

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRA MILITATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.657

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1657.

**Witness**

Jeremiah Keating,  
151, Bandon Road,  
Cork.

**Identity.**

Intelligence Officer, 2nd Battn., Cork No. 1 Bgde.

**Subject.**

Intelligence work, Cork No. 1 Bgde., 1917-21.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

File No S. 2977.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.657

STATEMENT BY JEREMIAH KEATING,

151, Bandon Road, Cork.

I was born in Kerry and came to Cork City in 1896.

In the year 1917 I joined 'G' Company of the Cork City Battalion, Irish Volunteers. At that time there was only one battalion of Volunteers in Cork City. There were two divisions in this battalion, known as 'A' and 'B'. The 'A' portion covered districts of the city north of the River Lee, and 'B' the area south of the river. 'G' Company district was south of the river and comprised, roughly, Upper Bandon Road down to Southgate Bridge which crosses the Lee, then southwards via Barrack St. to The Lough.

When I joined, Connie Neenan was Company Captain, Pat Collins 1st Lieutenant, and John Connell, 2nd Lieutenant. We had a very strong company, numerically. I am sure we had upwards of two hundred men on the rolls. The arms position in 1917 was very poor. There were, possibly, one or two rifles (not surrendered in Easter Week, 1916), a few shotguns and a couple of revolvers. We drilled in the open country in the adjoining Bishopstown district, and later on we had a disused house at Lehenagh in The Lough parish for rifle and revolver lectures. Occasionally we had practice with a service rifle in the country at Meagher's farm at Leheragh.

When the British Government threatened to enforce a conscription act on this country in 1918, a large increase in Volunteer membership was noticeable. The majority of these recruits left us when the crisis ended.

The year 1918 was spent in drilling, training generally and 'tightening up' the organisation. We took part in public parades, marching in military formation, but. I, personally, refrained from taking part in these parades for reasons I will refer to later.

In December, 1918, came the general election which swept the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond out of public life and elected in its place candidates nominated by Sinn Féin. In Cork City we had two Sinn Féin candidates named Liam de Róiste and J.J. Walsh; both these were returned with large majorities. In the election campaign 'G' Company helped in canvassing, distributing election literature, stewarding meetings, and generally assisted the Sinn Féin candidates.

In 1919, I was appointed Company Quartermaster, and during that year special services covering engineering and intelligence were organised within the company. In addition, a cycle corps was formed. The latter acted as scouts when the company was on parade.

During that year, on the instructions of the battalion, raids were carried out at night on private houses for arms. In these raids (which were undertaken by about half a dozen men, sometimes less), a few shotguns were secured. Some revolvers were purchased from sailors off the Moore McCormack Line ships at Cork docks, and, in addition, we bought some from the battalion with subscriptions from the men of our company. By the end of 1919, I estimate that we had about a dozen revolvers in 'G' Company, plus a few shotguns. Some of these guns were kept by the men themselves and some in my place of business. In the latter connection, I should state that I was (and still am) employed in the grocery and provision firm (and, at that time,)

bakery firm) of Messrs Phair, Bandon Road, Cork. The stores and outoffices provided an admirable hiding place for guns and other military equipment, for which I, as Quartermaster of the company, was responsible.

Early in the year 1920, I was instructed by the battalion to take over intelligence duty, first with the company, and later with the battalion. One of my first jobs was to track down and report on the movements of civilians seen entering or leaving Union Quay Barracks and the barracks in Blackrock Road, Barrack St. and College Road, Cork, these being the four barracks in our area.

It would be, so far as I can remember, some time late in January, 1920, when I was going on duty from the Thomas Ashe Hall, Father Mathew Quay, a tall, well-built civilian in a British army greatcoat pushed by me and went into the hall. He was a stranger to me and I thought it better to mention my suspicions to Tom Wall, a battalion officer who was on the premises at the time. I then left to take up barrack watch.

About a week or so afterwards, when I was handing in my reports to the Thomas Ashe Hall (which was 2nd Battalion headquarters) and was about to leave, there was a shout "There is a raid on" and all the lights in the hall were extinguished. Those of us there got safely away, with the exception of four men in a tap room of the building. These were arrested by police from Union Quay who carried out the raid. Union Quay barracks was at the far side of the Lee and in view of the Thomas Ashe Hall. A short distance from the hall I met Tom Wall and asked him who had given warning of the raid. He said, "The tall man you spoke about as being a spy, a week or so ago". As a matter

fact, this man did arrive at the hall ahead of the police raiding party and gave us warning. About a week or two following the incident I have related, the body of the strange man I had suspected of being an enemy spy was found shot dead a few miles outside the city. His name, it transpired, was Quinlisk. He was, in fact, shot by members of the 2nd Battalion. The date was 25th February, 1920.

On the night after the funeral of the murdered Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás McCurtain (23rd March, 1920), about twelve men from 'G' Company were told to report to the City Hall, Cork, where a meeting of brigade officers was being held under Terence MacSwiney, Vice Brigadier, Cork No. 1 Brigade. We were armed with revolvers, with twenty rounds of ammunition per man, and we were placed in positions on the roads around the Hall, with instructions to engage any enemy force which might attempt a raid, particularly from Union Quay barracks which was in close proximity. No raid took place.

Following an attack by men from the 1st Battalion on King St. (now McCurtain St.) R.I.C. barracks, it was expected that the police murder gang (of the existence of which we were aware) would make an attempt on the life of Terry MacSwiney, then Lord Mayor of Cork in succession to Tomás McCurtain. At this particular time, early July, 1920, Terry was staying in the house of Fred Cronin at The Lough which is in close proximity to Phair's Cross, Bandon Road. (Phair's was the firm to which I have previously referred, hence the crossroads at this point being called Phair's Cross). About twelve of us, with Connie Neenan, the captain of 'G' Company, all armed with revolvers,

waited in Phair's stables for about fourteen nights to engage the murder gang if they should approach Cronin's house. They did not turn up and our 'protection party' was withdrawn.

In the latter part of June, 1920, Connie Neenan, John Connell and I watched in barracks for Black and Tans going off duty. Invariably two Tans passed down that street on certain nights of the week at much the same time. On the particular night in question we waited armed with revolvers to shoot the two Tans on a signal from Connie Neenan. When they appeared we noticed that three, not two, were approaching. Apparently Connie Neenan decided that we were not sufficiently strong, numerically, to take on the Tans, because he failed to give us any signal to attack and they were allowed to proceed unmolested.

#### Shooting of O'Callaghan, Spy:

In June, 1920, I was instructed by Seán Hegarty, Vice Brigadier, to arrest and shoot a civilian named O'Callaghan who was employed as a civilian clerk in the Victoria Barracks, Cork, (now Collins Barracks). I understand that he was overheard by a barman in a city publichouse giving information to the military over the phone.

O'Callaghan passed along Patrick St. on his way to the barracks each morning, so I decided to contact him there. Between ten and eleven o'clock one morning I waited in Patrick St. in company with Pat Collins (our Company Captain) and John O'Connell. As O'Callaghan came along, I tapped him on the shoulder and said to him: "Were you assaulted the other night"? He said, "Yes, I was". I then asked him would he come along and identify the man who attacked him. He agreed to do so. We took him along to the Thomas Ashe Hall on Father Mathew Quay, where he was detained until about

three o'clock in the afternoon. When we were bringing him out to a car outside the door of the hall, he made a bid to escape but was chased and tripped up by one of our lads. We then got him into the car and took him out the country to the Farmer's Cross district, where he was shot and his body buried.

Execution of Lynch, Spy:

About the month of July, 1920, the houses of several well-known I.R.A. men in our district were raided by police and military and arrests were made which included Connie Neenan, an officer of the 2nd Battalion.

We suspected that the enemy had been tipped off by some informer, and, as a result, all enemy barracks were watched by us for civilians entering or leaving. Eventually suspicion fell on two men named Herlihy and Lynch. Our suspicions were confirmed as a result of information passed on to us by a man named Conroy who was employed as a confidential clerk in the Victoria military barracks, Cork.

An attempt was made to capture Lynch, but this failed. Herlihy, however, was taken up and charged with being an accomplice of Lynch. He (Herlihy) was identified by Conroy as being one of the men he had seen in the barracks and whom he knew to have given information to the military authorities regarding certain prominent I.R.A. men in our area, in which he (Herlihy) lived. On instructions from our brigade, Herlihy was taken out to the Farmer's Cross district and shot. His body was buried there.

Disarming of Black and Tans in Turner's Hotel, Cork:

It was in the month of July, 1920, when I received instructions from the brigade to watch out for Head Constable

Ferris of the R.I.C. and, if an opportunity offered, to shoot him. Ferris was a particularly active enemy of ours and various attempts were made by Cork City I.R.A. men to shoot him. On this occasion I was accompanied on my look out for Ferris by Pat Collins and George Burke, both members of 'G' Company. We were armed with revolvers.

Having waited for some considerable time in the vicinity where we expected to contact Ferris, there was no sign of him and we decided to disperse. Collins and Burke went into Turner's Hotel, Oliver Plunkett St., for a drink, and when they entered they found two armed Black and Tans also having a drink. Our two lads drew their revolvers, ordered the Tans to put up their hands (which they did), disarmed them and left the premises.

Execution of Hawkes, Spy:

An important source of information regarding enemy agents was the postal mails. As Battalion Intelligence Officer it was my duty to arrange for the frequent hold-up of postmen and the capture of letters. I.R.A. men in the various companies of the battalion undertook this job.

In this particular instance, however, it was a mistake in the delivery of a letter by a postman in our district which led to the discovery of a spy named Hawkes. The latter wrote to his mother who lived in our company area. The letter was delivered by mistake to the house of an I.R.A. man named John McCarthy, who, in turn, passed it on to the brigade. I cannot say what information was contained in the letter, but I do know that it led to Hawkes coming under suspicion as being a spy for the enemy. He was later executed by the I.R.A. in West Cork.



Execution of Charles Beale, Spy:

During the year 1920 it became known to us that the Freemasons in Cork had organised a secret service through the Young Men's Christian Association (a Protestant organisation) in the city. The object was to supply the enemy with information regarding the movements of known I.R.A. men in Cork.

There were two sections of this secret service, one for senior members and one for boys. As regards the latter, a youth named Parsons who was picked up by our lads as a suspected spy, admitted his guilt and gave details of the spy organisation in the Y.M.C.A. He was executed (by shooting) by men of the 2nd Battalion.

The secretary of the senior branch of this secret service was a man named Charles Beale. He was manager of the well-known grocery and provision store of Woodford Bourne and Company, Patrick St., Cork. Instructions were received from the brigade to capture and shoot Beale.

This man, Beale, lived on College Road, Cork, and on 16th February, 1921, Pat Collins, John Horgan and I, with two others, watched the approaches to College Road. John Horgan and I spotted Beale as he was crossing Southgate Bridge en route to his home. I went and got revolvers, picked up Beale and brought him by car to the Wilton district, where he was shot. We found in his possession papers giving valuable information relating to the spy organisation with which he was connected.

In my opinion the shooting of Beale broke the back of the anti-I.R.A. - Sinn Féin organisation in Cork City.

During the month of March, 1921, Séán Mitchell, J.J. O'Connell, Pat Collins and I, with Patrick Keating acting as scout, kept watch on a police patrol between Elizabeth Fort and College Road. We were armed with revolvers and our instructions were to shoot a Constable Murphy who, so far as I can now remember, was concerned in the ambush at Dripsey, Co. Cork, where an I.R.A. party was surprised by enemy forces, taken prisoners and shot out of hand. We held up a few R.I.C., but these were known to be friendly and we were told not to harm them. Unfortunately, although we waited at least four successive nights, we failed to get Murphy, who did not accompany the patrols as we expected he would.

In May, 1921, when a military curfew order from seven o'clock in the evening was in force, I was instructed to proceed to Cook St. (which is in the centre of the city) armed with a revolver. I was one of an armed party to act as cover for others of our lads who were waiting to shoot a British intelligence officer named Sterland. The latter was, I believe, going to the Oak Bar in Prince's St. (adjacent to Cook St.), where he was to be waylaid and shot.

We weren't long in position when we were warned by Mick Murphy, the 2nd Battalion O/C, to get away as quickly as possible as we were surrounded by military. I remember Mick saying, "If there is a man shot here to-night, not one of ye will get out of it alive". We got away safely. About a week later, Sterland was shot and killed by men of the 2nd Battalion at the Rob Roy Hotel in Prince's Street, Cork.

An incident which occurred during this period (early 1921) may be worth recording. I was in Phair's shop in Bandon Road (where I was employed) one day when I

noticed a man named Canty standing at a street corner. This man was suspected of being a spy. I left the shop to change my coat and when I came back he was gone. I then went out along North Main St. where I met one of our lads from 'G' Company, who told me that he had seen Canty going in the direction of the railway station in a car drawn by a white horse. I followed on to the railway station and saw him walking up and down the platform. Four lads from the 1st Battalion came on the scene. I pointed out Canty to them. Our quarry then boarded the train (it was noon) for Blarney, while two of us got in to the guard's van and two others with the driver of the train. Unfortunately, Canty again left the train before it started. Apparently he must have noticed he was being followed. Some other 1st Battalion lads went on in a commandeered motor car to Blarney to board the train there, not knowing that Canty had left it at Cork. So far as I am aware, he was never subsequently shot.

General:

As I have previously mentioned, I was employed in Phair's grocery and provision store at Phair's Cross, Bandon Road. From this premises I transacted all my duties as 2nd Battalion Intelligence Officer and Company Quartermaster. I had eight men from seven companies of the 2nd Battalion working for me. They brought their reports to Phair's and received instructions from me there. These men were engaged watching spy suspects, watching the homes of the anti-Sinn Féin crowd, following and reporting their movements to me, noting civilians entering and leaving military and police barracks and reporting on their movements. Barracks were watched for the movements of troops, the strength of enemy garrisons and suchlike. I had men, employed in shops,

hotel bars and railways, who reported to me conversations they overheard or persons they had seen which might prove of value to us in locating spies or providing us with information of enemy movements. All such reports were brought to me at Phair's.

Occasionally I received word from the brigade of suspected persons in our area. Immediately I assigned men to the job of watching these suspects, on whom I furnished reports back to the brigade.

There was one retired R.I.C. man who was very helpful in giving information. This man obtained for me the names and addresses (in England) of Black and Tans in barracks at Elizabeth Fort, which was in our area. I believe that the brigade wanted these addresses to carry out reprisals on the homes of these men by burning.

I had also three very valuable lads working for me named Mick Buckley, Matt Burke and - Spillane. These lads specialised in tapping wires and picking up morse messages going from the military barracks in Cork to outlying barracks. They were great boys and the best lads in the city at this job. They are all dead now, R.I.P.

Matty Burke was caught tapping wires at Cobh Junction and did a stretch in gaol. Mick Buckley was arrested when the battalion dump at Vernonmount was raided by military. On the occasion of this particular raid, Buckley had brought the papers taken from Beale (the spy who had been shot by us) to Vernonmount for Mick Murphy, the Battalion O/C.

When Buckley was in gaol in Cork his sister went to see him and asked about Beale's papers. He said they were hidden under an old bucket out in the field at Vernonmount.

Sure enough, the papers were found by us just where Buckley said they were. If they had been discovered by the military in the raid he would have been tied up with the shooting of Beale and would most certainly have been executed by the British.

It was my policy never to take part in funerals or public parades of any kind, and I believe that this was the principal reason why I was never arrested. Phair's shop where I worked was really the centre of 'G' Company's activities. Arms and bombs were stored there, and there was a constant stream of I.R.A. men bringing me reports at all times. No arms or ammunition were ever taken by enemy forces, and it is correct to say that after the execution of Herlihy, the spy, there was no leakage of information to the enemy from our area.

At the Truce of July, 1921, the arms position in the company was quite good, although I am not now able to remember the details. I was still at that time 2nd Battalion Intelligence Officer.

Signed: *James ab Keating*Date: *14/8/57*Witness: *T. O. Gorman*

(Investigator).

