

W.S. 1299

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 1,299

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,299

Witness

Christopher (Kit) Farrell,
70 Upper George's Street,
Dun Laoghaire,
Dublin.

Identity.

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

Q.M. 3rd Battalion do. 1919 - .

Subject.

'A' Co mpany 3rd Battalion, Dublin
Brigade, 1917-1921.

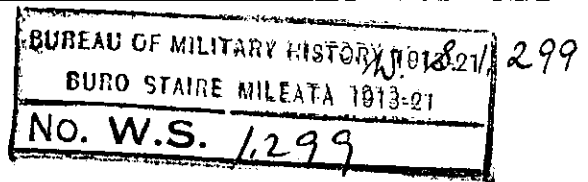
Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2651

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL



MR. CHRISTOPHER (KIT) FARRELL

70 Upper George's Street, Dun Laoire, Dublin.

I joined the Third Battalion, Dublin Brigade, Irish Volunteers at 41 York Street shortly after the reorganisation in 1917. After a period of training with a recruit section I was posted to No. 2 Section, A/Company. The officers of the company at that time were: Joe O'Connor, Sean Guilfoyle and Sean Golden. I felt very proud when I received my membership card and paid my first subscription to the arms fund.

Training with the company was of a very intensive nature including field exercises on the Dublin Mountains, rifle practice at various places around Crumlin and the "Gem" in Aungier Street, and other exercises built up the high standard of efficiency eventually reached by A/Company.

Then came a vacancy for company quartermaster. On parade one night I nearly collapsed from shock when I heard read from orders that I had been appointed to fill the vacancy. I felt rather nervous at first, but soon settled down to my job, thanks to the help and encouragement I received from my good friend the late Captain Sean O'Keefe who, at that time, was acting battalion Q.M., whom I afterwards had the honour to assist in many of his operations. Shortly afterwards a vacancy occurred for the position of battalion Q.M. caused through Sean O'Keefe going to B. Company as officer commanding and, to my amazement, I received notification from Commandant J. O'Connor that I had been selected by Battalion Council to fill the vacancy, afterwards receiving from the officers, N.C.Os. (particularly the company quartermasters) and men of the battalion more than my measure of co-operation.

The re-arming of the Volunteers after the re-organisation became a matter of keen competition between the companies within the battalion, each company going all out to do better than its neighbour. This spirit of friendly rivalry acted as a tonic on the morale of the various companies.

In the study of ways and means to procure arms, etc. many opportunities were presented which could and did prove productive. One such opportunity came the way of A. Company. Jimmie Murray and Jack Bracken contacted two British soldiers. During the conversation they discovered that the soldiers were Irish and were not satisfied with the manner in which the "Defender of Small Nations" was treating the Irish people. For this reason they were prepared to help the Volunteers any way they could. Naturally, the boys suggested rifles, ammunition and "what have you?" They agreed to this, but requested to be put in touch with an officer. The boys made an appointment and reported the matter to the battalion commandant. I was instructed to investigate and given full authority to make what arrangements I thought necessary to bring the matter to a conclusion. I kept the appointment, accompanied by Jack Bracken. No time was wasted. I went straight to business and suggested rifles. Things were going so smoothly that I became suspicious, wondering what sort of trap was being set for us. I decided to risk the trap, if any. Having a good knowledge of the position of Wellington Barracks (now Griffith) we formed a plan before parting.

The Grand Canal forms the rear boundary of the barracks which is situated between the bridges - Harold's Cross and Sally's Bridge. Inside barrack railings, at a point almost opposite to Greenmount Lane (on opposite side of the canal) is a small red-bricked house known as the Schoolmaster's House. This house offered cover to both myself and the contact on the inside. It was decided that I would swim

across the canal at this point. The rifles were to be passed out under the bottom bar of the railings. Time - 1 o'clock striking by clock in the barrack tower. Signal - three low whistles.

Next morning at 00.50 hours, seven men arrived at Greenmount Lane. Each man knew his job; everything in the vicinity was normal. Gas lamps bordering the road were dimmed by men detailed for that job. I swam across the canal. From my position on the canal bank I could see the light shining from the Guardroom and hear the measured tread of the sentry across the barrack square. As the barrack clock struck the hour, I gave the signal and received the answer and was in possession of three rifles. The operation was definitely on. I strapped the rifles on my back, using the slings, and swam back to the boys. I was helped out. Very shortly the rifles were on their way to the dump at Jimmie Murray's home.

I made about 14 crossings on different nights on this plan, out of which we obtained about 50 rifles. It was winter and on several occasions I swam through a thin coating of ice. On one occasion I was about half-way across when I received the danger signal. I had four rifles strapped on my back and had to remain longer than usual in the water. I was seized with cramp and was taken from the water by Peadar O'Meara. The cause of the danger signal was a couple of soldiers who, accompanied by their lady friends, arrived at the spot where I had intended to land. They would select that spot to say goodnight. They were soon got rid of by Jimmie Murray who proceeded to mend an imaginary puncture in the wheel of his cycle. We now received our first setback. Our inside contact was suspicious of things inside and requested us to lay off until we heard from him.

During the waiting period we decided to change our plan and work from the front of the barracks. About a week elapsed before we received the all clear from the soldiers. I explained the change of plan to our contact. He pointed out the fact that, though it was a quicker means of getting the rifles away, it exposed to greater danger the men working on the outside as they would be practically in full view of the sentry and could be seen quite easily. The risk was ours. We took it.

The main entrance to Wellington Barracks was on the South Circular Road. Inside the gate was situated the guard-room and a sentry post. About 50 yards from this post towards Leonard's Corner is another gate which is more or less covered by the shadow of a block of buildings facing the road. It was through this gate we proposed the rifles should be passed to us. Our first attempt here was so successful that we carried on at intervals for about six weeks. In spite of the close proximity of the sentry, rifles were passed through the bars of the gate, carried across the road and dispatched to the dump. Very shortly, and very unfortunate for us, this regiment was transferred elsewhere. The entire operation gave us over 100 rifles and some ammunition.

Our second setback occurred during this part of the operation in the very early hours of one morning. A brilliant moon shining, making the streets as clear as day, we were in possession of, I think, 10 rifles and ready to proceed to the dump when word was received through Kit Murray, a brother of Jimmie's at whose residence the dump was located, that they were of the opinion that the place was under observation and it might not be safe to go there. Most of us lived in the vicinity of the dump. The situation was rather awkward. I remembered some people who lived close by and thought they

might help us. I called but drew a blank. It was then suggested that I see the 'Skipper' and explain the position. It was much against my will that I agreed to do this; my reason was that the 'Skipper' - the late Major General Sean Guilfoyle was at that time battalion adjutant, and his family had already had a good deal of trouble from the enemy forces and, to me, it seemed like adding fuel to the fire. However, we proceeded to the 'Skipper's' home, situated in Pleasants Street, using as cover the shadows cast by the various buildings en route.

Arriving at Pleasants Street, the boys with the guns went into hiding. I proceeded to the house, knocked gently on the door. In a short time the door was opened by the 'Skipper'. His first words were: "Have you no one else to appear to at this time of night?"; then; "You are in trouble?" I answered yes and explained the situation. He gave a low whistle and remarked "This is serious". He then asked: "Where are the boys and guns?". I told him. His reply was: "Bring them quietly to the house". I did so and, with the assistance of his sisters who were members of Cumann na mBan, the rifles were safely hidden and myself and the boys regaled with steaming cups of cocoa and I assure you no cocoa ever tasted better. Later in the evening the rifles were removed to the dump.

I feel it my duty to pay tribute to the boys who got the rifles back to the dump - their calm courage and cool efficiency played more than a major part in the success of the operation. I give their names hereunder:- One or two names I may have forgotten, but should an account of this operation come their way, I am sure they will understand and accept the tribute I have endeavoured to pay to their comrades: Sean Guilfoyle, battalion adjutant; J. Murray,

P. O'Meara, J. Bracken, Leo O'Brien and Tom Scully. The soldier inside the barracks was Private Sean Kenny; he is at present in the Garda Síochána.

The late Captain Tom Cullen had received information regarding gelignite, fuse and detonators stored on the premises of a certain firm of well-sinkers situated not far from the battalion dump, which he reported to the battalion O/C. I was detailed to investigate.

In his report Captain Cullen submitted some very useful information re. interior of premises, position of magazine, offices and staff. On looking the place over, I discovered that entrance was gained through a large wooden gate opening in two halves. The left half contained a small wicket. This gate was closed by pulling a bar across on the inside, but it was not padlocked. The small wicket was used by staff as a means of exit. Inside the gate, and situated on the right of the passage, the offices were situated. About six clerks formed the staff. The gate was closed at 5.30 p.m. but the wicket was open. I decided to use the wicket as a means of entrance. Six men were selected including Jimmy Murray and his famous horse and cart. Shortly before 5.30 p.m. the following evening we took up our allotted positions which were: two men and myself close to the wicket; Jimmy with his horse and cart facing gate on opposite side of street assisted by one man, the other man to remain outside in case of a slip up. At 5.30 the big gate was closed. The wicket gate began to open slowly. Myself and two men followed in the opening gate, held up the man opening it. We closed the wicket and moved quietly across to the office, taking the man with us. On entering the office we held up the staff and disconnected the telephone. After this, one of our men left the office, opened the big

gate and admitted J. Murray and his assistant, plus horse and cart. They drove direct to the magazine at the end of the yard. On the way they picked up a couple of workmen who were working about the place.. In the office I pointed a gun at the person I thought might be the chief clerk, demanding him to hand me the key of the magazine off the keyboard near where he stood. He hesitated a moment, then obliged, leaving two men in charge of the office. I left the office taking with me the clerk and proceeded to the magazine. On arrival there I handed the key back to the clerk, requesting him to open the door, which he did. With the assistance of the two workmen it did not take us long to load the precious cargo into the cart, covering it over with a few old sacks. Jimmy Murray and his assistant drove cheerfully to the dump. We gave him ten minutes start.

We obtained approximately 70 lbs. gelignite, a quantity of fuze, detonators and a plunger.

On Spy Wednesday night, 1918, when Jimmie Murray, "A" Coy. Quartermaster, was returning to his home, he was pounced on by a D.M.P. man who inquired why he had no light on his bicycle. As Jimmie had a Lee Metford rifle with him, he gave his correct name and address and many excuses so as to be allowed to proceed home and save the rifle. The D.M.P. man did not believe him and brought him to the Bridewell Police station. The police notified the British military authorities of Jimmie's arrest and the fact that he was in possession of a rifle.

The British soon cordoned off an area round Jimmie's house and searched his house and yard. They discovered only one B.S.A. .22 rifle, although in the dump hidden in the yard were 43 single-shot Martini rifles, some Lee Enfield rifles,

about 2-cwt. of gelignite, revolvers, gun-cotton, Mills grenades, a quantity of .303 ammunition and other war materials.

Fearing that the British might return and search the place again, as had happened in other cases, it was decided to remove the dump. Tom Scully, who at the time was a squad leader in A/Company (later captain), volunteered to do the job. Scully selected Christy Murray, brother of the Q.M., and myself to do the job with him. We were instructed to report at Scully's house the following morning. When we arrived there Tom was waiting for us with a builder's handcart complete with a ladder and some building material.

We set off with the handcart and went to Jimmie's house and unearthed the dump. We then realised that we would have to make three runs to remove all the stuff. On the first journey we took three 43 Martinis and the 2-cwt. of gelignite and brought them to Walsh's provision shop in East James's St. Tom Scully told me that when he asked Mr. Walsh to allow him to bring the stuff to his premises, not only did Mr. Walsh agree, but he thanked Tom for paying him the compliment. Mr. Walsh was father of Tom and Jim Walsh who were members of the Clanwilliam House garrison in the Easter Rising. We dumped the stuff in the cellar under the shop.

On the second journey we brought all the .303 ammunition and the Lee Enfield rifles. We brought the remainder of the dump on the third load. We nearly ran into trouble at the junction of Nassau St. and Grafton St. where one of the wheels of the handcart/came off and we caused a traffic jam while fixing it. The D.M.P. man on point duty gave us terrible abuse and threatened to report our 'boss' (meaning the builder) for employing boys to do men's work. However, we got safely to our destination. We then went to Scully's home for a meal

where Sean Guilfoyle (later Major General) was waiting for us. Sean congratulated us on the success of the job. He told us that Sean MacMahon, Q.M.G. (later Major-General) had instructed that the dump was to be distributed among all the units of the 3rd Battalion, the idea being not to keep all our eggs in one basket.

Tom Scully went to Fitzgerald's shop in Great Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) where he contacted General MacMahon from whom he received instructions concerning the distribution of the stuff, and a long screw-driver with which we were to remove the stocks of the Martinis. It was 2 o'clock the next morning when we had completed the distribution of the dump.

In the spring of 1920 I got blood poison in my foot and I was incapacitated for several months, therefore I relinquished my appointment as battalion quartermaster. When I was fit to resume my activities I reported back to A/Company, 3rd Battalion.

At midnight on Saturday, 20th November 1920, I was asked by Mick Kennedy to go on a job the following morning. He told me the job was the execution of an enemy intelligence agent who resided at 28 Earlsfort Terrace. He told me that if I had any scruples or conscientious objection to going on it I need not go and that nothing the worse would be thought of me. I agreed to go. We were to bring our own revolvers and meet at the junction of Hatch St. and Harcourt St. at 8.45 the following morning, Sunday 21st November 1920.

We assembled as arranged and each man was issued with a grenade. I was detailed to take charge of the covering party. I was to place my men at strategic points in the

street and engage any enemy forces that might come along. I was to remain in position for five minutes after our attacking party had left. In my party were Joe Lynch, Jim and Kit O'Donnell (brothers), Con Conroy and a lad named Jones. Paddy Byrne was in charge of the party which was to enter the house and carry out the execution. In this party were Leo O'Brien, Michael Kennedy and two brothers named Timmins. At 8.55 I moved off with my party and placed the men at strategic points. I took up position outside the door of No. 28, Earlsfort Terrace. Sharp at 9 o'clock the attacking party arrived and knocked on the door. They were admitted by a servant girl. They lost no time in getting down to business as, almost immediately, I heard the sound of shots being fired inside the house. When the party came out, Captain Paddy Byrne said to me "Come along Kit". I reminded him of my instructions to remain for five minutes after they had left. He said: "There is no necessity for you to remain". So we all moved off together. My party was not called to action. The operation was successful.

Many other raids took place with which I was connected in some way or other, but they were of no great importance.

The 3rd Battalion was the first unit of the Dublin Brigade to attack a party of Auxiliaries. This attack took place at Ballsbridge Post Office on 14th December 1920.

Ballsbridge was not in "A" Company's area. Another Company of the battalion had been detailed to carry out this operation but, owing to some hitch occurring, the attack hung fire and eventually "A" Company was assigned the task.

Several members of a special squad in "A" Company received mobilisation orders to attend at Hyland's Printing

Office, Drury Street, on a Sunday morning. At this meeting the situation was explained to us by Joe O'Connor, the Battalion Commandant. We were informed of the danger attached to the operation on account of (a) its close proximity to Beggar's Bush Barracks, then the headquarters of the Auxiliaries; (b) the exposed positions from which it would be necessary to carry out the attack. We were given time to think the matter over before volunteers for the job were asked. Needless to remark, when the call came every man present stepped forward, including P. Lynam, who had attended from a sick bed. We were all ready and anxious to go through with the task. Most of us had never been under fire up to this, which was the first effort from Easter 1916, in the Dublin area in open engagement against the enemy. Leo O'Brien, Acting O/C. of the Company and in charge of the operation, then received from Commandant O'Connor such information as he had at his disposal, which was as follows:-

A party of Auxies call each morning (except Sundays) at Ballsbridge Post Office to collect mails for their Headquarters, Beggar's Bush. Time of arrival, 09.00 hours. Escort vacate car, leave engine running. Two enter Post Office for mails, remainder stand in groups in vicinity of car. All are armed with rifles and revolvers.

On this information we based our attack. Our orders were to attack, destroy the enemy and capture the mails, arms and car.

Following a reconnaissance carried out by the officer in charge of the operation we assembled one morning at 08.00 hrs. and moved from point of assembly - junction Lower Leeson Street and St. Stephen's Green - to positions previously selected on Shelbourne Road, each small group occupying its allotted

position quietly and without fuss or attracting attention.

DISPOSITIONS: Leo O'Brien and four men, armed with revolvers at junction Shelbourne Road and Pembroke Road. Opposite side of Shelbourne Road, at cul-de-sac almost facing Post Office entrance, two men armed with revolvers and one hand grenade, just casually chatting. At Tram sheds below Post Office, two more men, out of sight, also armed with revolvers and one hand grenade. To all appearances everything on Shelbourne Road was just normal on that morning.

Willie Fitzgerald of "B" Company, and another driver attached to Headquarters were detailed to report with a Headquarters' car (actually a captured enemy car).

W. Fitzgerald's job was to drive away the Auxiliaries' car when captured. Our own car, with the other driver at the wheel, was to remain in Herbert Park Road and to be used for removing any of our men who might become wounded.

Two rifles were brought to the scene of the operation in the H.Q. car and in the original plan it was intended to use these rifles to give overhead supporting fire to the attacking party from the windows over a shop which faces down Shelbourne Road from Ballsbridge. This part of the plan had to be cancelled on instructions from G.H.Q. as no excuse was to be given to the enemy for subsequently burning any property as a reprisal. The two rifles were also intended to be used from H.Q. car to cover the retreat of our party should enemy reinforcements arrive and the attack go against us.

PLAN OF ATTACK: On the approach of the enemy the party at Tram Sheds to signal with white handkerchief, thus alerting all positions. No shot to be fired until Auxies bringing

mail sacks from P.O. to car reached centre of footpath. At this point attack to be launched by Capt. O'Brien and his party, taken up by men at cul-de-sac opposite P.O. and carried on by the men in Tram Sheds.

THE ATTACK: A few minutes to nine o'clock the enemy's approach was signalled by men in Tram Sheds. Car and escort arrive at P.O. Car vacated. Two Auxies enter P.O., remainder of escort stand about car. Everything going as had been anticipated. We are all feeling excited waiting for the stillness of the morning to be broken by the crash of explosives. Your two men leave P.O. with a sack of mails each; reach given point. L. O'Brien signals to the party, starts to yell and open fire. After the suspense of waiting the rattle of his .45 is good to hear. He and his party, advancing rapidly, give the enemy all they have got. The men on opposite side of road take up attack (unfortunately the hand grenade thrown by them rebounds off tram standard and falls short of the enemy), they continue with revolvers. The mail sacks are dropped on the footpath, the Auxies are blazing away for all they are worth in a vain effort to halt the charge. Now the men at the Tram Sheds take a hand; a grenade bursts on footpath in rear of enemy car. Willie Fitzgerald arrived with a rifle from our own car, moves forward in the attack. Under the comparatively heavy and continuous fire of our men the enemy retreats into the Post Office. W. Fitzgerald reaches car, dumps the mail sacks into car and drives off. The party have now closed in on the P.O., but all doors are securely fastened. We had driven the enemy off; the car, mails and one rifle were captured.

The attack had lasted about seven minutes. The element of surprise had been most successful; the terrific din

created by O'Brien and his men with the explosion of grenades gave the Auxies - judging by his official account afterwards published - to understand that they were attacked by a much larger party. For most of us the occasion was a thrilling experience; we had received our "baptismal fire" and, I hope, brought some honour to our old Company. Our casualties, Nil; enemy's not known.

Those taking part were:- Leo O'Brien, C. Farrell (myself), W. Oliver, F. O'Rourke, M. Kennedy, J. McCluckey, J. Sliney, J. Hayes, Willie Fitzgerald, the driver of the H.Q. car, and some others whose names I cannot recall.

Later, I took part in a few actions in the "Dardanelles" (Camden St. - Wexford St. area) which were commanded by Jack Doyle of Dunlaoghaire, a 1916 man and a member of "A" Company.

In one he launched an attack on a military patrol composed of an armoured car, followed by a lorry containing troops. This attack took place in Camden street at a point between Pleasants St. and Grantham St. as the patrol moved towards us. Doyle said: "Try for searchlight, Kit. I'll take the turret of the armoured car". We were armed with one grenade each. His next command: "Now, we let go". The grenades exploded all right, but the searchlight remained at full strength and the turret of the armoured car closed with a bang. The boys at Grantham St. in the meantime had opened up on the military in the tender. We retreated back through Pleasants St. and Grantham St. without loss. Military losses, if any, we never heard.

Another engagement I was in with the same officer took place on a St. Patrick's eve in the narrows between Whitefriars St. and Bishop St. It was about half an hour before our time

for withdrawing. We were standing at the corner of York St. I casually looked towards South Great George's St. and I saw coming towards us what appeared to be a small military tender covered with wire netting. So it appeared in the distance. I said: "Look out, Johnny, something coming". Doyle pulled the pin from a grenade. I yelled at him: "Don't, don't". He withheld his fire. It was not a military car, but a lorry covered with a large waterproof cover. Our trouble started then. The grenade pin got bent so much whatever way it came out, that we could not get it back in the bad light; eventually we succeeded in tying the lever with a handkerchief. Time was passing. Doyle handed me the grenade whilst he went to dismiss the boys at Bishop St. He had just left when I heard the engine of a car roaring. It was about halfway up Aungier St. travelling fast. It was a military tender. I quickly removed the handkerchief from the grenade which exploded against the side of the tender which almost immediately pulled up. Another grenade, fired from Bishop St., exploded quite close to it. The tender moved forward again. Quickening speed, it dashed through a fusillade of small arms fire from the boys at Bishop St. corner. Our retreat was through Bishop St. and Whitefriars St. The enemy suffered casualties in this action. Our losses nil.

Several "A" Company patrols operated in this area. I just mention Lieut. Doyle's patrol, it being the one I was in a few engagements with.

Shortly before the Truce I was transferred to G.H.Q. Intelligence Department as a full-time member. I was instructed to be at Messrs. Reis, Jewellers, Abbey Street, at 11.30 a.m. on a particular day. I was to look out for a small sized man wearing a cap and a white flower in his button hole.

I was to follow him to his destination. Soon a man answering this description came along. I decided this was my man and I followed him to an office over the Ancient Concert Rooms, Pearse Street. I opened the door of the office into which the man had entered, and I also went into the office. The man I had trailed caught me by the arm and introduced me to Frank Thornton who was in charge of the office. The man I had trailed was Charlie Dalton.

My duties here included reading the newspapers and noting the announcements of troop movements, the arrival or departure of British army officers or Auxiliaries, and studying photographs of British Intelligence agents, Auxiliaries, etc.

Each member of the staff had a number and was referred to only by his number. We were never called by our names. My number was 117.

The staff numbers were on a board and any special instructions or duties for the day were written opposite one's number.

during the course of my training as an I.O.

One day, my special instruction was to accompany Dan McDonnell, who was also on the staff, to Dun Laoire where we were to follow a man who would be outside Dun Laoire railway station and have a white flower in his coat. We went by train from Westland Row Station and when we reached the street outside Dun Laoire Station, I saw a man wearing a white flower standing outside the Pavilion Picture House on the opposite side of the street. When he saw us he turned and walked up the "metals" (i.e., a footpath running parallel to the railway) in the direction of Dun Laoire Baths. When he came opposite the entrance to the East Pier he turned left

and proceeded along the Pier. Just beyond the bandstand is the Boyd memorial near which is an opening leading to the rocks at the rere of the pier. Our man went through the opening; he stood on the rocks and looked in the direction of the Lighthouse. Between him and the Lighthouse were two other men also standing on the rocks. The man we had followed gave a signal to Dan McDonnell and then went back towards Dun Laoire. Soon the two men turned and proceeded in the direction of Dun Laoire. We followed then and when we reached the end of the pier, McDonnell told me to report back to the office. He continued to follow the men.

I learned afterwards that the first man we trailed that day was Dave Neligan, the detective who was in close touch with Michael Collins, and the two men he indicated to McDonnell were British Intelligence agents.

Signed: C. Farrell
(C. Farrell)
Date: 2nd Dec. 1955.

2nd Dec. 1955.

Witness. Sean Brennan, Lieut: Col.

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

