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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 689

Witness

Liam O'Doherty,
14 Lower O'Connell St.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade,
1913 - ;

O/C. 5th Battalion Dublin Brigade,
1917 - .

Subject.

- (a) His national activities 1916-1921;
- (b) Training of Engineering Battalion, Dublin Brigade;
- (c) Burning of Custom House, Dublin, 25.5.21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.634

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

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Statement by Mr. Liam O'Doherty

14 Lower O'Connell Street,

Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers at their formation in the Rotunda in November 1913. In 1916 I took part in the fight in North King Street, Dublin, this being part of the area of the Four Courts commanded by Commandant Daly. Apart from the surrender etc. the following incident during the fighting stands out in my mind:

A few Volunteers were standing at the window of Reilly's public house (first floor), junction of Nth. King Street and Church Street, looking up Nth. King Street towards Bolton Street as the British were working their way from Bolton Street down to our positions. This was on the Saturday morning, the firing had died down and dead silence prevailed.

To our surprise an Officer appeared from Nth. King St. Post Office and shouted to his men to come out from the houses. About 10 or 12 men came out and in a loud voice which could be heard a 100 yards off in the dead silence he told them that he was going to advance to our positions. We were going to fire on them but somebody suggested that it would be better to wait till they were advancing when they would be nearer - forming a better target. This British Officer gave all instructions to his men in such a loud voice that we could hear everything that was said and prepared accordingly. We also passed the information to the men who were at our barricades further down Church St., who passed it on to a further barricade in a narrow street between Nth. King St. Post

Office (where the British section was) and Church St.

As the soldiers advanced at the double they had a rifle in one hand and held their equipment on their backs with the other hand.

Immediately we started to fire on them they turned everywhere and ran down the side street already mentioned right into the barricade in this street. I do not know whether any of these British soldiers escaped, but when the British authorities afterwards stated that their casualties in this area were particularly heavy it is quite understandable.

It would be difficult to find a similar example of such downright stupidity - an officer shouting instructions to his men with the enemy looking on, listening to every word and preparing accordingly.

At the formation of K Company (Engineers) I was transferred to that unit, and when the 5th Battalion was formed I, in due course, became Adjutant, and subsequently when Commandant Archer was transferred to the Headquarters Staff of the Director of Engineering I succeeded him as O/C of the 5th Battalion.

As regards the history of the 5th Battalion and the drawings of grenades etc., these were done by J. Ryan - O/C No. 3 Company 5th Battalion.

Particulars of 5th Battalion (Engineers) Dublin Brigade:

About November 1917 each Company in the Dublin Brigade was instructed by Headquarters to form a special class of men recruited within the Company for "sapper" work as it was then called. The class was to consist of 10 men and organised on similar lines to the "Signal" classes and First Aid. The officer in charge of the "sapper" section was directly responsible to the Company O/C. The nature of the training depended on the officer's own knowledge and initiative, consequently the training lacked uniformity as between one company and another. The subjects taught were: - Earthworks, Trenching, Rough Bridge building, Telephone and telegraph communications and some Explosive work, as well as Map Reading and Field Sketching.

In early 1918 it was decided that each Battalion in the Brigade should form a single unit in their own Battalion of all the Company's Sapper Sections, and organise it as an Engineering Company under the command of an officer directly responsible to the Battalion Commander. The object of training was to have a Company ready to do any Engineering work that might be required in each separate Battalion area. The syllabus of training was, of course, extended and the Training Officers exchanged around to level up the general knowledge of the subjects.

Before the end of 1918 the Brigade Staff, realising the progress made with the Engineering Units, decided to take over direct control of the four Companies (which at that time were numbered 1, 2, 3 & 4 according to the Battalion which they served) and formed them into one Unit called K Company. At the same time the G.H.Q. decided to have an Engineering Department and appointed R. O'Connor as Director.

of that Department. At the end of 1918, about December, the Director took over control of K Company and formed it into a Battalion called the 5th Battalion, with four Companies called Nos. 1, 2, 3 & 4 and in charge of officers which he and his staff appointed. The re-organisation was completed by January 1919 and the whole Battalion got down to intensive training on a new syllabus. The Companies were now each commanded by a Captain, with a 1st and 2nd Lieutenant, a Company Adjutant, a Company Quartermaster, 4 Section Commanders and eight Squad Leaders. The sections were each specialised and trained in the following subjects: -

No. 1 Section : - Railway Demolitions.

Training consisted of a thorough knowledge of Rolling Stock and permanent way and the best means of destroying same by explosives, fire or manual methods. A knowledge of all Railway Repair shops, where situated and the extent of their equipment. The examining of points, crossings and curves of the permanent way with a view to derailing trains etc., and the practise of cutting rails with explosives by methods invisible to the look-out trains.

Application of training - ambush of troop train at Killester, burning of Dollymount Coast Guard Station.

No. 2 Section : - Communications :

The training in this section consisted of obtaining a detailed knowledge of all underground and overhead telephone and telegraph lines in the area, the examining of every manhole, the tracing of the underground cables to where they came from underground and led up to the overhead distributing poles and, of course, the tracing of the poles that connected Dublin with the different.

counties and the private military lines, all with a view to cutting off communication with any or all of above at any time at short notice.

This section had also to practise the use of their own portable Field 'phones to establish their own communications.

Application : - Isolation of Custom House etc.
(see separate note).

No. 3 Section - Road Mining: -

This Section was trained in the use of explosives, the making of mines, traps, grenades etc. and had to make a close study of all roads and lanes in the area with a view to ambushing troops or vehicles.

No. 4 Section - General Demolitions: -

This Section was trained in the manufacture of home explosives and the use of all home and foreign explosives and the methods of calculating quantities required and placing same for the destruction of buildings, bridges (steel and masonry), walls, cables etc. All were trained in a knowledge of all such bridge and building in their area.

Practical Application : - The blowing up of Maynooth Town Hall. The destruction by fire of Stepside Barracks, Rockbrook, Ballybrack etc. The smashing up of machines in newspaper offices etc.

Subjects common to all four sections were :-

Map reading and field sketching,
Single and double lock bridge building,
Tree felling by explosives and manual means,
The use of fire-arms including automatic weapons and machine guns,
First Aid.

Sketches are enclosed which will give an idea of training and progress of work.

Custom House, burning of, by the I.R.A.
Part taken by the 5th Battalion, Dublin Brigade:

A short time before the actual operation I was asked by the O/C Dublin Brigade whether it was possible to get complete plans of the Custom House - various floors, corridors etc.

One of the clerks of the Board of Works was sympathetic to the struggle, and I think to everybody's surprise and satisfaction he arrived with a full set of plans about an hour after he was asked.

The operation was divided mainly between the 2nd Battalion which carried out the actual burning of the building, assisted by the Dublin Active Service Unit, (the latter also took part in forming a protection guard outside) and the 5th Battalion who were responsible for the isolation of the building as regards cutting off communications - telephone, telegraph, etc., the holding up of the Post Office Staff at the Liffey side of building as well as strengthening of the guard outside. They had also to take possession of the building at the corner of Beresford Place and Gardiner Street which was occupied by a section of the Secretary's Office of the Post Office. As from this building could be seen any activity around the Custom House it was thought necessary to collect the Staff and keep them out of the way so that they could not give an alarm to lorries etc. which might be passing by.

About 30 men were engaged from the 5th Battalion divided up as follows :

- 16 - Cutting wires, cables etc. for isolation
- 6 - At Beresford Place Office
- 2 - In Post Office Custom House
- 8 - Forming outside guard around the Custom House railings.

Time was a very important factor in this operation especially regarding the cutting off of communications as it would not do to leave the cables cut too long before the I.R.A. entered the building, and, of course, it would be fatal if the men entered the building and it was not isolated.

The timing was as follows: -

Work of isolation began at five minutes to one o'clock
 Main body of men entered the Custom House at one o'clock
 Whole operation was to be completed by 1.20 p.m.

Further more, there could be no congregating of men outside the building, or indeed anywhere else in Dublin, at the time without an alarm being given.

The work of isolation consisted of cutting cables at various points around the building, dismantling telephone at Liberty Hall and climbing pole in front of Store Street Police Station as there was direct wire communication here between the Police Station and the Custom House.

This pole was about 60 feet high and it necessitated somebody dressing up and acting just like a line man as the pole was in full view of the police at Store Street. When it is remembered that this was done by a man who could have no experience of climbing poles, that the pole was about 60 feet high, that it was done in front of the police station with the policemen standing about, all in five minutes - it will be seen how far the will to succeed had entered the

minds of the I.R.A. This feat was performed by M. Cremen who was then O/C No. 1 Company.

The work of isolation etc. was completed just as the O/C 2nd Battalion with his men were crossing the square of the Custom House.

It has been said that the work was performed by experts. It was performed by men who night after night traced the cables and wires leading to the Custom House from all sides, patiently checking up day after day until it was certain that no loose end was left unnoticed. In this work our gratitude must be given to the late Andy Fitzpatrick of the G.P.O. Engineering Staff for his very great assistance in this matter.

The remainder of the work allotted to the 5th Battalion was duly carried out till the Military lorry crashed in about 1.20 when all the work of demolition was completed.

Volunteer's Initiative:

During the Black and Tan period Dick McKee, who was O/C Dublin Brigade, required an Orderly. I recommended to him Tommy Bryan, who was a member of No. 3 Company, 5th Battalion. It was very necessary that the man doing this job would be resourceful, quick and of sound judgment. As well as that, he would have to be thoroughly reliable as his work would consist of taking messages to the various headquarters' offices (which were, of course, worked in secret) and to the various Commandants of the Dublin Brigade etc. His work would be done on a bicycle.

I do not think that T. Bryan had a bicycle but he got one apparently on the hire purchase system. He was very proud to be trusted with this job.

A few months afterwards Tommy called at my house at an unusually early hour and it was apparent that something had happened.

The previous night he was delivering despatches and on his way to the house of the O/C 3rd Battalion he ran into a hold-up by the Auxiliaries in James' Street. At that time the Auxiliaries drove along in lorries, suddenly stopped and jumped out and then began to search passers-by. In a few seconds T. Bryan was surrounded by the Auxiliaries, and having despatches on him he threw the bicycle against one of the Auxiliaries and made a dash for the door of a public house, got through to the back and escaped.

During the night he remembered that the bicycle was bought on the instalment system or was hired (I don't know which) and this necessitated giving his own name and address and those of guarantors to the Cycle Shop.

The bicycle being in the hands of the Castle people he knew they would trace him from the number etc. The following morning he was waiting outside the Cycle shop before it opened. He entered the shop, stated he was armed and that it was necessary for him to have all the records in connection with the purchase. He explained the circumstances and assured them that everything as regards payment would be all right. They gave him an Index Card and I think a loose leaf of a ledger and it was these he brought to me for safe keeping.

That evening one of our men called to the shop to

say that everything would be all right and he was told that the Auxiliaries were there about 11 o'clock looking for the records and when told what had happened one of them laughed and said, "He deserved to get away with it".

I wondered how many would have thought in the circumstances of removing the records from the shop so as to eliminate evidence against himself and others.

He was very crestfallen when Dick McKee took him off the job as Orderly as he thought he had done something wrong, but Dick McKee explained to him that for his own sake and the work of the Brigade it was necessary for him to lay low for a while as one of the Auxiliaries might be able to identify him.

Tommy Bryan was executed some months afterwards (March 1921) in Mountjoy Prison having been caught with others preparing an ambush position near the Tolka in Drumcondra.

SIGNED

Liam O'Doherty

 LIAM O'DOHERTY

DATE

20th June 1952

20th June, 1952

WITNESS

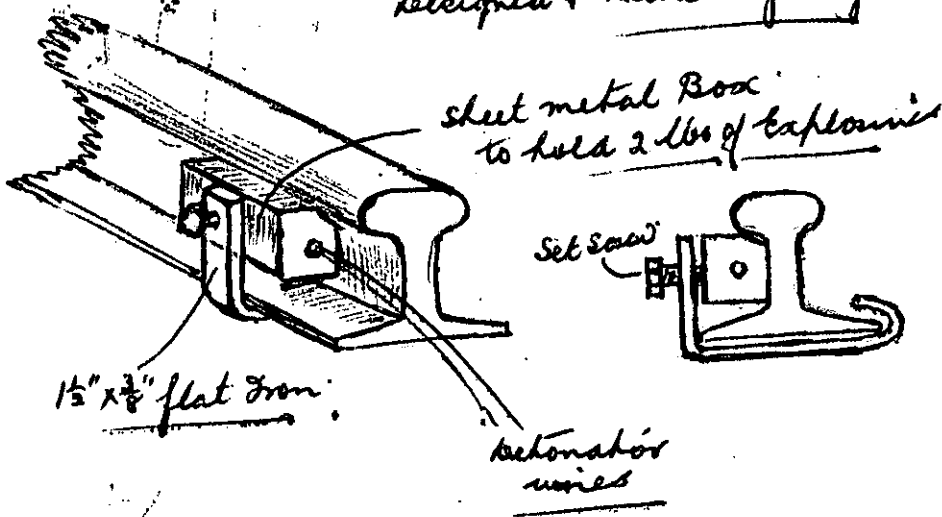
J. Kearns Comd't.

(J. Kearns) Comd't.

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Box & Clamp

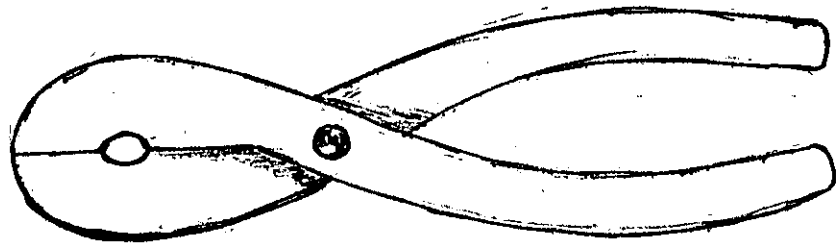
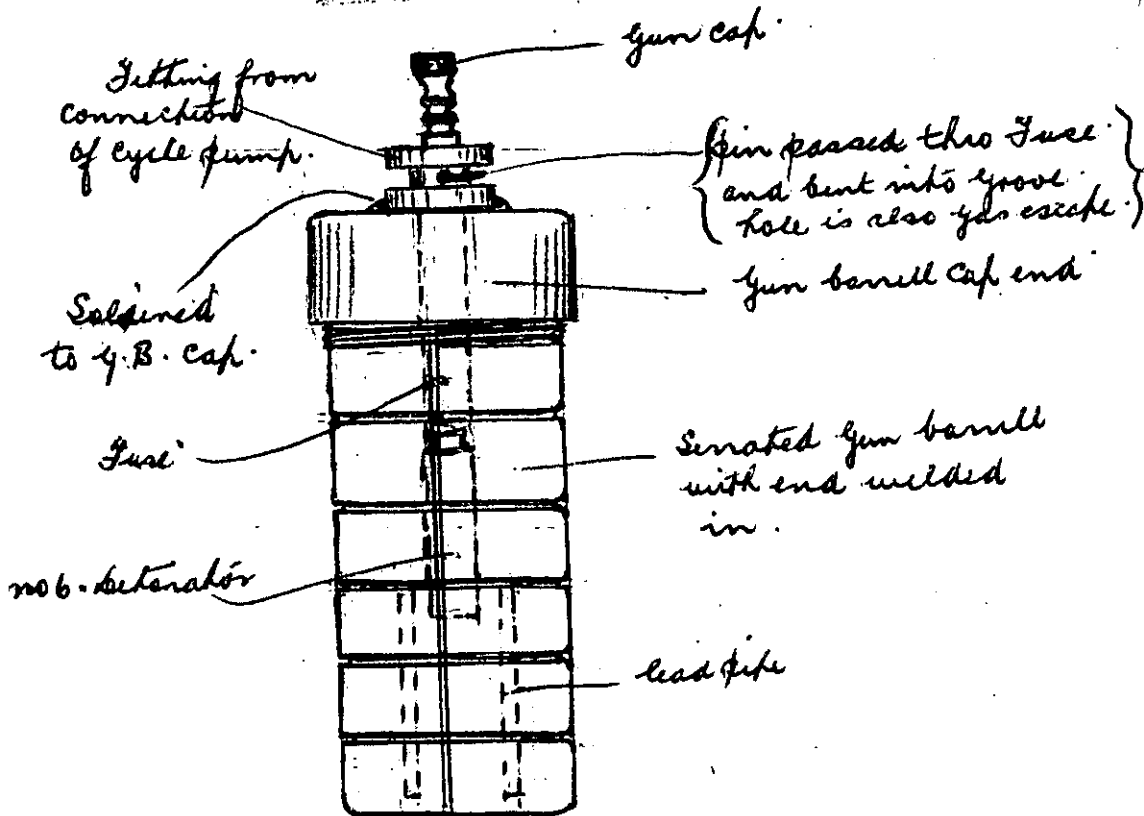
designed & made by engineers.



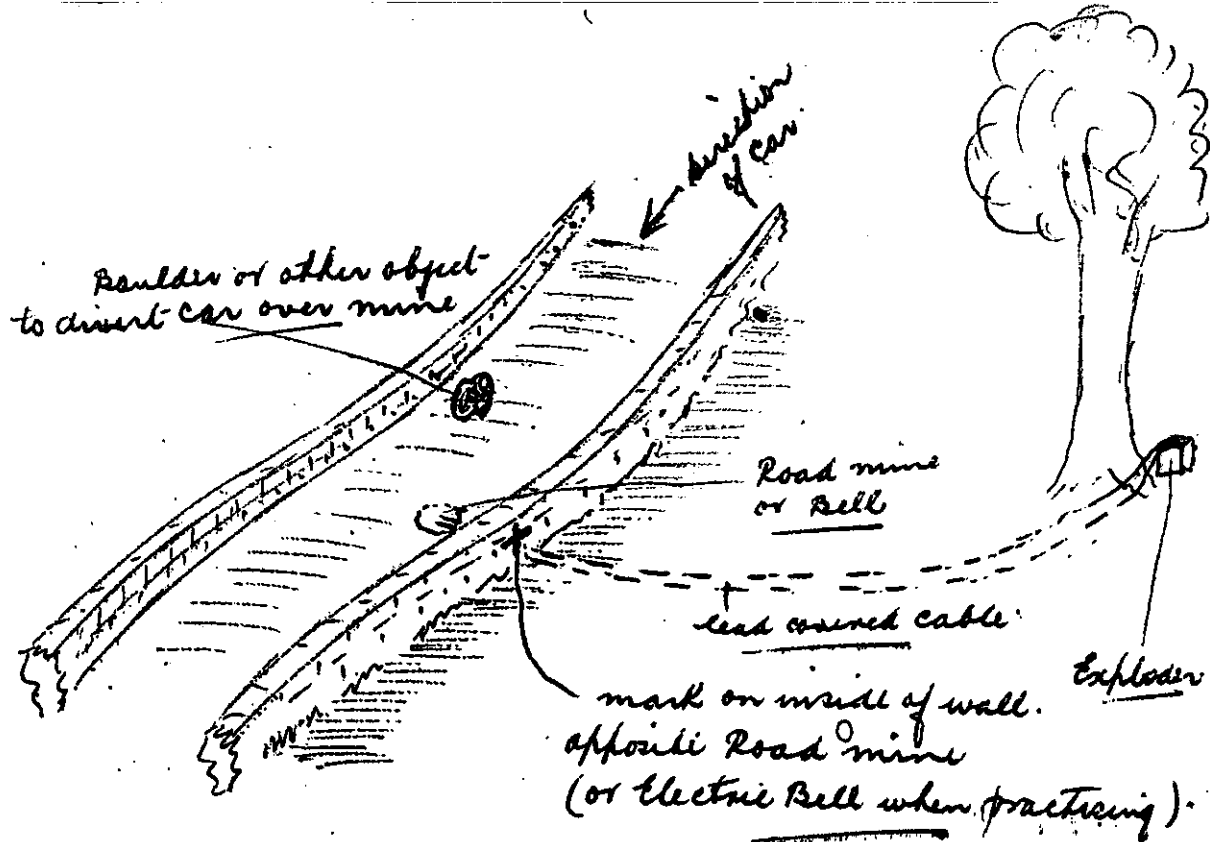
Box and Clamp.

used for cutting Railway Tracks.
placed on outer Rail of curve is not
visible to lookout on pilot Train
and cannot be cut by the wheels.

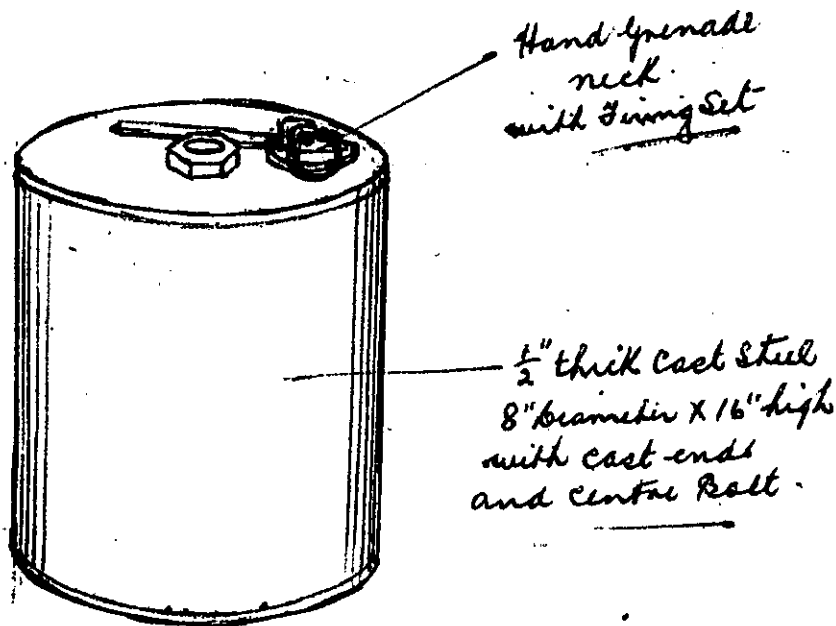
First experimental grenade
made by engineers.



Detonator Crimper
used to crimp detonator on
to Time Fuse.
(made from 164. Hoop Iron)
by engineers



mines + cables concealed under
ground and brushed over with brush



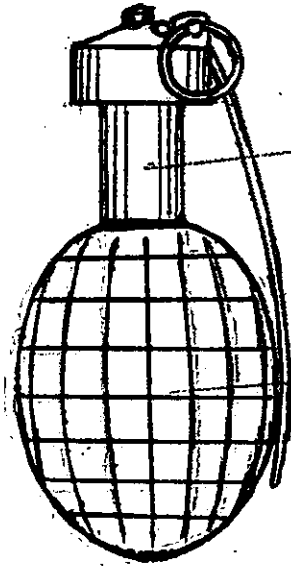
Standard land mine
converted to Trap mine
by using grenade neck.

Explosive cheddar = { D.N.T. = 12 qts.
POT. CHLORATE = 2 lbs.
CASTOR OIL = 8 qts. }

Primer 2 qts. Yelignite

For use as Trap mine it is inverted
and Ring withdrawn weight of mine
keeps lever in place, unless the mine
is lifted or turned over.

First Standard Grenade:
manufactured by Munitions Staff



Brass
machined neck.

$\frac{3}{8}$ " thick cast iron
Shell.

Explosive charge $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.
Tetryl

Timed for 2 seconds.