

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY
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NO. W.S. 48

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 48

Witness

Seamus Brennan

Identity

1st Lieut. I. V. 1913-1916.
Captain I. R. A.

Subject

Shooting of R. I. C. Sergeant at
Tullamore, 29th March 1916

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

File No. S. 403.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913-21

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STATEMENT BY SEAMUS M. O' BRAONAIN.

12th Lt. Sr. 1913-1916, Capt. '16-'21

Tullamore Co. Irish Volunteers was formed about November 1913, shortly after the formation of the Irish Volunteers at the Rotunda, Dublin. At first, I acted as Adjutant to the Company and, later, was appointed 1st Lieutenant; Peadar Bracken, who had then arrived home from Australia, being appointed Captain. Most of the Officers of the Company were composed of the reservists from British regiments or militia, who gave good service in drilling the Company. When John Redmond sought to get control later, a meeting of our Company - then over 400 strong - was held in the local Irish National Foresters' Hall, when about 60 members elected to continue under the leadership of Eoin McNeill and Pearse. These 60, however, proved to be the real workers, as the followers of Redmond "folded their tents and silently stole away".

Arms were collected and paid for, many journeys being made to Dublin for this purpose. By August 1915, about 30 serviceable German Mauser rifles had been secured and a contingent from the Co. attended the O'Donovan Rossa funeral, fully armed. Orders were received from H.Q. to retain our arms at all costs if attacked by British Forces.

On Sunday, March 19th, 1916, a G.A.A. Match was held at Tullamore, a special train being run from Dublin for the occasion. Cumann na mBan members held a Flag Day, the proceeds to be given to the Volunteers for the purchase of arms. A fairly numerous section of families of men serving in the British Army resided in streets en route to the G.A.A. Park, and wearers of Republican emblems, collectors for Cumann na mBan, and others were attacked as they passed through these streets. The following evening, March 20th, a meeting of Cumann na mBan members was held in the Sinn Feinn Rooms or Volunteers' Rooms in Columcille Street, our usual rendez vous, to arrange re collection. About 8 p.m., being then at my residence in Church Street, I was informed that bands of noisy youths of both sexes were marching through the town, waving miniature Union Jacks, and attacking members of Cumann na mBan and individual Volunteers. Shortly afterwards, my brother, Aloysius came in and stated that he had been struck by stones and attacked coming towards his home and had to take shelter about 100 yards from his residence. I went to the Sinn Fein Hall, where I found several members of Cumann na mBan with Captain Bracken, Lieutenant Wrafter, (R.I.P) and some other volunteers. We arranged (Captain Bracken and myself) who alone were armed at the time,) to escort the members of Cumann na mBan to their homes. We did so, followed by a hostile mob. We returned to the Hall, when the mob, reinforced by large numbers, congregated outside the Hall, boing and throwing stones at the windows. The barrage of bricks and stones becoming stronger, a shot was fired over the heads of the crowd, and another, later, by my brother, Frank, who, approaching the Hall, was attacked by the mob. Very soon after, several members of the R.I.C. (who, up to this point, had been conspicuous by their absence) burst into the Hall, led by Co. Inspector Crane, D. I. Fitzgerald, Head Constable Stuart, and several policemen, and asked who had fired the shot. On the position being stated, ^{Crane} immediately ordered "Search for arms". Captain Bracken and I stated "Volunteers will not give up their arms". There was a general melee, in which Sergeant Aherne, who grappled with Captain Bracken, was wounded in the shoulder by the latter. Co. Inspector Crane rushed towards me and I fired at him but unfortunately my automatic (Savage) jammed. I struck the Co. Inspector, who reeled back. The D.I. then came for me and said "Don't shoot: I know you". Bracken, my brother Frank and I broke through and reached the entrance of the Hall, when the mob attacked. We reached my residence in Church Street, after being beaten (my brother and I) by the mob. Captain Bracken took a different route and escaped the attention of the mob. We got a severe mauling

but reached home. Having considered the situation, I decided to get in touch with G.H.Q. and, to this end, left on my motorcycle at 5 a.m., reached the City, and proceeded to 2, Dawson Street, from where I went to Saint Enda's, Rathfarnham, where I reported to Pádraig Mac Piaras (Solus De ar a anam).

A play and concert was in progress at St. Enda's and, during an interval, An Piarasac brought me on to the stage and, having introduced me to the students, made a brief speech, eulogising our action and stating that "the first blood had been spilled and first blow struck in defence of the Volunteers' right to carry arms". An Piarasac sent me to Larkfield, Kimmage, where, at the rear of the residence of Count Plunkett, in an old disused mill, 40 or 50 "wild geese" from England and Scotland, who had refused to be conscripted into England's army, had taken up their residence, prepared to fight for the freedom of their own "small nation". Here, until Good Friday, we were engaged in the making of pikes, re-filling of shot gun cartridges, and other munition work, preparing for the coming fight, which we all felt was now inevitable.

On Good Friday, I was summoned to Count Plunkett's residence, where Pádraig Mac Piaras gave me orders to proceed at once to Tullmore, via Drumraney, Moate, where Bracken was in hiding (at McCormack's); to go from there to Tullamore, release the volunteers from the jail there, push on to Banagher and join, if possible, with Liam Mellows and his volunteers.

Having donned my uniform and got a raincoat from George Plunkett (R.I.P) and having got a quantity of arms and ammunition, I sent to my sister's residence at 8, Sarsfield Quay for my motorcycle. This having arrived, I started for the Midlands - Bracken and myself were on the police hue and cry at the time. In due course, I reached Drumraney and, taking Bracken on the pillion of the cycle, went through the night to a farmhouse ~~NEAR~~ (M.L.S.) Tullamore (Ballykinehan). We reached here about 4 a.m. and our friend's wife being very ill, we decided to sleep in an outhouse some fields away. This outhouse was used to shelter cattle. It was sans door, sans windows; the night was frosty; the rats were numerous; but in spite of the drawbacks, we slept! The following day I got in touch with my brother, Eamon, and another Volunteer (Ned Kelly). We arranged to make for our respective homes that (Saturday) night and to mobilise the few Volunteers, locally, who had not been arrested. We reached our homes late that night and next day (Sunday) tried to mobilise available Volunteers but found these numbered only four or five. About 2 p.m. my brother brought news that a stranger in a motor had called to Hotel and had enquired for my address. Soon after, Professor Liam O'Briain arrived and showed me countermand of all operations, signed by Eoin McNeill. Being unaware of the true state of affairs at Head Quarters, I decided to return to Dublin and, having picked up Bracken and accompanied my sister (who had been on a holiday from the city) we drove, via Mullingar, Drumraney (where we informed McCormack of the position). After some adventures, we reached Larkfield, Kimmage, safely, and discussed there the many strange happenings of the day - the seizure of the gelignite and the sad occurrence at Ballykissane Quay (Solus De ar a n-anamna). After a short rest, we woke early to hear a scout from H.Q. with the order to mobilise for Liberty Hall. Having collected all the arms and ammunition possible, we swung out to the nearest tram; thence to Liberty Hall, and soon afterwards led by An Piarasac and Seamus O'Connghaile, we marched to the G.P.O.

Signed *Seamus O'Connghaile*

31st October, 1947.

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