

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 775

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 775

Witness

Patrick Crowe,
Railway Station,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion,
Cork 1 Brigade. 1914-1921.

Subject.

Communications and Intelligence,
Glanmire Station, Cork,
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2103

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENTBYPATRICK CROWE,RAILWAY STATION, TRALEE, CO. KERRY.'A' COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION, CORK 1 BRIGADE,ENGAGED ONCOMMUNICATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE,GLANMIRE STATION, CORK.

My father was an evicted tenant in the townland of Stuke near Clonoulty, Co. Tipperary. He was always an Irish Irelander.

My brother Tim was with Tom MacEllistrim with Ballymacelligott Company of Volunteers in the start of the movement and in the great breakaway into the Irish Volunteers Miceál Staines led that break in Kerry with a meeting of all Volunteers at Castleisland. About 1,000 Volunteers travelled there that day from Tralee by special train. I was some years younger than Tim (R.I.P.) and used mind the Signal Cabin at night when he used to go to Ballymacelligott to train the boys. We lived at Gortatlea at that time and my father was Station Master there.

Tim was reported by some police agent and deported to Waterford, never to be allowed return again.

My father was also threatened with dismissal, though he took no active part at this period in his life, though it was well known where his sympathy lay.

Bye and bye, with a large family on his shoulders, I got employed in the G.S.W.R. at Cork Parcels Office.

There was a good bunch of Kerry boys there and we, in common with others, fell into line.

First of all, we joined Sinn Fein Clubs but this we felt was not of the type of work we were prepared to do.

There were men in the G.S. & W.R. in Cork at that time from every Southern County and the bulk of them were belonging to 'A' Company, with Sandow Donovan in charge. It was here we fell in.

The distribution of An t-Óglach was really responsible for the formal and initial establishment of Communications between General Headquarters and Divisions, etc., in the County.

At that time, Seán O'Connell, Clerk, Great Southern Railway, later Captain, Free State Army - now, I believe, in Transport House, was in charge in Dublin, and the writer in Cork. Our liaison man was Daniel Hickey, Passenger Guard between Cork and Dublin. The latter had a son in the I.R.A. forces and he became a despatch rider in the Free State Forces on their formation - Tim Hickey (Red Head).

For a long time An t-Óglach passed along and was in turn delivered to Nora Wallace's newspaper shop, Brunswick Street, Cork, the Southern Headquarters. Later it was found necessary, as Units became more organised, to transport communications, and, while this was done with apparent ease at the start, it became one of the hazardous jobs with raids at stations on trains, searches being made

as often as thrice on some journeys. No longer was it possible for these to be kept in the pockets or even in any visible part of vans, engines, etc.

Ink jars were used for a long period, into which the despatches were placed and when the stock ran out Guinness's dark bottle had to be made do. The bottle or bottles could be left carelessly thrown in any corner of vans and to anybody would appear to be discarded empties. The tail-lamp on the train could always be used during daylight. Very often they were nailed under the footboards of carriages and always with success. On one occasion when an important letter had to go to Headquarters, the train was under search and all people had to stand on No. 6 Platform, Cork; the letter was secreted in a fowl in the Dining Car. Chef Looney said afterwards that it was a good job none of the Auxies got hungry.

I was at the time attached to 'A' Company, Cork, and had to turn out for parades on word from the "Mobiliser", but when an urgent communique was delayed overnight and not delivered until a.m. there was some row. One job was enough was the verdict and the less known the better. Still the Mobiliser came. No. good. I had to play truant and I expect with shut mouth was classified as a backer out. Still, I had a long day from early morning until last arrival at night of trains.

Frequently parcels arrived with stores, etc., and these were not so easy to handle. Stripped of labels they were put into the Lost Property Office without a claimant until Seán Healy, Lieutenant of 'A' Company, could

have them removed. (He is now Station Master, Blackrock, Co. Dublin).

Despatches I personally delivered and collected from Wallaces from Seán Hegarty or the late Domie Sullivan, watchful of every hold-up in the city and moving by alternating routes. About the year 1919, Seán Ivers became a Ticket Checker and, on an occasion or two, got some letters for Cork and, knowing that the system of Communications was already there, insisted that all despatches be addressed to him. This was unknown until it was learned that one was picked up in King Street, now MacCurtain Street, and Ivers got a stretch in gaol for nothing else only his foolish intrusion into a matter he should have very well left alone. Thereafter the old procedure had to be reverted to, except that, in future, the correspondence was enclosed to yours truly, "Geo. Osborne", Cork, and never was there a let-up thereafter.

During the early period, when Officers of the British Army came on furlough they generally possessed a brown double-strapped holdall. I found that they generally contained macs, puttees, short knee trousers, revolvers in holsters, Sam Browns and, at times, the latest in field glasses. Only the revolvers in holsters appealed to me and, after abstracting them, I had the holdall placed in the cloak-room and not kept in the parcel office, so as to throw off all suspicion. This generally happened on night duty. Quite a number were got in this way until one night I was replaced in my old job. A plank was laid for my successor to see if in this case the revolver would

disappear and it did.

Empress Place then struck. We had got an excerpt from Domie Sullivan of a despatch to Dublin Castle, which stated the offices at Glanmire Station were honeycombed with I.R.A. or accomplices. A few of the murder gang came down about 1.30 a.m., took out Charlie Daly who replaced me in the parcel office on a Monday night. He was taken to the tunnel, shot in the heart and his chest placed on the rail so that his body would be mangled by the down night mail and thus destroy evidence of his murder. But Charlie was found. (He lived in the Lough, I think). He was sympathetic to the cause, not actually in it. Still he was buried with full honours. Thereafter the large gates outside the station were closed at night and a sentry put on the roof to watch any incursions by the mob in Empress Place. This happened the first night Daly went on (Monday) about 3rd March, 1921, and so I was back on the job on Tuesday night, a worried and a scared man. It was tough to be working solo and at night in an office, not knowing when the call would come to the door.

Yet the transport of material and correspondence went on. Seán O'Connell in Dublin had to go 'on the run'. I think he was replaced by Mick Davis, who was a Sergeant, I believe, in the Free State Army in Arbour Hill after the truce.

The foregoing gives a rough picture of the communications side of what was done, and it must also be noted that

NOTE: Empress Place dominated the railway station from halfway up Summerhill and two houses here were occupied by about fifty Auxiliaries, part of 'K' Company stationed in Victoria Barracks.

outlying Companies' despatches through North Cork and Kerry were dealt with as well as foreign despatches which went out in foreign boats at Cork. Most of the latter came from Dublin. Cork had many boats at the time being covered by convoy on shipping routes.

Rarely were I.R.A. personnel our trouble. These generally joined at outside quiet stations where enemy vigilance was nil.

One aspect of the work was the passing on of news of troop movements. The position was - there was an English Railway Transport Officer at the station. He got his instructions (secret) to have provision made at the Railway District Superintendent's office for the movement by way of extra carriages and a van or wagon for stores. The District Superintendent had, of course, to advise the Inspector to so strengthen trains and it was here we got the information, often by softening measures across the road. One case sticks out vividly and that was after the Clonbanin ambush, when a big draft of men and arms was being sent to Banteer for a country-wide round-up. Word was sent to Lombardstown for Nadd to be on the alert and I am glad to say the boys there appreciated it. There never was time to go to O.C. with such information as it was always acted on and word forwarded pronto, getting there before the draft in nearly every case.

Such work went on day after day until the truce.

Before the truce it definitely was beginning to get harder to work in town and Hegarty and Domie decided to get a young lad - M. O'Leary - to come to the Railway, as evidently we were being watched. He had no contact with trains and met us. He had a secret plank in an office which he emptied daily and generally left us much more for despatch. I now give you the history of a machine gun which arrived from London and which Headquarters in Cork told me they could not trace the sender of.

A tea chest arrived in Cork one day off the Rosslare Express. It was labelled 'Swanton & Co., North Main St.' The sender on the label was 'Bartrum & Co., Drapers, London'. No such party resided in North Main Street, and, consequently the sending station in London was written to, as were the senders themselves. After about ten days the sending station wrote back that they had no account of any such case and that evidently someone was trading in their name. Seán Healy and myself opened the case, and what a surprise ! Instead of drapery there was a machine gun in parts. Hastily it was closed and word sent in to Seán Donoghue (R.I.P.) for a car to remove it. Little did we dream that the firm in London contacted the Police Force, for, on the very day we opened the case, a convoy of Auxies arrived at 5 p.m. I was at the Platform on No. 6 when one of the lads from the office rushed over and said, "Crowe, the place is surrounded and what about the case ?" Immediately I returned to find the platform reeking with Auxies but their leader was waiting for the Stationmaster to return from the departure platform where I had been. I saw little hope now, but, on entering the parcel office, I saw Wallis's

carman loading up parcels on a four-wheeled barrow. I immediately gave him a hand and threw up the case also. Moving out the door an Auxie stepped aside to let us pass, whilst two more were at the outer gate.

In the meantime, a donkey and car from the Dairy Produce Stores, Bridge Street, had arrived for the case. I tumbled to it and told him to get going. Now, this was not all. The signature for the box was another thing and hastily a forgery was made by Clerk, Dan Houlihan, and the witness for the delivery was Seán Healy. After some fifteen minutes or so all activity was centred on the parcels office and the Auxies were dumbfounded to find the case gone. Healy gave a "description" of the "man" that took the case. The leader was no fool. He had been a railway clerk in York and Leeds and knew that where there was any doubt about ownership of the case bonafides should be produced. Healy said he got it and could not lay hands on it. Seán got twenty-four hours to get it.

That night the most peculiar raid ever took place in Haughtons, North Main Street, for a few billheads. One had to be typed there saying "Please give to bearer one case addressed Swanton & Co., etc." True, that document was called for within the twenty-four hours. Seán Healy handed it over after having put a hole in its centre as if he had it on a rough file. The leader of the Auxies was still sceptical and told Seán so, but the latter stuck it out.

Not many days afterwards Seán Healy found himself in the cage and, if I remember rightly, in the next one at

Victoria Barracks was a man named Swanton from West Cork - a loyalist.

The Navy is held up.

On an occasion a large number of sea survey maps from the battle cruisers at Cobh was being sent to Plymouth or Portsmouth - there would be about a dozen in all. These were about 4' square and 4" deep and were understood to give the navigable part of coasts, etc. The ships had evidently come from European waters and were returning them for other ships' needs before going foreign.

Seán Healy got in touch with some of the boys and had them all removed at Blarney off the train. Whether he destroyed them or not I cannot say.

The foregoing is, after a number of years, a rough outline of the principal features of the work of intelligence, communications, etc., carried out in Cork by railwaymen in the Glanmire Station.

No doubt, Seán O'Connell and Mick Davis can feature the Dublin end.

Alias "Geo Osborne"

Alias: "Geo. Osborne"

Signed: *Patrick Crowe*
(Patrick Crowe)

Witnessed: *C. Saurin* LT. COLONEL.
(C. Saurin)

Date: 29th December, 1952.

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