

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 220

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 220

Witness

Mr. Patrick O'Daly,  
41 Naas Road,  
Inchicore,  
Dublin.

Identity

Lieutenant Irish Volunteers from 1913;

Member of Fianna and I.R.B.

Subject

- (a) National activities from 1907-1916;
- (b) Took part in Howth Gun-Running 1914.
- (c) Led party that seized and burned  
the Magazine Fort, Easter Monday 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

File No. S.1286

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY MR. PATRICK O'Daly, 41, NAAS ROAD,

INCHICORE, DUBLIN.

I joined the I.R.B. in 1907. I was then 19 years of age. My two brothers, Seamus and Frank, were in the organisation before me as they were older. I was a member of a hurling club in Dollymount called the Colonel John O'Mahony Club and, having a clubroom, we used to have Irish classes, debates and Irish dancing. Sean O'Byrne (now Judge O'Byrne) used to attend some of these debates, also the Ingoldsbys and Tom Wheatley. Paddy Ingoldsby swore me in as a member of the I.R.B. sometime in 1907 and most of the members of the Hurling Club were members of the I.R.B. The Circle I joined was the Fintan Lalor Circle. Paddy Ingoldsby was Centre and the Secretary was Bulmer Hobson. Sean McDermott was a member, also Patrick and Willie Pearse, Sean O'Byrne (now Judge O'Byrne), Sean O'Casey (the playwright), Seamus O'Connor. We used to meet at 41 Parnell Square and I continued membership right up to 1916 and afterwards. We started to drill long before the Volunteers started and Sean Heuston used to act as Training Officer. We all bought a rifle each and used to pay in a certain amount every week to pay for these rifles. A lot of our debates dealt with events in Irish history, warfare and other military subjects.

In the year 1909 or 1910 I was present at a meeting in the Clontarf Town Hall attended by all the members of the I.R.B. in Dublin. Tom Clarke probably presided at this meeting, but I am not sure of this. A Father O'Sullivan from America addressed the meeting explaining the Church's attitude to secret societies and proved to us that the I.R.B. was not banned by the Church. I was a good while in the I.R.B. when this meeting took place, but I cannot be definite as to the year in which it was held.

On the formation of the Volunteers in November 1913, I joined the Volunteers in Tuam, Co. Galway, where I was then working. I was in the local I.R.B. Circle in Tuam then and the Centre was, I think, Liam Langley. George Nichols was Head Centre in Galway and at that

time there used to be a lot of cattle-driving going on. When I went to the West I had a note of introduction to George Nichols from Sean McDermott and, as the I.R.B. were opposed to cattle-driving, it was arranged by Nichols that I would address a meeting of the I.R.B. in Galway for the purpose of condemning cattle-driving and to appeal to the members not to take part in it. The reason for this was that some members of the I.R.B. were in favour of cattle-driving and some dead against it and this tended to split the organisation. The Church was also very strongly against it. When I arrived in Tuam the Circle there was almost broken up. This was about Sept. 1913, and when I was leaving Dublin Sean McDermott told me about this and asked me to get in touch with a Father Foley, a very old man and a Jesuit Father, who was then in Salthill. This Jesuit was very intimate with Sean McDermott, and when I contacted him I found him a strong believer in the I.R.B. and he gave me every encouragement regarding the organisation. He told me to have nothing to do with the lukewarm members and thought a great deal of George Nichols. I was in Tuam until Easter 1914, when I returned to Dublin.

I then joined B/Coy. 2nd Bn. and resumed attendance of the Fintan Lalor Circle. I took part in the Howth gun-running that year. The main thing that I remember about that episode was Arthur Griffith marching the whole way from the Father Mathew Park, Fairview, to Howth. He was then a member of B/Coy. 2nd Bn. I am not sure if he walked back, although I remember seeing him with a rifle on the road back. I forgot to mention that when I was in Tuam I joined the Fianna there as they were drilling and had manoeuvres and route marches, whereas the Volunteers there did little or no military training. When I got back to Dublin in 1914 I remained a member of the Fianna and organised a Fianna Sluagh in Clontarf.

The only connection I had with the Kilcoole gun-running was that a group of us, all Fianna members, were standing-to in St. Enda's that evening. We were mobilised some time after tea and went to St. Enda's that evening where we remained until about 6 a.m. the next morning. We did not, however, get anything to do, but we knew the

gun-running was on. I think it was Eamon Martin who was in charge of us. There were several groups like ours distributed around the South County, on that day and I think the purpose was that we might be required to help in the dumping and distribution of the arms and ammunition.

I have only a hazy recollection of all the things that happened at the time of the split in the Volunteers in 1914. I remember, however, that we in the I.R.B. were told that a split was coming and that we were to stand by our own executive. When the split took place the 2nd Bn. almost to a man stood loyal to Tom McDonagh who was O/C. of the Battn. Tom Hunter was Captain of B/Coy. at the time and we knew he was a member of the I.R.B. as well, and Harry Williams was Q.M. I cannot remember the other officers at this time.

After the split, training was intensified and we had a rifle range in Fr. Mathew Park where we all fired our course. We got lectures on street-fighting from Tom McDonagh and Capt. Monteith.

The first hint I got that there was anything in the air was on Palm Sunday 1916. On that day there was a meeting of some kind held in the Clontarf Town Hall (now St. Anthony's R.C. Church). Mr. McGinn an old Fenian, was Librarian there. The night before, I was told by Sean McDermott to sit on the sea wall at Clontarf, opposite the Town Hall the following day and to watch for any detectives or other suspicious movements by the authorities and, if I saw anything, to report to Mr. McGinn. I took up position the following day (Palm Sunday) about 11 a.m. and I saw Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Tom McDonagh and others whom I cannot remember going into the Town Hall. Sometime after 12 o'clock one of the McGinn boys came out and told me his father wanted me. When I went in and was shown into a sitting-room belonging to Mr. McGinn, I saw there Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Tom McDonagh. There was a fourth person there, but I am unable to say with certainty who he was. Sean McDermott said on my arrival. "Paddy has some great ideas about the Magazine Fort and I would like you to hear what he has to say". Then Tom Clarke asked me to explain all about the matter. Previous to this I was working in the Magazine

Fort as a carpenter employed by Thompson's, Fairview, Building Contractors, and I had reported to Sean McDermott as to the whole layout of the place. That was in February or March of that year. I had been able to ascertain a lot of information about the Fort, such as the strength of the garrison, the layout and where the keys were kept, but it was Sean McDermott who detailed the information from time to time that I was to get. I had, on his orders, to get information as to where the tools were kept such as axes, sledge hammers, &c also what the various stores contained. I brought a rough plan of the fort to him and he insisted on me finding out what this or that store contained and all this information required by him took up most of February and March. I got to be very friendly with a Sergeant who was a storekeeper or something like that in the Fort and it was from him I got a lot of the information. He did not know, of course, that he was giving me this information. I used to bring him in an odd half-pint of whiskey which he always purchased himself and, in that way, we became very friendly. Up to Palm Sunday I had not discussed this matter with anybody except with Sean McDermott and he had warned me not to.

At the meeting in the Town Hall on Palm Sunday, after being asked to give those present an account of what was in my mind, they cross-questioned me on it, asking me how many men I would require to overcome the guard and how I would go about surprising them; also could I get as far as the gate without causing any suspicion. I remember one thing which Tom Clarke asked me "Could it be done in daylight"? I told him, in my opinion, it would be easier to do it in daylight than in darkness. Tom McDonagh was all for getting the .303 ammunition out of the Fort and Clarke and McDermott wanted the whole place blown up. They questioned me on my knowledge of explosives and I had to tell them I had none whatever. I told them that from watching the place I knew every Sunday groups of footballers used to pass outside the gate of the fort and I told them that this was my idea of how we could approach the gate. I told them that the only store inside that I knew was the .303 ammunition

store, the paraffin oil store and the tool store which was in an annexe off the paraffin oil store. I told them all the keys were kept in a glasscase in the guard-boom and that I could lay my hands on all the keys which were numbered, but I could not tell them the number of the gun-cotton store as I never could get near enough to it. This store was away off to the left and away from the .303 amm. store and there was a light railing around this store with a notice on it which read "out of bounds to all staff". Even the sergeant with whom I was friendly could not go near that store, but it was he who told me about it.

Tom Clarke then said to me - "I suppose you would have no difficulty in picking a football <sup>team</sup> if you were going to take the fort" and I suggested that we could get a group of the Fianna officers who were all lads between 18 and 21 or so. That seemed to meet with general agreement. They then had a bit of a conference together and I was told to discuss the matter with nobody and that I was to go to 12 D'Olier St. the following day and see Sean McDermott. I was over an hour discussing the matter with them, but their main anxiety seemed to be to have the ammunition store destroyed. I remember Clarke saying during our discussion that this ammunition would be probably used against us before very long unless it was destroyed, or words to that effect. I took it for granted when I heard this that something important was going to happen soon. They had a discussion on the gun-cotton store and I remember it was there I learned for the first time that you could burn gun-cotton without exploding it. It was Tom Clarke who said that.

Before I left the meeting Sean McDermott suggested that I would get a commission as some of the men who were selected for the operation were my senior officers in the Fianna. Tom McDonagh then wrote out a commission for me as a Lieut. in the Engineers and handed it to me and told me that when the job would come off I would be in sole command. When all the men were finally picked and we got orders to go ahead with the job, everybody accepted my being placed in charge without a murmur.

The following day (Monday) I saw Sean McDermott at 12 D'Olier St. and he sent me over to see James Connolly at Liberty Hall with a plan of the Magazine Fort which I had made out. Connolly saw me immediately on my arrival and seemed to know all about my errand. He asked me further questions similar to what the others had asked. The only thing he objected to was having all Fianna boys selected for the job and he indicated that he would give me a few hefty men to add weight to the team. He told me that my O/C. would make final arrangements with me. On Wednesday or Thursday of that week (Holy Week) I got definite orders from Tom McDonagh to call a meeting of those selected for the job and he told me Tom Hunter would speak to them. This group consisted of seven or eight and we got together in Fr. Mathew Park either on the Thursday or Friday and we discussed the whole operation. Tom Hunter was present and he told the group that the plans were completed and sanctioned by headquarters that I was put in command and that I had selected these men to accompany me. He told them that they must come on the job purely voluntarily and nothing the worse would be thought of any of them if they withdrew. None of them withdrew. I told them that more men were wanted and we discussed who else we would select. We had to leave vacancies for James Connolly's men. We filled the team at this meeting and decided to meet on Sunday morning at Garry Holohan's house in Rutland St. The job was fixed to take place at 12 noon on Easter Sunday.

Very early on Sunday morning I got a dispatch to say the job was off. The dispatch was from Tom McDonagh and said that the original order was cancelled and to hold all men in readiness for further orders. I immediately got on a bike and proceeded to Fr. Mathew Park and saw nobody there that I could discuss the matter with. Going out I met Tom Hunter and he told me the job was off but only temporarily and that we were to hold the men in readiness. I told him where I had the men and he told me to let them go home but to warn them not to leave the city and to be ready at a moment's notice. I went back and dismissed the men and nothing else happened during that day. At this time I knew nothing whatsoever about any happenings in Kerry.

I remember seeing the countermanding order issued by Eoin MacNeill in the "Sunday Independent" I remember a lot of .303 ammunition which I had in my house was collected on Easter Sunday and brought to Fr. Mathew Park. I think it was Leo Henderson who collected this.

I was at my breakfast early on Easter Monday morning when either Garry or Paddy Holohan called with a dispatch ordering me to proceed to Liberty Hall for instructions. I proceeded there, calling first at Fr. Mathew Park. I picked up Bob Gilligan and a chap named Costello there together with Tim Roche and Sean Ford. Ford had a number of the tin-can bombs with him. I brought these chaps along with me to Holohan's house at Rutland St. where I found a number of the men who had been selected for the job on the Magazine Fort. Others were being mobilised at the time. I then proceeded to Liberty Hall where I saw Connolly and Tom Clarke. This must have been about 10.30 or 11 o'clock. Connolly spoke to me about the job and expressed the opinion that the team selected for the job was very light and that I wanted more weight in it. Somebody then said to Connolly that Ned Daly had men at Liberty Hall waiting for me. A chap named Paddy Boland was then brought in and I remember Tom Clarke saying "Those boys may be light but they are great boys". Then Connolly asked me not to enter the Fort before 12 noon but to be there on the point of 12. I remember Tom Clarke had his arm in a sling and I held his tunic whilst he got into it. Connolly was in uniform but in his short sleeves and I jokingly picked up Connolly's tunic and held it out for him to put it on. We then said goodbye and Connolly said "Try and report back to your own battalions when the job is finished".

We then proceeded towards the Park along the quays in twos or ~~the~~ threes. I and a couple of the men went into Whelan's shop on the quays to get a football. I told Seamus Whelan what we wanted and that we had no money to buy one. He passed a joking remark and said we could have one. We then proceeded to the Park and, going up Parkgate Paddy Boland said to me to change the plan so as to allow him to tackle the sentry at the gate of the Fort instead of the man who was detailed for this part of the job. I agreed and arranged accordingly.



The plan was that we were all to stroll across towards the gate of the Fort with the football as if we were a football team and throwing the ball from one to the other. I was to ask the sentry where the soccer ground was while Paddy Boland would then jump on him and disarm him. We did this, and the moment Paddy Boland seized the sentry I made a dash through the archway for the guardroom as arranged. Garry Holohan and, I think, Eamon Martin were detailed to look after any sentry that would be outside the guardroom. The moment I entered the guardroom the soldiers there threw up their hands. We put them all facing the wall and I put my boot through the glass door of the press which held all the keys. As we were leaving the guardroom I heard shooting and discovered that Garry Holohan had shot a sentry. I understand that this sentry, who was on a parapet, had fired at Holohan first and that Holohan then fired at him and wounded him in the leg. He then took the sentry's rifle. Paddy Boland had by this time carried the sentry whom he had seized on our entry into the guardroom. As previously arranged, some of our men then held watch over the soldiers of the guard together with a Mrs. Playfair and her two sons who were living in a house beside the guardroom. I then led the way to the ammunition store and opened it without any difficulty with one of the keys from the guardroom. I did likewise with the paraffin oil and tool stores. I then sent somebody over to the gun-cotton store with the remainder of the keys whilst the remainder of us proceeded into the ammunition store with sledge hammers and hatchets. We immediately started to smash up the ammunition boxes, and others of us wheeled in drums of paraffin oil. These were burst open and all the store was saturated with paraffin oil. A number of the tin-can bombs were then placed in a number of places among the ammunition boxes and after clearing out all the men two or three of us remained and lit the fuses of the bombs and put matches to the broken boxes which had been saturated with the paraffin oil. We then came out leaving the door of the store half open so as to let the air in and locked the outer iron gate taking the key with us. Our scouts outside the fort then told us that a number of people were collecting on the hill outside through

curiosity. Previous to this I was told the men who had gone to the explosive store could not get in there and we decided not to do anything further about it. I then went to the guardroom and released Mrs. Playfair and her two boys and told them they should leave the Fort as it would be blown up any moment. I told the soldiers they could go too, but they were not to go in the direction of Islandbridge Barracks or they would be shot. We then all cleared out of the Fort and, as previously arranged, we scattered and made off individually, every man for himself. Everyone got away safely, and it was the next day when I heard that one of the Playfair boys had been shot at Islandbridge going into a house there.

I got back to the Four Courts and reported to Frank Fahy and remained with the garrison there until I got wounded on the Wednesday following. Some time on that morning a report came in that British troops had got into the Medical Mission opposite the East Wing of the Four Courts. I think it was Joe McGuinness, ex T.D. who was second-in-command to Frank Fahy, who ordered three or four of us to dash across, smash in the windows of the Medical Mission, pile straw in through the windows and smash bottles of whiskey on the straw to make it inflammable and set the place on fire. We proceeded to do this and, whilst engaged on the job, I was shot in the right arm by a .303 bullet fired from the building. I was brought to the Richmond Hospital the following day and remained there under treatment until I was taken to the Castle hospital a few weeks afterwards. I was in the Castle hospital until I was released on 4th June which was my birthday, and was arrested about 4 or 5 days afterwards at my home. I was then brought to the Bridewell and put on an identification parade. At this parade young Playfair picked me out as one of the men who had been at the Magazine Fort on Easter Monday. After about three days at the Bridewell I was shifted to Kilmainham and was sent from there to the North Wall and arrived in Frongoch where I remained until released the day before Christmas Eve.

During my period in Frongoch, nothing of note took place except that there was a row one time there over cleaning out the guardroom.

We used to be put on our own fatigues in turn and one day the Camp Commandant issued an order that the fatigue party belonging to us ~~was~~ could also clean out the soldiers' latrine buckets as well as our own. We refused to do this and several of our fatigue parties who in turn refused were isolated in another part of the camp. We then decided that the next party to be isolated would refuse to do any fatigues whatever. This day I was put in charge of a fatigue party and we got the order as usual. I said we wouldn't do it. We were brought in before the Camp Commandant and we were sent to the isolation camp for 14 days. We then decided to go on hunger-strike and, having started, we were all put into solitary confinement. I carried out this hunger strike for 14 days at the end of which I was brought back to the camp hospital. I had not known at the time, owing to being in solitary confinement, that the others had gone off hunger strike. I was then courtmartialled by the camp authorities for disobeying a lawful order and sentenced to 56 days in Walton Jail, Liverpool. I served this sentence in Walton Jail and the first morning I was there I was brought out to join the working party of ordinary prisoners. I refused and was then brought before the Governor. I told the Governor I was not a criminal and to my surprise he told me he did not rank me as one. He told me that life for 56 days there would be very monotonous unless I had something to do. I told him I did not mind working, but I objected to associating with criminals. As a result I worked for a few days in the Governor's garden cleaning up flower beds with no warder over me, and on wet days I was told not to be out in the rain. I got better food there than what we were getting in Frongoch and I was kept well supplied with books by the librarian. I was also put working repairing chairs in a small workshop and during the whole period of the 56 days there was never a warder put over me. At the end of the 56 days <sup>as</sup>/I was leaving, the Governor told me that he was sorry

he had to hand me over to an escort and that I was not going home. I was then sent back to Frongoch. This was on 3rd December and I was there until my release.

Signed: Patrick O'Daly

Date: 6th April 1949

Witness: McDonagh Comd.

