

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ-MILITARY 1913-21
No. W.S. 175

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 175.

Witness

John J. Styles, 19 Effra Road,
Rathmines, Dublin.

Identity

Courier to Commandant Éamon Ceannt 1916.

Subject

- (a) I.V. Dublin from Howth Gun-running.
- (b) Miscellaneous events up to
Easter 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. S. 1082.

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY JOHN J. STYLES, 10-~~11~~ ST. PATRICK'S

ROAD, RATHMINES, DUBLIN.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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The week after the landing of the Howth rifles I joined the Irish Volunteers (Arran Quay Company). Some time after this the split came, and of about 140 men, all went over to the Redmond Volunteers except 12, I being one of those, and some time after this I joined A/Coy. 4th Bn. at Larkfield. It was here I met Eamon Ceannt for the first time. Like all other companies in Dublin which remained loyal to Sinn Fein the number was small, 16. Eamon Ceannt was the Captain. Shortly after this the Coy. grew in numbers, the training more extensive. I was sent to attend an Armourers' class at No. 2 Dawson St. Eamon de Valera was in charge of this class. About this time the Dublin Brigade had been reorganising; Captain Ceannt became Comdt. of the 4th Battn. and Cathal Brugha Vice-commandant. The great trouble now was to get arms and ammunition. At this period there was very little outside the Howth rifles and the amount of Howth ammunition was small compared with the number of rifles. At that time there were some Lee Enfield and Martini rifles to be had, but each company had to pay for whatever number were given to them. Any volunteer who had the means paid for his own rifle. An Arms Fund was also started. Perhaps I should mention here an incident that happened in connection with this fund. It was decided to hold a concert to raise funds. It was held in the Foresters' Hall in Parnell Square. At this time there were a number of young men who came over from England. Among them was Michael Collins. They bivouacked at night in Larkfield.

At this time Dublin Castle and the police were getting very active. On the night of the concert a number of G. men attempted a raid on Larkfield but they were driven off by revolver fire; one of them was wounded, after which they withdrew. A message came to Parnell Square as to what had happened. I remember meeting the O'Rahilly in the hall and he said "This is first blood for us". It was confirmed next day that one of the G. men was in Mercer's Hospital wounded. It was about this time Commandant Ceannt

excused me from attending Company meetings at Larkfield in order that I could give all my time working for and with him. How this came about was - I possessed a motor cycle and sidecar. The first duty allotted to me was the carrying of dispatches; this, and to attend the armourers' class which led up to the incidents which I took part in, always under orders from Comdt. Ceannt, as I never held any rank other than Volunteer, nor was I a member of the I.R.B. Towards the end of 1915 I left the armourers' class to work with The O'Rahilly. If I remember rightly, he was in charge of the arms section of H.Q., Dawson St. One of the first things I worked on with him was having a special cutting tool made for tapering down the Howth ammunition. This was done, I understood, as the Howth ammunition was the dum-dum pattern and was barred by international law on humanitarian grounds. With this tool the blunt shape of the bullet was cut down to a pencil shape. The next job on which we worked together was shotgun cartridges. I would say this was early 1915. By this time there were a number of shotguns in each company. To make these more effective we made a number of Plaster-of-Paris moulds in which we cast a quantity of 5/16 balls. At this time it was not easy to get lead. I purchased and collected as much as I could get and melted it into blocks, brought it out to the O'Rahilly's house at Herbert Park, Ballsbridge, where we melted it on the kitchen range and cast the first lot of 5/16 shot. The end of the cartridges was then opened and the small shot taken out and nine of the 5/16 shot inserted and ends closed. These proved to be very effective at short range.

At this time Dublin Castle were getting very active and H.Q. decided to run their own postal service all over the country. Having a motor cycle, I received orders from Comdt. Ceannt to carry all the H.Q. letters and dispatches between Dublin and Maynooth. The procedure was - I was given a packet of letters and a time sheet which I signed and then started right away for Maynooth where I handed them over to Dermot Buckley. He noted the time of my arrival and signed my time sheet. He carried on to the next

section. At this period H.Q. had a number of organisers through the country starting new companies of Volunteers. I went on the work at weekends to Co. Carlow, where I started some companies. I was obliged to give up this work as Dublin Castle sent an order to the R.I.C. in Co. Carlow (Rathvilly) to arrest me. I got back to Dublin, reported this to Comdt. Ceannt; he ordered me to lie low for a while; this ended my work as an organiser. From this time I was fully engaged carrying out missions from Comdt. Ceannt and going with him on important work on Sundays such as - I called to his house one Sunday morning. He told me to drive to the Curragh. When we got there we spent our time in he taking notes, making plans of the Curragh Camp, the railway lines and bridges around Newbridge. On this day he was in a very serious mood. I knew by him there was a number of matters he would like to discuss with me and take me into his confidence, but he could not do this as I was not a member of the I.R.B.. A short time before this he asked James Kenny, 4th Battn. to ask me to join the I.R.B. I refused; notwithstanding this he had great confidence in me. On other occasions when I was on some important mission with him and Cathal Brugha, if there was anything I should not know, they always spoke to each other in Irish. They knew I had no knowledge of the Irish language. On the day of the big display of the Redmond Volunteers in the Phoenix Park he came to me that Sunday to tell me to report to his house that night for night manoeuvres. That night the Dublin Brigade assembled, as far as I can remember, at the city end of Glasnevin Road. At this time the Dublin Brigade was not very strong. The H.Q. staff made their base in the O'Rahilly's motor car. The different battalions then moved on to their positions along the Glasnevin Road to advance on Finglas which was held by the Fingal Battalion under the command of Thomas Ashe (I am not sure if this is right, but we were led to believe it was Thomas Ashe). My work that night, as motor cycle dispatch rider, was to carry dispatches to and from H.Q. At this time Comdt. Ceannt came to my home at Ellis's Quay, often in his lunch hour, with instructions as to what he wanted

me to carry out. On one of those visits he told me there were a number of cases of .303 ammunition coming that night from Belfast by road and I was to call for him at his home that night, which I did. We went to the Gaelic League Hall, Parnell Square, where there was a ceillidhe in progress. There we met the O'Rahilly, Eamon de Valera and Cathal Brugha. The man who was bringing the ammunition in a motor car was to meet us at Parnell Square. At 2 a.m. the ceillidhe ended and the car had not arrived. The caretaker put us out of the hall. It was well for us that Cathal Brugha had the keys of the Keating Branch, Frederick St. We moved in here. Then Cathal Brugha and myself got the motor cycle and sidecar, going back and forth along the Santry Road. We kept it going like this until 8 a.m. It was then decided to give up. Comdt. Ceannt sent me home with orders to keep myself in readiness in case anything should turn up. At 1 o'clock that day he came and told me our friend had a breakdown on the way up from Belfast and had got into Dublin at 10 o'clock and there was no one to meet him and he did not know of anyone or any place he could go to. He called to Larkfield, but there was no one there. He then drove back to Parnell Square and was then almost out of petrol when he saw a man he knew coming down Frederick St. He called him and told him the fix he was in. This man brought him to his mother's house (this house was on a road off Berkeley Road near Mountjoy Prison). The cases of ammunition were put into this house. That night we all met at the house. Those present were the same party of the night before including the man who met our friend and another man whom I did not know. Shortly after we arrived those present went into another room and left me in the sittingroom. I expect they held a meeting to decide what was to be done with the cases of ammunition. There were ten cases containing 200 rounds in each of .303. After a short time they came back to the sitting room. Cathal Brugha looked at me and said "Would you be afraid to move this stuff? I will go with you". Before I could answer him Comdt. Ceannt said "If I tell him to do it he will". I replied

"As it is an order from Comdt. O'Connell I will move it". We were only able to take two cases at a time. The cases were put in the bottom of the sidecar. Cathal Brugha sat in the sidecar holding his gun in his lap and we delivered the first six cases in houses in Glasnevin and Drumcondra districts, the next lot to my own place on Ellis's Quay. The last lot - one case - was taken by de Valera who met us with his motor cycle and sidecar under the railway bridge at Harcourt Road. The last one we put into Cathal Brugha's home on the Rathmines Road.

About this time the big parade was held in College Green. Every Volunteer in Dublin paraded that day with full equipment. The section I was in was drawn across Dame St. from the end of Sth. Gt. Georges St. I saw a motor car approaching from the direction of Dublin Castle. It stopped at our line. The driver got out and demanded to be let through. By this time the passenger in the car was arguing with the officer in charge of my section. Comdt. de Valera, who noticed what was taking place, came on the scene and gave an order that no one was to get thro' our lines. After this, the driver got back into the car, reversed and drove up Georges St. Later I was informed the man in the car was the British Under Secretary coming from Dublin Castle.

I never had very much contact with Patrick Pearse; it would be mostly in delivering dispatches. On one occasion I was sent on a mission to the country to inquire into some matter about one of the organisers. I cannot remember what it was, but I do know I had to bring the report back to him personally. When I got back to Dublin I went out to St. Enda's. I was brought into a room to wait. When he came in I gave him my report verbally. We stood facing each other. When I had finished he put his hand on my shoulder and said "You are very good and thank you". I only mention this, for above all those with whom I worked, there was something about him I cannot explain. He seemed different to other men.

The next thing I remember was an order that as many Volunteers as possible, who had full equipment and who could pay their own expenses, were to go to Limerick on a certain Sunday for a parade. The reason for this was - the Limerick Companies were having trouble with certain elements in parts of the city. Capt. Monteith had gone down to Limerick some time previous to this. The number of Volunteers who went to Limerick that Sunday would be between 150 or 200. When we arrived in Limerick there were also some companies of the Cork Brigade there. De Valera and Cathal Brugha were in command of the Dublin Companies. We formed up outside the station - the Dublin and Cork Companies at either end and the Limerick Companies in the Centre. We moved off and marched through certain parts of the city. I must say we got a very hostile reception; all kinds of missiles were thrown at us, sometimes from the windows of the houses. When the march was over all our equipment was placed in the hall used by the Limerick Companies, except our small arms. That evening as we went about the city in groups, one could notice the tension. There were some ugly incidents such as this - three of us were going up O'Connell St. when a woman rushed at us and struck one of the men I was with with a gallon can which contained porter. We had to take him to Barrington's Hospital to have the wound in his head stitched. When we came out there was a hostile crowd outside waiting for us and as we moved off they were about to attack us again. We drew our revolvers and threatened them. Just then some men of the Cork Company came along and came to our assistance. However, we got back to the Hall. By this time there was a large hostile crowd gathered around and leading to the railway station. The Cork Coys. were the first to march to the station; this mob attacked them with all kinds of missiles and the R.I.C. made no attempt to or were unable to disperse them. The Dublin Companies were then formed up ready to march to the station. I noticed Comdt. de Valera and some others in consultation; there were also some priests with them. The next thing I remember was Cathal Brugha taking a number of us

out of the ranks and making us into a section to act as rearguard under his command. He addressed us as to our duty and then gave the order 'fix bayonets'. By this time I could see people were getting very excited, Some of the women were praying and putting rosary beads around our necks. Just before we moved off a priest hurried up to Cathal Brugha and appealed to him to give the order to unfix our bayonets. He agreed to this after the priest had parleyed with him for some time. Then he ordered us to grip our rifles by the barrels, to use the butts to keep off any attack from the mob. I could see the mob attacking and breaking into our ranks, using bottles, stones and sticks. As we of the rearguard moved into the mob we used the butts of our rifles with good effect and succeeded in keeping the mob off until our men were inside the railway yard and the gates closed. All that happened after this was - a lot of bottles and stones were thrown over the gate into the station yard.

There were all sorts of rumours in Dublin that evening as to what was happening in Limerick.

It was some time about the end of 1915 that Captain Seamus Murphy of A/Coy. 4th Battalion, came to my place at Ellis's Quay with an order from Comdt. Ceannt telling me to go to the Curragh Camp with a member of A/Coy. named Kerrigan to get six rifles which had been dumped somewhere in the Curragh Camp. Captain Murphy led me to believe the details were carefully arranged between himself and Kerrigan, also he said Comdt. Ceannt had approved of them. The arrangements were - Kerrigan was to call the next day at 11 o'clock to come with me in the motor cycle and sidecar, which he did. On the way down I asked him how he got the rifles. He said it was from a friend of his who was in the 8th Hussars. This friend intended to desert as they were under orders for France. He began to get windy and he asked me what we would do if we were held up coming back. I told him he should have thought of that before he started. At this time the R.I.C. stopped

all motors and examined them at the most unlikely time and places. When we got to the Curragh we were stopped at the Tower by the sentry. I told him I came down to see a friend whose regiment was going to France. He allowed us to pass and we went on into one of the buildings and found our friend. I told him we came for the rifles. I asked him where he had them dumped. He said he had not got them out yet. I then said "where are they"? He answered "They are on the racks over the beds; those fellows are on leave before going to France. I will get them out tonight". I said "I was given to understand they were already dumped outside the camp". I was very disappointed and told him I must return to Dublin and report all this to Comdt. Ceannt. He asked me to give him a lift to Newbridge. I did. When we arrived at Newbridge they decided to have some refreshments. In the course of conversation I learned this man intended to marry a relative of Kerrigan and intended to use the money he got for the rifles for this purpose. He finally decided to come to Dublin with us. That evening I went to Comdt. Ceannt's house. I told him what had happened, giving him all the details. This was the only time I ever saw him in a temper. He asked me had I any idea of the type of man I had been with; if anything had gone wrong it would have meant life imprisonment or death for you, me and many others. He then told me to go home and he would see Captain Murphy at once and I was never again to take orders from anyone but himself. I never knew what took place between himself and Captain Murphy. After this incident Comdt. Ceannt came one day during his lunch hour. He told me they had information that the G/men from Dublin Castle and the Army were to carry out a big raid that night and I must move all the ammunition in my care as I had a considerable amount. He was standing at the back of my shop window which was encased with glass shelves all round. He was anxious about the ammunition and "where have you got it" he asked. I answered "You are standing beside it". I then told him I had it packed in those nice cardboard boxes in the window. Then he asked me how

did I intend to get it away safely. I told him I had a friend who would help me. "Can you trust him" he asked. "Yes" I answered. "It is Mr. M. Cummins who owns the pawnbroker's shop next door". I told him while Mr. Cummins was not an active Volunteer, he contributed to the fund and helped in many ways. The G. men looked on him as one who would help them. On a couple of occasions he gave me information which saved me from arrest. When Comdt. Ceannt left I went in to see Mr. Cummins and told him the position. He then told me he was about to come in to see me to let me know a G. man had been in with him inquiring about me. He there and then rang up his brother and got him to bring in his car. In the meantime I undressed the window and when the car came I got all the boxes of ammunition packed into it and brought it out to St. Mary's, Terenure, the home of Mr. Cummins. We packed it away in the wardrobe in his own bedroom where it remained until Easter Week. I reported what I did to Comdt. Ceannt that evening and he was satisfied. That night the raids came off all right, but they got nothing.

As I mentioned before, the great trouble was to build up stocks of ammunition; no matter how small the amount, it was eagerly sought. I got orders from Comdt. Ceannt to be ready on a certain Sunday morning to go to Monasterevan with Con Colbert to see about some Howth ammunition. It was only a small amount and it was held by a Company of Redmond's Volunteers. We knew the treasurer of this Company had left and was favourable to us. We went to see this man and told him what we came for. He said he had not got it, but he knew it was in the house of the local J.P. who was the senior officer of that district. We said we would go and see him, but he advised not to do this. We let him know our H.Q. were determined to get it. Then he said he had eighty pounds of the Company's funds and he offered to go and see him and tell him we were with him looking for the ammunition and it was the rightful property of our H.Q. and unless he handed over the ammunition he would give the eighty pounds to our H.Q. We came

back and Con Colbert reported on the result of our mission. I was later told the ammunition was handed over to our H.Q. the following week.

It was now approaching Easter Week. Dublin Castle were getting very active. They arrested Liam Mellowes and Ernest Blythe. They were both lodged in Arbour Hill Jail. A public meeting was held in the Mansion House protesting against their arrest. Some of the speakers called on the Volunteers to attack Arbour Hill and rescue them. After the meeting they were deported to England. If my memory serves me right Liam Mellowes was sent to Southport and Blythe to Swansea. Shortly after they were deported Comdt. Ceannt came to me one evening and told me I was to meet Barney Mellowes at 6 a.m. the next morning at St. John's Rd. Kingsbridge. I was to take him to Drogheda. He said Barney would tell me what to do when I met him. I met him as arranged and we started for Drogheda. We did not discuss anything about his mission on the way down. Just outside the town Barney told me to pull up. We sat down on the side of the road and waited until we heard the train coming from Dublin. He then got into the sidecar and I drove him into the station just as the train drew in. The last I saw of him was, case in hand he was running for a carriage. I got back to Dublin. I think it must have been Saturday. I was leaving my house sometime after 1 o'clock p.m. when I met Seamus O'Connor. He asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to see Comdt. Ceannt. He told me he was not at home (Comdt. Ceannt). He was down at the Redbank having lunch with Sean McDermott and Michael Staines. I went there and as I approached, Comdt. Ceannt stood up and asked me how we got on. I reported to him I had seen Barney safely on the train. As I spoke to him Sean McDermott jumped up from his chair, very excited. He wanted to know who I was. I remember Comdt. Ceannt saying "It is all right, Sean. He is one of my boys". After some further discussion I left them. I presume there was some other group working for Ernest Blythe. Shortly after this the papers came out with the news Liam Mellowes

had escaped back to Ireland and Ernest Blythe had been caught attempting to escape. I was give to understand Barney brought over a clerical outfit for Liam and that is how he came back to Dublin; he was hidden by Frank Fahy then living on the Conyngham Road. It was early in the week before Easter Monday. I got orders from Comdt. Ceannt to have the motor cycle and sidecar ready. I was to take Dan McCarthy with me; we were to go to Galway and there would be another motor cycle and sidecar in which would be Liam Mellowes and the driver. My instructions were - I was to keep about a mile in front of the motor in which Liam was travelling and see the road was clear for them. On the day we were to start this order was changed. I was not to go, but to hand the motor and sidecar over to another man who would drive it as I was wanted for other duty. They started, and everything went well and Liam got to Galway.

It was on the Friday before Easter Monday I received my last order from Comdt. Ceannt. It was brought to me by Capt. William Cosgrave and Quartermaster Kenny. I was ordered to collect all the ammunition in my care and deliver it to a grocer's shop facing the South Dublin Union. I think the owner of this shop was related to Captain Cosgrave. I got my friend, Mr. Cummins, to get his car and we went to his home, Teremure (St. Mary's) to collect the ammunition he had placed there some time ago. This, with all other ammunition in my possession, I delivered as ordered (this explains why I did not go on the Galway trip). There is nothing I can say about Easter Week that has not been told already except this incident - the first of the enemy to be killed in Easter Week was an officer (young) of the Dublin Fusiliers. He was shot outside my shop, 23 Ellis's Quay, when the attack was opened by the men in the Mendicity Institute, Usher's Island, under the command of the gallant young officer, Sean Heuston.

I often wonder if the people of Ireland know of the great sacrifices this band of noble Irishmen made the two years previous to Easter Week, some of them mere boys, and the vast

majority just plain working men, many with young families; in many cases depriving their wives and families to enable them to pay for rifles and ammunition. I have marched with these men many times on cold and wet days; many were without overcoats and some hardly had a boot on their feet, but none heard them complain. They were fortified by the great love they had for their country which they hoped to free from Saxon rule. Of those with whom I had the privilege to work - they never thought of themselves; everything they possessed they gave to the Volunteers. The O'Rahilly was a splendid officer, a grand comrade, always very jolly. I remember one occasion I had to get some things for a job we were working on. He said "this is too much; you cannot be paying for those things" and insisted on paying for them himself. He was splendid.

Of Cathal Brugha - he was a very determined man who did not know ^{what} ~~was~~ fear was.

Comdt. Ceannt was the most unselfish man I ever met. He never thought of himself; gave everything he possessed to his men and the cause; he had so much at heart. He used to worry a lot about any money I spent and the expense of running the motor cycle, but never made mention about the sacrifices he was making, and they were many I remember being with him the week before Easter. He insisted on my taking a cheque for two pounds. It was made payable to Mrs. Brennan, his mother-in-law. Everything went to the Volunteers. The only way I can express my feelings of him is to quote an extract from one of his writings taken from the Volunteer Gazette, Christmas 1913 - "Stoop your back to the burden. Keep your eye clear and your nerves steady. Be skilled in the arts of war, and there will be no war. Live plainly so that you may be strong and hardy. Be not given to vain boasting. Do not tarry long in taverns nor take counsel of those who would betray you.

Keep your own counsel. Be simple. Be efficient. Be noble and the world of Ireland is yours.

Signed: John Styles

Date: 27th January, 1949.

Witness: Patrick J. Mc Nally Captain

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