

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 986

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 986

Witness

Sean O'Byrne,
The Avenue,
Gorey.
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Treasurer, Gorey Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Wexford, 1905-1916.

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Gorey, Co. Wexford,
1905-1916.
- (b) Gun-Running, Kilcoole, 1914.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2313

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY MR. SEÁN O'BYRNE,
The Avenue, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

I joined the Gorey branch of the Gaelic League in 1905. In 1907 I attended the meeting at which the first branch of Sinn Féin was started in Gorey. There were about a dozen members. The late Mr. Seán Etchingham was chairman of the branch. Although we were small in number we helped considerably to keep the national spirit alive. Later Liam Mellows was a frequent visitor to Gorey organising the Boy Scouts, and I accompanied him to many places in the immediate vicinity of Gorey in connection with this work.

In November 1913 I went to Dublin with Seán Etchingham and attended the meeting in the Rotunda at which the Volunteers were started. Very soon after this meeting a notice appeared in the press that on the following Sunday night a meeting would be held at 25, Parnell Square and inviting men from the country to attend it. A football match was being held that Sunday at Croke Park between Wexford and, I think, Kerry. Etchingham and I attended the meeting for the purpose of getting speakers to address a meeting in Gorey to start a Company there. At this meeting we were asked to attend a meeting of the Volunteer Executive the following night (Monday) in Wynn's Hotel. Among those present at the Executive meeting were: Pearse, O'Rahilly and Mellows. It was decided that Pearse and M.J. Judge would speak at a public /
meeting

in Gorey to launch the Volunteer movement there. As far as I can remember the meeting was held in the first week of January 1914. The meeting was well organised. We had two bands and held a parade from the Ram's Arms Hotel, which was situated on the Enniscorthy side of Gorey, to the Town Hall which was on the Arklow side. The meeting was so big that large numbers could not obtain admission to the Hall; therefore it was necessary for Pearse and the other speakers to address the large crowd assembled outside from one of the windows.

In the course of his speech Pearse asked the men to hold up their hands if they intended joining the Volunteers. Practically all present did so. We had a very big Company. Seán Etchingham was in charge of it. Michael McGrath was one of the Lieutenants. I was Treasurer. We were drilled and trained by ex-soldiers or reservists of the British Army, some of whom were paid for their services. Parades were held weekly, and each Volunteer subscribed towards Company funds. We had miniature rifles and held rifle practice, principally at Bolger's Mills. Each man paid for the ammunition he used.

On the Saturday following the gun-running at Howth we got word to go to Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow, to assist at another gun-running. Peter Connolly and I cycled to the Glen of the Downs where, by arrangement, we met Seán Etchingham. With him were Martin Ryan and Charlie Murphy, both from Dublin. We then went on to Kilcoole

where a large number of Volunteers from Dublin had assembled. The Dublin Volunteers had arrived by bus and it was kept in the convent grounds to await the arrival of the boat. When the rifles were taken from the boat and put on the strand the bus was brought to the railway station. We carried the rifles and ammunition and loaded them on the bus. When the loading was finished the five of us - Seán Etchingham, Peter Connolly, Martin Ryan, Charlie Murphy and myself - were given a rifle each. I do not remember the number of rifles or the amount of ammunition that was brought on that occasion.

When we arrived in Kilcoole a Sergeant and a constable of the Royal Irish Constabulary were on duty on the railway. They were not molested until we got a signal that the boat was coming. They were then placed under arrest by the Volunteers. When the Dublin Volunteers were ready to leave with the rifles and ammunition we were instructed by an officer from Dublin to keep the police prisoners for an hour after the departure of the bus. We kept them for the hour and then cycled to Gorey, bringing our rifles with us.

I would like to record the fact that although the work of unloading the boat and carrying bundles of rifles to the bus was rather heavy, and while doing so there were some heavy showers and men were wet from wading into the sea, not one of the Volunteers took a drop of whiskey although it was available to them.

When the split occurred in the Volunteers the followers of Redmond left the Company. They started a Company of the National Volunteers but it did not last very long.

On Easter Sunday, 1916, with Seán Etchingham and a few others I went to Battalion Headquarters (known as "Antwerp") in Enniscorthy for instructions. Among those present were Seamus Doyle and Seamus Rafter. While we were there Father Pat Murphy of the Mission House, now Parish Priest of Glin, and a lady from Dublin arrived with the countermanding order. We returned to Gorey. Late on Easter Monday night we heard that the Rising had started in Dublin. On Tuesday morning we got word from our Headquarters in Enniscorthy that they were going to rise. I went to Courtown to Seán Etchingham and told him the news. That night six of us, Etchingham, James Gleeson, Joe Funge, Eddie McDonagh, Seán Doyle and myself, cycled to Enniscorthy. When we got there we were told that they had decided not to rise for the present. We stayed in "Antwerp" that night. We heard that the Dublin Port had been taken over by the Volunteers. We were then afraid the British would send reinforcements via Rosslare, so it was decided to remove some lines from the railway and to block the tunnel. But this was not necessary as the British did not come!

On Wednesday I was instructed by Seamus Doyle to go to Ferns and tell the Company there to mobilise and to go to Enniscorthy again. I did so, and

continued to Gorey to mobilise the Gorey Company, but before this was done the surrender had taken place. The following Monday or Tuesday I was arrested by the R.I.C. and handed over with about 20 other prisoners, mostly members of the Ferns Company, to the British military. We were brought by lorry under heavy escort to Arklow. From there we were taken by boat to the North Wall, Dublin, and marched to Richmond Barracks. We were kept there for about a week and then transferred to Wandsworth Prison, England. For some time in Wandsworth we were kept in solitary confinement, being allowed only half an hour exercise every day. On the 16th June I was transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp and was released during August 1916.

Signed: Sean O'Byrne
(Sean O'Byrne)

Date: 12 Aug 1966

Witness: Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col
(Sean Brennan)

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