

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 289

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COSANTA:

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 289

Witness

Captain Manus O'Boyle,
McIntyre's Hotel,

Mountcharles, Co. Donegal.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers London 1913-1916;
" " " " Belfast 1916-1921;
" " I.R.B. " 1916 - .

Subject

- (a) National activities 1913-1921;
- (b) Preparations for Rising Easter Week 1916;
- (c) Engagements between catholic and orange men Belfast 1920 up to date of Truce 1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Captain Manus O'Boyle,

McIntyre's Hotel, Mountcharles, Co. Donegal.

I went to London in 1913 and left it on March 1st., 1916, having got notification that conscription was passed. I was posted to the Wandsworth Yeomanry, I went to Belfast as I had a sister there. I was in the Gaelic League in London and in the Volunteers. We drilled with dummy guns in a hall in Hammersmith.

I was in the I.R.B. as a boy, being sworn in by Joseph MacManus. ^{from Charles (LSD)} I continued my membership in London and Belfast. Dinny McCullough and Peter Burns were important people in the organisation.

In 1916 James Connolly came and gave us a lecture on street fighting at the Willowbank ^{field (LSD)} Hall. One of the first men I met in Belfast was Cathal O'Shannon who wrote an article about me "The Small Dark Man". Then the Rebellion came on. On Saturday afternoon I was in Seamus Dobbyn's house and Mrs. Dobbyn was making up food for her three sons, and her husband came in and told her she should prepare it for four as he was going out too. He was then a man well over 60. They were all in the I.R.B. Seamus was an organiser for the I.R.B. in Donegal at one stage.

We were mobilised on Easter Saturday night. We went to Dungannon by the last train and marched to Coalisland after dark. One of our superior officers was Sean O'Neill, who had been a sergeant-major in the Irish Guards. Peter burns and Dinny McCullough were with us. We carried small
/arms.

arms. I think the arrangement was that we would meet the Tyrone men in Coalisland. They turned out too. We slept that night in a hay-barn belonging to Mr. Ted Byrne, who was after a brother-in-law of Seán McEntee. Pat McCartan was then with the boys from Carrickmore. Colm O'Lochlann arrived probably about 2 or 3 in the morning by motor bike with the countermanding order from McNeill. We were told about it after breakfast. We had already been to Mass and Communion. We were told by our Officer Commanding, Peter Burns, to march back to Cookstown to take the train back to Belfast. We were accompanied all the way by R.I.C. men. An incident took place there. One of our lads, who was overcome by fatigue, fell back and on trying to rejoin us, while still alone, he was attacked by the Orange element. He pulled his gun and they fled. Of course the R.I.C. had him spotted. Then one of them cycled forward to the police barracks in Cookstown further along the street. Passing the barrack door the Sergeant and seven R.I.C. men came out, broke into our ranks and arrested the lad. We all drew our guns to resist the arrest and McCullough appealed to us for God's sake not to take any action. He was taken into the barracks and retained. I remember McCullough, who at this time was marching beside me, saying "They are rising in Dublin to-morrow." Old Henry Dobbyn had succeeded in getting a car to bring him to the station. Although McCullough was much my senior, I remember pointing out to him at the time that we were being led into a death trap by returning to the city, or words to that effect. He stated that orders were orders and had to be obeyed and that all the Volunteers had to

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hold themselves in readiness for a further mobilisation the following day. Peter Burns had some maps and documents that he did not want to risk taking back by train to Belfast, and he asked Liam Gaynor, Seamus Dobbyn and myself to get out at Castledawson to bring them to a safe place. We did so and spent the night there, returning to Belfast on Monday. The re-mobilisation order never came and we heard no more about it. There were all kinds of rumours floating about the City that we would be re-mobilised, but we never got a lead or a direction from that on. We were waiting in suspense that day and the next day. We all went back to work on Wednesday or Thursday. I was in John Arnott's counting-house at the time. The rounding-up started then. I felt perfectly safe as I was hardly known, being in the city only about a month. Dinny McCullough was arrested at Wards in Sydenham.

I remember a rather funny incident. Mr. Murray, the Secretary of our business, a man of about 65, asked me where I had been and I told him. He was the right stuff and gave me a great lecture. I was the white-haired boy with him until I left. When I left Arnotts I got a job with W.J. Campbell & Son, builders in the Ravenhill Road. I left that and went to James Henry & Son, builders, as cashier. They were building the main yard for Harland & Wolf at the time. That was where my life-long friendship with Ted Courtney, at present Chairman of the C.I.E., began. He was chief engineer

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there, being chosen from 900 applicants, although he was a Catholic and a Cork man.

During this time, although the Volunteers were smashed, the I.R.B. carried on their organisation. Liam Gaynor, two of the Dobbys and myself were great friends. The first thing that brought the Volunteers into prominence again was the outbreak of the trouble about 1920.

Whilst I was in Campbells we had a special train going to Aldergrove, the biggest aerodrome in the world then. It had the blue ribbon for production at the time. A number of members of the Belfast Brigade of Volunteers used to travel with this train, as if they were employees of the firm; they were actually on the pay roll and I used to issue the train's tickets for them; I always had a roll of them in my pocket. When they arrived at Aldergrove they crossed over the lines to the neighbouring farmers and worked for them and checked out in the evening. Thus they drew two salaries to swell the funds of the Brigade. We did not make it a matter for confession that we were 'despoiling the Egyptian'. On account of the huge number of workmen and the open space at Aldergrove it was impossible to carry out an effective check.

In Harland and Wolf's shipyard there were always murmurings about clearing out the Catholic workmen. I remember the day the attack started there, it started in the east yard. The Orange workmen started throwing rivets, bolts and all sorts of missiles at the Catholic workmen who were hopelessly outnumbered. About a month before that I got an appointment as cashier in the

/Chemical

Chemical Works in the Short Strand area. As from the outbreak in the East Yard the fighting started seriously. The Catholic workers who had to leave the Yard retaliated by throwing stones. The Protestant workers burned out the homes of the Catholics. I know that the heaviest fighting took place in the Ballymacarrett area, where there were about 7,000 Catholic families. On the outskirts of that area there were about 40,000 Orange families. St. Matthew's Church, Convent and Schools were the continuous target of the Orange hordes. In the early days it was chiefly a stone-throwing competition, until the Volunteers got organised. Prior to the fighting I was a member of 'B' Company of the 1st Battalion. Joe McKelvey was my Section Leader - also a Donegal man. I was detailed then by the Brigade to organise a Company of Volunteers for the defence of Ballymacarrett. I succeeded in forming a Company of about 120 men. These were now all unemployed. Then the fighting proper commenced as we were now armed with small arms and grenades. It was a continuous street fight in Ballymacarrett. Our opponents were heavily armed and had the assistance of the police and military. During all the fighting our headquarters were in the Cross and Passion Convent in Bryson Street. The nuns were magnificent. Mother Teresa, Sister Ethna, Sister Peter Paul and Sister Bridget are four that I remember particularly. This continued all through 1920 and up to and after the Truce. My brother-in-law, Joe Clarke, who was a member of the R.I.C. stationed in the Shankill Road, Belfast, was one of our chief intelligence officers attached to the Belfast Brigade /of

of the I.R.A. He left the R.I.C. and went to America as did many others. Prior to leaving he was presented with a beautiful gold watch by Joe McKelvey on behalf of the Division.

There was an Inspector of the R.I.C. I would like to mention too, J.J. McConnell. He is at present the Irish representative of the Canada Life Insurance Company. Mother Teresa could always present us with hundreds of rounds of .45 ammunition which she received from him. She told me one day that she and her nuns had orders to leave the Convent. I said we would be sorry to lose them. She replied that they had refused to go, alleging that the work they were doing was invaluable, namely maintaining peace and order. We posed as a peace picket. When Inspector McConnell came in one day to a room in the Convent we were all assembled there sorting out ammunition - .37, .38 and .45. He said nothing except "So this is the peace picket", and walked away. A short time after an attempt was made on his life and then he was transferred to Cork. When he was telling me about it at the Convent he said "This is the end of me". I replied "I don't think so". I went to see Joe McKelvey that night and told the whole thing to him. He immediately placed the matter in the hands of Frank Crummy who took the necessary steps which must have been pretty effective. Years afterwards he called to see me at Finner Camp and told me the rest of the story. On his journey to Cork he was approached by railway officials at different stations who inquired about his comfort. Also he said there was never an ambush when he was a member of a /patrol

patrol in Cork. He was invaluable to us while he was in Ballymacarrett.

Another policeman I would like to mention is Constable McNulty of Ballina. He is at present Harbour Master there. He constantly gave us information and ammunition. He was stationed in Pottinger Barracks and kept us posted regarding raids.

There was fighting day and night, although there was curfew from 10 o'clock to dawn.

One memorable incident I would like to recall. A few minutes before curfew one night, three of us - Jimmy Rice, Sean McGarry and myself - were stationed at the end of Albert Bridge waiting for a man called Calow, who was a very active sniper in Corporation Street and whom we had orders to put an end to. We expected him to get off at the tram stop beside us. We had left our guns inside on the sill of an open window, of a friendly house behind us. Suddenly we saw a lorry approach us, down the Ravenhill Road, which we took to be a grocer's van. There was a sharp angle which the driver saw too late. He swerved and knocked down a pedestrian who was rushing to get home before curfew. The man seemed to be seriously injured and one of the men in the lorry who appeared to be in charge asked us to show them the nearest hospital. I said if we did we would be curfewed. He said he was D.I. Cooper from Gormanston Camp and asked us to get into the lorry. We decided to bring them to Raglan Street where we knew Frank Crummy had a strong bodyguard on duty. When we crossed the

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bridge approaching the markets we were halted by a mixed patrol of military and police. The D.I. again explained who he was and the Sergeant in Charge of the patrol sent some men with us to the Royal Victoria Hospital, Grosvenor Road. We dumped in the injured man whom we now knew to be dead. The D.I. invited us to the hotel the police were staying at for a drink. We stayed in their company till curfew was lifted. We were treated all through the night by the D.I. who seemed to have plenty of money, but we drank only about one out of six drinks offered us. They became very drunk and we remained sober. Immediately after curfew we went and reported the whole matter to Frank Crummy, Divisional I.O. The following night three of the D.I.'s men, who had come to Belfast to give evidence against a prisoner who was arrested on a charge of murdering a Sergeant of the R.I.C. - either the prisoner or the Sergeant was called Gray - went early to bed in the hotel, still drunk after drinking all day. Before closing time six Volunteers entered the snug in the bar and when "Time, gentlemen" was called, everyone cleared out of the bar except the six. They held up the barmen, and a sister of the proprietor, Julie Roddy, rushed to the telephone to call the police. One of the six smashed her wrist with the butt of his gun. They rushed upstairs to the bedrooms and shot the three men. All were killed except one who, although he received fifteen wounds, recovered but was a maniac. Julia Roddy, the sister of the proprietor, said to the man who hit her with the gun "I recognise you, Manus O'Boyle, you'll pay for this." I was not within two miles of the place, nor was Rice or McGarry.

/About

About a month after I was arrested - I was on the run all the time - and paraded in front of the survivor but he failed to identify me. He had not recovered his senses - luckily for me.

I don't know if I am right in mentioning McGarry's name as he is still living in Belfast and if this story was known about him there it might cause trouble for him.

Signed: Maurice O'Boyle
 Date: July 24th 1949.

Witness: S. M. Cosain

Date: 8th Meadon Fojniak

