

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
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No. W.S. 1529

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1529.

Witness

Patrick Wilcox,  
Goleen,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C; Lisagriffin Coy., Schull Battn.;  
O/C. Training, Cork III Bde., I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Lisagriffin Coy. & Schull  
Battn. Column, Co. Cork, 1919-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2834.

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRE MILITAIRA 1913-21

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK WILCOX

Goleen, Co. Cork.

I was born at Letter, Goleen, on March 10th 1892. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Lisagriffin National School until I reached the age of 15 years. When I left school I went to work on the farm at home.

I joined the Royal Irish Constabulary in July, 1913, and having undergone a course of training at the Depot I was detailed for duty in North Clare. I served in this area until I resigned from the R.I.C., on the conscription issue, on June 10th 1918. I then returned home.

The organisation of the Volunteers in Goleen area commenced in the summer of 1919. The organiser was Seán Lehane of Scart, Bantry. The strength of the company in the early stages was about thirty. As the year progressed the membership increased to about fifty.

The first O/C of the unit was James O'Mahoney, Goleen. The principal activities in the early stages were military training in close and extended order drill, manoeuvres, the care and use of firearms and organisation work.

Early in 1920 Schull Battalion, which was the 7th Battalion, Cork 111 Brigade, was organised by Seán Lehane. The companies in this battalion were: Goleen, Schull, Lisagriffin, Dunmanus, Glaun, Leamcon, Dunbeacon, Ballydehob and Skehanore. I was now appointed O/C Lisagriffin Company. Jeremiah Coughlan of Balteen was appointed second in command. He was later demoted and replaced by Denis Hegarty. Denis Sullivan of Balteen was appointed 2nd Lieutenant, and Michael J. Crowley of Carrigmanu.

Q/M. The Adjutant was Denis O'Mahoney of Lisagriffin. It may be noted that Crowley was afterwards killed in action.

The strength of Lisagriffin unit was now between fifty and sixty men. A good percentage of the number were more or less forced to join and were of little use from a military or security point of view. The men who joined voluntarily were good and were prepared to do a man's part always when called upon.

The routine programme of the unit was two parades per week at which the men were put through a course of training. While training was in progress, scouts were always posted so that there could not be a surprise by the enemy. A levy of 3d per week was collected by the Q/M for the funds of the battalion.

The first act of aggression against the enemy was the destruction of the vacated R.I.C. barracks at Goleen village and the Courthouse there. The house of Eugene Sweeney, Toormire, was raided for arms. Three rifles - a long Lee Enfield, a Mauser and a Martini Henry - and some ammunition were taken in this raid. The officer in charge of this raid, which took place in May, 1920, was James O'Mahoney, Goleen.

The next operation carried out in this area was a raid on Mizen Head Fog Signal Station on May 16th 1920. A large quantity of explosives was seized. This operation was carried out by men from Bantry area with the co-operation of some locals. Seán Lehane was in charge.

A short time after this raid two enemy lorries took another consignment of explosives to the magazine at the

Mizen. The local company (Lisagriffin) were called together, procured a horse and cart and then marched to Mizen, where about half a ton of explosives was again captured. These explosives were hidden in the company area. They were later despatched in small quantities to Brigade H.Q. as required. This operation was carried out under my control.

On the night of August 15th 1920 members of Lisagriffin, Goleen and Dunmanus Companies attacked and captured a fortified British post at Bro<sup>?</sup> Head. A quantity of arms, ammunition, some military equipment, a prismatic binocular in case, two telescopes and a receiving set were captured in this raid.

I was in charge of this operation. Others who took part were James O'Mahoney (Goleen), Tim O'Mahoney (Goleen), Con O'Reilly (Goleen), Denis Hegarty (1st Lieut. Lisagriffin), Denis O'Sullivan (2nd Lt. Lisagriffin) and Jerh. Coughlan, Balteen.

Questions were asked in the British House of Commons about this raid, stress being laid on the importance of this post to British shipping communications. The men who carried out the raid were described in the reply to the Parliamentary question as Irish Bolshevick anarchists.

This post was surrounded by a barbed wire entanglement about six feet wide at the base and tapering from all sides to the top with a puzzle entrance. Entrance was gained with the help of a local schoolboy whose people were supplying the garrison with milk. It was this boy's job to take the milk to the garrison at fixed hours. He had a separate entrance to the post and through this he led us. His name was John Downey (Stephen). He has since died.

Only about six men actually took part in this operation, but a large number of others were engaged in scouting, cutting telegraph wires and standing to in case of necessity.

During November, 1920, three men from the company (Lisagriffin) attended a training camp under Tom Barry in Dunmanus area. They remained here for only one day and then completed the training in the hilly district north east of Ballydehob. The men who attended this camp were Patk. Wilcox (witness), Denis Hegarty and Denis O'Sullivan.

The road leading to Goleen area along Dunmanus Bay was made impassible during December, 1920, as this was a route by which the enemy could enter the area without being observed in time.

About this time all bicycles not absolutely necessary to their owners to carry out their work were seized by orders of Brigade H.Q. The bicycles were hidden in each area and subsequently used by I.R.A. men on duties such as scouting, despatch carrying. The owners of all bicycles seized were supplied with receipts for same from the officer in charge of each area.

Acting on the reports of spies and supporters, the enemy forces were now becoming active in their search for men in the district who were anyway prominent in the I.R.A. It then became necessary for all officers to impress on their men the necessity for being very careful in their conversations with non-members of the organisation. Most officers had now to go on the run - never sleeping at home. It was now almost a wholetime job for some.

Not meeting with any success in raiding the homes of wanted men, the enemy now adopted the tactics of surrounding Catholic Churches while the congregations were at Mass on Sundays and searching all grown-up males when they emerged. Such raids were carried out by Auxiliaries from Glengariff. This force was composed of demobbed British Army officers, who were anything but gentlemen. They usually got their information through the local loyalists or their clergymen.

During the early part of 1921 a small mobile unit was formed by Seán Lehane (Battalion O/C) with a view to harassing enemy forces in the area. This column carried out an attack on the Coastguard Station at Schull which was occupied by Marines, while, at the same time, the members of Schull Company, under Charlie Cotter, O/C, demolished Schull Workhouse to prevent its occupation by enemy forces. I was a member of this column.

Shortly following the attack on Schull we lay in ambush on Skibbereen road in the vicinity of Ballydehob in expectation of a foray by enemy forces from the garrison at Skibbereen. This was abortive as the enemy did not arrive, although we were in position from 4 a.m. until late evening. Despite the fact that many of our efforts to engage the enemy proved abortive, the operations served as good training for our forces.

From mid 1920 onwards signalling, first-aid and engineering sections were organised in each company. About a half dozen men were trained in each special service. The signal section was trained in semaphore and morse signalling with flags and lamps. It was surprising how proficient the men became in a short time. The signallers

in my unit (Lisagriffin) also learned to signal in morse with some powerful police whistles which were procured by the Adjutant - Denis O'Mahoney.

Another grave problem which confronted responsible members of the I.R.A. during this period was the maintenance of order in their districts. There were individuals in the area who took advantage of the existing conditions to carry out acts of petty spite. A small gang organised and carried out several acts of armed robbery. These were carried out at night and were well planned. Each of the families robbed in the area were Protestants. The raiders told them that they were acting for the I.R.A. and that, if they made any complaint anywhere they would be in for worse treatment. In the circumstances it was some considerable time before any hint of these occurrences reached the company officers. The first news of them was received by Con O'Reilly from Thomas Love of Crookhaven district - one of those raided - but he wanted O'Reilly to keep the news to himself in case he (Love) would get into any further trouble. He was actually terrified.

However, we immediately undertook an investigation of these happenings and in a short time we discovered the culprits. Only one of them evaded us. He boarded a boat bound for Cork before we were ready to strike. The others were arrested.

The worst feature of the whole business was that all the raiders were members of the I.R.A. They were courtmartialled by the Battn. O/C (Seán Lehane) and his staff, who gave them the punishment they deserved. Some of them were deported and others were sentenced to terms of hard labour, which they served with people in other parts

of the area whose sons were on active service. All were, of course, dismissed from the I.R.A.

During June, 1921, I was appointed Training Officer, Cork 111 Brigade. I was replaced as O/C Lisagriffin Company by Thomas O'Neill, Balteen. From now on I cannot account for the activities of the company but I believe that the new O/C allowed matters to drift.

When the split came in 1922 O'Neill and three others from this area joined the Free State Army.

This is a general outline of the organisation, training and activities of the I.R.A. in this area to the best of my memory and knowledge.

Just prior to the Truce I was engaged in training units throughout the brigade area.

My rank at the Truce - O/C Training, Cork 111 Brigade.

Following the Truce I continued to establish and carry out training at various camps throughout the area. Some time about the end of September, 1921, I went to Dublin with Seán Lehane where we reported to H.Q. We were detailed to proceed to South Roscommon area on training duties. We remained here for a few weeks and then returned to Dublin and later to the 1st Southern Divisional area.

Signed: Patrick Wilson

Date: November 12<sup>th</sup> 1956

Witness: P. Lonnell  
(Investigator)

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