

W.S. 1,236

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1236

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,236

Witness

Sean O Bruadair (Sean Brouder),
Newcastlewest,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Brigade I.O.
West Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

National activities, West Limerick,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 8916-236

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN BROUDER,Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick.

Born in Newcastlewest, 30th April 1888. Member of same West Limerick family as Dathi Ó Bruadair, Gaelic poet of 17th century. Educated at Courtenay Schools, Newcastlewest. Having contributed articles on national affairs to local newspapers invited by the editor to join the staff of the "Munster News", May 1909. Was one of a number of young men in Limerick who called a meeting at the Town Hall of that city on the 14th December 1913 for the purpose of establishing the Irish Volunteers in Limerick and was a member of the committee selected by the meeting to carry through the work of organisation.

Was promoted Assistant Editor of the "Munster News" December 1912 and was acting Editor of that journal on the 10th November 1915 (in the absence of the Editor, W.S. Burke, who was then attending a funeral of a relative in West Clare) when the Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, came into the office and handed me a manuscript in his own handwriting and asked me if I could publish it. It was the celebrated letter written by Dr. O'Dwyer in defence of the poor Irish emigrants who had been savagely attacked by an English mob in Liverpool about that time. (The full text of the letter will be found in "Limerick's Fighting Story," page 38). Having glanced through the letter I told the Bishop that I would publish it that evening fully and without change. His Lordship thanked me and withdrew. It was late in the evening when the Bishop handed me the letter; it was, moreover, publication evening, and I knew the paper was almost ready to go out

on the streets. On entering the machine office I found that the pages were already locked. But I spoke to the foreman and his assistant (Messrs. James Gleeson & Patrick Fennell), and I told them and the compositors that I had an unusual request to make. It was to stop the issue of the paper; to reopen the pages; to go back to their cases again and set up a most important letter from the Bishop. Printers are highly intelligent men as a rule. They were quick to grasp that the letter was written and would be published in open defiance of the Defence of the Realm Act; and I want to place on record here that that notwithstanding, and knowing their livelihoods might be at stake, not one of them hesitated but cheerfully tackled the job of handsetting the type for the letter. They worked with a will and the paper was only slightly delayed. It appeared on the streets about 6 p.m. with the trenchant and amazingly brave letter of Bishop O'Dwyer and needless to say at that period it created a sensation throughout this country and in all parts of Britain. It was said at the time that Dublin Castle feared the distinguished Bishop of Limerick so much that they did not dare to take action against him nor against the "Munster News".

A newspaper called the "Weekly Observer", with more modern machinery than the Limerick city papers was started in Newcastle West by the late Mr. A. J. Byrnes late in 1914, and in the Spring of 1916 I came back to my native town to act as editor of the new paper. A broadminded proprietor Mr. Byrnes was, and although the newspaper was raided by British forces almost every week, and was eventually wrecked by British military in June 1920 during a midnight raid, which began for me in my own home, and was continued

to the office in the same street where the delicate printing machinery was broken up by the military with the butt ends of rifles; be it recorded to Mr. Byrnes' credit he never made a complaint to me. Previous to this incident the paper had been frequently suppressed and it was one of the five provincial newspapers suppressed by special order of the British Government in March 1918 when the country was threatened with conscription.

In January 1920 was elected as a representative of Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. on Newcastle West Town Commissioners and was elected Chairman of that body. Our first public act was to declare our allegiance to the First Dáil.

During the year 1917 helped in the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers in Newcastle West. (The moving spirit of every phase of the Independence Movement in Newcastle West at this period was Rev. Father Michael Hayes, one of the two curates (Very Rev. Canon Wall, P.P. Ballingarry was the second) whom General Maxwell asked Bishop O'Dwyer to punish for their support of the Volunteer Movement in 1916).

In the Spring of 1920 the local Volunteers Company decided with the assistance of the Brigade Commandant, Sean Finn, to attack the Newcastle West R.I.C. Barracks, the largest barracks of its kind in Co. Limerick. It had then a garrison of about 30 men. As it was not a detached house but had common side walls with the Munster & Leinster Bank and the house of Mr. John Condon, solicitor in the Square of the town, secret arrangements were made with an employe of the Bank and of Mr. Condon to admit the Volunteers after 10 o'clock into the two houses named.

Preparations were completed by the end of May. Sandbags were prepared secretly and drawn to the grounds of Kincora Villa (where Rev. Father Hayes C.C. and Rev. John O'Kelly, C.C. resided) and secreted there with the permission and enthusiastic support of both patriotic priests until the night fixed for the attack. The plan agreed on was to break in the party walls from the two adjoining houses and thus set fire to the barracks, while the building would be attacked by rifle fire from houses at the front and rear of the barracks.

When the whole plan had been perfected, however, word came from the Brigade Commandant, Sean Finn, that an attack on Kilmallock Barracks was to take place on the 28th May and that he and other West Limerick men then on the run (with all the available arms in West Limerick) would be required there. The attack on Newcastle West barracks had, perforce, to be postponed, and no other opportunity came to attack it during the months that followed up to the Truce of 1921, because, apparently thoroughly alarmed by the daring attack on and destruction of Kilmallock barracks, the very next night after Kilmallock siege, the British military sent out an armoured car, which took up a position in front of the R.I.C. barracks, and a regiment of military who remained permanently there until the Truce.

On the 29th June 1920 had to go "on the run" after a party of British military and R.I.C. had broken into my home following many previous more or less "authorised" raids. They openly stated to my housekeeper they had come to shoot me. I escaped at the back of the house before they could burst in the door.

I made my way to the hills and shortly afterwards joined Sean Finn, the Brigade Commandant, Garrett McAuliffe, Vice Commandant, and some other Rathkeale boys who were "on the run". In Sept. 1920 we formed the first Flying Column in West Limerick and Brigade Commandant Finn, who was a close personal friend of mine since before 1916, appointed me Brigade I.O.

The rest of the West Limerick story will be found in pages 140 to 173 of "Limerick's Fighting Story" published by the "Kerryman"; and a special article about the Newcastle West Company of the I.R.A. appears in 61 to 63 of the same work.

As most of those pages were either written by or submitted to me for approval, I have only given here generally interesting historic facts not recorded in that story. I have nothing else to add to "Limerick's Fighting Story".

Signed: Sean O Bruadair
(Sean O Bruadair)

Date: 3rd 9 - '55
3rd 9. '55.

Witness: John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

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