

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUIRO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
W.S. 120

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Diarmuid Lynch

Identity

Member of Supreme Council I.R.B.

Subject

The National Flag, 1916.

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ORIGINAL

Diarmuid Lynch - comments by.

30.12.47

"THE NATIONAL FLAG"

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1813-21

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120

Soon after my comments on R. M. Fox's "Green Banners" and his "History of the I.C.A." were penned there appeared in the "Irish Press" of July 1, 1946, a letter under the above heading from Patrick O'Connor. He cited Commandant Pearse's flag-orders issued to the Irish Volunteers (March 1915 and March 1916); quoted excerpt from an article by Dr. Hayes McCoy (Comdhail Naisiunta na Gaedhilge, Eire, 1945); and added statements respecting flags flown from the G.P.O. during Easter Week, 1916. These references call for comment:

Pearse's orders:

From 1914 onwards Pearse acted in intimate collaboration with the IRB "Executive" in the preparation of military plans for an Insurrection. In the summer of 1915 he was formally appointed a member of the IRB Military Council, and later that year became a member of the IRB Supreme Council.

Now, it is a fact that for years the Green, White and Orange were the recognised colours of those publicly referred to as "extremists" - those who in fact were members of the secret IRB together with non-members to whom its open policy (as voiced in "Irish Freedom", etc) appealed. These colours had long been in evidence at gatherings and celebrations throughout the country held under IRB auspices - especially at the Bodenstown commemorations of Tone ("the father of the Irish Republic"). We of the I.R.B. revered them as the colours of the Irish Republic which the I.R.B. had "virtually established".

On the other hand, we Irish Republicans of that generation were alive to the fact that the central figure of the old green flag of Ireland - the Harp - was one of the emblems incorporated in the "Union Jack", and that the Green Flag itself had in recent years been identified with "Union-Jackery" in Ireland.

Pearse must necessarily have had all this in mind when he issued his order to the Irish Volunteers in March, 1915: "The authorised flag is a plain gold harp on a green ground". And, it may be taken for granted that neither Clarke nor MacDiarmada nor any of their colleagues on the Supreme Council of the IRB objected. To me the reason in each instance is obvious:

We know that the Irish Volunteers were not established as a revolutionary organisation - not openly so established - and that its "platform" was neither republican nor revolutionary. But, we also know that the I.R.B. meant it to be both - if and when opportunity offered. It is also a matter of record that the IRB took pains to cloak its intention in this respect - not alone having in mind the attitude of the "moderate element" on the governing body of the Volunteers but to mislead the British Government. As the insurrectionary plans of the I.R.B. progressed from 1914 onwards the camouflaging of this situation became more and more essential.

Thus I am convinced that camouflage ~~was~~ was the underlying idea of Pearse's flag-order to the Irish Volunteers. Pearse and his IRB colleagues knew that if the question of a national flag

was

was left to the discretion of battalion commandants throughout the country many of them would in all probability have carried the Tricolour in their parades. It seems to me that it was to obviate any such possibility Pearse further stated in the order of March 1915 : "No other flag, except authorised regimental colours, is to be carried by bodies of Irish Volunteers".

Pearse's subsequent order on the point (March 1916) - issued just a month prior to the date fixed for the Rising - was doubtless for the same purpose, viz. camouflage. Note his words: "This flag should be well in evidence on all occasions of formal parades, such as those arranged for St. Patrick's Day and ~~the~~ those contemplated for Easter and Whitsuntide next". The Green Flag was in evidence in the St. Patrick's Day ~~parade~~ "formal parade" But, when this order was issued Pearse knew full well that the turn out at Easter would be no "formal parade", and that if in the providence of God there should be parades of armed Irish national forces at Whitsuntide (40 days after the start of the contemplated Rising) the flag to be carried would be none other ~~the~~ than the Tricolour of the Irish Republic - for the permanent establishment of which the Rising at Easter was intended.

This reference to Whitsuntide is akin to Pearse's phrase in his instructions to I.V. Battalion Commandants for the so-called manoeuvres at Easter time (April 22 - 24):

"Each Commander will on or before 1st May next, send to the Director of Organisation a detailed report of the manoeuvres carried out by his unit"

Again, in this March 1916 order we find this passage:

"but it is believed that at this stage the recognised National Flag more fully symbolises what the Irish Volunteers stand for, and will gain a readier consideration and respect from Irishmen in general".

Note the words: "At this stage"/ Pearse unquestionably meant the stage before the Rising, - a period at which the vast majority of the people were opposed to what was termed "Sinnfeinism" (the Irish Volunteers were as we know dubbed "the Sinn Fein Volunteers") and recognised the Green Flag with harp as the national flag. Pearse was careful not to specify the particular flag which he had in mind for a later stage - the Republican Tricolour of Green, White and Orange. ~~Two~~ Two Tricolour flags had been provided by order of Pearse or one of his colleagues on the Military Council for the Headquarters Battalion in the Rising, - one was flown from the G.P.O. and the other from the Imperial Hotel. (These had been forgotten at Liberty Hall when the forces moved from there on the G.P.O; Pearse sent Sean T. O'Kelly from the GPO to get them. The latter also brought the green bannerette referred to hereunder).

Flags flown from G.P.O. during Easter Week.

Patrick O'Connor in the Irish Press quotes Dr. Hayes McCoy:

"Ba sin é an bratac (an sean-bratac uaitne) a bi ar foluamain go h-ard ar an ngaic os cionn Ard-Oifige an Fuist ... le linn Seachtmaine na Cásge, 1916".

and Mr. O'Connor writes by way of confirmation:

"There is evidence that the Green Flag with harp uncrowned was actually flown from a staff on the G.P.O. during Easter Week. The words "Irish Republic" were on that flag".

Both are wrong. The old Green Flag with harp was not flown from the G.P.O. The so-called "flag" with the words "Irish Republic" painted thereon was something different; it bore no harp. It was not a "flag" in the national sense of the term; it was what may be termed a bannerette.

More than one publication erroneously describes this bannerette as "the Republican Flag". Even an "order" from Pearse and Connolly (which I believe was merely a casual suggestion) would not constitute it THE Republican flag. Neither would the fact that James Connolly handed it to R.H. Walpole in the G.P.O. for erection on the roof.

(I may here remark that neither was "The Plough and the Stars" (which was hoisted on the Imperial Hotel on the Wednesday) a "national flag". It was simply the "regimental flag" of the Irish ~~R~~ Citizen Army.).

The Tricolour on the G. P. O.

With reference to the individual reports of survivors of the G.P.O. Garrison (1937):

Walpole's report states that so far as he can remember "there was no other flag over the G.P.O. till late on Tuesday" "when it flew from the right hand side of the building i.e. opposite Nelson's Pillar".

Denis O'Moore's report, on the other hand, states that he saw the Tricolour over the G.P.O. on Easter Monday at approximately 1.30 p.m. and that "the flag was apparently attached to the figure in the centre of the front parapet".

Walpole is wrong as to the time the Tricolour was hoisted and O'Moore is wrong as to its position, - errors of this nature are easily understood. It was hoisted at or about the same time as the bannerette; the Report of Operations, ratified by the Garrison members, gives the time as 12.30 p.m. Monday.

Frank Thornton, O/G in the Imperial Hotel, and Sean McEntee who was posted in Earl Street - both of whom had the GPO under constant observation - state emphatically that the Tricolour flew from the Henry Street corner of the GPO roof.

(I received oral corroboration on both points from civilian onlookers on the Monday).

Flags hoisted on other garrisons during Easter Week.

Neither during Easter Week, nor over the decade that followed, did it occur to me that our insurrectionary forces in any position held by them went into action under any flag other than the Republican Tricolour.

Had the contrary been asserted I would have contended that surely Pearse must have issued secret instructions to procure Tricolours for the occasion, or in the alternative that the

see copy of letter on p-7
AK

Military Council - in pursuance of its ultra-secret policy with respect to the date of the Rising - must have procured a sufficient number of Tricolour flags for distribution at "the eleventh hour" to the battalion units.

Either of these steps would in my opinion have been only proper in view of Pearse's published orders to the Volunteers (March 1915 and March 1916). It seems, however, that the order visualised by me was not issued, and that the Military Council provided Tricolours for the Headquarters Battalion only.

But, when we consider the confused situation due to unfortunate developments during Holy Week, and that the all-important problem then confronting the Military Council was to ensure the start of the Rising - coupled with the lateness of the date on which one or more of the Dublin Commandants received definite orders for Easter Sunday - we can understand how and why this detail of The Flag was not attended to as thoroughly as it otherwise could have been.

==555555==

In August, 1946, I wrote to several Easter Week men in Dublin requesting information as to the flag flown in their areas. I heard from some and not from others - it has become increasingly difficult for me to contact the majority of them, the addresses I have of many being passed.

Replies received are to this effect:

FOUR COURTS: The Tricolour (hoisted by Joe McGuinness).

MARROWBONE LANE: Green Flag with Harp.

SOUTH DUBLIN UNION: Suggested Tricolour, but not certain.

JACOBS: Tricolour (made at Jacobs' on Thursday).

G.P.O. : Tricolour and "Irish Republic" Bannerette.

~~BOLANDS~~

BOLANDS: Green Flag with harp (obtained from St. Enda's - the only flag DeValera had).

IMPERIAL HOTEL: The Tricolour (Tuesday); the "Plough and ~~the~~ the Stars" (Wednesday).

STEPHEN'S GREEN: ?????

CITY HALL: Tricolour (not certain).

(Typed copy of excerpts from ~~Replies~~ replies from which the above details are taken are attached hereto).

EASTER WEEK.

FOUR COURTS : "Joe McGuinness hoisted the Tricolour on the
Four Courts"
(Patrick O'Connor, National Library, to D.L.
October, 1946.)

MARROWBONE LANE: "Green Flag with Harp" (Joe O'Connor 4/9/46
- quoting Seumas Murphy)

SOUTH DUBLIN UNION: "Suggested Tricolour, but not certain."
(Joe O'Connor, 4/9/46 - quoting S. Murphy.)

JACOBS: "We had forgotten to bring our Tricolour on Easter
Monday. On Thursday ... with green and white
bunting and some yellow grass cloth we
made a very fine Tricolour and hoisted it. This
flag, according to James Stephens in his book
"The Insurrection in Dublin" was the last flag flying
after the surrender"
(Corporal T. Meldon - at 26th Rifle Battalion Reunion.
Galley proofs from Frank Thornton, Oct. 1946).

G.P.O.: "A green pennant with the words "Irish Republic"
on it in yellow or orange or perhaps gold, flew on
the Princes Street corner next the Metropole
and
the Tricolour definitely flew on the corner of
Henry Street.
(F. Thornton , 28/9/46)

"On the roof floated two flags: the further one
(looking from Parnell Street) a green flag bearing
white letters; and the other a tricolour of green,
white and orange"

"shrapnel fire carried away the flag-staff ~~xxxxx~~
~~xxxxxx~~ from which the Republican flag
floated over the Henry Street corner of the Post
Office"

(Sean McEntee - statement February 1938.
Confirmed orally to D.L. by S.McE. Oct.'46)

BOLANDS: "He (deValera) hoisted the tricolour on a distillery"
(Dorothy Macardle, p.180)
This reference to the Tricolour is erroneous.
DeValera, speaking to me in October 1946, stated
that the Green Flag - with harp - which he hoisted
was the only flag he had - one which he obtained
from St. Enda's, Rathfarnham.

"Green Flag. I cannot remember the harp, but
definitely Green"
(Joe O'Connor - letter 4/9/46)

IMPERIAL HOTEL: "Tri-colour was hoisted on the Imperial Hotel
the Tuesday afternoon immediately after we
took over"

(Frank Thornton, 28/9/46)

"On Wednesday The Plough and the Stars"
was hoisted"

(Frank Thornton, 28/6/38)

(Above confirmed in other "reports" 1937/8)/

STEPHENS GREEN: ????????

(Joe O'Connor to write Harry Nicholls 4/9/46)

CITY HALL:

.... Tricolour - not ~~certain~~.

(Joe O'Connor quotes Jack O'Reilly, 4/9/46)

MENDICITY: ??????????

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Submitted, December 30, 1947


DIARMUID LYNCH

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 120

C O P Y

Tracton, Ballyfeard,
Co. Cork, Feb. 3, 1948.

Mr. Theo. FitzGerald,
4 Leeson Park,
Baile Atha Cliath.

A Chara: "Green Flag" on G.P.O.

Our mutual friend, Patrick O'Connor of the National Library, in a letter which appeared in the Irish Press, July 1, 1946, wrote:

"..... is in the archives of the National Library, as well as a signed explanatory drawing by the Irish Volunteer who designed and painted the words I i.e. IRISH REPUBLIC I pursuant to an order from Commandants Pearse and Connolly"

I am ~~particularly~~ interested in the phrase underlined (by me) - and particularly in the word "order".

Mr. O'Connor informs me that the underlined words are from a verbal statement made by you to Mr. Carty and himself, and recorded by them. I am inclined to the opinion that the word "order" gives greater emphasis to the incident than the circumstances warranted. I would be glad to hear from you in this matter.

You might also, please, mention the date and the place - on and at which Commandants Pearse and Connolly saw the unfinished banner with you on the occasion referred to.

I may remark that the information I desire is in connection with an article on "the National Flag" which I have promised to the Bureau of Military History.

Slán agus beannacht!

(signed) DIARMUID LYNCH.

*Memo: I got no reply to this letter.
D. Lynch Mar. 22. 48*