ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 594

Witness

Liam O'Carroll,
29 Annamoe Road,
Cabra,
Dublin.

Identity.

Lieut. 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, 1916;

Captain/Adjutant same Battalion, later.

Subject.

National activities 1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY MR. LIAM O'CARROLL,
29 Annamoe Road, Cabra, Dublin.

We were put on board a cattle boat at the North Wall and eventually arrived at Knutsford Gaol. We were held in solitary confinement in Knutsford Gaol for a period of probably two to four weeks. The food there was anything but what it might have been but somebody discovered that, on making a complaint, the regulations required that the person making the complaint be brought before the governor and, generally speaking, the governor, in order to avoid trouble, rectified the matter to that particular man's satisfaction. Naturally, a whisper of this carried around and in a very short time the complaints were, I might say, too numerous to be dealt with.

We next had visits from Members of Parliament, including Larry Ginnell, as well as a number of the Members of the Irish Parliamentary Party who were not too well received by the prisoners. They asked a number of questions as to our treatment and so on, and were very anxious to supply us with copies of the "Freeman's Journal". Up to this stage we had got no news from outside and had no knowledge of what had happened or of what the position was.

Shortly after these visits all the prisoners were paraded one day and a gentleman read out an Order. The general impression was that this gentleman had been sent from the War Office in London. The order which he read out granted a certain amelioration of conditions, including rights to receive parcels, correspondence and visitors. Some time after this we did actually receive visits from friends and relations from Ireland. Again, the general policy of giving as much trouble as possible came to the fore, as

on visiting days there appeared to be more visitors than there were prisoners in the gaol. The normal reception facilities were completely inadequate, and the only method they could devise was to stretch a rope right across the exercise ground, that is, the space between two wings of the prison, with the prisoners on one side and the visitors on the other. This, of course, gave rise to a number of breaches of the regulations. For instance, my people were very anxious to get the uniform I had been wearing and, although it had been taken from me and was held on the prison landing by the sergeant in charge, I succeeded in getting it from him one day while he was drunk. I managed to bring it down on visiting day and handed it over, and it was safely brought back to Dublin.

After about three months in Knutsford we were transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp, North. This consisted of an old distillery building and a number of army huts. We remained here for roughly three months. We were then sent in batches from Frongoch to Wormwood Scrubbs in London to appear before the Commission there. This only took a couple of days, after which we were returned to Frongoch. The object of the Commission apparently was to pick out the harmless individuals for release. As far as we could see, when the list of releases came it seemed to work out the other way round, the harmless individuals were retained in custody and the others were released.

With a view primarily to keeping the prisoners' minds occupied, various efforts were made, the most effective being the holding of classes and what I might call reading circles. The classes generally consisted of classes for the teaching of Irish. The reading circles were generally for the reading of Irish history and the hearing of lectures from the more highly educated prisoners.

I think it could safely be said that a considerable number of prisoners, who got there through accident rather than from their activities, left Frongoch confirmed rebels.

I was released from Frongoch with a large batch of prisoners about October, 1916, and returned to Dublin.

Some time at the end of that year I was approached by Diarmuid O'Hegarty who asked me if I would undertake to re-organise "A" Company of the 1st Battalion, my own old Company. I proceeded to do this, and we succeeded in getting together all of the old members who had taken part in the Insurrection. These numbered about twenty-five. We met as a debating society in the Columcille Hall in Blackhall Street, and probably the biggest item of debate we had at the time was on the possibilities for the future, what we could do and what we would do. I rather think that every member was convinced that the organisation must be carried on to its obvious conclusion. A big bone of contention at the time was whether new members should be admitted or not. Personally I was in favour of new members, for very obvious reasons, but I am afraid I was in the minority.

We eventually recognised ourselves as definitely a Company of the Volunteers and we had an election for officers. From recollection, I was elected Captain, Peadar Breslin was elected 1st Lieutenant and Denis Callaghan was elected 2nd Lieutenant. Peadar Breslin was murdered. Denis Callaghan is dead, I think. Callaghan was a nephew of Donnchadh Healy, one of the old I.R.B.

A Battalion Council was then formed. I am not sure about the personnel of the Battalion Council but I believe that Tom Byrne was Commandant, George Irvine was Vice-Commandant, I myself was Adjutant, and Pat Corless was Quartermaster. The Battalion organised the various

instruction classes which were necessary for the maintenance of a Battalion, and the Q.M. and Peadar Breslin did an enormous amount in the way of obtaining arms. My father had a small hand in this matter. He was running a shop in Manor Street at the time and managed to make a considerable number of contacts among the soldiers in the Royal Barracks adjoining. Any soldier who needed a few shillings could always obtain them from him, the cost being some item of equipment. In this way, a considerable quantity of small arms was acquired, not to mention a considerable quantity of useless rubbish which also had to be paid for, but on the balance we obtained the best end of the bargain.

On one occasion we had delivered to us a five-ton lorry loaded with two-gallon tins of petrol. This cost £5. We took the petrol into the house but asked that the lorry be removed to somewhere else as we had not space large enough to hide it. The petrol was subsequently taken charge of by headquarters.

In February, 1918, while I was inspecting one of the engineering classes mentioned above, held in North Frederick Street, the place was raided and we were all arrested - about twenty-eight men in all. We were removed to the Bridewell where we were held without any charge and no statements were taken or attempted to be taken from us. On the general policy of giving as much trouble as possible, we sent out a notice addressed to the "Incompetent Military Authority", setting out that the law required that a prisoner should not be retained in the Bridewell for a greater period than twenty-four hours without being charged and that, as this twenty-four hours had now expired and we were apparently forgotten, we were giving formal notice that we were on hunger-strike as from the sending of this letter. Some hours afterwards we were removed to Mountjoy.

In Mountjoy we were brought into "the reception" where an attempt was made to search us, which we resisted. We were then ordered to strip off and take baths, which we also refused to do. The governor was then sent for. I did not mention before that I had been accepted as leader of these prisoners. The governor arrived and I spoke to him. I told him that we were prisoners-of-war and that we were not going to permit ourselves to be treated as criminals. He was rather obstreperous; he insisted that the regulations must be carried out and said that he would see that they were carried out. I told him that, since he was taking up that attitude, he could proceed to see them carried out. This, of course, he failed to do. Eventually he spoke again to me, and in a more reasonable frame of mind, explaining that the reason for the searching was that the normal criminal who was brought in sometimes suffered from suicidal tendencies and naturally they had to take precautions. I repeated that we were not criminals but prisoners of war, and that therefore these regulations did not apply. We eventually agreed that all prisoners in possession of razors or knives would voluntarily hand them over and that, the prison doctor being satisfied, they would be returned to them within twenty-four hours.

We were then removed and locked in separate cells. Immediately this was done, six warders were sent into each cell, one after another, and each prisoner was forcibly searched. I immediately demanded to see the governor and was brought to him. I pointed out that I had taken his word as a gentleman that certain things would be done or not done, as the case might be. I told him that I had now discovered, not without surprise in dealing with a British official, that he was not a gentleman and that neither I nor any of the other prisoners would, for any of the period we were in Mountjoy, recognise him or have any discourse with

him. This was strictly carried out for the period of roughly two months that we spent in Mountjoy.

We went on hunger-strike and, after a couple of days, we were served with a form of summons setting out charges against us. They were the usual charges under the Defence of the Realm Act. A summary court was held in Mountjoy. We were all paraded before this court. Each prisoner, on being asked did he plead guilty or not guilty, refused to plead and stated that I was speaking for the whole party. At first, the registrar refused to have any dealings with me and insisted on each prisoner being asked, but got the same answer each time. Eventually I was asked, and I made the stereotyped reply that we refused to recognise the court. Without any evidence being heard, we were informed that we were released to appear at the police court seven days later at 11 a.m. I stated on behalf of the prisoners that we were not giving any bail nor were we giving any undertaking to appear at the court, and without further ceremony we were bundled out of Mountjoy on to the North Circular Road.

We immediately held a meeting and decided that we would not appear at the court. We were aware that, on our non-appearance, warrants would be issued for our arrest, and each of us decided that we would carry on in our normal way and allow ourselves to be rounded up, again to give as much trouble as possible. Things happened just so, and in one day we were all rounded up and lodged in the Bridewell. We were all placed in one cell and, for some extraordinary reason, having placed us all together in one cell, they were unable to identify any individual of the twenty-eight. We took advantage of this, of course. We were brought through the underground passage in the direction of the court and were held at the bottom of the stairs leading up

to the dock. We could hear the magistrate instructing a policeman to call one particular prisoner. The policeman called that name down the stairs but, of course, got no answer. They went through the formality of calling each of the twenty-eight prisoners three times but eventually had to bring the twenty-eight of us in together.

The first twenty minutes of the time of the court was occupied in a legal argument as to whether the magistrate had or had not jurisdiction, he himself holding that he had not.

The prisoners refused to remove their hats. A considerable number of the public had been admitted to the court, and there was a lot of confusion and noise. Seán O'Duffy managed to get into the solicitors' bench, where the table was screwed down to the floor. He helped to organise the pandemonium from there. The magistrate ordered that O'Duffy be removed but he remained in the corner of the compartment and twisted his legs round the legs of the screwed down table. There was a struggle, and I think they could have been struggling until now without removing him but I felt that it had gone far enough and I called him to attention. Seán O'Duffy obeyed my order immediately, in first class military fashion saluted and, when I ordered him to retire, he marched out. The guardians of the law were so dumbfounded that they let him go.

When the trial started I insisted that the police witnesses who came to give evidence should be sworn, and the magistrate said it was not usual to swear them, that they always accepted police witnesses. I replied that we were not accepting them and stated that the case would not proceed any further unless they were sworn. They were then sworn and, on their own statements, we proved perjury

against them.

The main charge against us was of attempting to blow up the railway bridge at Lucan, which crosses the Midland Great Western line and the canal at that spot. An engineer was brought from the Midland Great Western Company to prove that the bridge on the chart was, in fact, the railway bridge at Lucan. In cross-examination he also flatly contradicted his evidence and was ordered down by the magistrate.

Eventually it was decided that we be released on bail to be of good behaviour. In the case of myself and one of the men, Corry, the bail was to be £50; the bail for the other men was to be £25. I informed the magistrate that we had no intention of giving bail. He then said that, on our failure to provide bail, the men on £25 bail should serve two months, and myself and Mr. Corry should serve four months.

We were then removed to Mountjoy where the same performance occurred as had occurred a week or ten days previously. We were on hunger-strike at this time and there were continual negotiations. The Deputy Lord Mayor, Fanagan, and Sir John Irwin paid me quite a number of visits with a view to settling matters up. At the same time, I was in communication with headquarters outside through a warder. Eventually an agreement was made whereby we were granted treatment as political prisoners, and the hunger-strike was called off.

From that time on, for a short time, we adopted the usual practice of creating as much trouble as possible, with the result that we were removed with prisoners from various other prisons, where apparently circumstances were the same, to Dundalk Gaol which was used purely as a prison for

political prisoners.

Micheál Brennan was Prison Commandant in Dundalk. We also had there with us Ernie Blythe, Diarmuid Lynch, who was married in Dundalk Gaol, and Terry MacSwiney.

While in Dundalk Gaol the main threat of conscription came, and we got orders that any prisoner who could get out on bail was to do so.

I might mention here that we had at this stage acquired keys of all the main gates of the prison. It was intended that these would be used in the event of conscription becoming an accomplished fact.

About the end of May, 1918, I was released with some others from Dundalk Gaol, and I returned home. I immediately made efforts to get on the anti-conscription committee in the parish, and succeeded. To the best of my recollection, I resumed duty as Battalion Adjutant.

In January, 1918, in connection with the South Armagh election, I received orders, roughly a week prior to polling day, to proceed to Dundalk on a Saturday evening and on Sunday morning to take charge of the local Volunteer Company and proceed to Crossmaglen, where meetings in connection with the election would be held. It was anticipated that there would be considerable trouble, and my orders were to deal with any which would arise.

I proceeded early on Sunday morning at the head of the Dundalk Company to Crossmaglen. On arrival there, we were met by the local sergeant of the R.I.C. and a couple of constables. They ordered us to leave the town, which order, of course, we laughed at. After an amount of argument, the police retired to their barracks and remained there during the day.

In the course of the meetings, what amounted almost to a riot developed, and the Volunteers under my charge had forcibly to separate the two meetings and eventually drive one party clean out of the town. After the meetings were finished and things quietened down, we marched back to Dundalk.

Further in connection with this election, on the day before polling day a considerable number of Volunteers of the Dublin Brigade proceeded under orders to Newry by train. They were accommodated there in numerous houses and also in a very large corn-loft. They were told off in batches to the various polling stations, parties of six to twelve men, depending on the size of the place, and they proceeded to their posts very early on the morning of polling day. I myself with eight men was posted to Poyntzpass. At the end of polling day, we escorted the polling boxes back to Newry and returned to Dublin.

Somewhere about the beginning of 1919 a considerable amount of police work was undertaken by Volunteers in Dublin. This was done, to an extent, in conjunction with the Dáil courts and also with a view to undermining the authority of the police. The duties involved were very varied and concerned the investigation of a large number of personal cases, robberies, house-breaking and the like. Where persons were caught, they were tried, and the most usual sentence in cases of this sort was deportation, with the warning that if they appeared again in the country they would be shot. One outstanding case in this connection was in May, 1919, I think, when the Volunteer Police rounded up a gang known as the "Sons of Dawn". They were also known as the Moore Street Gang. They usually met in a billiard saloon connected at the time with Woolworth's of Henry Street, and Woolworth's themselves had engaged Volunteer Police to keep the premises under observation. In the

course of this duty, one of the Volunteers obtained information that this gang were about to break into and rob a wholesale merchant's place in Capel Street. If I am not mistaken, the name of the firm was McEvoy, Ltd. However, the gang were rounded up, having broken in, and were brought to the Columcille Hall in Blackhall Street. Here a court was held. One member of the gang appealed for clemency on the ground that he was being married the following week. He gave the name of the priest who was to marry him. The court privately decided that, if the priest was of the opinion that any good could come of it, they would treat this particular man with leniency. The priest in question was interviewed. As a result, all the members of the gang were treated equally. They were all deported and, as set out above, warned that if they appeared again in the country they would be shot.

Afterwards we had the usual parades and training but nothing of any great importance up to the murder of my father on 16th October, 1920. I was not at home that night and had not been at home for some time. I was staying in a house in Mary Street, No. 1, and I was awakened that night by the shooting of a man in the street. Some hours afterwards, a message came to me telling me of what had happened at home, and I went there. When I got home, I found that the body of my father had been removed to the Richmond Hospital. A notice appeared in the papers that day to the effect that the holding of inquests was prohibited by military order and that, in future, instead of an inquest in such circumstances, a military court of inquiry should be held.

There was a meeting of the Dublin Corporation on 17th October, and I attended it at the invitation of Micheál Staines, who was an Alderman of the Corporation at the time. I am not clear about what happened exactly but Micheál

Staines made the demand at the meeting that the City Coroner be instructed to hold the inquest. This he refused to do, in view of the military order, and Micheál Staines then proposed that, since there was no work for a coroner, no salary should be paid for the post, and I think this resolution was adopted.

I think it was on the same day, the 17th, that the military court was held. Naturally no member of the family attended. A policeman was sent to the house stating that the court required a member of the family to attend to identify the remains. He was informed that we had no intention of going, that we did not recognise the court. At the same time, all the neighbours were warned to the same effect, as the police appeared to be making an effort to obtain somebody who would identify the remains. Eventually, a young brother of mine, Gerard, who at that time would have been about twelve or fourteen years of age, was seized by the police and brought in the direction of the Richmond Hospital, apparently for identification of the remains. My mother heard about this, went after them and overtook them at the door of the Richmond Hospital. There was a scuffle and she succeeded in taking the boy from them. The three members of the court came out to talk to her on the footpath. There was a senior officer and two junior officers. They told my mother that, unless some member of the family would identify the remains, they would not allow them to be removed for burial. They told her that they were there only in the cause of justice and to find out who was responsible for the murder. My mother's answer was that there was no need to hold an inquiry into the matter, that they themselves were personally aware of the identity of the murderers, the army having held both ends of Manor Street while the Tans carried out the murder. The three officers did their best to get my mother to come into the hospital with them but she

refused and left.

Some time afterwards a policeman called and informed my mother that the court had adjourned until such times as a member of the family would come and identify the remains, and that, in the meantime, they would be left in the mortuary unburied.

We made the usual arrangements for the removal of the remains for burial and attended at the hospital at seven o'clock with a number of members of "A" Company. We entered the hospital, held up the hall porter and demanded the keys. He gave us the keys, at the same time informing us that there was no need for a hold-up, that he had just received instructions that, if anybody called for the remains, they could be handed over.

It may be of interest to mention here that, when the authorities were trying to obtain a member of the family to identify the remains, an undertaking was received from the court that, for seven days after the court, there would be no interference in any way with the family, nor would any member of the family be arrested, if any member attended for identification purposes.

I was at the time employed by the G.E.C. and, a few weeks after this, they offered me a job as commercial traveller in connection with their Belfast branch. I was unwilling to leave Dublin then, although things were rather hot for me, but I saw Dick McKee, the Brigadier, and he told me that it would be very desirable that I should take the job because I could be of considerable use. I, therefore, decided to take the job. I was on the new work only about three weeks when Dick McKee was murdered in Dublin Castle, with the result that whatever he had in mind for me to do did not materialise. I then applied for and got back my

original job, and returned to Dublin. Actually, while I was working up North, I used to come to Dublin every week-end to try and get in touch with Dick McKee in order to find out what he wanted me to do for him.

Shortly after I came back to Dublin, I was arrested during a raid on the G.E.C. A series of raids took place on the firm, about ten raids in all. The first raid occurred one night at about eight o'clock when we were stocktaking, and it happened that I opened the door to the Tans. I introduced myself as the manager, giving my name as Cahill. The place was searched. The raiders displayed interest in various articles, particularly cases in the basement, which was the goods reception department. They insisted on one particular case being opened and, when this was done, it was found to contain Dublin city street setts packed carefully in straw. I did not know why the setts were packed in the box, and I am still wondering. The Tan officer was very annoyed. When leaving, he wanted to take me with him to the Castle as evidence that they had carried out the raid but a member of the staff, named Donnelly, who was not a Volunteer, very decently pointed out to the Tan officer that it was essential that I, as manager (I was not, in fact, the manager but had been so accepted by the Tan officer) should remain, and he offered to accompany them to the Castle. They agreed to this, and Donnelly was taken away.

They raided the premises again a day or two later during the daytime and, when I met the officer, he informed me that he was looking for a member of the staff named O'Carroll. I told him that O'Carroll had left the firm some months previously and had gone to Belfast. However, he searched the place and removed a couple of other members of the staff when leaving.

There were about eight or ten raids in all, with about two days interval between each, and they had removed most of the male staff before they discovered that it was myself they were looking for. They would not have found out about me from the existing staff but a man, who had been brought up from Cork owing to the depletion of the staff, gave me away.

I was brought to Wellington Barracks, from there to Arbour Hill, and from Arbour Hill to Collinstown internment camp. From Collinstown I was brought to Kilmainham and then to the Curragh, where I remained until the general release. We had just finished a tunnel in the Curragh, through which we were going to escape, when we were released. Noel Lemass, Seán McGlynn and Morrissey were the ringleaders. We were in "B" cage. The average number there was 120. The camp was supposed to be tunnel-proof. There were no fixed buildings on it, with the exception of a kitchen which consisted of a concrete floor about twelve inches thick, with a back and roof. We succeeded in starting the tunnel through the concrete, got it finished, and all arrangements had been made to escape on the morning that we were released. One man only would have had to remain behind, because he was too stout to fit through the tunnel, but he was resigned to it.

SIGNED: Liam Pt Campbell

DATE: 5th Oct. 1951.

WITNESS: M F Ryan Comdt.