

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. **WS. 374**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 374**

Witness

Micheal O Droighneain,
Furlough,
Co. na Gaillimhe.

Identity

Captain Spiddal Company Irish Volunteers 1916;
O/C. East Connemara Brigade I.R.A. 1920-21.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1910-1916;
- (b) Formation of Irish Volunteers, Spiddal,
1914;
- (c) Co. Galway - Preparations for Rising
of Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. **S.1333**

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY MICHEÁL Ó DROIGHNEÁIN

Furbough, Co. na Gaillimhe.

I became a member of the I.R.B. towards the end of 1910 when I was teaching in Dublin (from August, 1910 to January, 1912). Then I left Dublin and came to my native place, teaching in Spiddal for one year, and coming to Furbough in January, 1913, where I am teaching since.

In December, 1913, a huge public meeting was held in the Town Hall, Galway, for the purpose of starting the Irish Volunteers in the West. Máirtín Mór McDonagh was in the chair, and Eoin McNeill and Roger Casement were present and spoke at the meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting the late George Nicholls, Dr. Brian Cusack and I took down the names of all those joining the Irish Volunteers, and so Galway City Company was formed.

In the summer of 1914, the first Company was established by me in my own area - Spiddal. The first piece of foot-drill was given to us, in Irish, by Pádraig Mac Piarais himself in the grounds of the Irish College, Spiddal, on a Sunday evening. On that occasion a photograph of the Company was taken by Mr. Leaper, Galway, and I had a copy, postcard size, but I am sorry to say my copy cannot now be found. It showed a number of us in two

ranks with Pádraig Mac Piarais standing a few paces in front and Liam Mac Piarais standing at the extreme end of one line. That evening we had our first route march, marching from the College grounds on to and through Spiddal, led by Colm Ó Lochlainn playing the pipes.

Eamonn Ceannt, his wife and son Rónán, were staying with us in my parents' house for about a month in the summer of 1915. He had a beautiful German revolver, which could be changed into a short rifle by the addition of a stock which he had, and he taught us the mechanism and working of it. Eamonn came to a meeting of our I.R.B. Circle one night, addressed the men, encouraging them in their work. He spoke many times to me about the Rising which was coming, and before he left us he had arranged in code the message which he would send me when the Rising was about to take place. In an ordinary letter which he would write to me, in Irish, the following sentence would appear - "An bhfuair tú amach fós an t-aimm atá ar an rud úd a chonnaic muid sa gcladach ar an 25adh.....?". The Rising would take place three days before the date he would have mentioned in the letter; for instance, if he had mentioned '25th', the Rising would commence on the 22nd.

One night we got a message that the R.I.C. Sergeant at Spiddal was on the 'phone to his superiors in Galway, at the Post Office, Spiddal, and talking to them about someone they were shadowing. Presuming that they referred to Ceannt, we decided that neither he nor

I would sleep in the house that night. So we kept watch all night, but nobody came to bother us.

I was teaching Irish at Coláiste Chonnacht, Spiddal, every summer from 1912. One day in August, 1915, we had another visit from Pádraig Mac Piarais, and he spent two whole hours with me, walking up and down between the College and the entrance gate, talking about the coming Rising. I cannot bring to mind now anything special that he said to me on that occasion.

I had established a Circle of the I.R.B. at Barna and one at Moycullen, and around them I had also formed a Company of Volunteers in each district. We kept constantly in touch with one another and with Galway City. The Volunteers were not all I.R.B. men, but the officers were.

Coming to Holy Week, 1916, I had ordered some pike heads from Mick Newell, Briarhill (Castlegar), and three of us - my brother Máirtín, Micheál Duignan and myself went to Newells for them. All he had left was one dozen which we took with us. We waited for the dark night and each of us had four pikes tied on his bike, and we brought them to Spiddal. When Duignan reached his own house we two took them all. We wheeled our bicycles through the village of Spiddal, each of us having a bare pike head in his right hand, wheeling the bicycle with the left, prepared to use the pikes if we chanced to meet an R.I.C. patrol. It was very late at night and we met no patrol. We took the pikes home and fitted them

with handles which we had prepared. Tom Hynes of Galway sent me out four single-barrelled shotguns and ammunition for them. I had a .32 revolver and a B.S.A. miniature rifle, and these were all our weapons.

I had twenty-four good lads in the Spiddal Company that could be depended on; fourteen or so in Barna and about sixteen in Moycullen.

On Good Friday, Peadar Duignan came to me with word that a strange lady wanted to see me. She had made inquiries for the teacher and had been directed to Peadar O'Grainne's house - he was teacher in Spiddal - and I was teaching in Furbough, but living at my old home about a mile west of Spiddal in Knock parish. The lady made a few discreet inquiries of O'Grainne and found he was not the man she wanted, but he had me sent for. When I met her, and when she knew I was the right person, she took a letter out of her stocking and handed it to me. I opened and read it. It was from Ramonn Ceannt, and in the course of an ordinary letter I came to the sentence - "an bhfuair tú smach fós an t-ainm atá ar an rud úd a casadh linn sa gcladach ar an 25adh?". My heart went into my mouth as I saw the hour was coming very close. I want to say now that the lady who brought me the letter was Mrs. Martin Conlon. She had come by train from Dublin and had cycled from Galway to Spiddal. Her message delivered, she cycled back again to Galway and off to Dublin. Bádraig Ó Conghaile of Moycullen parish, now an Excise Officer in Dublin, was staying with me during Holy Week, and he was with me when I got this message. We had hurleys, and with Micheál and Peadar Duignan we went to

the College grounds for a few pucks, but I was all excited and we did not stay there long. I sent Pádraig Ó Conghaile off to Moycullen to meet the boys there, in charge of Morgan Davoren, now in America - and have them prepared. I went to Barna myself and met the boys there and then in the night I collected all the Spiddal Company.

On Holy Saturday a meeting of officers from different parts of the county was held in the Town Hall, Galway, as there were rumours of disagreement in Dublin. I can't remember all who were present at that meeting, but I know that the following were there :-
George Nicholls, Larry Lardiner, Pat Callanan (The Hare), Tom Ruane, Mattie Neillan, and I think Niche Kyne.
After a long discussion it was decided to send John Hosty, Galway, to Dublin, with instructions to see both McNeill and Pearse, and bring back word of the real situation. Accordingly, John Hosty went to Dublin that evening.

On Easter Sunday morning on getting up, the first thing I saw was a fleet of warships in Galway Bay, and I began to have some misgivings about the situation. Why were they cruising about there at this particular time? Was it all up?

At 6 o'clock on Monday morning, a knock came to the door and I got up. Peter Fagan (Barna) had come on horse-back with the message back from Dublin, by John Hosty : "The rising is off, don't make any move". I told my brother the news. I stayed around the house all day, and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon George Nicholls

and Liam Langley came to the house with another message - which Liam had brought from Dublin. The message read - "we have begun at noon today, carry out your orders - Pearse". Nicholls and I had a consultation about the matter and before he left we had decided that we would do nothing until we got more information. So Nicholls and Langley left me. I was miserable all the evening, and during the night, because of the uncertainty of the situation. Tuesday morning came and no word from anyone.

At eleven o'clock I took my bicycle and cycled off to Galway. I looked around for a bit and noticed a good deal of police activity in the town. I went in to McDonnell's café and had a cup of tea. When I came out to the door, I met a Castlegar Volunteer named Fahy. We spoke for two minutes. He said, "we are collecting our men and going towards Orammore in a couple of hours." This was about one o'clock. "In that case", I said, "I better go at once to my own men". I jumped up on the bicycle and made off down the street. At Bridge Street I met a Ford car coming up against me, driven by Heard, the County Inspector, R.I.C., with four other policemen. I saw them out of a corner of my eye but didn't pretend I noticed them. I kept on at a normal pace, and I had only reached Dominick Street when the car came sweeping past me, halted about twenty yards in front of me. They jumped out and came rushing towards me with their rifles levelled. They pulled me off the bicycle and rushed me into Dominick Street Barracks. Heard shouted at me: "You blackguard, we have you at last". I said, "I am no blackguard", and said no more. I was immediately stripped and searched. They threw me a big pair of R.I.C. pants while they were searching my clothes. I had a .32

revolver in my hip pocket, fully loaded, something like £20 in cash, as I had a few days before cashed a salary claim. I had refereed a hurling match some nine days previously and I had two lists of names of players in my pocket. They took them to be lists of Volunteers.

As soon as Heard had pushed me in, he went off and arrested George Nicholls in his home at University Road, and when I was brought up afterwards to Eglinton Street Barracks, George was there in a cell before me, and I was put into the one next him. We started talking. In a short time Séamus Carter and Frank Hardiman were brought in. Then they got two side-cars, put Nicholls and me handcuffed together on one side, two policemen with rifles on the other side, and another policeman driving. They put Carter and Hardiman handcuffed together on the second car, with their escort. In that way they drove us to the Docks, our car leading. The second car was pelted with mud off the streets by the mothers of men serving with the British Forces - Hardiman and Carter receiving lumps of mud in their faces. Word soon spread about the arrests, and Louis O'Dea followed us to the Docks, and wanted to know if we required money or anything else. Nicholls spoke to a Naval Officer at the Docks, asking him to show authority for having us arrested and handcuffed, and his answer was - "my word is enough, we are at war".

We were put on board a large trawler used for mine-sweeping, called the "Guillemot". When it was beginning to get dark we heard somebody else coming aboard. It was Pádraic Ó Máille who had been arrested while on his way home to get to Connemara. We slept in hammocks that

night, and on the following day Mr. Leslie Edmunds, an Englishman, an official of the Congested Districts' Board in Galway, came on board and in a short time the ship's gun fired fourteen shells in on the land in the direction of Castlegar. We asked one of the sailors what they were firing at, and he said, "at a meeting of rebels". We spent two days and three nights on board the "Guillemot", anchored in the roads by day and cruising around the Bay between Galway and the Aran Islands by night. On the third day we were transferred to a mine-sweeper, the "Laburmm", where we met fourteen other prisoners - Dr. Tommy Walsh, Professor Steinberger, Tom Flanagan, Johnny Faller, Paddy Dunleavy, Joe Cummins, Pete Howley, William McGill, Tom Kilgarriff, Michael Ronayne, John Conroy, ___ Conway and two more whose names I can't remember. We were then brought by night to Cove, huddled together below in the bottom of the boat, ferociously sea-sick.

On arrival at Cove we were transferred to a large Man-of-War - the "Albion" - where we were kept for seven days. The "Albion" was afterwards sunk in the Dardanelles. While there I noticed among the Marines a man who was working in the kitchen at St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, when I was a student there. I couldn't attract his attention, and in any case he looked very sulky.

After seven days we were put on board a sloop, and brought around the coast to Dublin, landing at Dunleary in the early morning. From there we were brought to Richmond Barracks. We were put into an absolutely bare room, broken windows and no furniture of

any description, where we were kept for three days trying to snatch a half hour's sleep huddled up by the wall, and every now and then getting up to walk around trying to keep warm. After three days we were all marshalled out into the Barrack Square, along with many more men and word went round that we were going to be sent to England. Among the men whom I met on the Square were, Seán McDermott and Gearóid O'Sullivan. I remember Seán McDermott saying, "I don't think they will send me across", and sure enough in a very short time he was called back. So was Gearóid O'Sullivan, who had a lovely sweet cake which he handed to me when he was called back. I shared the cake with my fellow prisoners. Then we were marched off under escort through the streets to the North Wall, and there we boarded a ship that brought us to Holyhead, and then by train to London to Wandsworth Jail.

Arthur Griffith was one of the number. As soon as we were allowed to mix up in the prison yard and to talk, we said the Rosary in Irish every day. I gave it out and the rest answered. One day one of the officers of the prison sent down word, asking us if we would mind saying a decade of the Rosary for his son who had just been killed in the war. I put the question to all the men and with one voice they agreed to the request. So it was done.

We spent seven weeks in Wandsworth Jail, and then were sent to Frongoch Camp. We were in the North Camp, the South Camp being full before us.

When Hughie Thornton was being looked for to have

him conscripted, a large number of us refused to answer our names in order to shield him, and we were sent to the South Camp, which by this time had been emptied of prisoners, for punishment. One officer of the Camp knew my name as Thornton and I was picked up on two occasions for Hugh. But they satisfied themselves that I was not the man they wanted. Hugh, however, was discovered by them and they took him along and gave him a khaki uniform to put on. Instead of putting it on, he danced on it. Then he was courtmartialled and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

While in camp I had an Irish class, which was mainly composed of native speakers, who had not been able to read or write the language.

We were all released two days before Christmas, 1916, and I reached home on Christmas morning.

SIGNED: Micéal Ó'Donoghue

DATE 9th Dubreán 1950

WITNESS

Sean Brennan

