

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1707

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1707.

Witness

Patrick Collins,  
"Fatima",  
College Road,  
Cork.

Identity.

Capt. 'G' Company, 2nd Battn., Cork No. 1 Bgde.

Subject.

'G' Coy., 2nd Battn., Cork No. 1 Brigade, I.R.A.  
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2998.

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

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BURO STAIRA MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1727

STATEMENT BY PATRICK COLLINS"Fatima", College Road, Cork.

I am a native of Cork where I joined B/Company of the Cork City Battalion, Irish Volunteers, in 1913, when the organisation was started in Cork.

Prior to the Easter Rising of 1916, I drilled and trained with B/Company in a hall in Fish Street, Cork, and later, in what became known as the Volunteer Hall, Sheares St. There were about 100 men in the company, so far as I can remember. I am not at all clear as to the arms position prior to Easter Week 1916, but I do know we had a few "Howth" rifles, police carbines, Lee-Enfield rifles and shotguns. The commandant of the battalion was Tomás MacCurtain, with Terence McSwiney second in charge.

During the Easter Week-end of 1916, I happened to be out of Cork and, consequently, did not parade with the contingent of Cork Volunteers which proceeded to Macroom on Easter Sunday, 1916. I returned to Cork on Easter Monday 1916, and reported to the Volunteer Hall in Sheare's St. where I received instructions to report back there again day by day during that week. I did so, but nothing of importance occurred, until I learned that, by arrangement with the Most Rev. Dr. Cohalan, then Catholic Bishop of Cork, and the British military authorities, it was agreed that the Volunteers should hand up their rifles to the Lord Mayor of Cork (Butterfield) for safe keeping. In return, the British promised that no arrests of Volunteers in the Cork area would be made. A number of rifles were, in fact, handed up (but by no means all of them), mostly "Howth" rifles, which were not of much use. These were put into a store owned by the Lord Mayor. The evening following, this store was raided by the British and the guns taken away.

Many arrests of Volunteers followed.

After the Rising, notwithstanding raids and arrests, the Volunteer organisation in Cork remained intact, but, with reduced numbers. However, on the general release of prisoners in December 1916, reorganisation commenced, and, in the latter end of 1917, or perhaps early in 1918, three battalions were formed in Cork city and suburbs. The battalion known as the Third became merged into the "First" and "Second" after about six months. Of these two battalions, the 1st Battalion area could be generally described as lying on the north bank of the River Lee, and the 2nd Battalion as covering the district on the south bank of the river. The 2nd Battalion, to which my company "G" was attached, had Sean Sullivan as commandant and Paddy Trahy as Vice-commandant. My company officers were: Connie Neenan, captain; myself 1st Lieutenant, and ... Mitchell 2nd Lieutenant. G/Company area covered, roughly, the Barrack St.-Bandon Road-College Road districts of the city.

We had about 100 men in G/Company. Drilling took place in the open country while we held regular weekly meetings in the Fr. O'Leary Temperance Hall in Bandon Road. The arms position at first was very poor; we had only a few shotguns and revolvers, the latter being bought from British soldiers stationed in Ballincollig Barracks. In common with other Volunteers Units, we carried out many nightly raids for arms on the houses of ex-British soldiers and others where we had reason to believe a gun of some kind might be kept. We did not increase our store to any great extent as a result of these raids and quite a number of the guns we did get were not of much use. In a few instances, we were fortunate to secure a rifle or two and a few revolvers in the houses of ex-soldiers who had brought them home from the 1914-18 war.

Rescue of Donnchadh MacNeilus.

The first episode in the struggle with which I was associated and which is worthy of record was that relating to the rescue of Donnchadh MacNeilus (a Cork Volunteer) from Cork Gaol on the afternoon of 11th November 1918.

On 4th November 1918, the house in which MacNeilus lodged in 28 Leitrim St. Cork, was raided by R.I.C. men in charge of Head Constable Clarke and an attempt made to arrest MacNeilus, who was armed and resisted arrest. In the struggle which followed, the Head Constable was very seriously wounded, but MacNeilus was eventually overpowered and taken prisoner to Cork Gaol.

In the event of the police officer's death, the fate of MacNeilus was inevitable. It was, therefore, decided by the officers of the Cork Brigade that an attempt should be made to rescue him from what seemed certain death and, on the afternoon of 11th November 1918, the attempt, which proved successful, was made.

Briefly, the plan was that six Volunteers should enter the prison in pairs at intervals of about five minutes to visit certain prisoners, such visits to prisoners being allowed at certain times. One pair of Volunteers would ask to see MacNeilus, while the others inquired for two other prisoners whose names they had. One of the Volunteers was in clerical attire to allay suspicion. The warder in charge of MacNeilus was to be overpowered and his keys taken from him. The party of six Volunteers would then make their way through the doors and gates of the prison using the captured keys to get to safety outside.

Meanwhile, a party of Volunteers was stationed at intervals outside the walls of the gaol with instructions to hold up all persons approaching the prison at a specified time. I was in front of the gaol gate on the Western Road, armed with concrete

A feature of our activities was the constant raiding of railway premises for supplies of all kinds which were being consigned to the British military in Cork and elsewhere in the south. These raids were carried out, usually, by daytime, on information received from some of our men employed on the railways. A very large quantity of stores was captured in these raids.

As a result of various attacks by Volunteers on R.I.C. barracks in isolated positions throughout the country, it became the policy of the British authorities to evacuate these barracks and withdraw their garrisons to more central stations. Togher barracks, in our area, was one of such evacuated. About a dozen men from our company set the building alight one night and burned it to the ground. There was no R.I.C. barrack in that neighbourhood subsequently.

During the year 1920, our activities against the enemy increased. Attacks were made on individual soldiers and Black and Tans in the streets of the city and armed patrols from the company were out to engage small parties of Tans and police.

On a night in June 1920, I was one of a party from G/Coy. under Connie Neenan waiting to hold up and disarm two groups of Black and Tans at Crosses Green, near Southgate Bridge. One group of four Tans used go on to Elizabeth Fort, and another two Tans to College Road police barracks. We had watched and noted these Tans previously. On the night in question we were in positions armed with revolvers when five Tans, instead of the expected four, came along Barrack St. Connie Neenan, who was in charge, then decided that he had insufficient numbers to attack and gave no signal to go into action, with the result that the Tans passed on unmolested. The two Tans we were waiting for duly came along and were set

upon by Sean Mitchell and myself. With the help of a few of our lads who came on the scene, we tied up the Tans and then took their guns, belts and ammunition.

Attack on Farran Barracks.

Early in the month of July 1920, I was one of a party of, approximately, 25 men from the 2nd Battalion which took part in a night attack on Farran R.I.C. barracks, Co. Cork. Farran village is about nine miles west of Cork city and, approximately five miles north of Ballincollig. It is on the Cork-Macroon road. The attack was carried out by the 2nd Battalion on the instructions of the Brigade O/C. Sean Hegarty.

On the night in question, we left Cork city by motor cars in which the rifles, shotguns and explosives were carried, and reached the vicinity of Farran about 10 p.m. Some distance from Farran, we left our cars and met men of the local battalion who were engaged scouting and blocking roads in the neighbourhood. We proceeded quietly on foot into the village, and I, with seven or eight others, was allotted firing positions behind a fence opposite the R.I.C. barracks. We were armed with shotguns

Another party of our lads entered the building adjoining the barracks and, having removed the occupants to a place of safety, placed a charge of explosive against the dividing wall in a room in the house. The intention was to blast a breach which would allow our men to enter the barracks and force the garrison to surrender. There were from 12 to 15 R.I.C. and Tans in occupation. The barrack was a stone and slated three-storeyed building and the windows were fitted with steel shutters with loopholes for firing.

At about 11 p.m. a loud explosion occurred as our lads blew the charge in the house next to the barracks. Immediately, the garrison opened fire with rifles and grenades and sent up Verey lights to summon assistance. We next noticed that the

house adjoining the barracks and portion of the barrack building itself was on fire. I learned later that the breach blown in the wall was not large enough to admit our lads forming the actual assault party and that petrol had been thrown through the breach (and ignited) to force the garrison to surrender. This, apparently, did not succeed in its object because the occupants of the barracks kept up a constant fire and showed no signs of surrender.

After about half an hour, during which much firing took place on both sides, the whistle blast for a retreat was given. We then pulled out of the village and returned to the cars waiting some distance outside. We returned (avoiding the main road) to the outskirts of Cork where we left the cars and guns and got back safely.

#### Anti-Sinn Fein League in Cork.

It was known by our Intelligence Service that, during the latter half of 1920, there was formed in Cork an Anti-Sinn Fein organisation, comprising members of the Freemason and Protestant Young Men's Christian Association in Cork City. The objects were to supply the British authorities with information concerning (principally) the I.R.A. in the city. There was a senior section (for adults) and a junior section in this organisation and it was some time before our Intelligence got to grips with this highly dangerous situation. Eventually, the names of some of the principals became known and it fell to the lot of G/Company to deal with one of the officials - the secretary - a man named Charles Beale. This man was employed in the wellknown grocery and provision store of Woodford Bourne & Co., Patrick St., Cork.

On instructions from the Brigade, we picked up Beale on his way home after work one evening. He was taken to the Wilton district in the city suburbs and was executed. In

Beale's possession were found papers giving us valuable information about the spy organisation with which he was connected. As a result of disclosures which came to light in the papers found on Beale, members of his organisation were picked up by other I.R.A. companies in the city/suitably dealt with. This had a discouraging effect on the Anti-Sinn Fein League which faded out, thus removing a serious threat to the Cork I.R.A.

The presence of enemy spies in our districts was a constant menace to our activities. Many of these spies (apart from those already referred to) came from the ex-British army class. One such was a man named James Herlihy who lived in G/Company district. He, and some other civilians, were known to our Intelligence Service to be in touch with the British military and to have supplied to them the names of prominent I.R.A. men in our district. We also learned that these spies had been supplied with revolvers (by the British) for their protection in case of attack by the I.R.A.

As the result of military raids on houses of prominent I.R.A. men in our area, it became known that Herlihy was one of those who had given information and we were instructed by the Brigade to pick him up. One morning, he was taken into custody by men from G/Company and removed to the Pouladuff district south of the city, where he was executed by a firing squad from the company, on instructions from the Brigade.

I knew Herlihy very well and asked him, the day before he was executed, why he gave us away to the enemy. He said he could give no reason why he did it, but added that he had given the military a wrong address in my own case. This, in fact, was quite true, because the 'address' he gave for me was literally torn apart by the military when searching there for me. I was,, of course, elsewhere at the time.



Another civilian spy dealt with by G/Company was a man named Callaghan. The Brigade had ample evidence that this man was conveying information to the enemy and I received instructions to get in contact with him and take him into custody. At about 11 a.m. one morning, I was in Patrick St, with Jer. Keating from G/Company, when we saw Callaghan leaving town. A night or so previously, Callaghan had been in a row of some sort and had been beaten up. Keating and I stopped Callaghan, told him that we had picked up some of those who had attacked him and asked if he would accompany us to identify those who had beaten him up. He agreed to do so and he came with us to the Thomas Ashe Hall, Father Mathew Quay, Cork, where he was placed under guard. Later that evening he was taken by car outside the city and executed.

#### Parnell Bridge Ambush.

On 5th January 1921, at about 6 p.m., an ambush of R.I.C. and Black and Tans took place in the vicinity of Union Quay and Parnell Bridge, Cork. It was customary for a party of police and Tans to leave Union Quay each evening at about 6 p.m. for patrol duty in the city. Their route lay across Parnell Bridge after crossing which, small groups detached themselves for duty here and there in various parts of the city. About 25 men, comprising the company officers of the 2nd Battalion, with Mick Murphy, the commandant, in charge, took part in the attack.

Our party was divided into groups, one at Parnell Bridge, where I was stationed; one at Anglesea St. and another at Parliament Bridge. In addition, a few men, of whom Mick Murphy was one, had placed a Lewis gun outside Moore's Hotel, which is almost directly opposite Union Quay Barracks and divided from it by the River Lee. As expected, the Tans left the barracks shortly after 6 o'clock and, when they were all out and heading

towards Parnell Bridge, a burst of Lewis gunfire was opened on them from our lads at Moore's Hotel. The police party scattered in all directions; some fell wounded or killed. As they ran towards Parnell Bridge we opened up on them with revolvers and grenades driving them back again and wounding or killing some of them. Eventually, the Tans reached the shelter of the barracks or ran up side streets out of our sight. Fearing encirclement by vastly superior enemy forces, the order was given to us to get away. This we succeeded in doing in safety.

I cannot say, with any accuracy, what casualties we inflicted on the enemy that evening, but at least a few were killed and about half a dozen wounded, so far as I can recollect.

#### Attempted rescue of prisoners.

It was, so far as I can remember, some time in March 1921, when I formed one of a small party which took part in an attempt to rescue prisoners from Cork Jail. I cannot recollect who the particular prisoners were, but I have an idea that the plan of escape was much like that employed in the case of MacNeillus in 1918, with the difference that, on this occasion, when the prisoners inside had (as it was hoped) reached the outer prison wall at a specified time, we were there with a rope ladder to help them climb the wall and get safely away.

I was one of a party of four, armed with revolvers, waiting with the ladder outside the wall of the jail on this particular evening. According to arrangements previously made and which the prisoners making the escape were acquainted with, we waited at the appointed time with the ladder while one of our party climbed up on the wall to watch for the escaping men. We waited for over half an hour but nothing happened, so it was decided to call the thing off. I learned later that the arrangements made to knock out a certain warder in the jail and secure his keys had gone astray and so the attempt to escape fell through.

All the time during the struggle, one of our principal activities concerned the securing of arms and ammunition which were so badly needed to carry on the fight. Various ways and means were devised to improve our very scanty resources in that respect. Curiously enough, so far as G/Company was concerned, our main source of supply was from British soldiers stationed at Ballinacollig, about three miles to the south of our district. We secured quite a large quantity of rifle and revolver ammunition which we bought from these soldiers, who were quite willing to do business at a price. It is an interesting fact that a large quantity of .303 ammunition which we bought from Ballinacollig was transferred by G/Company to Tom Barry's flying column in West Cork immediately prior to the successful ambush at Crossbarry on 19th March 1921.

Another source of help to us in the latter months of the campaign was a supply of Mills type grenade. These were made in the foundry of Messrs. Merrick & Sons, Cork, by Willie Neenan who was employed as a moulder in that firm. He afterwards made these grenades for the 1st Southern Division, I.R.A.

The events which I have related are only those which, in my opinion, and, to the best of my recollection, are of sufficient importance to have recorded for history. Very many other minor incidents relating to the struggle have passed my memory.

I continued an active member of G/Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade, I.R.A. up to the Truce of July 1921. Later, I took the anti-Treaty side, as did all of my company, excepting about half a dozen.

Signed: Pat. CollinsDate: 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1951Witness: [Signature]