix Park and the route he was taking. I duly saw him leave the depot with about twelve others and they walked in pairs towards Parkgate Street. I walked on ahead and observed them crossing Kingsbridge and proceed up Steeven's Lane towards James's Street. I cycled past across the quays, across Watling St. Bridge, with the intention of reaching the Squad and warning them of his approach. As I crossed Watling Street Bridge I saw a squad of British armed soldiers in open formation coming along the city quay towards Kingsbridge. I had just time to head them off and reach the Squad and so warn them. It so happened that simultaneously with the soldiers coming along the quays another platoon was advancing down Thomas Street. The

Squad had to withdraw from their positions without attacking Igoe. By this time we had full particulars. We knew that he was in charge of a group of R.I.C. men brought from the country to the city for the sole purpose of identifying prominent Volunteers from the country.

One of my daily jobs was to call to the house of Batt O'Connor of Brendan Road, Donnybrook, and collect mail from him, as he was in a position to get it from the Post Office. I would then take all mail to Liam Tobin. I also frequently took my lunch in the West End Café, Parkgate Street, which was frequented by Auxiliaries and Black and Tans. Maura Gleeson (deceased) was manageress in that café. She was an old Cumann na mBan girl and very active there. Needless to say, she always gave me any information she possessed concerning people going into the café. She was subsequently the proprietress of a café known as "An Stáid" in North Frederick Street. I think she was a native of Limerick.

Simultaneously with our watching the movements of Igoe and his gang, we were also busily engaged in watching the movements of British Intelligence officers and ascertaining their addresses. We got on the track of these Intelligence officers by information that had been collated at headquarters through reports that had been sent in by Battalion Intelligence officers and as a result of our observations. If we saw a car in any particular street which might give rise to suspicion we took the number of that car and persistently watched it. It often happened that the cars belonged to innocent civilians, but in a number of cases our suspicions were justified. For example, we paid particular attention to any car we saw outside Mitchell's Café, which was a favourite haunt of the British Intelligence officers and the Auxiliaries. We immediately passed the number of the car back to Intelligence and all Intelligence officers were notified to be

on the lookout for it with a view to ascertaining the business of its occupants. Some of these cars that came under my suspicion very often pulled up at addresses in Mount Street. It transpired, following 'Bloody Sunday', that the cars were, in fact, owned by British agents.

I was deputed also to watch Auxiliaries who called each morning to the Post Office at Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, at 9 a.m. where they collected mail. I did this observation work for a considerable time and subsequently the Auxiliaries there were attacked on a Monday morning some time in December, 1920. I don't think the mails were captured that morning, as the grenade that was thrown rebounded without exploding and the car got safely away. At this time I was staying at Clonskeagh, and it came to my notice that a Major Fitzjohn was living in Clonskeagh Castle and left there about 10 o'clock each morning in a car. On reporting this to Liam Tobin he was immediately identified as Major Fitzjohn of General Tudor's staff, whose whereabouts were anxiously sought, and it was decided to attack him. Knowing the vicinity of Clonskeagh, I was anxious that the ambush should take place from the wall of the Masonic School on Roebuck Road, facing Roebuck Castle gate, as there was a good line of retreat through the fields on to the Stillorgan Road. It was decided, however, that the ambush would take place at Charlemont Street Bridge. On the morning the operation was to take place the Squad were engaged on another job at Exchequer Street at St. Andrew's Hotel; consequently, the A.S.U., under Paddy Flanagan, were deputed for the ambush of Major Fitzjohn. It was a wet morning, and for this reason I found difficulty in identifying with accuracy the car as it approached. I did, however, identify it before it crossed Charlemont Street Bridge and fired the first shot, as a signal, which immediately started off the ambush. The car went so fast, however, that it was not

known at the time if Major Fitzjohn was wounded or not, and I never learned the facts. Judging from the intensity of the attack, he should have been wounded.

Frank Flood, who was arrested a short time later and executed, was on that operation. On that morning I had to come from Clonskeagh, go to the office in Crow Street, get the gun from the press there, bring it to the scene of the ambush and return it to Crow Street. This, notwithstanding the unexpected activity in Exchequer Street, caused a certain amount of tension, as we expected much activity and holds-up from Crown Forces.

Lord French was to attend the wedding of the daughter of the Provost of Trinity College. Arrangements were made to attack him. The Squad were in position somewhere in the vicinity of Nassau Street when information was received that Lord French would not be attending the wedding. I was sent to the Squad to collect some arms from them and to inform them that the job was off. When returning from that mission along Nassau Street and in company with Ned Kelleher, to my surprise, I saw Lord French swing round into Kildare Street in his car, but on account of the instructions nothing could be done.

I remember another morning when the Squad was given the job of covering Michael Collins's retreat from a house in Fitzwilliam Place. Frank Saurin and I were together on Fitzwilliam Square and, of course, we were armed. No sooner had we taken up position when we saw an armoured car approaching which caused apprehension on our part, but it passed on without stopping. Had we taken premature action, it is doubtful if Collins would have escaped.

Major-General Crozier, who at that time was in charge of

the Auxiliaries, was due to arrive from England on the evening mail boat on a particular date. The Intelligence Department were aware of this beforehand and the Squad were detailed to take up a position in the vicinity of Blackrock Park, where the road was under repair, in readiness for an ambush. The instructions were that the ambush was not to be carried out if Crozier was escorted by an armoured car. To ascertain if he was so escorted, a member of the Intelligence Staff who, I believe, was Joe Guilfoyle, was sent to Dunlaoghaire, and it was arranged that he should 'phone to a telephone at Blackrock Park the information as to whether an armoured car was escorting Crozier or not. His code word was "Lizzie arrived", which meant an armoured car. When we received this code word by 'phone, we knew that an armoured escort was present, so the operation did not take place.

Bogus message received at G.H.Q.

During the time that I was engaged in observing the movements of cars of British agents, a message was received mysteriously by Liam Tobin at his headquarters to the effect that a Captain McCormack, residing at a house in Donnybrook, was willing to disclose some information that would be of importance to us and the number of a motor car was given. I was instructed to call there and see him. I went on a Sunday evening on my bicycle and, when I got to the house, the hall door was opened by a man of typical British officer appearance. I asked for Captain McCormack and he intimated to me in some way or other that he was Captain McCormack. I told him I had been sent to see him in connection with a motor car, giving him the number of it. He immediately evinced great interest and invited me inside. I happened to see an Auxiliary cap lying in the hall which immediately aroused my suspicions, and I switched my inquiry into asking him if he had a car for sale.

He still tried to induce me into the house and, by using some evasive excuse, I got away from it. I learned later that on this occasion the house was occupied by Auxiliaries who were lodging there. I reported back to Liam Tobin, who was much surprised, but could not remember the source of the information given to him.

Subsequent to 'Bloody Sunday' our Headquarters office at Crow St. was changed to an office over the Picture House in Pearse Street. This meant conveying documents and other equipment in the transfer. I was carrying a parcel which I knew contained medals and other property of Intelligence officers who had been shot on the 21st November. On passing along College Street, I walked straight into Igoe's complete gang. They separated on the path and I passed through their formation, but, luckily for me, they made no attempt to hold me up.

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