

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 709

Witness

J.N. (Sean) Beaumont,
59 Dartmouth Square,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of British Officers Training Corps,
Trinity College, 1920-1921.

Subject.

Intelligence work among Auxiliaries,
Dublin, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.1925.....

Form B.S.M. 2

Statement of Mr. Seán Beaumont

59, Dartmouth Square, Dublin.

Dan Donovan asks me to obtain information about
ex-British Army students in Trinity.

In 1920 or 1921 when I was talking to Dan Donovan who at that time was Secretary to Michael Collins as Minister of Finance, Dan Donovan said to me that there were a lot of ex-British Army men in Trinity College who probably disapproved of the Black and Tan campaign and might probably know some of the Auxiliaries, and suggested that I should try and get information about them from such students.

About the same time my young brother, William Beaumont, who had been in the Dublin Fusiliers during the war, was returning home one night from Rathmines to Dawson Street, where we lived at the time, when the tram on which he was travelling was held up by Auxiliaries and all the passengers searched, he as well as the rest of them. He had in his pocket a notebook which he had used when he was in France in charge of a machine-gun school for American officers and, when the Auxiliaries found this, they were sure they had made an important capture. He had some difficulty in convincing them what the notebook really was, but eventually succeeded as one of the Auxiliaries had been in the same places which were mentioned in the notebook. He came home furious with indignation about the way that he and the other passengers, particularly the women, had been treated and the first thing he said to me when he came in was that, if I got him a gun, he would shoot some of the Auxiliaries. That reminded me of my talk with Dan Donovan and I suggested to him that he

should cultivate their acquaintance and pass on any information he might get to me. He did so and got to know some of them through the fellow who had searched him and in other ways.

My brother William does Intelligence work among the Auxiliaries.

From then until the Truce, my brother spent almost every night in their company, drinking. Sometimes they started in pubs or hotels and sometimes they finished up in the Castle to which he accompanied them, after curfew. They used to leave him home in an armoured car about two or three o'clock in the morning. When he came in I used to write down as much as he could remember of their conversation when it had any bearing on the war. I gave these notes to Dan Donovan periodically. He was able to give me the names and addresses of all the Intelligence Corps of the Auxiliaries, that is, all the men that were shot on Bloody Sunday and a couple who escaped. The first and second in command escaped on that occasion, Stokes and another whose name I don't remember.

On one occasion when my brother was in the Castle with the Auxiliaries Stokes came in and said to him, "I'll just show you what these Sinn Feiners are able to do". He showed him and read to him my notes giving information about himself and his friends. They had captured them in a raid on Mick Collins' Finance office which at that time was in Fitzwilliam Square at the back of Mrs. McGarry's house. Dan Donovan had concealed them by putting them under a hearthrug. My brother did not know whether they were trying him out. As a matter of fact, they had no suspicion of him apparently, but he thought they had.

Collins told me when I met him shortly afterwards that Dan Donovan had no right to butt in or collect such information, although he admitted it was very useful.

At some period shortly after I began sending the information forward, my brother was introduced to some members of the Dublin Squad, Tom Cullen, Frank Thornton, Liam Tobin and Kelleher, amongst others, and he arranged with them signals which he would give them when he met them in the company of Auxiliaries. The members of the Squad would be standing in pre-arranged places in Grafton Street and elsewhere and my brother, if in the company of an Auxiliary of the Intelligence Corps, used to give them a pre-arranged signal so that the Auxiliary might be followed by the members of the Squad, and in that way their daily habits were learned.

On several occasions my brother was warned by members of the Squad to go to London for a few days to be out of the way when an attack was likely to be made on the Auxiliaries. He did not go to London on each of these occasions and disregarded further warnings. I think he went away once, but I am not quite sure, and when nothing happened, he was a bit annoyed and he did not take any notice of any further warnings. He told me he came to the conclusion that Collins did not want to prosecute the war vigorously against the Auxiliaries. I don't know whether he actually had an interview with Collins or with one of the Squad but he accused them anyway of not acting vigorously enough and more or less washed his hands of any further activity. Willie often told me that he thought Kelleher was the only sincere man amongst those of the Squad with whom he was dealing.

When in the company of the Auxiliaries, Willie was anxious to keep as sober as possible. Somebody had told him that, if you drank paraffin, alcohol would not affect you and he used to drink paraffin every evening before he would meet them. The plan was not always effective because he was nearly always very drunk when he came home and he had his information all muddled up which took me some time to straighten out the next day.

On the last occasion on which I saw Mick Collins- which was shortly after the Truce, he abused my brother roundly and called him a "bloody so and so". I know that Willie had strongly expressed his opinion of their lack of activity against the Auxiliaries but I cannot say whether it was to members of the Squad who reported it to Mick Collins, or whether he had a personal interview with Mick Collins himself.

I often accompanied Seán Ó Muirthile or Colum Ó Murchadha to Vaughan's Hotel after meetings of Coiste Gnótha of the Gaelic League and there we would meet Mick Collins, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Gearoid O'Sullivan and Rory O'Connor. I was not taking part in any activities myself at all. People used come in to see Mick Collins and the others at Vaughan's and they would be taken into another room to discuss their business, or sometimes they would discuss their business in a corner of the bar. I did not know any of these people. If anybody brought a letter to Mick Collins, he would read it and immediately burn it. He never kept any papers.

Jack O'Mara, Roddy Connolly and Willie went to Germany during the Truce to procure arms and ammunition, particularly trench mortars. They went at the suggestion of Seamus Robinson who was acting

for the G.H.Q. of the Southern Brigades. I was present at some of the interviews with Seamus Robinson when the idea was first suggested. Seamus explained to Willie the necessity for heavier armaments to end the stalemate which had been reached in the South. The police and military were practically confined to barracks but no further action against them was possible with the arms at their disposal and the Republicans wanted something that would demolish buildings. When Willie heard that he suggested trench mortars. The British used a Stokes gun for this purpose and the Germans had a similar weapon.

Willie, therefore, went to Germany as technical adviser on arms. O'Mara went representing the Southern Division and Roddy Connolly had contacts with Communists which enabled them to procure the necessary passports - forged of course. Seamus Robinson produced the money, as far as I understand.

At this time Briscoe was also in Germany, sent by Mick Collins to procure arms and the three were told not to let him know of their presence there, as they were going over the heads of G.H.Q. in Dublin, who were not, they considered, sufficiently active in procuring arms for the country divisions. In spite of this Roddy Connolly, on reaching Berlin, immediately got in touch with Briscoe and told him the whole business. These fellows got word of supplies of arms and came back to Dublin to report. The matter was eventually dropped and the arms were not obtained at that time. I visited Germany myself about September, 1921, to pick up the contacts made by the three. I discovered that the offers of arms were not bona fide and that the man with whom they were dealing was a proper ruffian. He may have been the

same man with whom Hughes Dowling, who was Briscoe's agent, was dealing. I was informed while in Germany that Hughes Dowling was induced to hand over a large sum of money as evidence of his good faith and never saw his man again or the arms. Whether this is true or not I cannot state, but probably Bob Briscoe has information on the point. Of course I never discussed it with him.

While I was in Berlin I met Charlie McGuinness who had been sent out by Colline to follow up the Hughes Dowling fiasco. Briscoe left Berlin shortly after, leaving McGuinness in his place with a sum of money - a million marks - which McGuinness carried about in his pocket. When McGuinness found himself with a free hand he went to Bremen, bought a boat, hired a crew, came back to Berlin and purchased in a shop in Berlin a cargo of arms for his boat. He eventually succeeded in bringing this boat to Ireland and afterwards purchased a larger boat, the "City of Dortmund" and carried on a disguised trade in arms for some time. By an arrangement with the two sides half of each cargo used to go to Beggars Bush and the other half to the Four Courts - according to what McGuinness himself told me.

I found McGuinness a most entertaining companion but absolutely without scruple of any kind, financial or moral. On one occasion he invited me to a well-known night club in Berlin and when I demurred on the ground of expense, he tapped his breast pocket which was bulging with Briscoe's money and said "That's all right, Dee Valéra will pay for it." Later on he claimed ownership of the "City of

Dortmund" and defended his claim in the Courts.

Signature J.N. Beaumont
(J.N. Beaumont)

Date 17. 7. 52
17.7.52.

Witness S. Ni Chiosain
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