

ORIGINAL

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 316.....

Witness

Mr. Peter Folan,
134 North Circular Road,
Dublin.

Identity

Head Constable R.I.C. 1913 - 1921.

Aided Irish Volunteers and I.R.A.
by secret information.

Subject

- (a) Duties as reporter of Irish meetings;
- (b) Dublin Castle Easter Week 1916,
and miscellaneous events from that
date to 1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S.1431.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY PETER FOLAN (Peadar Mac Fhualáin)

134 Chuar Bhothar Thuaidh,

Blá Cliath.

I reported several meetings throughout the country. I was always chosen to attend meetings which were likely to be addressed by Irish speakers.

Previously, that is from 1908 onwards, I attended meetings that were addressed by Séamus Ó Muilleagha, who was from East Galway and used to travel from County to County as Organiser of the Gaelic League. I was a shorthand reporter and gave verbatim reports of all speakers. Séamus, in addition to advocating the cause of the language, advised the people that it was a scandal to have large ranches in the possession of one man while there were numbers of poor men without land. He advocated the driving of the cattle off the land. Some time after the meetings large cattle drives took place in the vicinity, the cattle being hunted in all directions. When he went to County Mayo I was sent there and followed him everywhere he announced a meeting. The English transcripts of all my reports were forwarded to the Castle. On any occasion that he saw me present he avoided saying anything incriminating, and he was never prosecuted as a result of the meetings I attended.

I reported several speeches of Mr. Lawrence Ginnell, who held meetings in various parts of County Meath, because it was thought at the Castle that there would be Irish speakers at the meetings. There never were.

About April, 1914, Eoin MacNeill went down to Killarney to present the Volunteers with a flag, and I was sent to report the meeting. In the course of his address, which was all in Irish, he referred to the Volunteers, calling them

Fianna Éireann. In my translation of the term Fianna Éireann I said that the meaning was the Fenians of Ireland, and the Castle people thought that this meant the '67 Fenians. In fact it referred to the Irish Boy Scouts.

At another meeting in Cappagh, County Armagh, on 29th June, 1914, I also reported his speech, but on this occasion he spoke in English. Several other people spoke. The meeting started at 10.45 and finished at 12.30 a.m., the reason being that there was a deluge of rain up to then. He spoke a good deal about the Northern (Carson's) Volunteers, how every facility was given to the Protestants of the North and bad treatment was meted out to the Catholics of Belfast. One remark of his, "I say this country is a nation, a nation that is not defeated and a nation that cannot be defeated" was used against him at his courtmartial. This quotation and the remark about Fianna Éireann were the only parts of my reports that were introduced at his courtmartial, to which I was summoned as a witness. Mr. Chambers was lawyer for the defence. This seemed to me peculiar, as I knew he was a prominent member of Carson's Volunteers and I had heard from members of the R.I.C. that he was one of the Carsonites who bled themselves to show that they were ready to die for their cause. At the commencement of my cross-examination Mr. Chambers held up a little notebook and he said to the Court, "We admit the accuracy of the transcript of the notes of Mr. MacNeill's speeches". I had been on the point of blurting out that MacNeill had never said anything as violent as Mr. Chambers and his fellow-Carsonites, but I thought better of it.

It was rumoured freely at the Castle after Mr. MacNeill's arrest and before his courtmartial that, on account of his countermanding the Easter Sunday parade, nothing very serious would happen to him and the courtmartial was a matter

of form. When the life sentence was published in the papers in his case and that of his fellow-prisoners it was considered in the Castle a mere effort to save the faces of the officials. When Mr. MacNeill was released from prison an order was issued that his speeches were not to be reported in future.

I had no connection with any of the other courtsmartial.

I conclude that I was sent to those early meetings of MacNeill's because the Castle thought it advisable to have a report of the proceedings as he was President of a new organisation, the objects of which they were not too sure of.

The second shot of the Rising was fired at me.

During Easter Week I stayed the whole time at the Castle, not going home even at night.

At the very beginning of the Rising when the Citizen Army marched up to the Upper Castle Gate, I happened to be standing at a ground floor window at the left-hand side of the Gate as you go in, preparing to go home, as Sir Matthew Nathan had informed me there was no more to be done for the day. I saw the first shot being fired and Constable O'Brien, who was standing at the left-hand side of the Gate as you go in, fall. When the Citizen Army approached, the constable made a sign to them with his left hand, to pass on up Castle Street. The Gate was open all the time, as usual. I think it was a man in the first or second line of marchers that raised his gun and shot the policeman. Another took aim and fired at me, but I threw myself on the ground. A pane of glass was shattered. It was replaced some day during the week because the draught was blowing the papers all over the place. There were a lot of files kept there, as there were three of us working there, typing, etc. After the shots, commotion started immediately. The Volunteers - 15 or 20 of them - made to go in through the Gate into the Yard, which they did

and took possession of the soldiers' guardroom on the right-hand side of the Gate after entering the Yard. The two soldiers who were on sentry duty at the Gate had fled into the guardroom when they saw the policeman shot. The Volunteers emptied their shotguns through the windows on the soldiers inside the guardroom. I could not see them as the windows of the room in which I was were blind on that side. The military fired no shots, because they carried nothing but the rifles and pouches of blank ammunition.

One or two of the men who did not enter the Gate retraced their steps to the block of buildings known as the Rates Offices. They broke the windows of it with the butt-end of their single-barrel shotguns and entered it.

I could not see what took place in the guardroom for the reason already stated, neither do I know how long the Volunteers occupied it, but I think they were there a considerable time. I went up to the library, where I had some work. I used to examine the newspapers, cut out any articles of a political nature and paste them in a newspaper cutting book.

The Volunteers could have easily taken the Castle, there was not a gun in it, and any ammunition to be found was blank. The fact of MacNeill countermanding the Parade had lulled the Castle authorities to a sense of security.

Some time later, possibly about 3 o'clock, from the library window which was at right-angles to the guardroom, I saw a British soldier who came along down Castle Street being shot by one of the men in the Rates Office. I had come back to my own room and did some work typing.

In the course of the day I heard rumours in the Castle that a detachment of military was coming from the Curragh.

On account of its being Easter Monday, the only one in authority at the Castle, to my knowledge, was Sir Matthew Nathan. There was no meeting that morning in the Chief Secretary's office. Sir Matthew Nathan sent dispatches for the various heads of the Departments. The soldiers from the Curragh arrived about 7.30. I had no communication with the outside world, I might as well be in prison; there was nobody in the Castle with whom I could discuss matters. I had my meals and slept in the D.M.P. quarters. I do not think I went home until the following Monday. During the week there was an atmosphere of mistrust. One did not know what people's thoughts or feelings were, and one did not like conversing with anybody.

After that things were quiet and dull and there was little communication between the people employed at the Castle.

I do not know anything about Mr. Asquith's visit. Mr. Joseph Brennan, who was Private Secretary to Sir Matthew Nathan, would probably be able to throw light on the events that took place in the Castle after the Rising.

Nothing of importance, as far as I am aware, took place for a long time afterwards.

After the Rising there were no meetings reported anywhere throughout the country and I was employed only in the office.

When the Press Censorship was established in Ireland, there was very little printed matter given to us for examination. After the Rising every scrap that was printed in Irish in any paper in Ireland had to be submitted to Dublin Castle, and I read every document and I allowed them all to pass. I used to draw a blue pencil under an occasional sentence (to show that I was doing the job) and

bring it in to the Chief Censor, Lord Dunsany, and when he left, to Major Cooper (I should mention that the latter had his daughters taught Irish).

Pádraig Conaire's "Seacht mBuadha an Éirighe Amach" was given to me in instalments to translate before publication was permitted. I did not cut out any of it. I was asked on one occasion why it was that I was not cutting out any of the articles that were submitted for censorship. I told them that I was taking my cue from Sir Edward Carson, that the writers connected with his movement were using all sorts of language and nothing was done to censor them and I was following that line. My authorities agreed with me.

I knew nothing about the document published in Holy Week 1916 or the plans it contained. I think it likely that Mr. Joseph Brennan would be able to give information on that matter, if he wishes.

During 1919-20-21 I was given additional work which I mostly had to do at the R.I.C. Depot. After the Knocklong affair, at which a policeman called Wallace was killed, Sir Hutchinson-Poe and others organised a fund to help the dependents of any policeman who was shot. I was appointed Honorary Secretary to the Fund. The work in this connection was carried out at night after my office hours.

Whenever a policeman was shot, I was empowered - the Committee met only every half year - to pay out £500 to the widow or dependents to defray immediate expenses. The disbursement would be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee and a further grant given. A circular was issued to the members of the Constabulary asking for contributions - the lowest contribution was 4/- half yearly per man, and it was increased according to rank. Large sums were contributed by sympathisers throughout the country. The fund was wound

up at the disbandment of the R.I.C. in 1922; the amount in hands was divided among all the cases that had occurred since the inception of the fund, the grants being made on the basis of the number of the dependents.

I got acquainted with Michael Collins when he was home on holidays from London. My brother-in-law, Michael Barrett, was a constable stationed at Clonakilty and was very friendly with the Collins family, especially with Mrs. Collins O'Driscoll and her husband, who was a free-lance reporter on one of the Cork papers. I used to visit them and thus met Michael Collins.

Some time in 1918 a Galway friend of mine, Michael McHugh who was a compositor in the "Freeman's Journal" and Seán Ó Muirthile whom I had not known before, sent for me to come to McHugh's house in Manor Street.

Some years previously - in 1915 - I had been discussing with McHugh my position in Dublin Castle which I was anxious to resign, although there was no other employment open to me. McHugh, who described himself as being in the "inner circle" of the national movement, advised me to stay in the job, as I could be useful to them if I kept my mouth shut and did not discuss anything with anybody in the Castle. "You don't know whom you'll be talking to" he said. He said they had others working for them there, but did not tell me who they were.

They asked me what I could do for them in the way of getting information, copies of documents, etc. Of course I promised and did. To make sure that I would be recognised and not molested by the I.R.A. they had me photographed several times as I went along the street to my work in the Castle. I also learned afterwards that the I.R.A. had me followed for 21 days on my way to and from the Castle by an

ex-soldier called Fitzgerald. When he gave in his report he was informed that I was a better Irishman than himself. I took out copies of secret documents. My method was to take shorthand notes of the documents on the files, translate them into longhand and pass the translations to them. I had various friends through whom I sent them. On one occasion, I cannot remember the date, the military had collected the names of all the I.R.A. on the North side of the city. The list ran into several pages. The military were to arrest everyone on the list that night between 12 o'clock and dawn. Knowing that I would not be able to give a complete list, I brought the file home with me inside my shirt. I then communicated with Father Paddy Flanagan in Aughrim Street. He gave us the loan of his room and we got a few typewriters and copied the whole list. Father Flanagan had a couple of girls to type it. In the meantime a number of friends were summoned and they went around to every address warning the Volunteers to be out of their houses that night. The next morning I left the file back in its place. There was hell to pay in the Castle. The military had gone out in their lorries; they visited the nests but the birds had flown. Of course General Tudor and the higher ranking officers could not understand how it had happened that they found no one and they concluded that there must be a leakage. I was never suspected. I was very cautious and knew how far I could go.

Father Turley, another Curate of Aughrim Street, often came to me about prisoners. I brought him to Mrs. Fitzjohn, private secretary to her husband, Colonel Fitzjohn, who was in charge of the department of prisoners. The prisoners in question would be generally released. In this connection four men (Volunteers) were arrested at Kingsbridge. They were playing cards in a cab belonging to one of them to while away the time, as it were, while waiting for passengers. The

military surprised them and brought them in the cab to the Castle. Had the military searched under the seat of the cab, they would have found six Mills bombs. Fortunately they did not search. The mother of two of the boys - Mrs. Byrne of Benburb Street - met me next morning and asked me could I do anything for her. I knew her because she was working as a tailoress at the Depot. Her sons, Jack and Charlie, had a shoemakers' shop in South King Street. I went to Colonel Fitzjohn and told him my story, which was a fabrication, that they were shoemaker boys, one a cabby, having no connection with anything political. They were released that day and that night two of these boys were among those who ambushed the military in Capel Street. They told me that themselves. I knew that the Byrnes had a couple of machine guns and about 20,000 rounds of ammunition in the cellar of their house.

I kept rifles and ammunition in my house. I used to get them from various sources, mostly friends who asked me to keep them because they thought mine would be a safe house.

One night Charlie Byrne came with his motor - he was not any of the Byrnes mentioned in connection with the last episode - and took away the arms and ammunition.

One night there was a raid on Michael Collins' place in Mountjoy Square. The Auxiliaries had surrounded the place even before he knew it and while they were knocking at the door he went upstairs and out on the roof. That was easy because there were skylights. Apparently going along the roofs he escaped down to the street. I heard he was out on the street among the spectators watching the Auxiliaries raid the house. Next morning, as I was going in to my work in the Castle, I was overtaken by my friend Micheál McHugh, who told me the incident of the night before, and said that Michael Collins would be ever so grateful if I could recover for him

the five parabellum revolvers (Automatic) that had been taken. I went into the office where all the stuff that was seized during the night was left on the tables. That office was called the epitomising room because it was there that all seized documents were brought, examined and epitomised. I was usually first in the room and, therefore, I had an opportunity of feeling the sacks in which the seized booty was. I located the sack containing the parabellums, mixed with a lot of documents, etc. (Their method when raiding was to put the seized contents of each room into one sack and label it) I took out the five parabellums, put them into my pockets, I put back the label on the sack and came down to the R.I.C. department where there was a room, seldom or never used, containing old papers. I put the revolvers under a heap of the loose papers. I went back to my room with an innocent face and sat down to my work translating documents. When the Staff Officers - Colonels and Majors - came in after ten o'clock they began to examine the contents of the sacks. Soon there was a furore when it was found that the captured guns were missing. They came to the conclusion that it was the Black and Tans who had been in the raiding party that had pinched them. This particular type of "gun" was always much sought after.

When I went out at lunch hour I met my friend McHugh and told him I had possession of them, but how to get them out was the problem. In any case I told him to meet me at 5.45 or thereabouts at Michael and John's Church. I spent an uneasy day but decided I would take the risk. I could not trust anybody sufficiently to ask them.

At about 5.45 I was ready in the office. I came down to the aforesaid room. I had an old loose trench-coat on and I put the five parabellums into the pockets of my jacket and trousers with the loose trench-coat over all. I walked

beside my bicycle past the sentry at the Lower Castle Gate - since 1916 the Upper Gate was always kept closed. The sentry knew me well and never challenged me. I still walked beside my bicycle on the street, intending to go across the laneway to Michael and John's Church. As I came to the corner of Parliament Street - Henry & James - to my great surprise there was a line of soldiers stretched across the street with bayonets fixed walking towards me. I stood near the kerbstone. As the soldiers were within a few yards of me I put up my hands like everybody else. They were searching all comers. I said to the soldier facing me, "You'll get my pass in this pocket", pointing to the breast pocket of my jacket - my trench-coat was hanging loose. (This pass was issued to me in Easter Week, 1916, by Mr. Joseph Brennan.) The words were scarcely out of my mouth when the officer in charge, who was on the footpath at my right-hand side, said to the soldier, "Stop that, stop that. You should know Mr. Folan, he is one of our men in the Castle". I said, "Thank you, Sir", and if ever these words were true they were true on this occasion. I passed on trembling all over, knowing how near I had been to my doom. I went in to the Chapel - Michael and John's - as arranged, met my friend and handed over the five parabellums. I had a letter handed to me next day from Michael Collins.

Owing to my position at the Castle, and being a Head Constable, I was entitled to the use of a motor car to bring me to and from my work in the Castle but I refused it because it would not be possible for me to convey any messages to the I.R.A. These messages could be more conveniently delivered to and by me when cycling along the streets. I also was provided with an I.R.A. pass which enabled me to go anywhere without obstruction at any time of day or night. To the best of my recollection it was signed by Seán Ó Muirthile. I shall make a search among my papers as I

may still have it.

I should point out here that there was a great difference between the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries. The latter were gentlemen officers of high rank. There were ten of them in the epitomising room working with me, and at all times they behaved as gentlemen and most of them were very friendly towards Ireland. Two of these became Catholics while in Dublin. They married Irish typists who had come from London to work in the Castle. One of the Auxiliaries shot himself on the Monday after Bloody Sunday. There was some suggestion that he had given away a secret that led to the death of his brother officers in their lodgings. As far as I am aware this was not published at the time.

The introduction of the Black and Tans into Ireland - who were all low-class, many of them criminals - caused a lot of trouble. The Lord Lieutenant, Lord French, called a meeting at the Viceregal Lodge, and the Inspector General of the R.I.C., Sir Joseph Byrne, was invited to attend. All the members of the Kildare Street Club, as well as the Castle officials and high ranking officers of the Army were also invited to attend. After dinner a discussion arose about obtaining recruits from England for the R.I.C. because they were not getting any in Ireland. Sir Joseph told me himself that he objected to getting recruits from England because he had obtained the views of all ranks in the Force and they were all against it because they did not wish to associate with English guttersnipes. Sir Joseph said he would go to all the Bishops in Ireland and ask them to recommend young fellows to join the R.I.C. as recruits. After further discussion Lord French said that Sir Joseph Byrne must be afraid that the English recruits would contaminate the morals of the Irish girls. "I said to Lord French", said Sir Joseph, "that 'that remark comes very badly from you who were cashiered by Lord Kitchener for keeping a bawdy house at the front.' "

