

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 523

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 523

Witness

Richard Connolly,
12 Iveragh Road,
Whitehall,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. London, 1902 - ;
Member of Irish Volunteers London, 1913 - ;
London Representative on Supreme Council of I.R.B.
1913 - .

Subject.

- (a) National associations 1901-1915;
- (b) Election of I.R.B. Executive, September 1913;
- (c) Military Committee I.R.B. 1915;
- (d) Supreme Council I.R.B. 1914-1915.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S.342

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NO. W.S. 523

STATEMENT BY MR. RICHARD CONNOLLY,

12 Iveragh Road, Drumcondra, Dublin.

I went to London in 1901 to take up an appointment in the General Post Office and in 1902 I was initiated into the I.R.B.

The G.A.A. was the first association I joined. I belonged to the Club called the "Hibernians", and Dr. David Barry, Footballer and Hurler, was President of this Club. Those of us employed in the G.P.O. then started one of our own known as "Eire Og". William McCarthy was President of it. He was the donor of the present All-Ireland Hurling Cup. Sam Maguire, in commemoration of whom the All-Ireland Football Cup was presented by his friends, was prominent in the G.A.A. and Gaelic League in London as well as the I.R.B.

I was also a member of the Gaelic League and a member of the Irish National Club in Chancery Lane. The President of this Club was Dr. Mark Ryan, and Michael McWhite, up to lately Minister of the Republic in Rome, was Secretary. I joined the I.R.B. in 1902 in this Club in Chancery Lane, where the Section I was attached to met, and I was sworn in by Michael McWhite.

The I.R.B. in London was organised in Sections. We did not call them Circles. We had from twelve to fourteen Sections in London, and they usually met in the halls that we used for Ceilis. This Club was pretty well watched. It was just off Fleet Street. We were visited twice a year, I think, by a representative of the Supreme Council from Dublin. The earliest visitor we had was P.T. ^{DALY} Dolan. We had Fred Allen as a visitor up to the year 1913. We had Jack O'Hanlon too. We had a section in Peckham which was called the Davis Section. We had a branch of the

Gaelic League there called the Thomas Davis Branch and we used that as a cover for our activities.

I became a Section Master in 1907 of the Thomas Davis Section. We had a Section Board in London which met about once in every six weeks. In the summer of 1913, which was the election period, the biennial elections, when P.S. O'Hegarty went over to Cobh on transfer from the G.P.O., London, I was elected chairman of the Section Board for London, and I became a member of the County Sections Board. Sam Maguire was the secretary and I think Sean Hurley (killed in 1916) was treasurer. The chairman, secretary and treasurer formed the Executive. It was on the lines of the Supreme Council arrangement. It was very difficult to do anything in London; the more people one knew the more difficult it was. A lot of them were G.A.A. people who were taken up with games, and until the Volunteers started the I.R.B. made little progress. The English Volunteers organisation was started during the Boer War. There were shooting galleries got up for English people who could not join the Volunteers, and it was just to keep them in touch with military work. All our men joined those clubs to avail themselves of the training in the use of the rifle. They kept on in the various sections. The Post Office itself had one particular Volunteer Corps called the 24th Middlesex, and a lot of our fellows joined it and a few of those who did join later joined the British army and were killed fighting in India.

I was chairman of the Section Board in 1913 when the Volunteers started in London. They started there before Christmas in December 1913. We took a hall and we had two drill masters - one was Sergeant Scanlan, and the other was Louis Noble, who was a Pipe Major in our army for a while. Noble was in the Post Office Engineering

Branch and he had been in the 24th Middlesex Volunteers, and he and Scanlan were the two chief men. Scanlan rejoined his Colours in August 1914 when the war broke out. Noble did not. When we started, we had about 1,000 Volunteers in the G.A.A. grounds on Sundays and in the halls twice a week. The hall was a German gymnasium. It was the Germans who built it for their own colonies in London, where they had boxing, gymnastics, etc. It was blown up by a German bomb in 1917.

Mick Collins was one of the heads of the Volunteer leaders at the time, also Patrick Egan, ^{MAGUIRE} Tyrrellspass, who has been a gunner and who rejoined the British Navy at the outbreak of the war. The Redmond call for Volunteers took a lot of them and the number dwindled to about 200. The remainder continued drilling in St. George's Hall up to May, 1915.

All through 1915 they were talking of conscription and there was a lot of talk about it before Christmas. Great pressure was exerted in the first instance, on the unmarried men to volunteer for the forces. In the end, conscription embraced all, married and single.

As I have previously stated, when P.S. O'Hegarty returned to Ireland in August 1913, I was elected representative for London on the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. and O'Hegarty was co-opted at the meeting of the Council in October 1913. The first full meeting of the Supreme Council I attended was at the end of September 1913. The Larkin Strike was going on. That meeting was held at Maginn's (the library) at Clontarf Town Hall. It was at this meeting that the Executive was elected. Seamus Deakin was elected chairman of the Executive and president of the Council. Sean McDermott was elected secretary and Tom Clarke treasurer.

Sean McDermott was the representative for Connaught. Mulholland represented Scotland and was at that meeting. Hobson was in attendance and represented Leinster. Dermot Lynch represented Munster and I remember him being there. Denis McCullough represented Ulster. Joe Gleeson represented north-east England. P.S. O'Hegarty was a co-opted member, also Tom Clarke and Dan Braniff, and the fourth co-option was Seamus Deakin; he was a chemist living near Mountjoy.

At that meeting in September 1913, there was no talk of starting Volunteers at that time. There was some little trouble in the north-east of England and it was getting worse. Manchester and Liverpool were not pulling together very well and that occupied a lot of the business of the meeting. There was some trouble with Seamus Barrett, Manchester. He was a bit difficult, and representations were made to the Supreme Council, to the secretary, and to Tom Clarke, to curb him.

There were Dublin rows too. A lot of the business had to be left in the hands of the Executive. In fact, most of the business was left in the hands of the Executive as the duration of the meeting, that is, from 10.30 a.m. until 6.30 p.m., once a quarter, would not allow for much business being completed.

The next meeting I attended was in January 1914. I think that meeting was held in the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, North Frederick St. The Volunteers were in existence then. The only thing at that meeting that I remember was that Clarke was insistent that the Volunteers should be used for war and he got very excited at that meeting. I will deal with that in the 1915 period. There was nothing very important discussed at that meeting. I think there was an emergency meeting held because of the Redmond demand for the control of the Volunteer Executive.

At the May 1914 meeting nothing important was discussed except that Clarke said he was not pleased with the fact that the I.R.B. members of the Volunteers were not forging to the front and getting to be section leaders and company commanders in the Volunteers. The I.R.B. men were to be pushed into these posts right away.

In June 1914, there was a special meeting called in connection with Hobson's action over the Redmond demand for representation on the Volunteer Executive. That was about three weeks before the Howth Arms running. That meeting was held, I think, in 77 Amiens St. in Clarke's or Holohan's house. It was a short meeting, Gleeson was there. The Scottish members were not there, as it was called at short notice. Gleeson, McCullough, Sean McDermott, Tom Clarke, Deakin, P.S. O'Hegarty and Dermot Lynch were present. Hobson was not summoned to it, but he was summoned to the following meeting. The question was considered as to how far the I.R.B. men would be of use to the Volunteers and, of course, McDermott took the long view. He said it was worth while to let Hobson remain on the Executive of the Volunteers. The war was threatened at the time. Clarke was insistent that the Volunteers should be made the nucleus of a fighting force no matter who controlled them, and he was more inclined to allow Hobson have his way for the time being.

The hottest meeting of the whole lot was in the end of September 1914, when Hobson was "on the carpet" over the Volunteers, and Clarke threatened to resign because there was ^{an} ~~the~~ idea of how far they would be able to use the Volunteers. He put forward his view that something should be done before the war ended. Clarke said definitely that, Volunteers or no Volunteers, he was going to let out some force during the occasion, that if they did not strike

during the war, they were damned for posterity. He discussed Casement's mission to America and he said he was going to splice Casement's mission by getting in touch with Devoy. That meeting finished up by agreeing with Clarke that before the war finished, the Council should take war action. I was quite certain Hobson was at that meeting. At the September 1914 meeting he tendered his resignation and he was allowed out. At that meeting there was no provision made for a successor. It was a fight between Hobson and Clarke. It seems, in the interval, Hobson was not living up to Clarke's ideal. I don't know who succeeded him.

About the middle of January 1915, we had a meeting in the Town Hall, Clontarf. That was a very important meeting. The military committee was mentioned at the September meeting and it was deferred to the January meeting. The military committee was certainly formed before Easter 1915. I fix that by the following:- On Holy Thursday of 1915, in the second week of April, two men arrived in London with introductions from Casement. One of these was a German officer named Boehm, and he was introduced to me as "Mr. Armstrong". The other was Anthony James Brogan, who was editor of "The Irish American", a newspaper circulating in the U.S.A. It appears that paper was parliamentary and that Brogan was in low water as the paper was failing. He got in touch with the German Embassy in America who made contact for him with Casement in Germany. The two arrived in Hull in Mid-March 1915. We had this information from the file in the British Home Office as Tom Donoghue, a member of the I.R.B., was in that office and he came across the file. The file showed that the report had been seen by the British Ambassador to America and that information had been supplied to him about Brogan.

He was attached to the Germans as an intelligence man, so Brogan informed us. He brought a letter from Casement to Mrs. Green, and a friend of mine, who visited her, 'phoned me on the Holy Thursday and said a gentleman wanted to see me. I met Brogan and he introduced me to "Mr. Armstrong", Armstrong hardly said a word at the meeting. Brogan was talking all the time and said he was told Mrs. Green could put him in touch with someone in London and contact Dublin. I do not know what was Armstrong's mission, but it must have been very important. The full information was in the Foreign Office file and was transmitted to the Home Office as it was stated that Brogan had stayed at the ~~General~~ ^{KINGSLEY} Hotel in Hull the previous weekend in company with another gentleman who spoke English with an American accent. We had an understanding with Brogan that nothing was to be done until Saturday, when Mr. Armstrong would have left the country again. I had arranged to meet Brogan on the Strand. He was staying in a first-class hotel known as the Kingsway Hotel. I had already sent a message across to McDermott to tell him about this individual and stating that someone should come across from Dublin and "get" him, that he should be silenced, or to see what he was. I knew Brogan's record and, though I pointed this out to him, he prevailed on me to see him again at the same place. On Monday morning he went to the American Embassy with a letter of introduction from Joseph Tumulty, who was American Secretary of State. He told the American Embassy that he had reason to believe that a plot was going to be laid against his life and he went to the American Consul, and at 2 o'clock he went into Scotland Yard and contacted Quinn, Head of the Secret Service Branch, and showed him his documents, and he showed him a note from the American Embassy, and said he would hold them responsible if anything happened to him.

I informed him I could not see him again until I heard from Dublin and would fix an appointment for him if such was to be made. I avoided him until I heard from Sean McDermott. When Sean came over from Dublin we met at Frascati's restaurant. We were there in a private room. Tierney, a steward on a Norwegian vessel, and O'Leary, who was married to Count Plunkett's daughter - both members of the I.R.B. - were present. The meeting lasted from 7 o'clock until 12 o'clock. Brogan appeared to be confused. He said in the early stages that whether the Volunteers fought or not, the Germans intended to create a diversion in Ireland. He admitted he was an Intelligence man himself. He said he could see that the organisation in Dublin did not want to do any fighting. Sean and he had a hot argument. Sean told him to get out and keep out of Irish affairs. After this meeting Brogan shadowed me all over the place, endeavouring to make contact with some of our men in Liverpool and Glasgow. He wanted information for the Germans. Eventually I told him I could have nothing more to do with him. This meeting in Frascati's took place about the middle of May. The next and last place I saw Brogan was at the Parnell monument on the evening of the O'Donovan-Rossa funerals. He told me then he was going to Spain.

Two or three months after the funeral, Tom Donoghue received the pamphlet "Freedom of the Seas" in London. This was a German publication. We heard nothing more from October 1915, until some war correspondent came back from Italy and said Brogan had been turned into the hands of the Earl of Cavan and that he had been shot as a spy. This war correspondent, although London-born, had Irish connections. My opinion of Brogan is that he was genuine, but that he was carrying the German spy business too far, and I think Casement must have got the idea that he was genuine too,

because otherwise he would not have given him the letter. He was in a position to judge him better than I was. Seven or eight weeks was the limit of my acquaintance with Brogan. Devoy has denounced him; he naturally created mischief all right.

At the January meeting of 1915 I think there was something about the military committee. I am certain of that. I had a discussion with Sean McDermott in May 1915, when he came to London to meet Brogan, and I asked him about it and he said it had been formed. He gave me the names of those who were in it - Ceannt, Pearse and Flunkett. He said they were not doing a great deal of work yet. At this meeting at Maginn's in January 1915, the military committee were sitting apart from us. The arrangement was that they were sitting in the next room which was separated from our room by folding doors, but these doors were pushed back. I was rather surprised when I saw Pearse there. It was the first time I knew he was in the I.R.B. He was sitting in the corner and I heard one of the other two who were with him was Ceannt. Before the discussion started, I was told this was the military committee. Whether that was the first meeting or an emergency one from September 1914, I cannot say. The Supreme Council had sanctioned the military committee before the May meeting of 1915 and the committee had been formed. One reason for forming the committee was this:- In January 1915, the discussion turned on the Citizen Army and I think it was McDermott brought it up that there was an understanding between Countess Markievicz and Connolly that if any attempt was made to disarm ~~them~~ the Citizen Army they would come out and strike. It was not to force the hands of the I.R.B. The committee was formed after that discussion so as to get a grip on the Citizen Army as well as the I.R.B. Volunteers. It was nearly twelve months later when Connolly disappeared. I distinctly remember that the

people I have mentioned were at the house in Clontarf, and that was in January. Ceannt did not take part in that meeting.

After McDermott came over to me about Brogan, there was a meeting early in July, some short while before the O'Donovan Rossa funeral. That was the last meeting of the 1913 elected council. There was nothing important at that meeting except that there was information that O'Donovan Rossa was dying and it was decided to have the funeral immediately in order to get a boost up for the organisation. The biennial elections were held between the middle of July and the end of August. For a couple of weeks nothing was done. The first meeting I remember after the elections I came over for the co-option of the four co-opted men. It would be about the end of September. I represented south-east England. Joe Gleeson represented north-east England. Pat McCormack represented Scotland. Denis McCullough represented Ulster - he was not present, as he was in prison. Dermot Lynch represented Munster. Alec McCabe represented Connaught. I don't remember who represented Leinster. Clarke and McDermott were co-opted, but I cannot say about Hegarty this time. I don't remember Pearse being co-opted at that meeting. I remember Pat McCartan being co-opted. Hegarty was in Welshpool at the time, and I don't recollect about Pearse at the moment.

The next meeting I attended was about the 10th November 1915. McCullough had been released from prison and was in attendance. He was unanimously elected President and Chairman of the Executive. It was decided then that the next meeting would be held after Christmas. At the September meeting I don't think there was much done outside the co-options and the formation of the new Council. I think discussions took place on the work of the military

committee. Clarke was insistent from 1914 that he would never allow the occasion of the war to pass without having a fight and whether the Council was with him or not he was going to come out himself. He had been in touch with Connolly. They were half afraid. Connolly would 'steal the thunder'. Since Clarke had waited so long for the opportunity to strike, he was not guided by the military committee's advice.

I was not present at the meeting of January 1916. It was very difficult for anyone in England to get across at the time. The conscription affair was on and permits were now being issued. From that on no one could come from England without going through Scotland Yard.

Sean McDermott told me on the visit to London to which I have referred that everyone could see then that sooner or later the Americans would come into the war. Sean added that before the Americans came into the war they would have a tussle, that they would have a better chance of sympathy. For a start off, he said, our contact with America would be broken. He added that before America was forced into the war we would have to have a fight. O'Hegarty is wrong in his statement on this subject in his book "The Victory of Sinn Fein". Of course, Sean may have said as much to O'Hegarty, but to me Sean said that the only hope of any German assistance, he believed, would come through Devoy. Sean also said to me: "You know Clarke's views on this point" and I said: "Yes, that he intended to bring a clash about before the opportunity slipped". Sean added that nothing was being done except what I knew - no month was mentioned, but it was intended to make a trial before the Americans entered the war. From a discussion I had with Dermot Lynch in 1921, I gathered there was nothing definite in January 1916, of

the date of the Rising. The military committee was getting ready. The only thing that was stated time and again was Tom Clarke's expressed intention and his determination to have a tryout before the war ended. He did not mention the Americans entering the war, but Sean did.

The time given to our meetings of the Supreme Council was short. Only on one occasion did the meeting run into two days - that was in September 1915. It usually started between 9 and 10 a.m. and ended about 7 p.m. A good deal of it was routine such as the taking of reports. Until 1915, when the military committee was formed, there were very few military discussions. That is why, at the January 1915 meeting, the military committee was formed, and that was the first time I knew Pearse was in the organisation. The only curb on the military committee was the Executive. The Supreme Council did not count so much at all in 1914 and 1915 - it was the Executive that counted. Deakin resigned at the end of 1914 and his resignation was accepted at the January 1915 meeting. Pearse, Ceannt and Plunkett were present as the military committee. McCullough would have been in touch with the military committee from ~~September~~ ^{NOVEMBER} until Easter Week.

Signed: Richard Connolly

Date: 5th June 1951

Witness: Mr F Ryan Connolly

