

DUPLICATE

NO. W.S. 1519

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1519.

Witness

Charlie Cotter,
Ardmanagh,
Schull,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C. Schull Coy., Schull Battn.,
Cork 111 Brigade.

Subject.

Schull Coy., Schull Battalion,
I.Vols., Co. Cork, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2843

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DUPLICATE

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No. W.S. 1519

STATEMENT BY CHARLIE COTTER,

Ardmanagh, Schull, Co. Cork.

I was born at Ardmanagh, Schull, in November, 1901. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Schull National School until I reached the age of 15, when I went to work on my parents' farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Schull in the spring of 1918. The strength of the unit in the early stages was about twenty-five. The first officers of the company were:

- O/C - Jern. McCarthy
- 1st Lt. - Jim Roycroft
- 2nd Lt. - Jim Hayes.

The company area embraced the whole of the parish, and when shortly after its formation conscription was to be enforced by the British there was a big influx of recruits. The strength grew to about eighty. There was no change in officers.

The only type of training engaged in was close order foot drill. The instructors were our own officers but we were visited a couple of times each week by Seán O'Driscoll, Ballydehob. He took charge of training when he came to visit us. I think he was 'on the run' at this time and was more or less engaged wholetime on organising Volunteer units and Sinn Féin clubs in the area. Parades were usually held twice weekly - at night - in the fields in the area.

During the conscription period all Volunteers took a hand in organising the general public to resist conscription. The arms held by the company at this period consisted of some twenty shotguns. The majority of these guns were the property of Volunteers or their parents.

When the threat of conscription had passed, the majority of those who had joined up to fight conscription gradually dropped out. The company strength fell to about 25.

Beyond normal training, there was nothing unusual during the year 1919. The members of the company, however, took part in the organisation and collection of the First Dáil Éireann Loan in the area. As far as I can recollect, the amount collected for the loan was £640.

During 1918 and 1919 our company (Schull) had been an independent unit of Cork Brigade. There were, in addition, a couple of other units in the area and early in 1920 Seán Lehane moved into the area and organised Schull Battalion, Cork 111 Brigade.

When Seán Lehane had completed the organisation of the area there were companies of the I.R.A. in Dough (O/C Charlie Cotter), Goleen (Ricky Collins), Dunmanus (Mark Lucey), Leamcon (Ml. Donovan), Glaun (Ned Sullivan), Schull (Jerh. McCarthy), Ballydehob (Seán O'Driscoll) and Skehanore (Tim Ryan). The units were now formed in Schull Battalion. The first officers were:

O/C - Seán Lehane
Vice O/C - Gibbs Ross
Adjt. - Seán McCarthy
Q/M - Jim Hayes.

On May 31st 1920 some men from Bantry Battalion, in co-operation with Seán Lehane and a few locals, raided Mizen Head Fog Station. They seized a large quantity of gun-cotton, detonators and some wireless equipment. Some of the captured material was dumped in a disused mine shaft in Glaun Company area. I did not take part in this operation.

I should have mentioned that, with Wm. Cotter, John Regan, Paddy McCarthy and some other members of Schull Company, I co-operated with the men of Goleen unit, under "Ricky" Collins, in the destruction by fire of Goleen evacuated R.I.C. barracks at Easter, 1920.

Some time about May, 1920, the Courthouse at Schull was destroyed by fire by the members of the local company under Jerry McCarthy.

During June, 1920, all members of the I.R.A. were active in connection with the Local Government elections in the area. Jerh. McCarthy (O/C Schull Company) was elected a member of Schull Rural District Council and Cork County Council.

The next major engagement in the area took place on October 4th 1920 when Schull R.I.C. Barracks was captured by men from the battalion under Seán Lehane, O/C. About a week prior to this operation I learned of the plan to carry out the attack at a Battalion Council meeting. On the night of October 3rd 1920 Seán Lehane (Battn. O/C), Gibbs Ross (Vice O/C) and Seán McCarthy (Battn. Adjt.) came to Schull. I met them and took them to my home, where they remained until the following night. The other men being mobilised for the attack arrived during the evening of October 4th, when the whole body moved off from my home about 7.30 p.m.

We moved across country to Meenvane Road and a boreen leading to the barracks from the road. The building stood on its own ground in a field about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from Schull. It was surrounded by barbed wire entanglements through which there was only one narrow passage to the back door. The garrison consisted of a Sergeant, twelve R.I.C. and a wireless operator.

In view of the situation of the building it was not considered possible to capture it by an open assault from outside. It was decided to endeavour to enter the barrack by using the password in use by the garrison. This password was discovered by the O/C Schull (Jerh. McCarthy); it was "Kilmallock". A storming party of twelve was selected to carry out the attack. The members of the storming party were: Seán Lehane (Battn. O/C), Gibbs Ross (Battn. Vice O/C), Seán O'Driscoll (O/C Ballydenob), Jim Hayes (Battn. Q/M), Jerh. McCarthy (O/C Schull), Tim Murphy, Paddy O'Neill, Denis Murphy, Charlie Cotter - witness - Tom Hickey (O/C Skehanore), Jack McCarthy (Durrus), Denis Whooley (Schull). With the exception of myself, all the others were armed with revolvers. I carried a $1\frac{1}{4}$ lbs sledge with which it was proposed that I should break in the door should the officer on duty fail to open the door. Representatives from the other companies in the battalion were engaged on scouting and outpost duty.

It was close on 8 p.m. when we moved slowly across the open space towards the barrack. We reached the passage through the barbed wire and moved carefully to the door. Seán Lehane knocked. A voice inside asked: "Who goes there?" "Kilmallock" answered Seán. The door was immediately opened by Constable Gleeson, so there was no

need for me to use my sledge. We all rushed the door and held up the Sergeant and the R.I.C. men in the day-room who were playing cards. Sergeant Lorgan and his men were taken completely by surprise. The garrison were now searched. All arms and papers were taken from them and they were removed to an outhouse on Dan Hurley's farm nearby. Four or five members of the garrison were absent in the town at the time of the raid. These were held up by our party as they returned to the barracks and were placed under guard with their colleagues in Dan Hurley's outhouse. The barrack was now searched - thirteen rifles, twenty-six revolvers of various types, a large supply of rifle and revolver ammunition, some Verrey pistols, a number of Mills bombs were seized, while the wireless transmitting apparatus was also smashed.

The booty captured in the barrack was removed in a motor car owned by Mr. Duggan, Harbour View Hotel, driven by Richard Dempsey, and in a car driven by Patsy Collins, Ballydehob. It was taken to Kilmrohane area. The attacking party were assisted in the removal of the booty and in the burning of the barracks later by members of Schull Company.

When the barracks had been burned I went to billet in Jack Neill's house on the mountainside in Ardmanagh. I took one of the captured rifles with me. I should have mentioned that when the operation had been completed and before withdrawing, we escorted the captured garrison to Duggan's Hotel where they billeted.

Early in November, 1920, a Battalion Training Camp was set up at Dunmanus. Tom Barry (Bde. O/C Training) was in charge. After two days the camp was moved to Dreeelomane - where I joined it - having gone there with supplies from Schull. I was ordered to remain at the camp by Tom Barry and underwent a course of training there in the care and use of arms. When the camp finished - in about a week - I returned to Schull district.

Some short time prior to Christmas, 1920 - it was following the issue of the decree by Most Rev. Dr. Cohalan, Bishop of Cork - there was a change in the officers of Schull Company as Paddy O'Neill (1st Lieut) and Denis Whooley (2nd Lieut) resigned. The officers of the company now were: -

O/C - Jerh. McCarthy
1st Lt. - Tim Murphy
2nd Lt. - Neil Hayes.

During the period from October to Christmas, 1920, I was engaged with the other members of the company on the collection of the Arms Fund Levy in addition to carrying on normal training.

In January, 1921, I took over the custody of a suspected spy named Robert Lenehan who had been arrested by some members of Schull Company. I removed him to an outhouse on a farm at Ardmanagh where he was detained for some days. He was then interviewed by the Battalion O/C (Seán Lehane) and other officers. He was removed to the Workhouse, Schull, and to other parts of the area while further investigations were being carried out by our intelligence staff. Eventually he was taken out to the Calf Islands by John and Dan Regan, Schull. The residents

on the islands removed him later to Tranawade and then to Hayes's, Coosheen, where he escaped. He reported to the Marine Station at Schull and was taken west to Rock Island where he was picked up by a naval boat. About three weeks later he returned to the area with a convoy of 19 lorries of military, who rounded up all civilians in the area but failed to catch any member of the I.R.A.

The representatives from Schull Battalion, who had been serving with the Brigade Column, returned home prior to Christmas, 1920. Their arrival created a more military minded attitude amongst the members of the local companies and general activity was intensified throughout the area in the spring of 1921. A brigade order regarding the cutting of enemy lines of communication and generally impeding enemy freedom of movement led to increased activity everywhere. Roads were blocked by fallen trees or barricades of stones; trenches were dug, bridges demolished and telegraph wires were cut. This work in the spring of 1921 meant a continuous round of duty for the members of all units. It was a regular occurrence to find that a roadblock or a trench made to-night was filled in next day by forced labour squads collected by strong enemy forces. This meant the opening of new trenches or the erection of fresh roadblocks in the area next night.

The O/C Schull Company (Jerh. McCarthy) was arrested early in 1921 and I was appointed to replace him.

The officers now were:

O/C - Charlie Cotter (witness)
1st Lt. - Tim Murphy
2nd Lt. - Neil Hayes.

National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8

**Form to be completed and inserted in the original record
in place of each part abstracted**

- (i) Reference number of the separate cover under which the abstracted part has been filed: WS 1519/A
- (ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 1 p.
- (iii) The date of each such document: 22 / 10 / 54

(iv) The description of each document:
WS 1519 W. York Statement Charlie G. W. p. 8.
Names of individuals -

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

- (v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:
(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.

(These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

J. Moloney

Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.

About this time columns were formed in each battalion area. The Schull Battalion Column was in charge of Seán Lehane (Battn. O/C) and was composed of officers and men representing all companies in the battalion. The strength of the column was about 30/35. It was armed with about twenty rifles and 15/20 shotguns. Some members of this column were: Charlie Cotter - witness (Schull), Seán O'Driscoll (Battn. Q/M Ballydehob), Ned Sullivan (Glaun), Paddy McCarthy and Tom Hickey (Skehanore), Tim Allen (Ballydehob), Denis O'Mahoney, Tom McCarthy (Schull), Jack O'Driscoll (Leamcon) and Tom O'Driscoll (Dunmanus).

The Bank Manager, Provincial Bank Ltd., Schull, and a member of his staff were held up by armed and masked men on their way to Ballydehob on Holy Thursday, 1921. It was, I think, about the end of March. They were relieved of £500. When news of the hold-up "broke", the public were of the opinion that the hold-up had been carried out by the I.R.A. Seán Lehane (Battn. O/C) undertook an immediate investigation of the affair and within a day or two I was one of a number of selected men in the area to engage in a round-up of the raiders. We arrested four men, who were not members of the I.R.A., and having detained them in separate places for a short time they eventually confessed to having taken part in the organisation and carrying out of the robbery. They were tried by a courtmartial presided over by the Battn. O/C (Seán Lehane). Three of the raiders were sentenced to deportation and the other, who took part in the organisation of the raid but not in the raid itself, was fined £50. The money seized by the raiders (£500) was recovered and returned to the bank. The names of the raiders were:

- fined £50.

During April and May, 1921, I was moving round the area with the Battalion Column or engaged in the training and other activities of Schull Company as occasion demanded. While with the column we took up positions on numerous occasions but the expected enemy convoys did not put in an appearance. Our efforts to engage the enemy proved abortive when we took up positions at Barry's Mills on the Bantry-Ballydehob road at dawn one morning at the end of April or early May, 1921. Although we remained in position all day the expected enemy convoy of two lorries did not pass through. Similarly we took up positions in the town of Ballydehob about the same time. We remained on this occasion throughout the night - having gone into position as darkness set in - but morning came without any appearance by the enemy so we withdrew to billets in the surrounding country.

As the men on the column moved round the district they took a hand in training the members of the companies in the area in which they were billeted. In this way practically every member of the I.R.A. in the area was fit to take his position in the column at a moment's notice.

I think that it was early in June, 1921, I took part in the raid on the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse when we obtained about 30 cwt. of gun-cotton, primers and detonators. It was intended to carry out the operation on a Saturday night, but due to the condition of the sea in the vicinity of the Fastnet it was not considered advisable to attempt the operation. However, on Sunday evening John O'Regan, Wm. Daly, Michael Murphy (Gunpoint), Tom Murphy (Colla) and I landed on Cape Clear about 2 p.m. Seán Lehane, Jim Hayes and Seán O'Driscoll had been there since the previous night. From our position we could see a British destroyer circling our objective, but we decided to put to

sea - the Fastnet was three miles south west of Cape Clear and about twelve miles from the mainland. We were to pretend that we were fishermen should the destroyer hail us.

A boat - the *Máire Cáit* - the property of Tadhg O'Regan - was commandeered for the purpose of the raid. Into it stepped John O'Regan (skipper), Wm. Daly, Michael Murphy, Tim Murphy, Charlie Cotter - witness - Seán O'Driscoll, Seán Lehane, Jim Hayes - all from the mainland. We were joined by Dan Leonard, Dan Daly and Dan O'Driscoll from Cape Clear. Our skipper (Jn. O'Regan) now took the *Máire Cáit* out of the north harbour and into the open sea. The destroyer passed and did not hail us. It moved on towards Crookhaven and soon disappeared from view. Towards midnight we approached the Fastnet and as we drew near John O'Regan tied a rope round his waist and stepped on to the bow of the *Máire Cáit*. It was his job to jump on to the landing stage at the proper time as our boat came nearer, rising and falling with the swell. I was deputed to hold the rope and to ensure that, in the event of his failure to land, John O'Regan would be hauled back from the sea by me, or, in the alternative, that when he landed I would help him to pull the boat to the landing platform so that the remainder of the party could land.

As our boat rose on a gentle wave, John O'Regan jumped and landed safely on the platform, the rope trailing behind him. He immediately began to pull on the rope and we soon had the *Máire Cáit* at the platform. Having disembarked, the whole party, led by John O'Regan, dashed through the lighthouse door, which was open, up the circular stairway to the light room, where we held up the lightkeeper on duty. Seán Lehane informed him that we had come for the guncotton. While this parley was going on, the other keepers (two) on the Rock were rounded up.

Seventeen boxes of guncotton and three of detonators were lowered on to the Máire Cáit and in less than 30 minutes we were on our way to Leamcon, near Schull Harbour, where we put our booty ashore. It was dumped in the area for some days and was later distributed throughout the brigade.

One of the last operations in the area prior to the Truce was the burning of Schull Workhouse. This operation was carried out on or about June 27th 1921 in response to instructions received from Brigade H.Q. It was anticipated that additional enemy forces were to be moved into the area. Schull Workhouse had been selected for billets, so its destruction was ordered. The work of destruction was allocated to the members of Schull and Glaun Companies, while the Battalion Column, under Seán Lehane, were to carry out a covering attack on the Marine Station.

The joint forces were assembled at "The Gap" on the Bantry-Schull road about 10 p.m. I was in charge of the Schull Company detailed to destroy the Workhouse while Seán Lehane was in charge of the column. We were just about to move off to our selected positions when a dispatch rider arrived from Drealomane Section, Ballydehob Company. He informed us that a strong force of British military were camped at Drealomane School. In view of this operation it was decided to call off the job. The men from my company (Schull) and those from Glaun Company were sent home and I withdrew with the column to Dunmanus Pier where boats were always available to take us across the bay to Muintrevara. When we reached there about 4 a.m. we were informed by the local men that the British had cut off the area between Skibberreen, Mizen Head and the sea. We remained across the bay in Muintrevara

while the enemy forces were searching the area that day. When they had withdrawn we returned to Schull area and attacked the Marine Station while the men of Schull and Glaun Companies were destroying the ^{Work} ~~Garth~~house.

Shortly before the Truce there was a re-organisation in Cork III Brigade area. The Western Battalions (Bantry, Skibbereen, Schull and Castletownbere) were formed into a new brigade - Cork V. In the re-allotment of areas a new battalion was formed in Drimoleague area and was also included in the new Cork V Brigade. The officers of the new brigade were:

O/C - Gibbs Ross
Vice O/C - Ted O'Sullivan
Adjt.- Michael Crowley
Q/H - James Hayes.

The re-organisation led to some changes in the area of Schull Battalion. Lisheen Company was transferred from Skibbereen area. The companies in Schull Battalion now were: Lisheen, Skohanore, Schull, Pallydehob, Leamcon, Dunbeacon, Golcen, Lisagriffin and Dunmanus. Seán Lehane was now transferred to Dunmanway Battalion as O/C. The officers of Schull Battalion were:

O/C - Seán O'Driscoll
Vice O/C - Tom Hickey
Adjt.- Denis O'Mahoney
Q/H - Edw. O'Sullivan.

My rank at the Truce - O/C Schull Company, Schull Battalion, Cork III. Strength of the company - about one hundred.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____
(Investigator)

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