

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S. 375**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 375

Witness

Diarmuid O'Sullivan,
30 Seafield Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. 1909 - ;
Intelligence Officer 1917-21;
Close associate of Michael Collins.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1909 - 1921;
- (b) Intelligence work, G.P.O., 1917-21.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. **S.1294**

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STATEMENT BY DIARMUID O'SULLIVAN,
30 Seafield Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

I joined the I.R.B. in Killarney in 1909, and I was a member when I came to Dublin in March 1910. My brother, Father Denis, eased the minds of the I.R.B. in Dublin when he delivered a lecture in the old Town Hall, Clontarf, which is now St. Anthony's Chapel of Ease. Shortly afterwards Cathal Brugha initiated me into the I.R.B. in Killarney, and I attended all the meetings subsequent to that.

I was at the meeting where a resolution was passed by our section that there would be no physical force put into operation unless the majority of the people of Ireland wanted it. Cathal Brugha was at that meeting, which was held in Parnell Square. We met there every Wednesday.

I think we were No. 1 Circle of the I.R.B., but I forget the name of it. Before I came there the Circle was divided up, it had got too big with over one hundred in it. There were doctors and chemists in it. Deaken, who had a chemist's shop on the North Circular Road at Blacquiere Bridge, was with us. He left there and went down to Capel Street afterwards. Cathal Brugha, Seamus Hughes and Micheál Cowley were in the Circle too. Micheál Cowley, now one of the head men in the City Bank, was in Mackey's seed place at that time. Before the Rising Micheál Cowley or Diarmuid Lynch, I am not sure which, came and asked me if I could arrange to have I.R.B. circulars sent out to different people. He could give all the details about that. They went the circulars out afterwards from Mackeys pre-paid. Mackeys sent a lot of

stuff into the post office and they would be pre-paid. I think the Archbishop and lots of leading people in Ireland got the circulars, and there was consternation.

Before the Rebellion I took ill. I was completely run down and was out for nearly six months. I was exonerated from attending meetings or any form of physical work officially, but I kept in contact with Tom Clarke all the time.

I brought information to Tom Clarke from Mountjoy police station, from men on patrol who were watching certain movements. He told me that the information was quite correct, but that they had it already. He told me to keep in touch with them.

I have been waiting for some time for reports from Inspectors of postmen who co-operated in the Intelligence Section of the Post Office, under the Republic of Ireland, but so far they have not responded. The Chief Officer of the Uniformed Class was Martin Ryan who died last year. Both Martin and myself had worked for some time before Michael Collins, early in 1918, organised the work on a purely practical basis. The Telegraph Office was similarly organised, and the present Chief of Staff (Major General Archer) was in charge.

In 1917 I was in "correspondence" and I used bring home my correspondence to 33 Glengarriff Parade where I lived, and sometimes Martin would take it to a tailoring establishment at 47 or 48 Parnell Square, where Seán Morrissey worked. Morrissey was in "C" Company of the 1st Battalion, the same Company as my sons and the Floods were in. All through we used to bring it up to Mollôys in Frederick Street, and there was a Máire O'Neill and

another girl in Dorset Street where Martin brought his stuff.

When Michael Collins, as I have said, organised the work he appointed the late Captain Moynihan as Controller and myself as Superintendent and Martin Ryan as Inspector (in charge of the Uniform Section). At first when Captain Moynihan was issuing orders the men resented him very much as he had come from Cork under a shadow, being reduced from the rank of Superintendent to that of Sorting Clerk, and besides his Republican outlook was under suspicion. Martin Ryan came to me with instructions to approach Michael Collins and inform him that the men would not work for Moynihan.

I contacted Michael at Joint No. 2, which was Liam Devlin's public-house in Parnell Street, and I had reason to remember the incident as I had some correspondence for Michael, and shortly after, having arranged matters, we were surrounded by the military. Needless to say, Michael immediately decamped, there was always a place of escape at Devlins in case of an emergency. Devlin took charge of the correspondence and hid it under the footboard of the perambulator.

Now to come back to the subject of my interview: Michael - "You say they won't work with Paddy Moynihan?" "Yes", I said, "that's why I am here seeing you". Michael: "Well, now, go back and tell those men that I am arranging all this business and that I want them to take their instructions from both Paddy Moynihan and yourself". But before he said this he asked me very bluntly and lowered his head into my face, "Will you work with him?" Needless to say I had taken note of the fact that Michael was very determined and immediately answered

in the affirmative. I went back with my message to Martin Ryan and explained what had transpired. Some days after Captain Moynihan brought a written document containing our appointments, viz., Controller, Superintendent and Inspector respectively, for Moynihan, myself and Martin.

Moynihan was '118, I was 118A, Martin was 118B, and we had two others "C" and "D", I forget their names. First there were three of us, we became five officially and by degrees we took in more. We had associates - fellows who would be friendly, and we went up to "F".

After we were officially appointed we did not go to Molloys, although Mick said I could go there because sometimes I would find it hard to come down from the Rink and go down Parnell Square. We had to get places outside. We had McMahon's, the dairy in Parnell Street, we had Devlin's, and we had a public-house belonging to Seamus Kirwan. I used to go down to Vaughan's Hotel every Sunday and meet Dermot O'Hegarty, Gearóid O'Sullivan, Piaras Beaslaoi, and sometimes Mick Collins would be there. We met together like a family. I used to go to see Mick in the Gresham Hotel. I was a personal friend of Mick Collins all the way through, and after the Treaty was passed he personally paid a tribute to the work Captain Moynihan and myself had done for him. His exact words were, "Diarmuid, you, and 118 have served me well. I shall never forget it for you". Those words were said to me after Mick had arrived at Joint No. 2, where Frank Thornton and others were waiting for him; I was immediately in Frank's company and Mick had a glass of sherry with us. I never met Mick or spoke to him after that.

Very often written instructions would come to the Controller to capture certain documents (letters). The orders in the first case came to me from the Controller and I should pass them on to the Inspector. One week it would be letters addressed to County Inspectors, and another week District Inspectors, and again the Commissioner of Police, the Castle, the Chief Secretary and Under-Secretary. Carson said at one time that every post office in Ireland was a hive of Sinn Féiners, even though the captured items never left the G.P.O.

It will be remembered that in the summer of 1919 Paddy Kennedy and his associates walked into the Rink platform and at the point of the gun took the Castle mail bag away, which no doubt caused consternation. This feat could not be repeated, as two uniformed police and two plain-clothes detectives accompanied the mail afterwards and saw it landed on the table of the State Section - that part of the office which contained all State correspondence. Joe Leonard and a dozen or more men also made a morning raid on the post office and got away with a lot of stuff, even though the Castle had made provision to be communicated with in the event of an attempted raid, but the Castle did not take into account that every form of communication was already tapped by men who were officially attached to the Engineering Section, and as all communications to the Castle were cut, the Sorting Office Desk Clerk did not realise that his "switch" under his table could not operate, hence Joe Leonard and his boys got away unmolested - I was in the office that morning.

Now, we had to circumvent the Castle hacks who dominated the control of the G.P.O. I may here mention

that all officers of the Post Office who held key positions were Freemasons - the Secretary, the Controller, the senior Floor Superintendent, various Assistant Superintendents and Overseers, and Protestant Sorting Clerks, who were in the running for promotion, and all watching for culprits. How did we evade them? We did, right up to the finish.

When the Castle mail arrived it was dealt with in the ordinary way, and was placed in that part of the trough at the News and large letters sorting table. Here is where I came in. When we had got certain orders, it was a part of my duty to secure a friend for the "wind up" where "late fee" and Government letters were sorted. The postman in the State Section would hand-stamp the Castle correspondence and carefully keep aside the letters we wanted, the man at the "wind up" would put these letters into the Dublin City box, there were two boxes, Martin Ryan would carefully collect the Dublin special stuff, take it to the Postmen's office and dump it into a bag he had hanging near where he worked himself. Martin and I have since come to the conclusion that the Inspector did not want to see him, even if he did. If there was a suspicion that the Postmen's office was being watched, our man was ordered to put the letters into the Belfast box.

Martin, too, had to collect the correspondence for North 4, which included Belfast, and take it to the dispatching table, where he placed the Belfast stuff after carefully examining it, and setting aside the ones he wanted. His duty also was to bring all mis-sorts, etc., to the Blind Desk, where Captain Moynihan and I rotated duties. The correspondence was then assorted

and tied up with the face of the outside letters turned down, and a slip of paper bearing the words "Blind Correspondence" in blue pencil attached to the bundle underneath the string by which the letters were tied.

This correspondence was in many cases taken to Knocknagow Dairy if suitable, to Devlin's or Jim Kerwin's. Very often the correspondence would be at our Headquarters before the mails would leave the yard. Further to all this we had sometimes to change our tactics, instead of sending the correspondence through any circuitous route we would have the letters put on top of the sorting table with Blind Correspondence. This correspondence usually found its way to the Blind Desk and would be dealt with in the manner I have already indicated.

Of course this work could not have been done if the Assistant Book Officer at the time, Jack Hogan, R.I.P., one of P.S. O'Hegarty's London Irishmen, had not co-operated with us. He was able to put a friend on the "wind up" and allow a reliable man on the "spare", who cleared the "blind" correspondence and brought it to the "Blind Desk". Tim Hill, one of the sorters, a County Cork man, was most useful and reliable in this capacity, he often took correspondence out for me.

So much for the outgoing in the case of large letters.

At the primary sorting tables for small letters there was a particular place for "blind" correspondence and Irish addressed letters. Our friends would put any wanted letters with the Irish correspondence, and like the case of the large letters would come in due course to the "Blind Desk" where they would be dealt with.

I remember one Sunday evening being asked by the

Supervisor in charge to give him a hand at the "wind up" for small letters, which I did, and the very second letter I sorted was addressed to the Commissioner of Police. Needless to say I had it sent to the "Blind Desk". I opened that letter myself and saw where a woman was reporting a number of suspicious young men each night going James's Harbour way. I had that case dealt with immediately and it was some years afterwards, when Seán O'Brien and myself were comparing notes, that it transpired that he was one of seven who were doing special duty in that place, and the capture of that letter saved their lives. If the informer had not been a woman she would have paid the penalty due to such informers. Seán O'Brien is now on the printing staff at Dollard's.

From the time we started, the correspondence was at the bottom of everything that was done. Paddy Daly told me that they often wondered why orders that had been given were suddenly countermanded. Of course, he or the rank and file did not know of the Intelligence Section's work in the post office. Our lips were sealed. In fact my own son, who was sentenced to be hanged, did not know I was in the I.R.B. I never told him, and he was very vexed with me because there were lots of things he could have done, but I could not open my lips and I could not say what way I was situated with Mick Collins, even my wife did not know I was in the I.R.B. and she was a member of Cumann na mBan and has her Service Medal.

There were several instances I could relate, but I have given you a good idea how we were able to capture several letters. In fact we got one addressed to Carson himself and a bulky one it was, and another about the same time for the County Inspector, Enniskillen. I had

the pleasure of handling those letters.

When Michael Collins had two rooms in the Gresham Hotel I was privileged to see him there. On one occasion I had a bundle of letters which contained one that came by aeroplane to the Curragh and was for the Paymasters Army office. Michael had one room for himself, and when I knocked at the first door I was told to go around to the next, which was opened by Michael himself. He opened the letter that came by 'plane and when I saw it was a mere form asking that the officer's salary be sent to an address in the Isle of Wight, I apologized to Michael for having disturbed him, as that particular letter was principally the reason why I called. "There you are", said Michael, "If I had not organised the Intelligence side of the Post Office, I suppose you'd be taking that letter with the others to your own Company". The letter was from a Captain White and Michael and his men were for three months previously trying to trace him.

Before Michael organised the Intelligence section Martin and I utilised the Companies we were in touch with. My sons were attached to "C" Company, 1st Battalion, and Seán Morrissey was living with us. He was a tailor and worked in Parnell Square, opposite the back entrance to the Rink. Martin took letters to him also, as well as to Máire O'Neill of Dorset Street, and I took letters to the Misses Molloy of Frederick Street, they had a bakery there.

There was one other incident I would like to mention. A friend of ours was opening the mail bags arriving at the State office off the night mail. I was on the "Blind Desk" and every time he got a bundle of letters

for the Castle there would be so many of them that the Post Office staff would tie them in bundles. This young man would shout at the top of his voice, "Another blind bundle, Jerry". The trouble was to get them out, as it was past the normal hours of duty -- there was a duty 3.20 p.m. to 11 p.m. The Superintendent was a personal friend of mine, he is now dead, R.I.P.

A friend of mine had given me half a pint of poteen. In fact he was a policeman. There was an overseer on duty that I thought was watching me, but I now think I was mistaken, as two of his sons were in the Volunteers. Anyway, the Superintendent sent him home, and I gave the poteen to the Superintendent and he and another went into the Desk Clerk's office and I was permitted to go home with my load.

I went home by the Black Church, across Nelson Street, into the lane at the back of the nursing home in Eccles Street, into Leo Street and through North Circular Road to 33 Glengarriff Parade, where I then lived, and where a Volunteer, one of "C" Company, 1st Battalion, was. He took the correspondence (a very useful bundle) to Headquarters, Brunswick Street, as Pearse Street was then called. It was the first indication he had of the work that was being done in the Sorting Office, and needless to say it surprised him. That Volunteer was out in 1916 and took part in several ambushes in Dublin. He was afterwards blown to bits in Kerry.

It will be remembered that the Volunteer Headquarters published a Bulletin, and, for reasons that we could not understand, they kept sending it through the post, even though they were informed of its being confiscated by the postal officials, on instructions from the British

Army authorities. The procedure in that case was: a Protestant postman was detailed to look out for the Bulletin and take it to the Superintendent, who in turn would have the bundle made up and would, himself, put the bundle into the London mail bag. A friend in that section, seeing the operation, would inform me, and tell me that the bundle was transferred to the "Small Towns" bag, and for me to go to Westland Row, see a friend and tell him what happened. The boat staff would be joining the mail train at Westland Row. The instructions would be duly carried out. The "Small Towns" bag would be opened in the Boat Post Office, and the knife given to the string that carefully kept the bundle intact and the contents thrown out the port-hole and consigned to the Irish Sea.

There was a further case which illustrates the stupidity of the British. A motor messenger would arrive at the Rink with correspondence. He would have a slip to indicate the hour he left Headquarters and the hour of his arrival at the Rink. It might be 11.59 a.m., 12 noon, or 12.1 p.m. The exact hour of arrival was duly noted on the slip. Now this to my own knowledge had been occurring for several months, but before that messenger would leave the Sorting Office the official letters would have been transferred to our Headquarters.

The operation was very simple. The officer who ticked in the mails (collections, etc.) would give this particular correspondence to the Head Postman, a trusted servant as was thought, but he in turn always found an opportunity to hand the necessary items to Captain Moynihan, and that continued, as I have said, for several months.

When matters grew very hot Moynihan would stay out sick, he could always conveniently suffer from insomnia, but Martin and I would then double our efforts. It was obvious why Moynihan would feign sickness; it was so that he could not be directly associated with our work in the Post Office. Paddy was devilishly clever but still he was useful, and we, Martin and I, got on very well with him.

When the boycott was imposed on the Northern banks, Martin and I confiscated hundreds of bank letters, and our operations were so successful that instructions would come from Headquarters that they could not deal with all the correspondence, and to take matters easier.

The Army men would call daily for their post and Paddy Moynihan made it a point to be very friendly with one of them who promised him a ride in an armoured car which was used for the mails, and one day Paddy wanted to get stuff out and the place was surrounded by military. Paddy said to Jock, "You are always promising me a run in the armoured car. Will you give me a run to-day?" Jock took Paddy out in the car, past the military, and Paddy at the same time was loaded with stuff.

Another time we had a big bag of stuff in the post office, but how to get it out was the bother. Paddy was very resourceful and was a genius of the first water, and he made arrangements to get a horse cab to take out the stuff. We utilised Mackeys again, and said that Mackeys had sent over the stuff but that the packets were overweight and he wanted it back in order to extract some of the items from the packets. He got the porter to bring in a wheelbarrow to take the bag of stuff out to the cab, and the cab took it to Headquarters. A

messenger boy used to come with a badge on his arm, and they used think he was an auxiliary postman, that he was a temporary, but no, he was in our service; Paddy personally dealt with him.

Our part was as important a part of the movement as the physical force side, because we got all the spies. Bloody Sunday was troubling me for a long time afterwards.

At that time the telephones were directly under London. The telephone people could not go out to Gormanston to collect the telephone money because they were threatened with a gun by the Tans. They complained to the head office in London, and we captured the letter. That letter was published in "Nationality" and it caused consternation. You will find that letter in the pages of Griffith's paper. That was about 1920 or early 1921.

I have given you what I consider a very condensed account of our work in the Post Office. Before the Truce, John Hogan sent me on the South Travelling Post Office. I took correspondence from Michael Collins to Dónal Ó Ceallacháin, who was then Lord Mayor of Cork, in hiding.

SIGNED

Seamus Kallinan

DATE

12th April 1950

WITNESS

J. Keenan

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