

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913
No. W.S. 593

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 593

Witness

Eamon Martin,
4, The Rise,
Mount Merrion,
Dublin.

Identity.

Director of Organisation and Recruiting,
Fianna Éireann, 1915-1916;

Commandant Dublin Battalion Fianna Éireann 1915-16;
Chief of Staff " " 1917-'20.

Subject.

Irish Race Convention, Paris, 1922;
De Valera to Paris.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.114

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY ÉAMON MARTIN

4 The Rise, Mount Merrion, Dublin.

IRISH RACE CONVENTION 1922.

De Valera to Paris.

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| BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 |
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In 1922 in the Truce period, Liam Mellows with whom I had been working in the Purchases Department (though I was not on the pay-roll) came to me to say that De Valera wanted to get to Paris to the Irish Race Convention. As he anticipated delaying obstacles if he applied for his passport in the normal way, Liam asked me to go to London and prepare a passport for him. For some time previous to this 'we' had the use of a "Workshop" in Waterloo Road, London, where we had carried out work of a similar nature.

I crossed to London on that Sunday or Monday night and a few mornings later Seán McBride came to my hotel room to say that De Valera had arrived and to enquire if I was ready for him. I was not ready, as on my arrival I learned that our regular cameraman was away in Bournemouth. I had sent word to him and was now awaiting his return to London. I should mention that for our purpose this man always produced a "bad" photograph.

De Valera was impatient to get to Paris to forestall the election of a Treaty Party nominee as Chairman of the Race Convention. In fact Eoin MacNeill - the Treaty Party selection - had also arrived in London that morning, en route to Paris. That being so, De Valera was persuaded, or decided, not to wait for "my" passport, but to try and bluff his way through. Accordingly, he and Seán McBride proceeded to, I think, Dover. Here, however, De Valera was subjected to an examination which did not satisfy the

Embarkation Officials and he was requested to "stand aside". He and McBride made their "escape" and returned to London. I do not know what papers he had or on what he was relying to get through. I think it was some plan of Seán's which did not come off. I should mention that I did not know until early the next morning that this attempt had been made.

De Valera then decided on taking a chance and getting his photo at one of the commercial Passport Studios. We had this done in a studio opposite Charing Cross Station, and with this photo I proceeded to work - to fake a passport. I believe that the method adopted - and the manner in which I proceeded to prepare the passport should not be made public at this time - but I attach a full detailed account of the matter for the Bureau of Military History.

As De Valera was to travel as a Priest, it had been arranged that Father Tim Shanley of New York, who was visiting Ireland at the time, would accompany him, and I availed of his presence in London. When I explained to him how I wanted to "use" him, he knew, as I did, that he was taking grave risks - both in regard to the Law in England and with his own Ecclesiastical Authorities, but he brushed all consequences aside. I also availed of help from Seán Nunan, who was of valuable assistance himself and particularly by certain introductions he gave me. The parts played by these two men have been recorded in the account for the historical record.

De Valera got safely to Paris on the faked passport, and he was in time to be elected President of the Race Convention. I followed him a few days later with another passport - this time he was an Engineer - to be used on the return journey in case his disguise as a Priest became

known to the British Authorities. In fact it never did become known and De Valera returned on the same passport, as a Priest.

Meantime, before he left London, De Valera was rather worried about the negative of his photo as a Priest in the Charing Cross Studio, and I promised him I would do what I could about that. The day after he, with McBride, Father Shanley and Seán Nunan, left for Paris, I, accompanied by two friends, called to the Studio ostensibly to get reprints, and by a ruse, planned in advance, we succeeded in stealing the negative.

In an account written by Maura Lavery - she gives Seán McBride the credit for the handling of the whole affair in connection with the passport. Beyond accompanying De Valera, Seán had no part in the matter at all.

Maura Lavery writes :-

"As Seán McBride said afterwards, to disguise and smuggle a man of Mr de Valera's physical calibre from one country to another was not easy. Yet this task was twice assigned to him, and each time he carried it out successfully.

"The first time he had to smuggle "these seizable goods" was the occasion of an Irish conference in Paris. Mr. de Valera travelled as "Father Kelly" on a passport supplied by friends in London.

"The story of how an unsuspecting London photographer was induced to supply a photograph for the faked passport, and of the subsequent raid on the photographer's premises so that the incriminating negative might be destroyed belongs among the best effort of E. Phillips Dppenheim or William le Queux".

In point of fact there was no question of "inducing" an "unsuspecting photographer". De Valera was a casual clergyman traveller requiring passport photos. Nor was there a subsequent "raid" on the Studio.

The two friends who accompanied me had been 'in' on

the making of the passport and were Englishmen. Maura Laverty gives the name of the Priest whom De Valera was impersonating as "Father Kelly". In fact the passport was made out for a "Father Walsh" who had been in Rockwell with De Valera and whose address at this time was Cahir, County Tipperary.

On Tuesday or Wednesday night there was a fairly large gathering in the Irish Club in Charing Cross Road. I was there with Seán Nunan, Seán McGrath, Art O'Brien and others who were going to the Convention, and most of the talk was about the Convention. Towards the end of the evening I found myself alone with a man to whom Seán Nunan had introduced me - I think his name was MacDonnell. In casual conversation I learned that he was in the British Civil Service, some branch of the Foreign Office. I asked him if he had any influence with the Passport Office and he said as a matter of fact a very great friend of his held some executive position there. I then told him that I had a Priest friend who had only recently undergone an operation, that he had come over to London with me for a kind of a holiday and would now like to go on to the South of France - if he could get a passport in time to cross over with me. MacDonnell said he was sure his friend could arrange that and he immediately took me over to his bachelor flat, somewhere in the vicinity of Leicester Square, and wrote me an introduction to his friend - a Mr. Oliver. Very early next morning I got in touch with Father Shanley. By this time I had learned of the abortive attempt made by De Valera to get away with McBride.

I told Father Shanley of the introduction and that I wanted him as Father Walsh to come with me and we would make this 'emergency' application for a passport. I told him of the consequences if the plan went wrong. He fully appreciated the risk, but was prepared to do anything required of him. His bulk belied his 'sickness' but we agreed that he was liable to post-operational haemorrhages, hence his deep anxiety to have some friend travel with him. We got Father Shanley's pictures taken and waited for them and then we - I believe Seán Nunan accompanied us - went to see Oliver. When I enquired for him (I actually had my hand on the letter of introduction) the Clerk looked rather taken aback and said "Did you not hear - he's dead", and when I said - quite shocked - "What?", he said "Yes, quite sudden - he was here in the office only last Thursday". I immediately put on an act - as if Oliver had been a great friend of mine, and the clerk and I began to recall all Oliver's good qualities. After a while the clerk asked me if there was anything he could do for me and I explained the position in regard to my friend Father Walsh. He said he would have a word with the Chief, which he did, and after a little while, called me in to an inner sanctum. Here the Chief and I went through the same condolences and eventually got to the purpose of my call. He explained how careful they had to be in these matters - particularly in regard to an Irishman (incidentally, I, myself, was holding a British passport in the name of E. P. Cardiff) - but finally said he would have the passport issued as Father Walsh was a friend of mine and I was vouching for his bona fides. He called for an assistant and instructed him to take the necessary particulars and have the passport issued to me without delay. After the assistant got through he called a uniformed messenger and sent him with me

to another room to await the passport. When Father Shanley had signed the necessary forms he and Seán Nunan left - as Father Shanley made the excuse that he had some shopping to do and I remained to get the passport.

With the passport and De Valera's photo it was a simple matter for 'our' man - in the workshop - to substitute the photo for Father Shanley's. Incidentally, this man was deaf and dumb. He was a first-class Engraver and an absolute genius when it came to faking. Neither rubber stampings, nor embossing presented any difficulty to him, and no visa was too complicated for him to copy. I have had several experiences with his work, and, on one occasion, I used one of his passports which passed the personal scrutiny of a Continental Consul whose signature he had forged. For our purpose it was not necessary that Father Shanley and De Valera should look alike. It was sufficient that they were in or about the same height - had the same colouring in hair and eyes, and that neither bore any distinguishing marks.

SIGNED

Canon Martin

DATE

11.1.45

Seán Brennan. Comdt.

WITNESS

Patrick McLaughlin

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