

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 313

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 313

Witness

Mr. Sean O'Duffy,
50 Casimir Road,
Kenilworth Park, Dublin.

Identity

Member of 'A' Company
1st Battalion Dublin Brigade
Irish Volunteers, 1913-1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1913-1916;
- (b) North Brunswick Street Dublin,
Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S...320.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF Mr. SEAN M. O'DUFFY,

50, Casimir Road, Kenilworth Park, Dublin.

I joined the G.A.A. in 1909. I was in Croke Gaelic Club amongst the members of which were Tommy Gay, Tom Kelly, Stephen Farren and Owens who was killed later. There were about 32 of the members out in the Rebellion.

I was present at the Rotunda meeting to found the Volunteers in September, 1913. Following a chance meeting with Sean MacDermott at 41, Parnell Square and as a result of what he said to me I immediately joined the Volunteers and was attached to "A" Company, 1st Battalion, Blackhall Street. There I remember Michael McCormack, Liam O'Carroll and Dinny O'Callaghan who I think were officers. The members of that Company consisted of all classes of men - messengers, tradesmen, civil servants, etc. etc. I drilled regularly with the Company in Blackhall Street and in the Phoenix Park, where we had extended order drill, signalling and other activities. We had manoeuvres in the Finglas and Swords areas as well as in the Dublin mountains.

About a week before Easter Sunday it was announced in the Company that we would have manoeuvres on Easter Sunday and that we were to obtain all the necessary equipment and general rations. As a matter of fact the Company best equipped was to obtain a prize.

On Easter Saturday I was in Whelans of Ormond Quay and a man named O'Shea was there. He was rather agitated and he said that the whole thing was hopeless. He was referring
/at

at the time to the landing of arms and ^{at Smer} the man named Cahill expressed the opinion that it would be terrible what slaughter would take place and the plight of the women and children. I said that if we were all thinking of that we would never do anything. Evidently they had heard something about the failure of the ^{landing of the arms} arms at that stage.

On Sunday morning I saw the notice in the paper and like everyone else I was puzzled as to whether it was abortive or a hoax and with the idea of finding out the truth I again went to Whalans of Ormond Quay and I met Paddy Stevenson and I discussed with him every comma in the notice and I tried to get into MacNeill's mind - that it looked abortive. He said he was surprised that a man like me believed what the Sunday Independent published and on that we went home. Later in the evening I went down as far as Liberty Hall and there I saw the Citizen Army 'standing to' on the steps, and word was sent around to us individually that we were to go home and remain at home for further orders. That completes Sunday. I then went home.

On Monday morning as usual I left the house about 5 minutes to 10 to go to Mass and on going out at the rear of my house, No. 7, Reuben Avenue, South Circular Road, Peadar Breslin, who was a mobiliser, flew past on a bicycle and shouted to me to get my unit and report at once to Columcille Hall. I immediately turned back; my mother and sister were engaged in the normal household duties. I told them I had a sudden order and immediately I got my uniform and got into it. I got my sister to help me and just as I was going out the back-door in full equipment my mother gave me a dash of Holy Water and I told her not to drown me. I went straight to the Columcille Hall and on my way I met Phil Walsh, a
/mobiliser,

mobiliser, who was also in a hurry. While I passed Emerald Square I noticed quite a number of people in the Square belonging to the 4th Battalion. Peadar Doyle was there.

Arriving in the Columcille Hall between 10.30 and 11 o'clock, there was the usual excitement and exchange of views between the Volunteers who were assembled. Towards 12 o'clock Commandant Daly went on to the stage and said he had an announcement to make to us which he desired to be received without cheers. He said "To-day we shall declare for an Irish Republic and inside an hour ^{we} ^{will} ^{be} ⁱⁿ ^{an} ^{action}." ^{an} ^{hour} ^{there} ^{may} ^{be} ^{an} ^{action}." Following this there was a general buzz of excitement and some shook hands, saying "The day had come" in agreement.

We were then formed into sections and left the hall in military formation. "A" Company turned to the left of the building and marched towards Queen Street and took another turning to the left and went on to North Brunswick Street via Red Cow Lane. Liam O'Carroll and Dinny O'Callaghan left us. We got into Glynn's building yard where we obtained materials and made a barricade across the street of cement sandbags and building material. Afterwards I saw a barricade opposite Cullen's yard, of lorries and other material. We took possession of all the tenement houses in that particular area on each side of the street and we asked the occupants to leave for their own safety. They left. We loop-holed the walls and took out the sides of the windows to make ^{firing} ^{positions} ~~fighting~~ ^{saw}. We also got in fresh water. We drew on our rations. We always kept something on reserve. I stayed in ^{the} ^{yard} ~~a~~ building yard with that Company for the remainder of the week.

/Monday

Monday passed off quietly. We let the people through who were trying to get home from the Races. I had 15 or 20 men with me. All of our Company remained around there in that particular area. We could hear the sound of firing in the City.

Tuesday passed quietly. We had contact with "G" Company and free access. I was expecting to be attacked from the Royal Barracks and we were continually on the alert for such an attack. On Tuesday we noticed a rifle lying on the pavement ^{behind} ~~behind~~ ^{behind} Cullen's ^{backyard} ~~backyard~~ ^{and} North Brunswick Street. One of the Volunteers went out and succeeded in getting it. Tuesday passed off, as far as I was concerned, without attack.

Wednesday night passed quietly for us 'though we could hear the roar of the artillery and the cracking of small arms and machine guns from the City. At midnight on Wednesday we prepared to attack the Linen Hall Barracks. It was organised by Captain Dinny O'Callaghan. I was one of the party. Tom Nolan was there. We obtained picks and crowbars and we made an attempt to bore a hole. I picked the hole to put in dynamite in an effort to blow up the side wall. This was a failure. It was then decided to burn the place by igniting a shop adjacent. This was also a failure because we could not get close enough to put the stuff into it. It was now obvious to us that our explosives were not being effective so we smashed open the main gate with a sledge hammer and entered. We discovered that the men inside were unarmed. They were lined up - about 30 of them - and they quickly surrendered the keys. We escorted our prisoners to the Father Matthew Hall, one of whom was a constable of the R.I.C. The women of the neighbourhood

/implored

implored us not to shoot the prisoners and we told them in reply that we left that kind of work to the enemy. These women were very hostile. At the Hall we had them provided with food for they had been on short rations for some days. In this respect we treated our prisoners generously and in return some of them later on went so far as to identify our comrades at the court-martial.

Now we had a plentiful supply of material such as ^{bricks} ~~boards~~, etc. for the burning of Linen Hall Barracks. So tremendous was the blaze that it threatened the houses of Lisburn Street and we were called on to keep the fire in check. This we did by utilising a huge hose pipe from the North Dublin Union.

On Thursday night I had a view of the fires raging in O'Connell Street and it was a sight to be remembered. On Thursday our scouts brought word that an armoured car was hovering in the neighbourhood. The inhabitants of North King Street were accordingly warned to remain indoors in order that we might give it a suitable reception. The local craze for sight-seeing was naturally a cause of continuous embarrassment for us. About this time I saw a man named Peadar Lawless crossing King Street from a house on one side of the street to a house on the other side of it. I had a short conversation with him. I asked him "Are you not in it?" He said "No". Later on his body and those of others were found in a cellar.

About midnight on Thursday we left Glynn's yard in North Brunswick Street and came down to Moore's Coach Factory. While I was there the British began to make their way into the neighbourhood mainly from the direction of
/Capel Street

Capel Street and Bolton Street. The sound of rifle fire now became loud and continuous and it lasted all throughout Friday. At no time did I see any armoured car or any of the enemy. I only saw one soldier and he apparently came up from North King Street towards Linen Hall and was shot by Peadar Breslin. We were being attacked from the back of Ball's Chemist's shop in North King Street.

Somewhere around 3 o'clock on Saturday when I was in Moore's factory I met Father Albert. He placed his hands on my shoulders and said "My poor fellow, it is all over, Pearse has surrendered." This shock us very much. I told Father Albert that I could only accept the information from my Captain and he immediately went in search of him and soon we all knew the worst. There were between 20 and 30 of us then in Moore's factory. Father Albert hastily heard our confessions. A vote was taken on the question as to whether we would surrender. Although we mostly voted "Aye", it was agreed that if our leader wished to continue the fight we would also do so. He told us that the fight would be continued. Volunteers were called on to man Monks' bakery, a building across the street. These, we understood, were informed loudly through a window that we had provisions for three months and had no notion of surrendering. The speaker made no mention of the amount of ammunition we had. This was about 8 p.m. on Saturday. Peadar Breslin commanded the men left to hold Moore's where I remained. Coolly and skilfully he made the ^{best} ~~last~~ possible arrangements for its defence. Three holes were bored in the wall commanding the approaches to North Brunswick Street at one of which I remember was Mick McGee, afterwards killed at Drumcondra. We barricaded the windows with material available

available, mostly portions of cart-wheels. We had nothing else available.

A British soldier made his appearance at Lisburn Street when we were barricading a window facing that direction and he was shot by Peadar Breslin.

About this time some of us were ordered to take a rest as we were tired after the week's work but rest could hardly be possible under the circumstances. We lay down, however, with full equipment. The firing became now more incessant and it looked as if we might have a hand-to-hand fight with the enemy. The voices of the British soldiers on the one hand and those of the Volunteers on the other hand could be plainly heard. I heard Paddy Houlihan shouting "Take in that man, we wont fire". This was a wounded soldier lying on the street near Reilly's Fort. There was no response to our request to take in the wounded man and the fighting continued. About 10 p.m. I heard a voice shouting "For God's sake and for the sake of the wounded and dying and for the sake of the people listening to me, the British Commandant has agreed to a truce." Running to a window I beheld, standing on the street with outstretched arms, our good friend Father Augustine. Firing ceased and we made our way to the ground floor where stretcher parties were organised to bring in the dead and wounded in the vicinity. I went into the yard opposite and carried back to the Richmond Hospital the body of Phil Walsh, a Volunteer, who had been killed shortly before that.

On Sunday morning we paraded on ~~our~~ orders from our Captain with arms and equipment. *The British officer in Charge 5.02.* He asked who was in charge of us and Peadar Breslin replied that he was. He asked him /how

how many men he had and he replied '32'. This seemed to annoy him and he began to shout orders at us. Paddy Houlihan explained to him briefly that while we had arms we could only take orders from our own leaders. We marched to the corner of North King Street and left down our arms and equipment on the street. We were then hastily grouped and marched along Capel Street to Dublin Castle. We were lined up against the main wall of the Castle and rigorously searched and scrutinised by detective officers. A few hours later we were marched to Richmond Barracks. That was on Sunday morning and we remained there until about 8 or 9 that night when we were marched to the North Wall. We were transferred to Stafford Prison and I was later transferred to Frongoch from which I was released about the month of August.

Signed: Sean M. O'Duffy

Date: 30 September 1949.

Witness: G. J. Seelyford

Date: 30 Sept. '49.

