

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,691

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1691.

**Witness**

Ernest R. Jordison,  
"St. Anne's",  
10 Mount Prospect Avenue,  
Clontarf,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Manager and Director of British Petroleum  
Company, Limited, Dublin, 1916.

**Subject.**

Dublin 1915-1921.

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

Nil.

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1691

STATEMENT BY ERNEST R. JORDISON,

St. Anne's, 10, Mount Prospect Avenue, Clontarf, Dublin.

I was born in the city of Middlesborough, Yorkshire, in the year 1877. My father was of Norwegian extraction, and he was born in Yorkshire. My mother was English, of Irish extraction. I commenced business in the year 1891 - in the oil business. I came to Ireland, first of all, about the year 1895, on holidays. I returned to Ireland on business in 1897, having put up a proposition to the oil company, with which I was connected, for operating throughout Ireland.

I commenced operations in Belfast and spread out through the north of Ireland. I was then called back to England to organise the business in parts of England. About eight months afterwards, I returned to Ireland, going, first of all, to Belfast, thence to Dublin where I commenced operations in the city. I spread out, and eventually opened up a hundred and twenty-six depots through the country, north, south, east and west. I eventually settled down in Dublin.

About three o'clock on the Sunday afternoon, the day of the arrival of the guns at Howth, I was leaving my house in Howth Road when about twenty or thirty British soldiers of the King's Own Scottish Borderers arrived, with an officer, and took up a position beyond The Crescent. Some of them went down on their knees, and seemed ready for action. Just about that time, I saw several men coming from Clontarf railway station, hugging and crouching along the wall on the main road, on the railway station side, crouching down. Two of them crossed the wall at the

Clontarf golf links into Bradshaw's ground; another crossed the wall near Charlemont Road. Immediately, a lady (Miss Dowling, a school teacher) rushed out of her house where the soldiers of the King's Own Scottish Borderers had taken up a position, got in front of the soldiers and officer, and appealed to them not to shoot. I continued my journey to Fairview. There, I heard rumours of fighting at Bachelor's Walk and other places. I also heard that several guns had been found in the golf club grounds, and hidden in back gardens rear of Howth Road and near Charlemont Road.

In April, 1916, I arranged to give an outing to Fairyhouse by motor car to a few friends of mine on the Easter Monday bank holiday. I hired the best motor car in Dublin which was used for such purpose from Messrs. Sanderson & Son, Taxi Hirers and Motor Car Dealers, of Dominick St., Dublin. A Mr. Scott, a well known tailor, of Lower O'Connell St., Dublin, a Mr. Arthur O'Keefe, a tailors' representative of Rathmines, and a well known solicitor, P.J. O'Hagan of Newry, were of the party. I had arranged for all of us to meet at the Metropole Hotel, Lower O'Connell St., at 11.30 a.m.

We all met about the appointed time, and left in the motor car at exactly two or three minutes to twelve o'clock, to call at the "Bodega", Dame Street, to pick up a Mr. Salmon, who was then Manager of that hotel, and with whom I had arranged to provide the lunch in baskets which was served on the Fairyhouse race-course. As we all left the Metropole, several tram-cars, "full up" with the Irish Volunteers, with rifles, passed us as we went along Lower O'Connell St., past Middle Abbey St., Bachelor's Walk, into Westmoreland St., and thence to Dame St., to the Bodega.

We picked up Mr. Salmon, with his hampers, and made for Fairyhouse via Parliament St., Capel St. Bridge, Phibsborough and Navan Road.

When we arrived on the race-course, there were rumours of terrible happenings in Dublin. Reports were flying about that the Irish Volunteers had attacked the Post Office at exactly twelve o'clock, and that a policeman had been shot dead at the entrance, that the military had been called out, including the 21st Lancers, that many English soldiers of foot and horse Regiments and several horses had been killed, that all military were confined to barracks, and that the city was held and in charge of the Volunteers. There was great commotion in the reserved grand stand and other enclosures, and two of my friends would not return to Dublin with me. Mr. P.J. O'Hagan, (Solicitor, Newry) decided to return home by motor car with a Mr. Willis, Veterinary Surgeon, son of Mr. T.P. Willis, proprietor of a large bakery and confectionery business in Newry, who owned the motor car.

My friends, including Messrs. Salmon, Scott and O'Keefe, then left in the hired private car for Dublin. When we arrived at Phibsborough, a man at the junction road held us up, and warned us not to go any further towards the city, as the Irish Volunteers were in charge and all military and police had been confined to barracks, and a proclamation had been issued and posted on the important buildings of the city, proclaiming Ireland a Republic. This man told us he was a British officer, but had got into mufti, and he implored us not to go into the city "for God's sake" unless we wished to be shot.

We, however, decided to leave Mr. Salmon at his home, "The Bodega", in Dame St., and the four of us, with the driver, went on to the city via Berkeley Road, North Frederick St. and O'Connell St. There was a great lot of people about, from the entrance into O'Connell St., near Parnell St., and onwards, mainly on the footpaths. I actually saw boys with cricket bats and balls, playing in the middle of the road, before reaching Nelson's Pillar where I saw two dead horses lying in the road, on the left hand side of the Pillar, and an immense lot of blood all over that part of the road. These horses belonged to the 21st Lancers, I understood. They (the Lancers) had been ordered to leave their barracks and to attack the Irish Volunteers who had taken over the General Post Office, but they were repulsed and had to return to their barracks. At the entrance to Earl St. (Noblett's Corner, as it was then called), I saw a tram car, with men, women and children around it, with bundles of things.

As I passed Nelson's Pillar, I saw several hand-carts passing from Lower Abbey St., making for the Post Office. These appeared to be covered with sacking. I, at the time, concluded it was ammunition and stores being taken into the General Post Office. The Post Office windows were all built up with sandbags, and I could see some Volunteers behind, moving about with guns, and guns were protruding from behind the sandbags at the windows and the main door. I saw a bill posted on one of the pillars outside the G.P.O., and I could just see "PROCLAMATION", in large letters, I believe.

We continued on past Mr. Scott's (tailor) shop in O'Connell St., where we stopped for about two minutes only, as it was not touched. We then continued to The Bodega. There was a fair number of people about, but no military

or police, as all was quiet, these being confined to barracks. I left my friend, Mr. Salmon, at The Bodega - also Mr. O'Keefe. After staying there for about ten minutes, we hurried away, as Mr. Scott and myself wanted to get home in the motor car we had hired.

We passed along Dame St., Westmoreland St., Wellington Quay, Butt Bridge, Amiens St. quickly, as we were informed that the Volunteers were holding up all traffic in the city and suburbs and advising people to get home. We arrived at Annesley Bridge, and were held up by the Volunteers there, with rifles. They went down on their knees, pointing the rifles towards our motor car and asking us to halt. They wanted to know our business, where we were going, etc. We told them we were going to my home (now No. 49) Howth Road, and that we were coming from Fairyhouse races. One Volunteer asked me if Civil War had won. I told him it was third. (This was the name of the horse which had run third in the Irish Grand National that day). The Volunteers would not allow the motor car to pass Annesley Bridge, so Mr. Scott and myself decided to release the driver and private car, to return to the garage in Dominick St. The Volunteers agreed to this.

Mr. Scott and myself then tried to hire a side-car to take me home to Howth Road and Mr. Scott to his home in Sutton. The Volunteers informed us that the city was being surrounded by the Volunteers and held up, and they were expecting battles to take place, and advised us to get home quickly. After a lapse of about ten minutes looking for a jarvey, one came along as we were standing near Addison Road, Fairview. We arranged to pay the jarvey thirty shillings to drive me to Howth Road and Mr. Scott to Sutton. When we arrived at my house, the jarvey said he would go no further, as it appeared from the people

hurrying home that things were becoming serious. I got off the side-car and Mr. Scott remained, and eventually the jarvey agreed to take Mr. Scott to Sutton for five pounds.

As I got off the car, my wife, the housekeeper and three of the children were awaiting my arrival at the front door. They were in a very frightened state, as they had been told of the terrible happenings in the city.

Many of the people remained up the whole night, and were about early on Tuesday morning, looking for bread and provisions for their meals, but very little, or practically none, were to be had, especially bread. A youth, Stanley Woods (afterwards the famous motor cyclist) came along on a bicycle, with his sister, to see me and to get bread, etc., as his father had sent him from Sutton to see if I could help them to get bread and provisions, as there was none to be had in Sutton. Young Woods had a pillow case with him. He only managed to get one loaf, if I remember rightly. I cycled into Fairview early that morning, and Irish Volunteers were posted, with rifles, at Hayes, Conyngnam and Robinson's corner, and would not allow us to proceed on the Clontarf road towards Annesley Bridge. I, however, went towards Richmond Road, and got some bread and other things, and returned home on the bicycle. Going home, several people I spoke to informed me that they had been out all night, as they could not get any vehicle to take them home and they had to walk from Howth, Portmarnock, etc.

The oil company, of which I was general manager, had general offices, stores and stables in East Road, North Wall, and, after breakfast, I made for the stables, etc., to make sure that the horses would be looked after properly

by the stableman (Delaney) in charge. As I went past Fairview and arrived at Annesley Bridge, I was held up at both places by the Volunteers, and, as I explained my business, I experienced no trouble. On my way there I saw a dead donkey in the middle of the road, at Annesley Bridge crossroads. This dead donkey remained in the same position for several days.

There were many rumours of all kinds floating about on the Tuesday.

On Wednesday morning, I could hear guns from the British gunboat shelling the city from the Liffey. I looked out towards the Great Northern Railway bridge from my attic window, and also to see and hear where the firing of the guns was taking place, and where it was being aimed at. After a few minutes, bullets came flying just near me, hitting the roof, so I got down from my position. I then went out and walked towards the Clontarf Road Railway bridge, thence towards the Bull Wall, and eventually I saw soldiers (of the Nottingham Regiment) walking along the Wall, with rifles, evidently making for the city.

Very soon, permits had to be obtained from the British military who had tables and chairs fixed as places to obtain permits in order to move about, as persons were liable to be held up. One such place was at the Bull Wall, and another near Clontarf Road Railway Bridge, if I remember rightly.

There were rumours that every house in Clontarf and around the city was going to be searched by the British military, and, as things looked serious, I decided to take three of my children by bicycle to Drogheda, as this was the last point to which trains were running as from the North



towards Dublin, and to send them from there by rail to Carlingford where my mother was living. I got them as far as Drogheda, and gave them in charge of a cousin of my wife who took them by rail to Newry, to a Dr. Cronin there who was a friend of mine. He, in turn, took them in his motor car to my mother in Carlingford. I returned home from Drogheda after leaving my children there, and took my eldest daughter's bicycle along with me, pushing it along while riding my own. I had a few minutes stay in Balbriggan for refreshment, and continued my journey to Clontarf without incident. After leaving the main road at Santry, along the lanes, cycling home through Coolock and Killester, everything was still and quiet except for the corncrakes craking, as the weather was very beautiful and fine, and the country was lighted up from the reflection in the skies of the fires in Dublin city. I hardly met a soul the whole way home from Balbriggan. I could hear the guns being fired in the city, and the flames and reflections were very vivid over the city. The chain of the bicycle I was pushing and the bumping of the bicycles on the road made a clattering noise in the stillness of the night, all the way home.

On arriving at the gate of my house in Howth Road, there was a British soldier on sentry guard right opposite my house, and, as there was a lamp post on the footpath at the gate of my house, I put one bicycle against it, dismounted, and took my own into the house where my wife was waiting for me at the door, to warn me of the sentry as she was so afraid something might happen.

On the Friday morning, there was no sentry outside, and I took my bicycle in. I obtained a permit from the British military and went into the city on the Sunday

morning. Fighting had ceased, and the British soldiers were bivouaced around the Nelson Pillar and other points. There were many people about in the city, and on my return home, walking to Howth Road, I passed the dead donkey, still lying on the road in the same position. I think this animal's carcass, which was swollen and decaying, was moved on the Tuesday or Wednesday.

When my friend, P.J. O'Hagan, the Newry solicitor, left Fairyhouse in Mr. Willis's motor car for Newry, they were held up by the Volunteers on a by-road before getting into the main Belfast-Dublin road, and the car was commandeered. Mr. P.J. O'Hagan was put out of the car, and he eventually got to the railway main line (Belfast-Dublin), and walked for miles, being out all night, and arriving at Dundalk on the following morning. Mr. Willis had to drive the Volunteers around about the country. Mr. Willis afterwards informed me that, when he was driving, passing Castlebellingham, where they all stayed for some time, he was informed that a policeman on duty was shot dead against the railings in the centre of Castlebellingham town. Mr. Willis was released, and given a can of petrol to carry him home. Mr. Willis afterwards told me the car called at many houses around the country, informing the occupants of the happenings and giving some of the men, evidently Volunteers, instructions, and some were picked up and taken and left at different points.

During Easter Week, 1916, (if I remember rightly), one of the road tank wagons of my company, the British Petroleum Company, Limited, pulled by one horse and containing about 250 gallons of lamp oil, was delivering oil to shopkeepers in the Banteer (Co. Cork) area, near

Mallow, when the driver (O'Sullivan) was held up by the Volunteers and tied to a wheel of the tank wagon.

It was said that this was done because he was working for a British company, and mainly because there was a shield or plaque fixed on the side of the cab of the wagon, on which was written, "By Appointment. Purveyors to His Majesty the King". I was in my office in East Road, North Wall, Dublin, when I heard of this incident.

I immediately got in touch with a friend of mine who was in touch with Headquarters of the I.R.A., and the driver was immediately released, but the shield had been destroyed or burned in the meantime. I informed my directors of this, and suggested the withdrawal of the shields from all the tank wagons throughout the whole of the country, north, south, east and west - over 120 of these shields. This was agreed to immediately.

By the way, the British Petroleum Company, Limited then was a German company, with their head office in Hamburg, but their head office for the then British Isles was in London. During the War (1914-1918), the assets of all German companies in these Isles were taken over by the British Government Trustee, including the British Petroleum Company, Limited, who were then operating throughout Ireland and for whom I was general manager and director, with my head office in East Road, Dublin. Immediately after the War, I suggested that the company operating throughout Ireland should become an Irish company, and this was agreed to. A new company was formed, 1922/1923 - the Irish B.P. Company, Limited, and registered in Dublin. Some few years ago, this Company (Irish B.P. Co., Ltd.) has been co-operated with the Shell Company. (This only for your information).

Further particulars of this change can be obtained from official quarters should you require it, but the change did not take place during my period of office.

On the Tuesday following Easter Week, 1916, I left Dublin city for Galway, by motor car. Very few people were about, the whole way to Ballinasloe. About two miles outside Ballinasloe, I was held up, and put alongside a stone wall, searched and questioned by British soldiers, who kept me only a few minutes. On my return journey to Dublin - about Thursday or Friday - I entered the Phoenix Park at Knockmaroon Hill, and was held up by British soldiers near the Gough monument, and questioned. There was no further incident on my way home.

A few days before "Bloody Sunday", 1920, I was called away from Dublin to a directors' meeting of my company in London. On my return by mail boat from Holyhead on the Sunday morning, my eldest daughter and son met me at then Kingstown Pier, with my car. They informed me of the terrible trouble in the city during the early hours of the morning, and the killing of the British officers in houses and hotels around the city, and advised me to get home as quickly as possible. I was then living at Temora, at the corner of Stillorgan Road and Booterstown Avenue. After leaving Kingstown, going home for breakfast, in my car, I don't believe I passed a living soul the whole way. The district seemed to be dead. Afterwards, during the day and night, I heard of the attack by British soldiers on Croke Park, machine-gunning the spectators, and other happenings.

Days afterwards, I was in Eden Quay when the gun carriages were taking the coffins, with the remains of the British officers that had been killed, to a boat. I stood at the side of the road, and watched the procession of these gun carriages and British officers and men, making for the boat lying at the North Wall. I saw a British officer, with a gun in his hand, knock the hats off a couple of men who stood with their hats on, when the coffins were going by them. There were large crowds along the Quays during this procession to the boat.

One morning - in 1920, I think - that the Black and Tans went to Mullingar to haul down the Irish green, white and orange flag which had been hoisted on the Town Hall there by the Republicans (I.R.A.), I had gone there early from Dublin in my Rover car with a traveller of mine on business. I called and had dinner with friends of mine. Afterwards, while at Messrs. Weymes stores, right opposite the Town Hall, the Black and Tans arrived in the town, visited many shops, etc., commandeering drinks, etc., and they were holding up the town. A friend of mine, a Mr. Kavanagh of the Mills, Maynooth, had his own car and several friends, and, as we thought we might be held up, we made for home in the two cars. We called at Weymes stores at Kilcock, and stayed there a short while. During that time, two lorry loads of Black and Tans passed by Kilcock, on their way towards Maynooth. They pulled up alongside the Canal, on the main road, and one load of Black and Tans returned to Kilcock, but kept to the Mullingar main road, towards the Square. Our cars were stationary on the side road of the town near the railway bridge and station.

While the lorry full of Black and Tans was stationary alongside the Canal, the Black and Tans were very rowdy and drinking from bottles of stout and whiskey. I thought it the better plan to drive past them, with our two cars. I told my friend I would lead the way, so I went past the Black and Tans and I put up my hand as a kind of salute, and they held up their bottles and saluted, as if they were drinking our health. They were all very lively and rowdy. I discovered my friend's, Kavanagh's, car remained in Kilcock.

I went on, and, about 150/200 yards past the Black and Tans, at the bend in the road where the Canal leaves the roadway, I saw two men with guns in the field alongside the main roadway, which is below the roadway level. They had evidently been out shooting, as they had rabbits tied to the guns which they were carrying over their shoulders. I got near the hedge, and shouted to these men to hide, as the Black and Tans were stationed in a lorry a short distance away. There was a deep ditch below the hedge, and they hid. I did not stop, but went on to my home, and arrived in Dublin without further incident.

You, no doubt, will have the full particulars of the mutiny at Listowel R.I.C. barracks (June, 1920), when an R.I.C. officer (Smith) went to the police barracks at Listowel, had a meeting with the police officers and men stationed there, and instructed them all to "shoot at sight". Among the men in uniform who took off their coats and refused were Constable Jeremiah Mee and Constable Sheeran. Both these constables were, at a later date, taken into my employment and given

positions as travellers, Constable Sheeran covering parts of County Kerry, and Constable Mee, the Athlone-Mullingar-Longford area etc.

I happened to be in Cork city when the R.I.C. officer, who had made the speech at Listowel police barracks, was killed (shot). He was attached to King St. police barracks there, but no doubt you will have full particulars of this incident also.

On the night of the attack on the police barracks at Cabinteely in April or May, 1921, I was sitting in front of a large fire in the drawing-room of Mr. John Donnelly (coal merchant of Westmoreland St.), with a party of about twenty other friends, including Mr. and Mrs. John D., at their home, Clonfadda, Merrion Avenue, Blackrock, when Mrs. Donnelly left the room to answer a ring at the hall door. She returned, within two or three minutes, along with a man, with a black mask over a part of his face and a revolver pointed in front of him. He asked for the loan of one of the two cars outside the hall door, at the end of the drive to the house. He stated, at the same time, that the car would be returned shortly, intact, but, if it was not loaned freely, he would have to take it. He also asked where the telephone was, as he was going to disconnect it forcibly.

I spoke up, and told him that he need not bother about the 'phone, as I would see it would not be used, and that I would be responsible for this. I told him also that he could take which car he wished, my Rover car or Mr. John Donnelly's car, and I went down the steps of the house to the cars, where there were several men, all masked. I was informed that they

wanted the Ford car and not the Rover, and was asked for the keys. I went back to the house with the man for the keys, and Mr. Donnelly, who was attending to a couple of the ladies who had fainted with the fright they had got from the masked man, gave me the keys. The masked man evidently knew me, and asked me again for an assurance about the 'phone and keeping the matter quiet. He then informed me that the car would be safely returned in about half an hour, or so. This was returned, intact, in due course.

In the meantime, two or three of the ladies had become weak, or had fainted. One was a Mrs. McGowan, who now lives at 15 Howth Road, Clontarf. A Mrs. Lily Horgan, who is now living at 131 Clontarf Road, was also in the party.

On the following morning, the morning papers had large headings, announcing that the barracks at Cabinteely had been attacked and partly destroyed, that a policeman had been killed, and others wounded.

On the morning of the firing of the Custom House in May, 1921, I arrived at the stores and offices of the British Petroleum Company, Limited, the company I was representing, which was situated less than a hundred yards inside the entrance gates of the Great Northern Railway Company, Sherriff St. There was a very large tank, capable of holding about one hundred thousand gallons of petroleum oil, erected in an enclosure at the entrance gates. The licence for the storage of the oil was issued by the Explosives Department of Dublin Corporation. On the opposite side of the enclosed wall, the offices and stores were situated.



While I was in the office going through some particulars, a small Ford motor van arrived, with several men and the driver. This van, which belonged to the firm of Hampton, Leedom & Co., chemists, druggists and retail oil distributors, of Henry St., Dublin, operated throughout and around the city, delivering lamp oil. The man in charge took from the van (which I understood afterwards was commandeered by the I.R.A.) a number of two-gallon petrol cans - I should say roughly thirty or forty cans - and asked for these to be filled. As this was being done, I walked away, as I intended to make a call in Amiens St. When I had gone about forty or fifty yards towards the entrance gates, a lorry load of Black and Tans was going towards the offices. I returned to the offices, and the officer in charge presented an order for six drums of petrol. (This lorry had come from Gormanston Camp, County Headquarters of the Black and Tans. Immediately, the man in charge of Hampton, Leedom's van, turned out of the yard and went off. Several of the men scattered through the goods yard, and away. The Black and Tans remained, sitting on the platform and steps of the platform, and taking their lunch, knowing nothing of the commandeered van and its contents and occupants.

Later on that same morning, I proceeded to a call in Amiens St., and afterwards went to the Custom House to despatch a telegram from the telegraph and postal office which was situated at the main entrance to the Custom House on the Quay - Custom House Quay. I may mention that I consider that that was one of the last telegrams that was sent from the Custom House before it was fired.

I then proceeded along the Quays towards D'Olier St. when I saw and heard lorry loads of Black and Tans and police going down Eden Quay. I then stayed for a little time outside the Independent offices, Carlisle Buildings, watching the police running in and out, in different positions in front of the Custom House, facing Liberty Hall. Then I saw flames issuing from the Custom House. There was a good deal of firing going on, and I took cover at Carlisle House, and watched from there for some considerable time. The flames were issuing from the Custom House in different parts. (I think it was a couple of days afterwards that I went past, and the clock was still going!). There was a terrific quantity of papers flying all around. Some were thoroughly burned, all black, large and small pieces, flying all over the place.

I stayed there until two or three o'clock, and went home. I passed the Custom House, but I have a very dim recollection of it. I know the police were in charge. I remember going home about three o'clock.

About eight months afterwards, one of the men at the stores discovered a large revolver in a barrel, half full of bungs. I don't know what became of the revolver, but I know it was given to one of the men of the I.R.A. at that time, and someone has that revolver as a memento of the occasion.

While I was watching the Custom House, I saw the flames and the smoke issuing from the bottom part of the dome and all round there in different parts. They had evidently used the oil obtained at our stores for the purpose of firing the Custom House, and I understood this at the time.

I may mention also that it was not only lamp oil that they took away from the oil depot and stores, but petrol as well, that is, the men in the Hampton, Leedom's lorry. They asked for some to be filled with petrol and some with paraffin. Road tanks were not generally used for the purpose of delivering petrol at that particular time. It was all done in two-gallon sealed cans.

I remember watching the clock of the Custom House dome and people in the city became interested in it too - about the clock still going. It went for days, and people waited for it to stop as the flames were gradually enveloping it - and I actually saw it stop.

Signed: E. R. Jordan

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1957

Witness: J. M. Mackintosh  
(Investigator).

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