

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 675

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 675

Witness

General Piaras Beaslai,
82 Lower Drumcondra Road,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Original Committee of
Irish Volunteers;
Member of I.R.B.

Subject.

The Fixing of the Date of the 1916 Rising.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.77.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

30/4/1952

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Dear Commandant Ryan

I enclose a signed copy of my article in the Independent, as you request. I shall shortly be publishing some further articles on the same lines in the same newspaper.

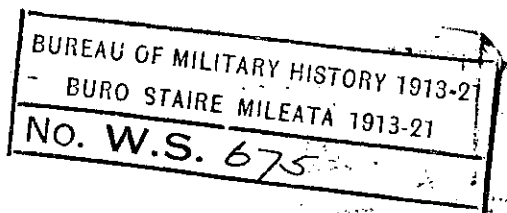
In reply to your previous letter stating that your Director urged me "to the preparation and submission of ~~you~~ a statement covering my association with the movement," may I point out that I am a professional writer, and a very busy one. I am at present compiling a book based upon my experiences and records; I am delivering a series of talks on Radio Eireann based on similar material; and, as I say above, a series of newspaper articles. Several nights a week are spent by me on committee meetings or other work in connection with the

the Irish Language Movement and old I.R.A. organisations. It is rather unreasonable to expect me to devote the very little spare time I have left to writing a history of my life for the "Bureau" - apparently as a kind of amusement and relaxation.

If you want to consult me on any particular point I will try to help; but if you want to get the full benefit of my experience, information and records, it would be more reasonable for the Director to ask me to consider joining the Staff of the Bureau.

Yours sincerely

Piarsa Béalai.
Major General



COPY.

S.77

24 Aibreán, 1952

Dear General Beaslai,

I apologise for worrying you, but your article on events prior to the Rising published in today's "Independent" prompts me to ask for a signed copy of same, which will be placed in the Bureau archives.

I hope you will give our request your sympathetic consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Sd. M.F.Ryan, Comdt.,

General Piaras Beaslai,
82, Lower Drumcondra Road,
Dublin.

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BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
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Extract from the Irish Independent,
Thursday, April 24th, 1952.
Pages 6 & 8.

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Piaras Beaslai
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On the 36th anniversary of Easter Week PIARAS BEASLAI tells of a secret trip he made to Liverpool bearing an I.R.B. message in connection with

The Fixing of the Date of the 1916 Rising

EVERYBODY who knows anything about the Rising of 1916, the anniversary of which is commemorated today, is aware that it was originally fixed for Easter Sunday, April 23, but, owing to unforeseen circumstances, it did not start until Monday, April 24.

Very few people, however, know when the previous date was decided on, and there exists a good deal of misunderstanding on this matter.

SURPRISING STATEMENT

MR. Desmond Ryan's book *The Rising* is carefully put together, and, in general, very reliable, but it contains one surprising statement.

But it was not in February, or March, or April (1916) that the Military Council and the Kerry leaders had begun their work to give the *Aud* a welcome.

Cotton and Stack were summoned to Dublin in the autumn of 1915 and had a long interview with Pearse at St. Enda's, Rathfarnham. According to Cotton's account, they were informed by Pearse, under a pledge of the strictest secrecy, that an insurrection had been arranged for Easter 1916, that arrangements had been made with Germany to land rifles, machine guns and explosives in Tralee Bay, that they would have to make the local arrangements for the landing and distribution of the arms.

According to this, Pearse had a clairvoyant knowledge of the future, and foresaw decisions which were not made until months later. In particular, the acceptance of Fenit as the place for landing the guns was practically a last-minute decision.

WENT TO LIVERPOOL

I CAN speak with personal knowledge on this matter, for it was I who carried to Liverpool messages first giving the date of the Rising, and dealing with the landing of the guns. This was the first stage of the journey of these messages to

Germany. The two others concerned in the transmission of the messages are available to corroborate my statements.

I do not rely on my memory alone, for at that time I kept a diary in Gaelic, in which the events in question are recorded in veiled language which I now interpret. I include some details not perhaps strictly relevant, but showing the atmosphere in which a revolution was hatched.

On Sunday, January 16, 1916, I met in a Dublin street, Joe Gleeson, of Liverpool, in company with Pat Hughes, of Dundalk. I gathered that Joe was in Dublin on business connected with the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He was at the time a member of the Supreme Council, representing the North of England.

He told me he had to meet at Westland Row a young lady who was arriving from Liverpool, bringing an important message. I accompanied him to Westland Row and we met the young lady and escorted her to the Exchange Hotel.

MESSAGE FROM DEVOY

I ASCERTAINED afterwards that the message she brought was from John Devoy to the Supreme Council, and the message I was to bear was a reply to it. The message from Devoy had been brought to Liverpool by Tommy O'Connor, a Dublin man, who was a steward on an Atlantic liner, and who conveyed all our messages.

I believe that Gleeson returned to Liverpool next day with an order for the members of the I.R.B. in that city. A little later all those of military age, including Joe and his brother, Martin, came to Ireland, and found quarters in the Volunteer camp at Kimmage, later taking part in the Rising.

But I must return to January, 1916. I was then a freelance journalist, and Secretary of the Irish Journalists' Association, with an office in 65 Middle Abbey Street. At that time Mr. Sean Lester was Chief Reporter of the *Dublin Daily Express* (a daily paper long since extinct), and, being a fellow-member of the I.R.B. he fre-



Karl Spindler, the Commander of the German ship, *Aud*, which arrived with arms for the Rising, but was scuttled off the coast of Cork after having been intercepted by British warships.

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AN I.R.B. JOURNAL

MY closest friend and associate was Sean Mac Diarmada, one of the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., and a fellow-member with me of the Provisional Executive of the Irish Volunteers. At this time his office was in 12 D'Olier Street, where *Nationality* was being published with Arthur Griffith as editor, and Sean as manager—a weekly journal, financed by the I.R.B. and printed in Belfast.

On the afternoon of Saturday, January 22, six days after my meeting with Joe Gleeson, I was in my office in Middle Abbey Street (where I had been helping the late George MacDonagh, chief reporter of the *Irish Independent* and honorary treasurer of the Association, to prepare his report for the annual general meeting of the Association, when Sean Mac Diarmada arrived.

He asked me if I was free to go

to Liverpool in two days' time. I knew that my father was editor of the *Catholic Times*, published in Liverpool, and that I was always glad of an opportunity of visiting him. I said I was perfectly free. He said he would see me later about the message.

MY INSTRUCTIONS

I TOLD him I was going to a meeting of a Gaelic League sub-committee (he and I were members of the *Coliste Gnoth*). He cautioned me not to say a word to anybody of my departure, not even to members of the I.R.B. After the meeting I returned to the office and waited for him. When he came he at once gave me my instructions.

I was to convey a message written in cypher and a second oral message. I was to avoid carefully persons connected with the movement in Liverpool, except Gleeson, who would put me in contact with Tommy O'Connor, the man to whom I was to deliver the two messages. When I delivered them there must be no other person present at the interview, who must be in a room where we could be neither seen nor overheard.

He said the message was quite ready yet, as it was transliterated into cypher, but would have it by Monday morning when I was to sail. He must explain the code to me, as alteration had been made in which it was necessary that the bearer should know.

THE TWO MESSAGES

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Continued on Page Eight

THE 1916 RISING

Continued from Page 6

I understood; the Germans), believed they could send us a shipful of arms and ammunition to assist us in the Rising. I was to convey a request that, besides the rifles, "they" would send us a number of machine-guns and some officers who could give instructions on their use.

"They" proposed to bring their ship to Limerick; it was intended that the local Volunteers should march down in a body, openly disembark the arms and ammunition and carry them away; there was a plan for their subsequent distribution. I was instructed to ask if "they" could contrive to bring the vessel to Dublin, which would much better suit the plans of the insurrection.

FENIT NOT MENTIONED

IT will be noticed that, as yet, there was no question of landing the guns at Fenit. I believe it was the Germans themselves who later suggested Fenit. All who have read Karl Spindler's account of the voyage of the *Aud* will realise how well-nigh impossible it would have been for that vessel to reach Dublin in safety.

Seán Mac Diarmada stayed with me in the office until half-past ten, when we walked up north together. He left for his lodgings in Russell Place, after promising to meet me in the Keating Branch rooms on the following evening, when he hoped to have the cypher message for me.

Next morning I paraded the First Battalion at 8 a.m., and took them out to the neighbourhood of Finglas, where we were engaged on field work until 3.30 p.m. After dinner I waited in the Keating Branch rooms (then in North Frederick Street) for Sean.

When he arrived he told me he had not got the cypher message yet, but was expecting it at any moment. He took me down to Tom Clarke's shop in Parnell Street (one door from the top of Upper O'Connell Street) where we waited for a long time. While we waited there was a terrific downpour of rain.

ARRIVAL OF MELLOWES

AT this time a Corporation by-law forbade taxis to ply for hire in the streets. I rang up several garages to try and get a car to take me to Westland Row in

the morning, but without success. I decided I would have to get a cab or outside car, of which there were always plenty available.

At length Barney Mellowes arrived, and Sean told me to go out with him. Barney and I walked down O'Connell Street and turned into Findlater's Place, then a narrow lane occupying the site of part of what is now Cathal Brugha Street, and there Barney handed me a small pocket notebook. I slipped it in my pocket and rejoined Sean.

We went up together to the Keating Branch. Later we got a cab to take us home. The cab went first to Sean's lodgings, and then to mine in Lindsay Road, Glasnevin.

MESSAGE DECODED

WHEN I got in I looked at the book and decoded part of the message which gave the date of the Rising—April 23. The book was one of those intended for keeping accounts, with columns for pounds, shillings and pence. The letters of the cypher were arranged in these columns in irregular lines, with bogus entries opposite some of them. This was ingenious. I thought, but hardly likely to deceive a suspicious person.

There was a further attempt to baffle by some other entries, but these lacked imagination. They were concerned with céilidhes and dancing competitions and the like—hardly the kind of entries which a steward on an Atlantic liner was likely to make in his pocket-book.

I had arranged that the cab which took me home would call for me in the morning, and by this means I reached Westland Row, and was soon aboard the mail boat at Dun Laoghaire, then officially known as Kingstown. On board I met Dick Connolly, a West Corkman resident in London, to which city he was returning.

MET I.R.B. LEADER

AT this time the entrance to the passengers' saloon contained a great heap of life-belts ready for use, and stewards used to recommend passengers to don them and wear them throughout the journey as a precaution in case the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine. (The mailboat *Leinster* was sunk by a submarine two years later.) I had already crossed the

Irish Sea several times during the war without mishap—the last time only three weeks previously—and I declined this precaution.

I lay down in a cabin during the sea voyage, so as to avoid attracting attention, but from Holyhead to Chester I travelled in the same carriage with Dick Connolly. I had no idea at the time that Connolly was a member of the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., and had been present at the meeting which decided the date of the rising; and he, I am sure, had no suspicion that I was bearing the resulting message on its first stage of the journey. We conversed chiefly on the London Gaelic League, of which I had been for a time a member, on Padraic O'Conaire, who had only just come back to Dublin from London, and on an erratic brother of Padraic's mentioned in some of his tales.

Three years later Dick Connolly's brother, Con, was a fellow-prisoner of mine in Strangeways Jail, Manchester, from which we both, with other prisoners, escaped in daylight.

A SHORT STAY

THERE is little more to tell. Arrived in Liverpool, I surprised my father in his office, and then crossed the river to Egremont, Cheshire, where my parents lived. In the evening I returned to Liverpool and located Joe Gleeson, who took me to the lodgings of Tommy O'Connor and left me alone in a room with him while I delivered my messages. Next day I rested at home, my only recreation being a ramble on the seashore; and on the following morning I returned to Dublin and gave my report to Sean Mac Diarmada.

It remains to add that Tommy O'Connor, the second bearer of the message, contrived to be in Dublin at the time of the Rising and served with "F" Company of the First Battalion, of which his brother, Mr. John S. O'Connor, was an active member, and later the commanding officer.

One word more. Some chroniclers of events in 1916 speak of the Military Council as though it were the supreme authority. This is, I think, an error. The Military Council was subordinate to the Supreme Council and derived its authority from that body. Under the Constitution of the Irish Republican Brotherhood the right to declare war was vested solely in the Supreme Council.