

W. S. 1,037

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21.
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1037

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,037.....

Witness

Sean Hennessy,
69 Paul Street,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Coy. 1st Batt'n.
Dublin Brigade, 1916.

Subject.

Intelligence work for Irish Volunteers,
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S. 2354.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY Mr. Sean HENNESSY,

69, Paul Street, D U B L I N.

I was born on the 13th April, 1901, the son of William Hennessy who lived in No. 4 Ross Street, Dublin, at the time. As far as I can remember my father was strongly sympathetic to all movements having for their object the freedom of the country and he kept in our place poems and songs relating to the Rising of 1918.

I was educated at St. Gabriel's School, Cowper Street off the North Circular Road. I left school in 1915 at the age of 14½. I served my time to the carpentry trade with my father who was a carpenter in the North Dublin Union.

I remember that during Easter Week my father was engaged fitting locks in doors in the Union for the purpose of keeping in custody the 5th Lancers who had been captured by the Irish Volunteers in the North Brunswick Street area.

I did not take an active part in the Rising in Easter Week. But in the latter part of 1916 I joined the O'Rahilly Sinn Féin Club which then had its offices in Blessington Street, the members of whom were, as far as I can remember, Sean T. O'Kelly (the present President), the late J.J. Walsh at one time Minister for Posts & Telegraphs, the brothers Monaghan - Alf and Joe. I was only about a fortnight a member of the O'Rahilly Sinn Féin Club when I was approached by Con Mulligan who asked me to become a member of "C" Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, which I did. "C" Company at that time had its headquarters in the Tara Hall.

I attended the usual weekly parades of the Company during the year 1917, took part in weekly drills, field exercises and small arms firing practises up in the vicinity of James' Castle, Pinglas.

This was the usual work in which the Companies of the Battalion were engaged during this year and nothing of exceptional importance took place which I can remember.

During this time I carried out my duties as a carpenter at the North Dublin Union which was then occupied by units of the British Forces. My Company officers were, as far as I can remember, Captain Sean Flood for one period who was later succeeded by Captain Sean Prendergast, both of them since deceased. The Lieutenant, as far as I can recollect, was a man by the name of O'Carroll and the Quartermaster was Mark Wilson who had taken part in the Rising of 1916 in the King Street area.

By reason of the fact that I was working in a British Military Post I was instructed to collect all information regarding their numbers and any other details which I felt might be of use and to convey it to the Company Commander. This I did while I was employed in the North Dublin Union.

I left my employment in the North Dublin Union in 1918 and went to work with Sir Patrick Shortall, Temple Street, a building contractor and a gentleman who had been knighted by the British Government for his work in connection with the reception of the King and Queen of England on their visit to Ireland. I carried on my intelligence work while there, and anything that I felt was of any use I conveyed to Company Headquarters as heretofore.

After some time I left Shortall's and went to work for a man named McDowell who had a builder's yard in Arbour Hill. As this man carried out certain works for the British Army it was necessary that all his employees should be in possession of a pass when entering barracks.

While working in the different military posts such as King George V. Hospital (now St. Brigid's) and Marlboro' Barracks (now McKee) which was then the Headquarters of the 5th, 16th and 17th Lancers I took the opportunity of collecting information regards their strengths, armour etc., and arms movement which I conveyed to my superiors. Any opportunity that offered itself for procuring items of equipment I availed of and I was instrumental in removing a small number of uniforms and horse equipment which I handed over ~~to~~ the Company.

Nothing of importance insofar as I am concerned took place during this period ~~and~~ up to 'Bloody Sunday' in November, 1920. I had been under suspicion for some time and I was aware that the Detective Branch had me under observation, particularly a D.M.P. ~~man~~ named Barton who was subsequently shot by the I.R.A. I have also reason to believe that a warder named Christy Byrne, who lived in Clonliffe Road and was employed in Mountjoy Prison, had knowledge of my activities. At this time I was living in 43 Avondale Avenue, Phibsboro', and the Byrne referred to, knowing all my movements, guided the Black & Tans to my house on the night of the 21st November and the morning of the 22nd November, 1920, when I was taken into custody and conveyed to the North Dublin Union.

While in the North Dublin Union I, with a number of others, ^{who} were arrested in or around that period were interrogated about every hour by members of the Black & Tan Forces who used threaten violence to obtain information regarding the I.R.A., particularly those engaged in the execution of the British Intelligence Officers.

It was customary for the Tans to burst in, pull out revolvers and fire shots all round them. They were invariably in an

advanced state of drunkenness and, despite the terrorist attitude, they failed to gain any information.

After a week in the North Dublin Union I, with a number of others, was transferred to Arbour Hill Military Prison where we were under the control of the British Military. There we were subject to further interrogation and I, with a number of others, was placed on a number of identification parades from one of which Thomas Whelan was taken, identified as having been engaged on the 'Bloody Sunday' shooting in Mount Street. Whelan was subsequently courtmartialled and executed.

After about three weeks in Arbour Hill a large number of us were ordered one afternoon to take our belongings and get ready for removal. We were paraded to lorries which had been lined up outside the prison, handcuffed in pairs and brought by way of the Quays to the North Wall where we were placed on board the British Destroyer "Sea Wolf" and conveyed to Ballykinlar Internment Camp.

The sea journey from Dublin to Ballykinlar was in the teeth of a fierce gale and this, with the conduct of our escort, made the journey most unpleasant. As the sea was so rough we suffered extreme hardship by being exposed to the fury of the elements.

We arrived in Belfast Harbour sometime the following morning, still handcuffed in pairs, and when we disembarked on the Quay-side we were assailed with showers of nuts and bolts from the Orange mob which had assembled to meet us. We found great difficulty in walking since we were handcuffed in pairs, and carrying whatever belongings we could put together. Hampered as we were, we could take no steps to protect ourselves from the hostile attitude of the Orange element. The British officers and soldiers who accompanied us looked on but took no action to protect us.

After some delay at the Quay-side we entrained for Ballykinlar which we reached in or about 12 o'clock mid-day, to 1 o'clock. On arrival at the camp we were posted to No. 1. Camp which was, up to that time, unoccupied, and I, with some others, was allotted to Hut No. 38.

After some time a camp staff was elected from the prisoners in internment, our first Camp Commandant being Joe McGrath. Leo Henderson at the time was Camp Commandant of No. 2. Camp.

Thomas Whelan, previously referred to who was executed, was a prisoner with me in No. 1. Camp, and after some time he and three other prisoners were taken in chains to Dublin to stand their trial by Courtmartial.

While interned I took part in the usual camp games such as football. My mother died early in 1921 and as I would not sign an application for parole I could not get a release to attend her funeral.

There were two prisoners killed while I was there named Sloan and Tormey for failing to obey an order given by one of the sentries. There was a British Order at the time in operation prohibiting prisoners assembling at the barbed wire barriers and Tormey and Sloan apparently disobeyed this order. So they were fired on and killed by the sentry.

I remained a prisoner in Ballykinlar until my release at the General Amnesty after the Truce in July 1921.

Signed:

John Hennessy

Date:

12th Nov 1954

(John Hennessy)

12th Nov 1954

Witness:

M. F. Ryan Comd't.

(M F Ryan) Comd't.

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