

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,313

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,313

Witness

Charles Gildea,
Moylough,
Tubbercurry,
Co. Sligo.

Identity.

Q/M. 6th Battalion, Sligo Brigade;
O/C. do. 1920-1921;
Vice O/C. Sligo Brigade.

Subject.

National activities,
Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1313

STATEMENT BY CHARLES GILDEA

Moylough, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo.

I was born in Quarryfield, Buninadden, Co. Sligo, in the year 1896. I received my early education at Buninadden National School.

As a result of long conversations with some old men in the district who had a very good national outlook and from reading monthly journals about the Hibernian Rifles, I became determined at an early age to join and support an organisation that would assist in gaining freedom for Ireland.

In 1915 I attended a convention at 27 North Frederick St. Dublin, in connection with the organisation of the A.O.H. Irish American Alliance and Hibernian Rifles. I was there appointed a provincial director of the organisation. John J. Scallan was General Secretary at that time. On my return from the convention I proceeded to organise companies at Achonry, Emlaughton and Ballymote, Co. Sligo.

Some time about July 1915 Alec McCabe approached me and explained the aims and objects of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was in full agreement and was enrolled a member by Alec McCabe.

On Easter Sunday 1916 I was instructed by Alec McCabe to attend at Tubbercurry Town Hall. A number of men from Tubbercurry, Mullinabreena, Chaffpool and other districts were present. Arrangements were made there for the distribution of such arms as were available. Twelve Martini rifles, some of which were purchased by John Kennedy, Castlerea, and 500 or 600 rounds .303 made up the principal armament. We had some .22 rifles and ammunition, also a few revolvers of various

calibres. We were disbanded about Friday of Easter Week. We cut some telegraph wires in the area during the week.

During the year 1916 I arranged for the collection of funds to buy arms. Funds were obtained from the proceeds of dances, sports and aeriochta. This latter function so enraged the local loyalists that they sent a party to destroy the premises at Doocastle in which it was intended to hold the function. The attack was repulsed with such punishment to the attackers that many of them as a result severed their connection with the loyalist element in the district. During that year I organised a branch of the Cumann na mBan in the district. We also managed to have some rifle practice.

In the spring of 1917 I assisted in the organisation of the Volunteers locally and formed a company at Moylough, Co. Sligo. On the formation of the Tubbercurry Battalion I was appointed Battalion Q.M.

On 17th March 1917, I attended a parade at Sligo, when the Freedom of the Borough was conferred on Count Plunkett, where I read an address of welcome to him at the Town Hall, Sligo.

Around that time I attended many meetings and organised branches of the I.R.B. in each active company area. My principal work at that period was listing the location of arms and the study of military tactics. On Easter Sunday night I took a party of Volunteers to Carracastle, Co. Mayo, to destroy Redmond's Volunteer Band. It was necessary to visit Carracastle three nights previously to study local conditions and acquaint ourselves with the layout of the place before carrying out the job. The destruction of this Band was essential as it helped to weaken the morale of the Redmond

Volunteers in that area where they were very strong, as can be borne out by the fact that the Clare Volunteers operated there during the General Election of 1918 when Mr. de Valera was returned against the late John Dillon.

Before the Election in 1918, the Sinn Fein Executive started a tillage drive in the county. A number of farmers in the county had large tracts of arable land and were not tilling it, while in poorer districts the amount of arable land was not sufficient to meet the requirements of the population for the production of food. Alec McCabe was responsible for the taking over and division of land for tillage. The people to whom the land was allotted tilled it and saved their crops without interference. The owners of the land were paid a reasonable rent and in most cases were satisfied. I accompanied Alec McCabe during this take-over of land. As a result, I was arrested, brought before the Court and sentenced to one month with hard labour, which I duly served.

During the anti-conscription campaign I was kept busy as the Volunteer strength increased greatly at that time. I also had to arrange for the collection of funds in connection therewith. I attended drill courses given by Frank Carty (later T.D.), then battalion O/C. I also attended classes organised for the purpose of creating scenes in Court in the event of arrest.

I assisted with the Register and General Election in 1918. Around that time I purchased a revolver from a British army officer. I was present in Sligo when the Freedom of the Borough was conferred on Rev. Fr. O'Flanagan, 23.7.1918.

As a result of my work in the 1918 Election I contracted a severe cold which later developed into 'Flu and left me

indisposed until March 1919. At that time I joined the Railway Service and, as a result, I was able to furnish very important information which resulted in the capture of a consignment of supplies for the British garrison at Tubbercurry.

On another occasion, information supplied by me resulted in the capture of an important dispatch. The dispatch was conveyed by Michael McSweeney (son of the stationmaster and a member of Fianna Éireann) to the Vice O/C. (Jack Brennan) at Cloonacool. This young man - McSweeney - was one of our most useful scouts. I furnished information about a quantity of treacle which was to be destroyed and I was later ordered in to an inquiry at the R.I.C. Barracks in connection with it.

About 5th August 1920, I went to Dublin for the purpose of procuring rifles. While there I met Alec McCabe who interviewed Michael Collins about arms for our battalion. Collins told McCabe that if we brought off an attack on Crown forces in our area with what weapons we had he would increase our supply.

On 10th August 1920, I participated in the hold-up of a party of four R.I.C. at Keevans - on the Bunniadden to Tubbercurry Road. A party of I.R.A. waiting in ambush held up the R.I.C. and relieved them of one rifle and 50 rounds of .303, 1 shotgun, 1 Webley revolver, one bomb, 4 bicycles and tunics. As a result of this holdup, Michael Collins informed us that we were entitled to rifles. Accordingly, I arranged for their collection. The Battalion O/C. travelled to Dublin having £360 - all that was available - towards the purchase. The rifles were forwarded on rail to Tubbercurry where I received them, having at that time full charge of the goods depot at the railway station. I arranged for their removal and immediate distribution to the members of the I.R.A. most capable to use

them. Actually, the men were on the spot awaiting their arrival.

On 30th September 1920, a mail car was raided in the early morning. Immediately afterwards a party of us took up an ambush position at Chaffpool expecting British forces activity in that area as a result of the raid on mail car. We waited in position most of the day. Towards evening, a Crossley tender came along. We opened fire on the armed police when they were in range. The driver of the tender was not hit and, increasing his speed, drove through to take his party to Tubbercurry. District Inspector Brady, who was in charge of the R.I.C., was wounded. He was a son of a Director of the Hibernian Bank. He had joined the British army and attained the rank of captain. He was a Catholic, but thought he would improve his chances of promotion by adopting the Protestant religion. He left the British army and joined the R.I.C. getting the rank of District Inspector. He was first posted to Drogheda. As he thought that place too quiet he applied for a transfer to an area where there was more activity. He is reported to have stated that he would end I.R.A. activity in any area he was posted in a very short time. He was posted to Tubbercurry a short time before the ambush at Chaffpool took place. District Inspector Brady was very severely wounded and when he was examined by the doctor he was informed that he would not live. He then sent for the Parish Priest and I understand he died a Catholic. Two members of the R.I.C. were wounded.

Frank Carty was in charge of one section of men. Michael O'Hara was in command of another section, while I commanded the third section myself.

The following is the list of names of the men taking part:-

John Owens, Ballaghy; John Haran, Cully; Richard Walsh, Cashill; Dr. Brennan (at that time a medical student); Joseph Duncan, Tubbercurry; Jim Killoran and Jack Walker, Tubbercurry. Scouts were: James Duffy, Thomas Kane and Thomas O'Connell.

Expecting reprisals in Tubbercurry after the ambush, all armed men in the battalion area were ordered to report at Tubbercurry that night to protect the town. Defence positions were selected and manned by the I.R.A. A short time afterwards several lorries of British forces came in from the direction of Sligo town. They reported at the R.I.C. barracks and, apparently having got their instructions as to the houses to be burned, they set out first for Howley's on the south side of the town, next door to the present Garda Barracks.

I ordered my party to open fire on them. The British forces retreated in the direction of the Square where they attempted to set fire to Phil Durkin's. The attempt to burn Durkin's place was not successful, as fire was opened on the British by the section under Frank Carty. Another party of British attacked and burned Cook's, a big establishment situated in the Square. The place was completely destroyed. Compensation was later paid to the owner, amounting to £67,000.

Some of the British forces engaged in the burning of Cook's premises joined up with the party engaged by my section. As we were in danger of being surrounded in our position, we withdrew to the north side of the town where the engagement was broken off.

We then proceeded to Tubbercurry Creamery to defend it against reprisals. We were about an hour in position when

two lorries of British forces arrived. My party opened fire on them immediately. A heavy fog had developed at this time, leaving visibility bad and resultant inaccurate shooting. The British forces poured a quantity of petrol on to a store of several tons of coal. The coal was stored in the main building. After setting it alight, the British forces withdrew. As we were still in a position around the Creamery, we might have been able to save it had the committee carried out our earlier instructions to remove the coal. Due to the intense heat of burning coal, we were powerless to do anything.

As a result of this activity, I was forced to go on the run and give up my work on the railway. I had Frank Carty as my constant companion..

In October 1920, Frank Carty, Alec McCabe and myself visited Collooney where we spent two days selecting an ambush position at Carricknagat on the Sligo side of Collooney along the main road. This ambush was arranged as a brigade operation and all available armed men in the brigade were assembled. Alec McCabe, Frank Carty and myself were in charge of three sections, my section being on the railway bridge overlooking the road. We had planned to attack any party of British forces travelling through with not more than two lorries. We considered that was the largest number we could successfully engage.

We were in position in the early morning of 25th October 1920. Four lorry loads of British forces passed along the road early in the day. According to plan, they were not attacked, We remained in our positions all day, but no more British came along. We withdrew from the position under cover of darkness.

In November 1920, Frank Carty and Mick O'Hara, Battalion O/C. 6th Battalion, were arrested. I was then appointed Battn. O/C.

I immediately set about organising the Battalion. Due to a number of men in the battalion being arrested and the fact that a number of prominent members had left the country, also the increased activity of the British forces, the morale of my men was lowered. I decided that counter activity was very necessary. I set about organising the men on railway line so as to ensure that the Belfast Goods Boycott would be more rigorously enforced. I held courtmartial on outstanding cases so that the pro-British element in the area might not develop. I intensified action against poteen makers and robbers who were taking advantage of conditions and the winter darkness.

I tested some of the bombs supplied by our G.H.Q. and found them useless. This test was made prior to a contemplated ambush at Lough Talt.

Having reorganised the battalion, I then set about organising a shock squad, also an Intelligence unit, and saw to the posting of these units at important points.

As a result of this organisation, the shock squad carried out an attack on^a British forces patrol in Tubbercurry on 14th January 1921. Two members of the patrol were wounded.

I was now getting things well on the way again. I got Jim Hunt of Gurteen, Co. Sligo, Alec McCabe of 47 Lr. O'Connell St. Dublin, and Sonny Marren (now deceased) of Gurteen, Co. Sligo, to come to the Charlestown end of the battalion to hold a courtmartial on one James Reilly who, under the protection of the British military at Charlestown, had assaulted a member of my column. During this visit we discussed the proposed attack on R.I.C. Barracks at Ballaghaderreen. A similar discussion took place in connection with an attack on R.I.C. at Ballymote. I undertook to supply the attacking party for the latter and

and also to take charge. We carried out this attack on a patrol of R.I.C. wounding some of them.

Later, I met Alec McCabe and with him proceeded to Cloontia where we had a mine in store. I built the mine into the centre of a load of hay and we returned to pick up our column at Monestraden, Ballaghaderreen, and continued our journey to that town. A party was detailed to place the mine in such a position as to destroy the outer defences; before this party reached their objective, they were fired on by a patrol of R.I.C. The main body then opened fire on the R.I.C. patrol. After an exchange of fire for some time we withdrew from the town.

On our return from Ballaghaderreen, Alec McCabe, H. Breheny and myself ran into a party of British forces at Oldrock. They were engaged in commandeering local labour to clear road blocks. After an exchange of fire the British forces tried to surround us, but we got away safely.

When I returned to the battalion area I held a court-martial on a man named Gilmore who had shot at and wounded one of our members. After thorough investigation of the incident we find him £20.

Shortly afterwards we raided the morning Goods train at Carrowmore station for the purpose of attracting military attention to this end of the battalion area.

On 27th February 1921, in company with Jack Walker, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, I proceeded to Gleneask for the purpose of forming an outpost there. Possibly due to enemy activity in the area, the expected members did not turn up. I waited in the area until the following morning as I was most anxious to have this outpost organised as a cover for the column which

was to make an attack on British forces on the following Thursday at Charlestown, Co. Mayo. On the morning of 28th February Auxiliaries surrounded the Gleneask area where I was billeted. I made a break for it into the hilly country but was finally captured and removed to Sligo Jail. Walker made off in a different direction and escaped.

While in Sligo jail I was appointed O/C. of prisoners and as such I had an opportunity to knock about a little extra. This gave me the idea of planning an escape. I established communication with Billy Pilkington, Brigade O/C., and had two skeleton keys made and sent out.

Michael Nevin of Sligo, who was Brigade I.O., had been a prisoner in Sligo Jail and released a short time previously, knew the layout of the place quite well. He assisted in the fitting of keys and conveyed messages from the Brigade O/C. for the planned escape.

Stephen O'Connor, a friendly warder in the jail, also carried out messages for me. A man named Joseph Henry, a temporary warder on night duty, was chosen as the best man inside to assist us. He had the key of our cells and, although the rescue party was outside for two nights, we could not move until Henry came on duty. On the third night Henry informed us that the ladder was on the wall. He opened our cells and we then tied him up so as to cover up his part in the escape. In the early morning of 29th June 1921, Battalion O/Cs. Frank O'Beirne, Tom Deignan and myself then made our escape over the wall. Bicycles were ready for us outside and we cycled to Screen. On the way home we held up a postman and censored his mail.

There were no further operations in my area. The Truce on 11th July 1921 terminated hostilities with the British forces.

I was appointed Brigade ^{VICE O.C.} ~~Quartermaster~~ on the reorganisation of the Brigade.

Signed: Charles Gildea

(Charles Gildea)

Date: 14-12-55

14.12.55.

Witness: James Conway
(James J. Conway)

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