

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉ TA 1913-21

No. W.S. 332

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 332.....

Witness

Mr. Joseph Kenny,
Shankill View,
Bray,
Co. Wicklow.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. 1909 - ;

Coy. Capt. I.V's. Bray, Co. Wicklow;

Subject

National activities, Co. Wicklow

1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S. 1126.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF SEOSAMH O'CIONNAIGH (Joseph Kenny)

Shankill View, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

1. One of my earliest recollections is the arrest and execution of the men allegedly concerned in the "Phoenix Park Conspiracy". I was then six years old and we lived in Killiney where my father was Station Master.
2. At the age of 13 I was present at one of the last meetings held (at Cabinteely) by Charles Stewart Parnell and saw his funeral a year later.
3. In 1898 I was a steward at the demonstration for the laying of the foundation stone of the Memorial to Wolfe Tone and was afterwards one of the Honorary Auditors of the Fund. From 1900-1906 I was Hon. Secretary of the Co. Dublin Board of the Gaelic Athletic Association.
4. In 190⁸ or 190⁹ I was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood by Tom Clarke at his shop in Amiens St where he lived. In the latter year I married and settled down in Bray where, apart from a year in Dalkey (1908-9) I have resided ever since.
5. During the years 190⁶-1916 I was in the habit of lunching at Mrs. Wyse-Power's restaurant at 21 Henry St. which was the favourite rendezvous of Arthur Griffith, Major John McBride, Sean MacDiarmada, Sean T. O'Ceallaigh (the present Uachtaran) and occasionally, Tom Clarke. I am honoured that I had the complete confidence and friendship of all these great men. I used to distribute by hand Sean MacDiarmada's paper "Irish Freedom". At that time the people distributing the news periodicals were reluctant to have anything to do with such papers.
6. I was present at the meeting in the Rotunda Gardens in November 1913, called to organise the Irish Volunteers and formed a company in Bray. We began with 10 members amidst a hostile populace and carried on until July 1914 when, as a result of the gun-running in Howth, we were swamped by the influx of new

members most of whom were associated with the A.O.H. At the break away on the 1st Nov. 1914, out of a membership of 600 or 700 I can remember myself and possibly a few more (I cannot now remember the exact number) who remained loyal to the original Volunteer pledge.

7. A week or ten days before the Howth gun-running took place on 26th July 1914, I was asked by P.J. Farrell, who was Centre of the I.R.B. here whether I could get him a motor boat for a night's fishing. In those days a man asked no questions and I promised to do my best to obtain the boat. I succeeded and the motor boat, owner John ^{Bowden} Beroden (deceased), Harbour View, Bray, accompanied the yacht "Asgard", belonging to Erskine Childers, to Howth. There were at least eight men concerned and when they reached Bray Harbour at midnight on Saturday, 25th July 1914, the tide did not serve and they slept in my home until dawn on that famous Sunday.

8. On this day also the Parish Priest, Rev. Richard Colohan, called me at the church gate where I was collecting for arms. He informed me that Lord Powerscourt was coming to Bray on the following Tuesday night to address the Volunteers. I told him that I as Secretary could not allow this, but that I would see Col. Maurice Moore, then C-in-C. of the Volunteers, next day to see whether he had any objection to this course. Col. Moore agreed, provided that Lord Powerscourt made no reference to any controversial matters. Lord Powerscourt kept his word.

9. Prior to the gun-running at Kilcoole on 1st August 1914, Sean MacDiarmada asked me to make a rough sketch of the road from Kilcoole to Dublin. I did this to the best of my ability and asked whether I could help in this job. I was told that as I lived in Bray it was best that I should remain about the town.

10. In Sept. 1914, while I was on holidays at Rathdrum, ^{near} I got a message that Lord Powerscourt was ^{coming 15 weeks} ~~making a recruiting~~ ^{for the company for the second time} ~~speech in Bray~~ ^{of recruits} I objected to his appeal, telling him that no recruits would go from Bray if I could stop them. I understood he asked the Sergeant R.I.C. for my name. When I returned to duty in the Congested Districts Board I was informed that I had been reported for interfering with recruiting for the British Army.

11. Having collected £36 for guns at the church gates on the day of the Howth gun-running, I forwarded the money to O'Rahilly who sent us 10 rifles. The local committee who discussed the distribution of the rifles voted 9 to 1 that the guns be returned to Volunteer H.Q. and a refund of the money claimed. The claim for a refund was rejected and I, fearing the police might capture the guns, took them by car to Shankill railway station, thence by rail to Dublin. I handed them over to Liam Mellows who gave me a receipt for nine rifles. I had retained one which I handed over in 1920 to Lawrence O'Brien, Commandant of the South Dublin Brigade.

12. On Easter Sunday 1916, at approximately 10.30 or 11 a.m. Arthur Griffith called at my house. He asked to see me but did not give his name for which afterwards I was very glad. My wife was engaged in the usual morning housework. At that time, believe it or not, we were in a position to have a girl help for the house and children and she answered the door. I was at Mass and the maid told Mr. Griffith where he might find me. At noon I was reading the "Sunday Independent" at Wilde's newsagency in the main st. opposite the Catholic Church. I was specially interested in the order of cancellation by Mr. Eoin MacNeill and saddened by the terrible news of the disaster at Ballykissane Quay, when I was tapped on the shoulder and turned to see the Chief (I always called

him the Chief) standing beside me. I got a bit of a shock but he quickly reassured me. I asked him what had happened, but he said the news was bad, that he had a message for me and that he had to return to town as soon as possible. We had by this time left the shop and taken the road to the station and I asked him to hold the letter for a little while as there was a police spy at the church gates - one of those gentlemen who had been keeping a rather close eye on me, as I had organised the Volunteers early in December 1913 (a month after the Rotunda meeting) and continued as Secretary to the local company until the split. Mr. Griffith and I proceeded to the railway station (no buses then) and on the way were joined by a friend of mine and a worker in the cause James Jackson of Rathmichael. The Chief gave me the letter. It was written and signed personally by Eoin MacNeill from Woodtown House, Rathfarnham, and dated, so far as I remember, that day or perhaps the day previous. It was the usual letter that we all know now. I knew MacNeill's writing and signature I asked Griffith how he had come by it and he said he had volunteered to take it as he was familiar with my home and had been there before. I told him I would not enter the station with him as there was another spy always on duty there and that it might embroil him later on if we were seen together. I had been a close personal friend of his from the time he returned from South Africa until his sad death, 1922, and was in daily contact with him in Mrs. Wyse-Power's little home from home and, knowing his views better perhaps than many of his close friends, I was determined that no word or act of mine would embroil him in any later developments unless he himself wished it. I even arranged with my wife that if the police were making inquiries, to say that she knew nothing of my business and I also asked the maid if she could identify the man who called and she said she would not know him again. After reading the message, Mr. Griffith directed

me to take it to the Secretary of the local Volunteer Coy. and that it was also to be noted by a Mr. P.J. Farrell. I told him Farrell was not a Volunteer. He said it did not matter, that Farrell was to know. I found Farrell, who, like myself, was a member of the G.A.A., in a "wash-out" in Bray river. There were several of the boys there all getting ready for action, cleaning revolvers &c. and one man I would ever like to remember. His name was ~~MacSwiney~~ ^{Wanley} (Joe). He was cleaning a gun. He asked Farrell who I was, where I came from and who brought the message. When he was told he simply said "To hell with the order". He was for Dublin. I knew afterwards that he got there. I would like to pay this tribute to a great man. That evening I got the message to two men who were not present at that meeting, Michael and James Higgins, Loughlinstown. I then took the message to the local Volunteer Secretary, Mr. James McCarthy, a railway official. After questioning me about it, he destroyed it before I could stop him.

13. It was then about 3 p.m. and I went home to my dinner, passing the police barracks which was only three doors from my house. There were 6 or 8 peelers outside the barrack and the D.I. Moloney was in uniform, an unusual sight on a Sunday morning to see a Protestant D.I. - or even a Catholic one - in uniform. Moloney was ^{one of the officers} in charge in Cork the night of the murder of Lord Mayor McCurtain. A second message was delivered to me after dinner by Mr. Sean Byrne, an old friend of mine who was an ^{Inspector} of telephones. ^{This} A third message was sent me by Mr. Diarmuid Lynch - a simple visiting card of his with the word "Cancel" written on the back. I kept the card for years but as I was arrested on 8th May 1916, and again on 18th ^{Month} May 1921, my wife may have found and destroyed it with other documents, as my home had been searched several times between 1916 & 1921.

14. I took no part in the Rising. There were ^{few} ~~no~~ members of the Volunteers remaining and I was not a member of the I.R.A. except to be in their confidence and to take messages to and from Dublin if needed. On Easter Monday, however, about 12 or 1 p.m. I saw the I.R.B. Centre and asked him what had happened or what was about to happen. He did not know what was happening in Dublin or elsewhere, but from the messages received on the previous day I knew that the Rising had been planned for the evening of Easter Sunday.

15. On 5th May 1916, I got to Dublin to my office in 23 Parnell Sq. and home again safely. On 6th May I got to Dublin again but was detained by military at Westland Row Station. A policeman I knew in ~~Dublin~~ ^{Dublin} persuaded the two soldiers who had detained me to let me go, but on Monday, 8th May, I was again arrested and taken from the train at Sandycove station by military and R.I.C. Mr. M.J. Hoey, Court Clerk in Bray, was arrested with me. We were interrogated at an empty house in Sandycove, taken to Dunlaoghaire police station and Town Hall and detained for two or three days. I was ordered to report daily to the police at Bray, which I did for 4 months, although this order was shortly remitted in the case of other men.

16. In the years 1918-20 I took an active part in the elections and during that period also I was the bearer of important messages between Dublin and Bray in connection with I.R.A. activities. Messages connected with the Local Govt. Department of the Dail passed through my hands and were transmitted by me to Mr. Daniel McCarthy at his office in Clare St. He was at that time Secretary to Mr. Cosgrave.

17. During 1920 and 1921 I was a member of the Prisoners' Defence Fund here and from the beginning of 1921 a member of the Belfast Boycott Committee and remained a member of both

committees until the boycott was lifted at the Truce.

18. On Monday, 18th April 1921, I was again arrested and taken to Arbour Hill with nine others for alleged complicity in an attack by I.R.A. forces on Bray Police Barracks. I had been ill with sciatica for three months previous to the attack, but as I lived only three doors from the barracks, there was no chance for me. I was released on 24th May 1921, the eve of the Custom House attack. Mr. Lawrence O'Brien and Mr. P. Martin were released with me.

Signed: *James O'Connell*

Date: *2. June 1950*

Witness: *Jim Cosgrove*

