ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1468.

Witness

Major-General P.A. Mulcahy,
Beggars Bush Barracks,
Dublin.

Identity.

Brigade Signals Officer.

Subject.

I.R.A. activities, Mid-Clare, and

Tipperary No. 1 Brigade, 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No 2788.

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY MAJOR GENERAL P.A. MULCAHY

Beggars Bush Barracks, Dublin

In January 1919, I was demobilised from the British army
at Oswestry, Wales, and returned to my home in Ennis, Co.
Clare. Prior to demobilisation I paraded with about 500 other
Irishmen for the Camp O/C. He wished us good luck and hoped
we would get work when we returned home. He told us that
Ireland was in a very disturbed state and that we should be
careful to avoid contact with Sinn Fein (pronounced by him
as Sin Fin). He attempted to air his views on Sinn Fein
but an almost instantaneous outburst of "mind your own .....
business" and some less choice advice from the troops brought
his speech to an abrupt conclusion. A shout of "Come on,
boys. Out of this .... Camp" was the signal for the men on
parade to march off in a more or less disorganised body to
the railway station. Prominent songs on the way were:
"A Nation once again", "Wrap the green flag round me, boys"
and "Tipperary". Some local military police attempted to
stop the row but to no avail. The men's attitude at the time
was one of resentment at any adverse criticism by an English-
man of the people at home even though their knowledge of
affairs at home was very vague.

One rather interesting incident happened at Oswestry
station where a lady told a few of us that she hoped we had
finished doing England's work and that we would assist the
boys at home.

On arrival at Dublin, I went to my brother's digs and
caused a mild flutter there by asking the landlady for Mr.
"O'Brien". As I was in uniform she doubted that Mr. "O'Brien"
would have a brother named Mulcahy in British army uniform.
However, I succeeded in getting in touch with Dick who was
then under the assumed name of "O'Brien".

Amongst other matters. I asked him about the Volunteers and he advised me to go home and to find out things for myself. I resumed my job in the Ennis Post Office and, later, got in touch with some fellows who had been with me at college. They told me about the local Volunteer company. I offered my services and was accepted as a Signal Instructor by Commandant Tom Brown.

Some time about March 1919, I realised that although certain jobs were being done in Clare, our company was not very active and a few inquiries elicited the fact that our company was an "independent" company not recognised by G.H.Q. I was told that the Barretts were doing most of the jobs of which I had heard. My sister then told me that she occasionally brought letters from Dick to Commandant Frank Barrett. I called on this officer at the Clare Hotel, Ennis, and told him of my position. I offered him my services, pointing out that I was in a position, being in the local Post Office, to get useful information and that I had been giving information to Brown, but such information had not been used. He told me that he would be glad of assistance and that I could let him have copies of cipher messages passing through the office and details of any police or military 'phone messages which came under my notice. He warned me not to give information to anyone except himself until he further instructed me.

The enemy garrisons in the town of Ennis, at the time, consisted of:

The Police Barracks   ...   40 to 50 R.I.C.
The gaol occupied by   ...   300 to 400 infantry
The Survey House occupied usually by a few hundred
                                      mounted troops.
The Mills - an outpost on the outskirts of the town.

Some of the Mid-Clare Brigade officers at the time were:

Commandant Frank Barrett   O/C. Brigade
Commandant Joseph Barrett   O/C., A.S.U.

Peadar O'Loughlin	Training Officer
Liam Stack	I.O.
Ignatius O'Neill	
Sean O'Keeffe	
Padruig Powell	
Dan McNamara	
Bernard Barrett	Quartermaster
Sean O'Grady and	
Paddy Con MacMahon.	

I was attached personally to the Brigade Commander and passed all information to him. I obtained keys to police, military and, later, to Auxiliary ciphers and translated all messages passing through Ennis Post Office. When I got this work properly organised, the translated copies of messages were very often in Commandant F. Barrett's hands before the original cipher was delivered to the addressee. Many a message ordering the arrest of a Volunteer was intercepted and the Volunteer warned before the local District Inspector was aware of the contents of the cipher wire. On two occasions I got such warning through to General Brennan (then O/C. East Clare Brigade) enabling him to get away before the raiding party arrived at his billet.

During November 1919, a shooting party containing several English visitors was arranged by the Vere O'Briens of Edenvale. It was decided to disarm the party which was reported to have some good shotguns. Four Volunteers - O'Loughlin, O'Neill, Powell and Geraghty - were detailed for the job but they mishandled the operation and O'Loughlin and Geraghty were wounded. The party knew that two attackers were wounded and extra police and military were drafted into Clare to search for them. The wounded Volunteers were kept in the Clare Hotel, Ennis, for over six weeks where they were nursed by Miss Josephine Barrett (later Mrs. P. Mulcahy,R.I.P.) During this period intense searching was in progress all over the country. The police divided Clare into areas for the search and each evening at six o'clock, they sent cipher wire

to all stations giving the rendezvous and the area to be searched on the following day. It was a simple matter to decipher the wire and to arrange that the particular area was clear of all Volunteers and equipment for the search. I overheard the County Inspector (Moore) telling Limerick Military Headquarters on the telephone that he could not understand how the search was so fruitless.

. . On the morning of the Rinneen ambush (end of 1919) where six police were killed and several military wounded, the Volunteers had neglected to cut the wires and a priority message came through to Ennis for reinforcements. I was able to delay the delivery of the message for nearly an hour and the Volunteers just got clear before the arrival of the reinforcements.

On another occasion early in 1920, I intercepted a cipher to the C.I., Ennis, stating that an important dispatch was being sent by train from Ennistymon. Information was rushed to the Brigade O/C. and the train was held up outside Ennis station. The dispatch was captured and great military and police activity resulted.

Another intercepted message about this period notified the sending of a truck load of military equipment from Ennis to Kilrush. The train was held up near Kilrush and the equipment taken or burned.

In July 1920, an unsuccessful attempt was made to disarm the military guard at the Mills. The permanent guard was withdrawn and a daily guard was sent from the Gaol. The military were disturbed over the attempt and the G.O.C. Limerick personally issued instructions over the 'phone regarding the formation of the daily guard during its march from the Gaol to the Mills and vice versa. I overheard these instructions

and they specially stated that the guard, if attacked en route, were to fight like hell and kill. The guard were to march in a particular formation, i.e., two files about 25 yards in front of the main body of eight and two more files 25 yards in rear. It was decided by our brigade that the guard would be disarmed on a Fair Day. Volunteers were placed at three different positions rounding a bend. They acted as if they were buying cattle. When the guard was in a favourable position for attack, the "buyers" rushed and three Volunteers charged each soldier. One grabbed the rifle, one stuck a revolver into the man and the third pulled off the web equipment. The whole operation, which was under the command of Commandant Joseph Barrett, was over in approximately two minutes. The rifles and equipment were sent off in a waiting car and the Volunteers dispersed.

During 1919 and 1920, the police and military kept in touch hourly by 'phone with all outposts. A favourite "annoyance operation" by Volunteers was to cut the telephone wire. This always resulted in intensive enemy activity. In order not to dislocate civilian communication, I prepared telegraph pole diagrams and, by marking the wires to be cut, ensured that only police and military wires were interfered with. Another form of "annoyance" was to get to know the colour of the rocket signal for any particular night and, after cutting the wires, to fire rockets midway between two outposts. This always resulted in great activity and generally upset enemy nerves.

These are only a few of the incidents in which I assisted the brigade. Hardly a day passed that some information was not procured either from cipher messages or telephone conversations.

Another form of assistance was the taking of important
police letters passing through the post. The bulky official
envelopes were seldom important, but I became familiar with
the handwriting of R.I.C. confidential clerks, D.I.s. and C.I.
Letters in their handwriting were always of interest. I could
also recognise disguised handwriting on envelopes addressed to
the police and invariably took such letters. They usually
contained information of Volunteer activity from some local
spy or, sometimes, a disgruntled Volunteer. One such capture
resulted in the banishment of one man from Clare. Usually,,
however, such letters were unsigned, but contained correct
information.

During this time I was assisted greatly by the stupidity
of the R.I.C. and military who discussed the most secret plans
over the telephone. The R.I.C. were especially at fault in thi
respect. The military erred thus only in times of stress
when nerves were not too good.

With regard to the ciphers used. The R.I.C. used a simple
substitution code which was easily deciphered even without a
key. The key was, however, usually available because they
used the last cipher message of a series to convey the new
key word to outlying stations. The military used playfair
code and the auxiliaries a figure code both of which were
almost impossible to decipher without the key.

The R.I.C. were also very stereotyped in their messages.
For instance, when the R.I.C. on railway station duty wished
to warn the next railway station that some suspect was
travelling, the departure was telegraphed in cipher thus:
"By train to you now ......" By substituting 15 letters of
the cipher, after crossing out the first three letters
(which were always 'dead') for the words given, you obtained

ten letters in the code. Another fault in the R.I.C. code messages was that they invariably contained the names of local Volunteers, i.e., BARRETT, MacNAMARA, etc. and it was comparatively easy to recognise such names in code because of the repetition of the letters.

As I did not keep a diary during the period, I can only give a general outline of the work on which I was engaged together with a general description of a few incidents.

In April 1921, I was sent to Tipperary No. 1 Brigade as Signal Officer and attached to the A.S.U.

The 3rd Southern Division had just been formed and some of the principal officers were:-
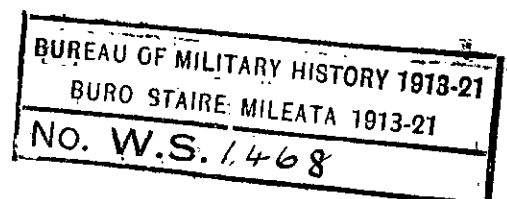
Commandant General M. McCormack	Division O/C.
Brigadier Sean Gaynor	Division Adjutant
Commandant A. MacCurtain	Division Q.M.
Commandant M. O'Brien	Division I.O.
Brigadier L. Hoolan	O/C. Tipp.No.1.Brigade
Commandant E. O'Leary	Adjt. do.
Commandant F. Flannery	Q.M. do.
Captain S. Collison	O/C. Tipp.No.1.A.S.U.
Brigadier L. Brady	O/C. Leix Brigade
Brigadier T. Burke	O/C. Offaly No.1 Brigade
Brigadier A. Gallagher	O/C. " No.2 "
Captain M. Gray	Police Officer Leix Bde.
Captain S. Connolly	O/C. Offaly No.1 A.S.U.

I attach as an appendix a tabulated compilation of the I.R.A. organisation in Tipperary No. 1 Brigade, Offaly Nos. 1 and 2 Brigades and Leix Brigade. The period to which this tabulation relates would be early in 1921 (approximately April 1921) in respect of the first three mentioned brigades, while, in the case of Leix Brigade, it covers the period prior to the division of that unit into two brigades.

Signed: _____

Date: ___11 July 1956.___

Witness: _____

Colonel,

APPENDIX.

Tipperary No. 1 Brigade.

(Organisation early in 1921. Compiles from old notes).

1st Battalion, NENAGH

Companies

Nenagh A.
Nenagh B.
Kilreeane
Puckaun
Ballynaclough
Silvermines

2nd Battalion, TOOMEVARA

Companies

Moneygall
Toomevara
Cloughjordan

3rd Battalion, BALLYWILLIAM

Companies.

Portroe
Ballina
Bushfield
Ballywilliam

4th Battalion, BORRISOKANE

Companies

Borrisokane
Kilbarran
Terryglass
Lorrha
Eglish
Ballingarry

5th Battalion, TEMPLEDERRY.

Companies

Templederry
Kilcommon
Glastrigan
Curreeney
Killeen

6th Battalion, NEWPORT

Companies

Newport
Ballinahinch
Killoscully
Lockamore

7th Battalion, ROSCREA.

Companies.

Roscrea
Dunkerrin
Shinrone

OFFALY NO. 1 (EAST) BRIGADE

(Organised early in 1921. Compiled from old notes)

1st Battalion TULLAMORE.

Companies.

Tullamore
Bracklin
Kilbeggan
Gorteen
Killeigh
Ballycowan

2nd Battalion, PHILIPSTOWN

Companies.

Philipstown
Ballingar
Walsh Island
Cloneygowan
Ballycommon
Geashill

3rd Battalion, TYRRELLSPASS

Companies.

Tyrrellspass
Croghan
Kilclonfert
Rhoda

OFFALY NO. 2 (WEST) BRIGADE

1st Battalion, CLARA.

Companies

Clara
Ballycumber
Rahan
Pollagh

2nd Battalion, FERBANE

Companies

Cloghan
Banagher
Ferbane
Shannonbridge
Moystown
Doon

3rd Battalion, KILCORMACK

Companies.

Kilcormack
Killoughy
Kinnitty
Drumcullen

4th Battalion, BIRR

Companies.

Birr
Rathcabin
Coolderry
Clareen

LEIX BRIGADE

(Prior to formation of Leix Nos. 1 and 2 Brigades)

1st Battalion, MARYBORO'

Companies

Maryboro
Stravoe
Lawler's Hill
Raheenaniskey
Mountrath
Closkeen
Raheen
Neath
Ballywan

2nd Battalion, CLONASLEE

Companies

Mountmellick
Rosenallis
Clonaslee
Clonaghadee
Ballyfin

3rd Battalion, ABBEYLEIX

Companies

Abbeyleix
Ballycollen
Rathdowney
Cullahill
Clogh
Ballinakill
Durrow
Ballybrophy
Clonmeen
Sharahoe

4th Battalion, TIMAHOE

Companies

Timahoe
Luggacurran
Kilcruise
Ballickmoyle
Wolfhill

5th Battalion, PORTARLINGTON

Companies

Portarlington
Emo
Killinard
Courtwood
Vicarstown

6th Battalion, BORRIS-IN-OSSORY.

Companies

Borris-in-Ossory
Camross
Killinure
Newtown