

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF  
BURO ST

13-21

21

No. W.S. 129

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 129

**Witness**

Sean O'Shea

**Identity**

Member of I.R.B.  
Took part in Rising 1916 with D/Coy.  
3rd Battalion, Dublin.

**Subject**

Reply to questionnaire

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

File No. S.591

Form B.S.M. 2.


ORIGINAL

A. - PERSONAL FACTORS

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- WS.  
129
1. I was a member of Fianna Phadraig, a scout unit organized on similar lines to Fianna Eireann. The unit was founded by Father Pat Flanagan, C.C., Ringsend. We were if anything better trained from the military point of view than Fianna Eireann. We met the latter in a scouting exercise on Ticknock in the summer of 1915 and proved to be the better unit on that occasion.
  2. No.
  3. Fr. Flanagan had some liason with "D" Coy., 3rd Battalion, the local Volunteer unit and the members of the Fianna were understood to be at the Company's service for despatch work and the like.
  4. Yes.
  5. Yes. I wore the Fianna uniform - grey shirt with orange kerchief, blue breeches, grey puttees, green wide-brimmed hat.
  6. Fo-Ceann or Section leader in the Fianna.
  7. About 1914 by Fr. Flanagan and the Scoutmaster.
  8. On the first day of the rising I was sent on messages (G.P.O., and 3rd Battalion H.Q., Boland's Bakery), but from the Tuesday the Company Captain, Joseph M. Byrne, stated I was to stay with him as a kind of aide-de-camp. The Capt. found me useful for getting round the Mill, a big rambling building, and checking up on the posts, reporting back any news such as appearance of enemy, etc.
  9. None.
  10. See 1. above.
  11. No other member of the Fianna Phadraig group took part in the Rising.
  12. As the Fianna group were not mobilized this query is not appropriate.
  13. Yes.
  14. Ordinary member.
  15. Sometime in 1915.  
The Emerald Circle:  
144, Gt. Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.).  
George A. Lyons.  
Attendance at meetings averaged fifteen.  
I can remember Lyons, Jack O'Hanlon, and Sean McMahon (later Gen. McMahon) only.  
I was introduced by and sworn in by George Lyons.
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B. - THE VOLUNTEERS PRIOR TO THE RISING.

1. (a) My recollection is that it was the I.R.B. who forced the issue when it was obvious that John Redmond was prepared to hand over the Irish National Volunteers to Britain. The break came and the Irish Volunteers were formed and the parent body became the National Volunteers and finally died out after a very short life. The schism did in fact prevent thousands joining the B.A., and the I.R.B. was strengthened by the success of its policy.  
(b) As most of the officers were originally members of the I.R.B. the direction of Volunteer policy was largely in its hands.
2. The officers of the Volunteers.
3. I cannot answer the first part but vacancies in Volunteer companies were mentioned at I.R.B. circle meetings and nominees of the latter advised to go forward with promise of support.
4. Cannot answer.
5. -do-
6. -do-
7. -do-
8. -do-
9. -do-
10. -do-
11. -do-
12. -do-
13. -do-



C. → PREPARATIONS FOR THE RISING.

1. (a) For fully a year before the Rising the possibility of an insurrection was discussed in Fianna and Volunteer circles. Fr. Flanagan spoke often of the hope he had that an armed rising would come in our lifetime and that we should be prepared to help when the time came. Men whom I knew in the Volunteers spoke of the possibility often.  
(b) Easter Sunday, 1916.
  2. No.
  3. Vol. Martin (brother of Eamonn Martin) met me on that Sun. morning and said that "the bullets would be flying before many hours are past." To convince me he produced a type-written slip which contained an instruction to parade at Liberty Hall that day at noon for further instructions. Martin may (but it is very unlikely) have the slip and the above is all I can recollect it contained.
  4. The one or two others who listened, I remember distinctly, left almost at once but offered violent disagreement with the idea of insurrection. I discussed the matter with Martin but we were of one mind regarding the desirability of an armed rising. I went to Fr. Flanagan but he did not appear to have heard anything definite. I told him what I had heard and expressed approval and hoped it was true.
  5. Does not apply in my case.
  6. No. On Sunday and during the actual week of the Rising the idea of the conflict being confined to Dublin was never entertained. We felt that the whole country was ready and willing to rise.
  7. My recollection of the few meetings I attended of the I.R.B. before the Rising was that insurrection was inevitable and that it was only a question of time. The idea and the need for a rising was always stressed by the Centre and the Visitor (latter was a person from the top of the organization who usually gave the Circle a talk of the enthusing kind).
  8. Cannot answer.
  9. -do-
  10. -do-
  11. -do-
  12. -do-
  13. -do-
  14. -do-
  15. Other than the talks given by Fr. Flanagan that we should be prepared to play a part whenever armed insurrection came there were no actual preparations. We did, however, get some instruction in arms and used .22 rifles in camp.
  16. Cannot answer.
  17. -do-
  18. -do-
  - 19 to 31. -do-
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D. - PLANS FOR THE RISING.

1. I understood <sup>THE VATICAN</sup> from other (older) Volunteers that there was.
- 2-5. Cannot answer.  
No information on the ~~steps to offer~~ <sup>plan but</sup>.
6. I understood there was / Comdt. Joe O'Connor or George A. Lyons (3rd-Battalion)-could probably answer this question.

7-8. Cannot answer.  
E. - THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RISING.

- 9-10. Yes. I remember that officers of the 3rd Battalion inspected some or all of the buildings that were subsequently occupied in the Battalion area (Ringsend, Mount St. Westland Row, Brunswick St. area). Cannot answer further. proceeding to take over Boland's Mill. I offered my services and on acceptance went home, out on uniform and joined the company at the Mill.
11. I believe so.
- 12-21. Cannot answer.
2. Yes.
22. Yes. I got my information from Volunteers who were on their way, on Easter Monday, to occupy Boland's Mill. They were in no doubt as to the purpose of the occupation of this outpost.
4. Irish Volunteers only.
- 23- On Sunday there was a sense of confusion among the men I spoke to but they were generally agreed that despite the counter order that a rising would take place. Not being a regular Volunteer I waited to see what the local Vol. company would do, company, 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, only.
24. Question no. 23 answers.
- 8-9. Joseph S. Byrne, Company Captain (at present Examiner)
25. See 23-les, Four Courts) will answer those two questions.
26. My contacts with Volunteers of the local company, led me to believe (a) they were quite certain that they would go into action; (b) that there would be a rising, if not at that Easter at some not far distant date. a building.
- 27-29. B. Cannot answer. flour were used to block windows. Sentries were posted. Building is of granite and needed
30. Some members of the local company had pikes but they were not brought out on the Monday.
12. The Company Quartermaster, Fagan, had some dozen or so pikes in his house which he had made. They were of a standard pattern. I saw them during the week of the
13. Rising when I was sent to his house to collect arms as he did not turn out himself.
14. Yes and were effective.
31. Cannot answer.
13. 33.
- Does not arise.
- Myself, student. A solicitor's clerk, a fitter, a quay worker, a grocer, a trade union official, an architect, a carpenter - all I can recall to memory.

K.- FLAGS.

1. Yes. A flag was put up on the distillery building which lay roughly between the Mill and the Bakery.
- 2-3. Tricolour and as far as I can remember of conventional design.
- 4-7. Cannot answer.
8. Michael Cullen, 2nd i/c "D" Coy.
9. As far as I can remember in the middle of the top front of the side of the distillery facing on to Brunswick St.
10. I think a pole had to be improvised.
11. I believe this was the flag recently handed back to the 3rd Battalion by the English Officer who took possession of it when Comdt. DeValera surrendered. Michael Tannam (Butterfield Ave., Rathfarnham or Chamber of Commerce, Dame St.,) presided at the recent function and should be able to give details.

L.- Railways and Shipping.

No information to offer.


M.- FOOD.

- 1-3. As far as I know, no.
4. Our garrison had flour and other food was handed in from outside during the week.
5. Range in the caretaker's house.
6. William Byrne - about the oldest man in the unit - took this work on himself.
7. Tea, greens, home-made bread. I do not remember seeing meat.
8. No. No precautions, so far as I know.

N.- FIRE.

- 1-2. Negative in both cases.

O.-CLERGY.

1. Yes. Fr. Union, C.C., Ringsend, and the P.P., of Star of the & Sea, Sandymount (whose name I cannot remember - he wore a beard!) called about the Tuesday. Fr. Union is still alive and in the Dublin diocese somewhere.
  - 2.
  3. Heard my and, I think, one or two other's Confession. Both upbraided us for our foolhardiness and urged that we go home and stop our madness. William Byrne took them to task and ordered them out of the garrison. He agreed to their hearing Confessions but took exception to their partisanship. Both, however, were known to hold pro-British views.
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O.- CLERGY (Continued)

4. One visit only lasting about one hour.

I should mention that on the Wednesday I was passing through the Hammond Lane Foundry (which formed a link with the Bakery and the Mill via the Distillery and the railway) when I was asked to take part in a conversion ceremony. Cathal MacDoubhgail, a member of the 3rd Battalion and, I think, Vice-Commandant (to Comdt. DeValera) of the unit, was being received into the Catholic Church. There was a priest - a Curate attached to Westland Row Church - present. I held a lighted candle during the ceremony. C. MacD died afterwards in Nice where he went for a holiday on doctor's advice. I think he died of T.B. He was a gifted person. Some of his drawings are still to be seen in the Municipal Gallery. He designed the reconstructed Upper O'Connell St., in his capacity as a city architect. I will get the name of the priest who officiated at the ceremony and forward it. I understand this priest was a member of the Emerald Circle, I.R.B., but I never saw him at any of the Circle's meetings.

5. Cannot answer.

P.- CASUALTIES.

1. On the Wednesday or the Thursday Paddy Whelan was shot through the head and killed. He was on duty at one of the upper floor windows facing towards the railway line. During the battle for Mount St., bridge fire came towards the Mill. Some of the shots might have been strays but at one stage we were fairly certain that fire was deliberately directed towards us. We endeavoured to support the men defending the bridge and from the roof of the Mill we had a view of the schoolhouse from which much of the British attack came when their frontal assault failed. There was at least one sniper firing at the side of the Mill facing in that direction and Capt. Byrne sent a Tom Byrne and myself out to reconnoitre. We went as far as the railway bridge over Barrow St., without finding anything untoward. There was a dead body of a woman (of middle-age) near the bridge. We did not move it. We returned without seeing anything to report but there was a fair amount of firing in the vicinity of the railway and from Mount St.; but difficult to locate exactly. Whelan was killed either by a stray from Mount St., direction or by the sniper.

On Friday afternoon I was standing with Tom Byrne at the front of the Mill (facing East - the side towards Mount St., looks south) when I felt suddenly weak and would have fallen but that Byrne caught me. It was found that I had been shot in the right leg. Later when the bullet was extracted (at my own home by my mother) that it had spread and had entered that flesh only about half an inch on that account. The mark of the bullet was found on the metal base of machinery just inside the front entrance. The bullet had evidently ricocheted. Its general direction would have been from where we had suspected the sniper was located.

I should add that Paddy Whelan was a Ringsend man and played hurling for the Fontenoy club. There is a block of modern flats in Ringsend named for him - Whelan House. There were no other casualties.

2. Answered in 1.

we learned

P.- CASUALTIES (Continued)

3. None that I know of.
4. No first-aid equipment was carried but volunteers were possessed of some knowledge of first-aid and it had also been taught to us in the Fianna.
5. Whatever medical or other aids available was at Battalion H.Q., in the Bakery. Our garrison had none.
6. No, so far as our garrison was concerned. Paddy Whelan was obviously past all aid when found and I was wheeled home on a bicycle when hit.
7. Not that I know of.
8. A John Doyle who lived at 104, South Lotts Road, Ringsend, was refused admission to Sir Patrick Dunn's Hospital. He was taken home and died after considerable agony. I was living at the next-door house (102) and my bedroom was next to his. When I was laid up with my leg I listened to him shouting in a delirium of pain and that continued for days before he died. He had been shot in the stomach in the vicinity of Mount St., I think, and when the hospital refused him admission his people were afraid to call a doctor.

9. Cannot answer.

10. Cannot answer.

11.

Q.- LOOTING.

1. On the Monday a number of youths came from the direction of the city towards Ringsend with articles of loot - billiard cues and balls and sports goods that probably were taken from the like of Elvery's or Lawrence's in O'Connell St. We left the Mill on being informed by one of our look-out men and intercepted them. We made them throw the loot into the canal, cuffed them and threatened to shoot them. They promised not to engage in the business again.

R.- Prisoners.

S.- Volunteers from G.B.

No information to offer under either heading.

T.- THE SURRENDER AND AFTERWARDS.

1. I was in bed with my leg wrapped up when word was brought to me that the surrender had come.
2. Some neighbour, but hardly relevant in my case.
3. Not that I know of. Comdt. J. O'Connor, George Lyons, or Joseph M. Byrne (55, Dartmouth Square) are in a position to cover this fully. (Lyons address is 26, Belgrave Sq., but I think you are aware of this.)
4. Not that I know of. Refer to persons named above.



U.- Conversations, etc., with Executed Leaders.

No information to offer.

V.- THE STORY OF YOUR UNIT.

1. Not that I ever heard.
2. If such account were required I would prepare it but I think Liam Kavengh is engaged on some such task. It must be remembered that our garrison was small and we were cut off from the main unit for the week. There is little to tell other than what I have put down here. I should like that Fr. Pat Flanagan's name and Fianna Phadraig should not be forgotten. While members of the Fianna (except myself) did not come out in the Rising - chiefly because of age - they gave a good account of themselves later in the I.R.A. Fr. Flanagan by his teaching and example inspired us, from our earliest days, with love of country. He was not the ordinary type of popular Curate but I would venture to say that his influence in the Ringsend-Beggars Bush area is felt to this day. Without ever raising his voice from the pulpit he succeeded in stamping out drunkenness and loudishness from Ringsend. His chief weapon was the Fianna, a well-trained body with its own pipe band. He had a definite military outlook. He took the Fianna, on winter's evenings, through the history of the Boer War, and showed us that that war had been imposed on a peaceful people by a bullying Empire. He told us how the Boers fought and how they could have won. He understood guerrilla warfare, and passed his knowledge on to us. We imbibed all this for four or five years before the Rising. We were the first Fianna unit to carry arms openly. This was the year before the Rising. He borrowed .22 rifles from all quarters so that we could march to the Tattoo we held in Shelbourne Park in the summer of that year. At that Tattoo we gave a military display of attack and defence firing blank from our rifles. We gave a display of tent-erecting and camp-fire singing ... He was a fine man. Would it be indiscreet to mention that he was the inventor of the sawn-off shot-gun? I know he conveyed the idea to I.R.A., G.H.C., complete with tapes inside the greatcoat so that the arms could be swung and suspicion of carrying the other kind of arms avoided. But perhaps it would be better to keep that off the record. He is now a Canon, P.P., of Booterstown Parish. I meet him occasionally in the R.D.S. His reading hovers between French classics and murder mysteries. Perhaps all this is irrelevant, but I could not resist putting down briefly these things that lie, almost forgotten, in the back of my mind, and are conjured up when the more relevant things are remembered.

W.- MISCELLANEOUS.

1. Of the ten in our garrison four were in G.A.A., and I should say most of us in the Gaelic League.
2. Can answer (c) only to say that <sup>we</sup> used Irish to what extent we could and always used the salutations.

X.- DOCUMENTS.

1. Anything I had of this nature was destroyed during 1920/21 when house raids were so frequent that it was impossible to hold on to anything that would incriminate one. I have some copies of 1915 numbers of the "Irish Volunteer" and I think, 1916 copies. I could unearth these if you were interested, but I think these are common enough.

*Sam O'Shea*  
2/6/48

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