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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 367.....**Witness**

Mr. Joseph Gleeson,
10 a. Aungier St.,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of Supreme Council of I.R.B.
and member of I.V's. Liverpool;

Member of G.P.O. Garrison Easter Week 1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1911-1918;
- (b) I.R.B. Liverpool 1911 - ;
- (c) G.P.O. Dublin, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 7913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 367

STATEMENT BY JOSEPH GLEESON

10A Aungier Street, Dublin.

1. I was born in Liverpool of Irish parents. My father was a Fenian, and my uncles were Fenians.

2. My earliest remembrance is being brought as a small boy to a lecture by O'Donovan Rossa in the Picton lecture hall, alongside the Museum and Art Gallery in Liverpool. The lecture was the usual thing about vengeance on England and it made a deep impression on me. I was about 12 or 14 years of age at the time.

3. The next thing I remember is joining the Gaelic League, which I joined in a room under the Pro-Cathedral in Copter's Hill. We shifted from there to Duke Street, and then Sinn Féin was started, and there was a branch started in South Great George's Street, Liverpool. Sinn Féin was Griffith's organisation. That was some time after 1907. Andy O'Byrne came over to Liverpool several times, as well as P. T. Daly, who was in the I.R.B., but was interested in Sinn Féin as well. Piaras Beasláí, a man named Lowe from Galway, and a man named Phil Coyne from Moycullen, Co. Galway, were in the Gaelic League too. The G.A.A. was used as a recruiting ground.

4. My introduction to the I.R.B. was by Pat McManus, who is dead now. He approached me and a man called Smith, who later went to Australia and was afterwards elected an M.P. in Australia. John Fitzgerald swore me into the I.R.B. Fitzgerald was a Centre and he swore me in at Aintree, Greenwich Park, where we used to have the hurling matches. I was attached to the Bootle Circle, but I did not remain with that Circle. They started a new Circle, and I was told to get the young crowd into it. Tommy Craven was

Centre in Rockferry, and I was on the South side of Liverpool and most of the young crowd were transferred to the Circle in the South side of the city and the older men were kept on in the other Circle. The young crowd wanted action and the older crowd were like a mutual admiration society. In order to try and settle the differences in Liverpool between the young men and the older crowd, P.S. O'Hegarty came from London, McCormack came from Scotland and Hobson came over from Dublin.

5. The dispute between the young crowd and the old crowd in Liverpool was settled by a man from Glasgow, Dan Branniff. Diarmuid Lynch and Hobson came over afterwards, and Hobson was instrumental in finally settling the dispute between the two crowds. Hobson conducted the election, and we carried on afterwards except for a few old men who were a bit disgruntled. I think that was in 1911.

Some time in 1912 just after the publication of the two "Irish Freedoms", Tom Clarke, who was then a ticket-of-leave man, was brought over to England to stand trial by courtmartial on a charge of mutiny. The charge was the result of a difference of opinion between the younger men and the older men of the I.R.B. Clarke was associated with a group that was in favour of action which the older men were decidedly against.

I was instructed to meet him at Birkenhead, which I did and conveyed him to the Morning Star public-house in Scotland Place. This was where the courtmartial was held. The court comprised Mulholland, Jim Murphy, Jack O'Hanlon and Fred J. Allen. The result of the trial was an acquittal, and this result caused a split in the ranks of the I.R.B. in England and Ireland.

6. In 1911 prominent in the I.R.B. in Liverpool were Steve Lanigan, Tom Craven and Neil Kerr. The latter was a member before I was. He was one of the Labour crowd and he was on Mick Collins' Supreme Council during the Tan racket. In 1911 in Liverpool there were also McCormack and Pat Lively - the last mentioned was old then. I remember at that time P.S. O'Hegarty, who represented London. Tom Clarke was sent over for a Courtmartial that time. That would be early in 1912. It was about the time we had our trouble between the older and the younger men in the I.R.B. in Liverpool. It was Tom Clarke who started it by siding with the younger men, who wanted a more active policy. At that time in Liverpool, there were two men from Scotland - Mulholland and Diamond - who were on the Supreme Council. Jim Murphy was chairman of the Supreme Council. There was a secret Court in each Division to try people guilty of treason. The Secret Court in Dublin would, I presume, be favourable to Tom Clarke, because Tom Clarke was a ticket-of-leave man then. I was not aware Tom Clarke was coming over. Fred Allen told me to collect him at Birkenhead. There were no R.I.C. men there, and it was necessary to get the ferry across from there to Liverpool. It was handy to get off at Chester and get the train to Birkenhead.

7. I think that Murphy resigned as representative of the Supreme Council as he was an old man at the time. I succeeded Murphy on the Supreme Council as representative for the North of England, I think in March or April 1913.

8. The first meeting of the Supreme Council I attended after that was in Clontarf Town Hall, in, I think, 1913. Present at that meeting were Diarmuid Lynch representing

Munster, Dinny McCullough representing Ulster, Bulmer Hobson representing Leinster, Sean McDermott representing Connaught. South of England was represented by P.S. O'Hegarty. I represented the North of England, Mulholland was there representing Scotland, but he resigned some time after that. We co-opted Dan Branniff, Seamus Deakin and Tom Clarke. I forget the fourth co-option.

9. In 1913 the Volunteers had not been started - not until November of that year. I remember hearing a discussion about the starting of the Volunteers in October, I think but I do not recollect the details. We used hold quarterly meetings. I heard a discussion before that at the time of the formation of the Citizen Army. After Jim Larkin's speech in the Imperial Hotel when the police arrested him, the Citizen Army was started. It would have been after that I heard discussions about starting the Volunteer Force.

10. I returned to Liverpool after that meeting but came back to Dublin every three months for the quarterly meetings. The Dublin Executive was appointed to carry on if anything extraordinary happened:

O'Donovan Rossa was buried at Whitsuntide, 1915. I got a letter to deliver to Tom Clarke and when I went to Tom Clarke's house, he was living up past Ballybough, he was not in but Mrs. Tom Clarke was there. The letter was from John Devoy enclosing money to buy a grave for O'Donovan Rossa. The funeral was on Whit Monday, 1915, and we came over from Liverpool to attend the funeral. I think that would be the time the elections were held, and I was re-elected.

11. I remember being at one meeting in 1914 after Redmond captured the Volunteers and Hobson was put off the

Whit Monday
August

Supreme Council, but was left Head Centre of Dublin. At the start of the Great War Deakin got 'cold feet' and resigned. Archie Heron was an organiser of the I.R.B. He was doing the North; Ernest Blythe was doing Kerry and the South, and Liam Mellows was doing the West. Archie Heron was supposed to be travelling for Deakin, selling cattle food in Tyrone. The R.I.C. raided the place where Heron was staying and found Deakin's cattle leaflets and the I.R.B. Constitution and arrested Heron. He escaped with the help of the local Sergeant's wife.

12. Hobson was expelled from the Supreme Council over his attitude in accepting the Redmond nominees, but he was left to carry on as Dublin Centre. When Hobson was expelled his place was taken by Tom Hunter, representing Leinster, but he resigned and a man called Sean Tobin took over. Tom Hunter only attended one meeting. He handed in £80 in cash. Leinster was the principal paying district.

13. Immediately after the Great War started in 1914, I was at a meeting of the Supreme Council, some time after August 1914 - I think in September. I think the meeting was held in Mick McGinn's place in Clontarf Town Hall. Mick McGinn was the caretaker of the Town Hall. Two of his sons are alive; one of them is in the Customs and Excise and another was a Sergeant Major in the 26th Battalion. At this meeting I proposed war, but Dinny McCullough claims that it was he proposed war, he says that I seconded it. We were going to carry it on by having an insurrection; that was the meeting at which the insurrection was proposed. I think it was after that, that Deakin got 'cold feet' and resigned from the Supreme Council. I do not remember any discussion on when the insurrection was to take place, but

there was a standing committee elected. Arrangements were made to contact the three men on the other side, in England and Scotland, Dan Branniff, ^{McCormick} ~~Milholland~~ and myself, in the event of the British forcing a rising suddenly.

14. At the January meeting of the Supreme Council in 1915, there was a discussion about the insurrection, that it could happen without us being there. Tom Clarke and Sean McDermott called Dick Connolly, Charlie Carrigan and myself after the meeting and told us that if it did happen and we were not in it that we were to get in communication with Mrs. Clarke to keep up the threads of the organisation.

15. In the summer Elections of 1915 - I was again elected for the North-East of England and Dick Connolly for the South of England, Sean Tobin for Leinster, Alec McCabe for Connaught and Denis McCullough for Ulster, Dermot Lynch for Munster. Carrigan was elected for Scotland, but only came on for a short time. He was killed in 1916 in the Rising. Pat McCormick succeeded Carrigan. I came over to Dublin in February 1916 and Carrigan came across too, because I remember the two of us staying in Nth. Frederick Street. At our first meeting after the 1915 elections we co-opted Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Patrick Pearse and Pat MacCartan. At that meeting there were present - Dick Connolly, myself, Alec McCabe, Sean Tobin, Dermot Lynch and D. McCullough. Things could have happened and there were certain men detailed to deal with an emergency. We appointed a Military Council. I think in December I was across in Dublin and made arrangements for a number of Volunteers from England and Scotland to go to Kimmage. I saw Tom Clarke and Sean McDermott and we arranged to take over the Old Mills at Kimmage, and the first man to take

it over was Tom Craven. I think everything was to be left in the hands of MacDermott, Clarke and Pearse, but I know Sean McGarry was in their confidence. McGarry was a right-hand man of Tom Clarke.

16. In the I.R.B. days we used to drill and then one Manchester Martyrs' Anniversary Major MacBride was over in Liverpool and the same night the Volunteers were started in the Rotunda in Dublin, and we started immediately in Liverpool. The strength of the Volunteers was good at the commencement, but the Redmondite split came and we were small enough after the split. There were four Companies, Liverpool, Bootle, Seaford[^] and Rockferry, and there were roughly between 50 and 75 in each Company.

17. The Liverpool Volunteers decided to come over to Dublin and they came in January, 1916, to Kimmage. I came in February 1916 to Kimmage. It was at a January meeting 1916 of the Supreme Council that we decided on Kimmage and I was sent to Eoin MacNeill and Fitzgibbon to make things right in Kimmage to send the men over. Things were not put right until the men in Kimmage put them right, it was like an old mill. We got men there from Liverpool, Manchester, London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. As a matter of fact I have a list of the names of the Kimmage garrison. From the time we went to Kimmage Collins was one of the military staff. Denis Daly & Dan Sheehan left Kimmage on Holy Thursday to go to Cahirciveen. Daly was saved, but the others were drowned.

18. The man who took over after me in Liverpool was Pat Lively, a baker, he died in 1917. He succeeded me in 1916, I think, as the representative for North East England on the Supreme Council.

20. On Easter Sunday we stood-to all day. On that night Mick Collins came to our Headquarters and told me to report to Liberty Hall at seven o'clock the following morning. I reported as instructed, and there I received a mobilisation notice from James Connolly (Patrick Pearse was present) for the Kimmage garrison. I handed the notice to George Plunkett.

21. We started out from Kimmage about 60 strong at about ten o'clock on that Easter Monday morning and marched to Harold's Cross, from where we took a tram to O'Connell Bridge and then marched to Liberty Hall, from where we were instructed to proceed to the G.P.O., which we did. We got to the G.P.O. at about twelve o'clock. Our arms consisted of shotguns, buckshot, French bayonets on broomsticks, and improvised pikes, and one .32 revolver and 12 rounds of ammunition.

22. On arriving at the main entrance to the G.P.O. there was a D.M.P. man on duty. One of the party, Blimey O'Connor gave the order "Hands up", which the policeman was very reluctant to obey. We took him prisoner into the G.P.O. with us.

23. On entering the G.P.O. I got instructions from Diarmuid Lynch, I believe, to barricade the windows. When this was done I was put with Bill Donoghue in Prince's Street the telegraph messengers' room, because they thought the attack would come that way, and we had home-made hand-grenades made out of condensed milk tins to resist attack.

The next thing I remember was that Liam Clarke and the St. Enda's crowd arrived. One of the hand-grenades blew off in Liam Clarke's face and he was the first casualty.

On Easter Monday the Lancers came down O'Connell Street and they would have been wiped out only somebody got panicky and fired too quickly. There was a horse shot.

On Monday night it was raining and we spent it on the roof.

24. On Easter Tuesday a young lad came to us. Hannan was his name and his father had a bicycle shop on the North Strand. He is since dead. We had plenty of coal and utensils in Prince's Street, but we had no food there and we sent him out to loot to get bacon. There was sniping going on on Tuesday.

25. On Wednesday James Connolly left the G.P.O. and proceeded down Prince's Street, where he was sniped at and was brought back wounded in the thigh.

26. On Thursday we were brought out to smash through the "Freeman's Journal" office. There was an old man there with a telephone to the Castle and he was taken prisoner. We smashed through the wall of the "Freeman's Journal" and got into Fitzgeralds the wine merchants. When we were crossing from the post-office to the "Freeman's", Sean McGarry was nearly shot. He was in the party. Mick Collins was there too. They smashed through the fireproof brick wall.

On Thursday night we were still in the G.P.O.

On Friday the Imperial Hotel was blazing and we were told to put out the fire in the post office. The post office caught fire on Friday night because they were using incendiary bombs. We evacuated the post office on Friday night and went into Moore Street.

On Saturday afternoon Sean McDermott told us that there was an unconditional surrender. A number of the men were for fighting on, but eventually the entire party had to obey the orders given. We were marched into O'Connell Street and formed up on the tramway line opposite the Hammam Hotel, where we had to deposit our rifles, equipment and personal effects on one of the rails of the tramline. The "G" men had a look at us and took our names and addresses. We were marched then to the Rotunda Gardens in front of the Rotunda Hospital and kept there all night. During Saturday night we got a bit of a grueling from the military. The Four Courts crowd arrived there too.

On Sunday we were marched up to Richmond barracks, and the people were pelting us with mud as we went up Thomas Street and James's Street. We were marched along in the presence of a hostile crowd of spectators.

On the same day I was picked out by a "G" man and put into a separate room with Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott and others. McGarry, Liam O'Brien and Mallin were there. Tom Clarke seemed pleased with the outcome of the Rising. I think he said, "We have a minimum loss, which will result in a maximum gain". Tom Mallin had a spent bullet in his hat. Major MacBride was there too.

I was in that room for a week, during which time Tom Clarke, Major MacBride and Mallin were taken out, court-martialled and executed.

I was taken out before a Court of Investigation for examination. At this time I had changed my name to Joseph Redmond and I had removed my moustache. I was asked various questions about the Rising and about my associations with it. I pleaded ignorance to all the questions asked.

Having failed to establish my correct identity they deported me to Wandsworth Jail, where I remained until about May, and was subsequently interned in Frongoch until December 23rd 1916.

~~During the occupation of the G.P.O. I was not aware of any orders issued by Connolly or Pearse.~~ JS

In 1917 after being released, Sean O Muirthille and I were sent to England to conduct an election, for the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. At that election Neil Kerr was made Centre for the North of England. Subsequently Neil Kerr was arrested and Dr. Paddy Daly from Tullamore was sent over to replace him as Centre for the North of England..

At the first meeting of our new Supreme Council in 1917 after the Rising there was a crowd of usurpers present, amongst others, Seamus O'Doherty, Liam Clarke, Pat McCartan, Gregory Murphy, Tom Breen from Sligo. Alec McCabe was on the 'run'.

I was present at a meeting held in No. 32 Connaught Street at which Dermot O'Hegarty was present to organise a Circle. Gregg Murphy presided. They wanted to make me Centre and I said no; Michael Collins was appointed and I was made Secretary. The Dublin members of the I.R.B. did not like Collins. He had been attached to some other Circle before 1916. They ordered a new election and Dermot Hegarty presided and I think Tom Craven opposed Collins, but Collins was elected Centre.

I was in the I.R.B. all the time until the Truce but I did not go on the Supreme Council.

Signed; Joseph Gleeson

Date; 13 April 1950.

Witness;

A. J. Veely

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