

W.S. 745
A - 113

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 745

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 745.....

Witness

Patrick C. O'Mahony,
Clounalour,
Oakpark,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Dungarvan (Co. Waterford) Company
Irish Volunteers, 1916 - .

Subject.

Reorganisation of Irish Volunteers
and national activities in
South of Ireland, 1917-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.772.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 745

STATEMENT

BY

P.C. O'MAHONY, CLOUNALOUR, OAK PARK, TRALEE.

I have already given a statement to the Bureau (per Major F. O'Donoghue) covering the period up to 1916, and now give hereunder a statement embracing 1917-1921.

1917 - 1921.

The Political and Military arms of the movement were absolutely inseparable. One could not be revived independently of the other. Any organisation had to embrace both because the nucleus of an immediate reorganisation of forces was the same, consequent on the dissipation of 1916 on the one hand and the enthusiasm of the people generally on the other, together with the fact that jails and internment camps in 1916 were availed of to foster the National Resurgence.

I was appointed Sinn Féin Organiser from the 1st December, 1917, and my immediate job was to prepare for the General Election by the formation of Sinn Féin Cumann. I was at the same time to re-establish the Irish Volunteers and assist the Cumann na mBan. There existed in this a harmonious link which was to survive until the establishment of the First Dáil Éireann, principally because these organisations, being proclaimed, were semi-underground.

I organised a very large number of Cumann in County Waterford - one in each Parish area. These were controlled by a Dáil Ceanntair, subject to a County Executive.

The Volunteer Company was organised in Parish areas subject to a Battalion Council and finally Brigade. I organised a number of Companies and passed them on to the Battalion Council which was established about this time and continued its own development from here on.

County Waterford was really not at any time organised in the past, but now it was very quickly and thoroughly brought under Sinn Féin because advantage was taken of the people's enthusiasm and admiration for the 1916 effort. The real attraction was the military side which was a wonderful appeal by reason of its being charged with danger as well as doing something contrary to British edict and law. My experience of the Young Irishmen of my generation was when the appeal for a serious effort to strike a blow for Freedom was made it met with a zealous response. Personally, I never appealed in vain and the organisation grew rapidly, so much so that Officers' classes for training them had to be formed as this was our greatest defect. The Officers were appointed at this time by selection by the Volunteers and I must say they made few, if any, mistakes. At this time I drafted a short programme of organisation, which was approved. I could not remain long with any Cumann or Company as I had to cover every district quickly, but I covered sufficient ground to enable them to develop, which they did very satisfactorily.

Early in 1918 I accompanied Dan McCarthy and Joe McGrath to South Armagh and we fixed our Headquarters at Jim McQuills at Forkhill. The area was very disorganised but we had a lot of very fine supporters. I put the Waterford Scheme of organising in operation here and got several Cumann and Volunteer

Companies started in the first week. Mick Brennan, with a number of his Clare men, arrived and took charge of the military side, which had to be done quickly. Harry Boland and Noel Lemass also arrived to put vigour into them and on the day of the declaration of the Poll for the Election in Newry these two appeared in Volunteer uniform at a grand parade there, contrary to the British ban on the wearing of uniforms, which put great spirit into the boys, and we left a good organisation behind us in consequence.

From here I accompanied Eamonn de Valera and Seán McEntee to tour County Donegal. We had large and very successful meetings throughout the County, and Cumann, Sinn Féin, Volunteers Companies and Cumann na mBan sprang up everywhere like mushrooms. Miss Cashell came to take charge of Cumann na mBan and Fionan Lynch arrived to lend a hand with the Volunteers. The Volunteers were so active that I had a Brigade area established at a convention in Ballyshannon where the first Officers were elected. It was necessary to cement the Volunteers throughout the County and big parades in open defiance of the British were held at Letterkenny, Ardara and Bundoran, at which military words of command were issued, military organisation observed and the Commandants, Seamus Dawson, P.J. Brennan, Bunny Ryan and myself were subsequently arrested and tried in Donegal and received three months' imprisonment.

My last meeting of this tour was in Ballintra where I united "Orange and Green" in a grand torchlight procession, with two bands. As I was speaking, I received a telegram that had been following me all that day recalling me as John Redmond had

died. I made the announcement, accompanied by an Our Father, Hail Mary and two minutes silence in memory of a "great Irishman". This had a good effect and I returned to Waterford picking up Dan McCarthy and Joe McGrath in Dublin.

The Waterford Election is now a history in itself. Suffice it to say that I had to draft Volunteers from Kerry, Cork, Waterford County, Tipperary, Kilkenny and Clare into the City to combat the thugs of the R.I.C. who were specially picked to dragoon and bludgeon our people and also the machine-gun nests of the British military - these nests were manned by military established after the opening of the campaign. One was opposite the Metropole Hotel, which was our headquarters. They did not fire - it was just a terrorist effort. We were being sniped at from Thomas's Hall, principally by shot-gun pellets which wounded some of our men. I led an assault on this place, took it, and held it during the period of the Election, notwithstanding frequent desultory attacks which forced us to occupy, in addition, a number of surrounding houses. All this was great training for the local Volunteers. I attended a meeting with De Valera and Arthur Griffith at Mooncoin on the Sunday following the declaration of the result of the Election and on my return to Waterford City I was met by a force of British Military and R.I.C. and arrested. I was taken to Strabane, charged at Lifford and remanded to Derry Jail where I met the above-mentioned Donegal Volunteer Officers and arranged with P.J. Ward, Solicitor, on our plan of campaign. My first Jail fight for association by ourselves was started and won. After our trial in Donegal town at which there was a big display

of British Military with machine guns and bayonets and a large force of R.I.C. which did a lot more than I to cement and strengthen our organisation in Donegal. Our Chairman in Donegal, O'Doherty, received fatal injuries in a melee in the Courthouse at the trial and the Crown Prosecutor tendered his resignation from the position in protest as did practically all the J.Ps. of the County. So Donegal was well organised.

We fought in Derry Jail for Prisoner of War recognition and so Belfast Jail was opened to receive us from several jails to enjoy the fruits of the death of Thomas Ashe.

We set up our military organisation in Belfast Jail. Joe MacDonagh was appointed Commandant and I was appointed Adjutant. There were about seventy of us here, including Fionan Lynch, Darrel Figgis, Seamus Robinson, Kevin O'Higgins, Jack McKenna, Piaras Beaslai, Hugh MacNeill, Eamon O'Dwyer, An Seabhac, etc., etc., We were later joined by Austin Stack.

Due to a gross abuse of our rights and interference with some of our comrades, Joe instructed that the action agreed on be carried out and I issued the order for the demolition of a wing, which was wrecked in about two hours, as we were prepared for such an order since negotiation with the Authorities had failed. R.I.C. were drafted in with hoses to hose us out of wrecked cells with water and when we were overpowered to handcuff us behind our backs, in which position we were left for sixty-four hours, many of us receiving Holy Communion in that position. This was our first military operation within a Jail.

We were tried before a board of officials and Magistrates but each told them "we deny the right of any Orange Lodge to

adjudicate", and were sentenced to fourteen days and seven days bread and water and transferred to B. Wing, where we promptly ordered a hunger strike, to the great consternation of the Prison authorities. After four days of this Joe MacDonagh and myself were on a Habeas Corpus Order sent to Waterford Jail on the trial of Owen Passau, B.L., An ex-soldier was shot and seriously wounded during an election fracas. Owen Passau was identified, arrested and charged. We knew him to be innocent as he never had a gun, but he was legal supporter of Sinn Féin. Here we met Seán Milroy from an English Jail on the same errand. We decided not to recognise the Court, of course, which was being held by Judge Dodd, but the King's evidence failed and the case was dropped.

We returned to Belfast Jail and three weeks later I received word that I was being released but would be re-arrested and interned in Reading Jail in England for conspiracy in the "German Plot". This was a new one on me and as good a "frame up" as any. It was sad to see the lines of military and police that received me at the Jail gate to convey this humble prisoner to Arbour Hill, Dublin, but glorious that one small man could strike such terror into the British Empire.

In due time I arrived in Reading Jail, where were W.T. Cosgrave, Larry Ginnell, Frank Fahy, Walter Cole, Frank Thornton, Eamonn Fleming, Dr. Dick Hayes, etc., etc., afterwards joined by Joe MacDonagh and Paddy Cahill. There were seventeen of us in all and we were housed here until March, 1919, when we were released since the U.S.A. blew the bubble of the "German Plot".

We then decided on a provincial system of Chief Organisers with power to appoint County Organisers and to embrace all functions of Dáil Éireann - Eamonn Fleming, Leinster, P. Ryan, Connaught, Eamonn Donnelly, Ulster, and myself, Munster. The I.R.A. now came under a Minister of Defence. Our first duty was to consult with Ministers and receive instructions. Policy was being decided on and we were to see it carried out. The Sinn Féin Cumann were to be spearhead and they were to be effectively and efficiently instructed. They would be responsible for operating all orders of the Dáil. In close association with them would be the I.R.A. for military and police purposes to carry out decrees and orders as well as protection of people and property.

In this connection, to give us the necessary authority, we received appointments classed as Staff Officers or Army Organisers. I received mine from Mick Collins about May, 1919, in writing, and carried it sewn into the peak of my cap. I had also certain intelligence work.

During 1919 I carried out all my duties, including, among others, reorganisation of the military force in Battalion and Brigade Councils, advising Officers, and the establishment of contacts with General Headquarters, and investigation and reports as required by General Headquarters; also, the movements, locations and strengths of the British Forces throughout Munster. Additional duties, for which I was responsible, included organisational activities with the objective of defeating the British Local Government administration and the necessary preparations for the 1920 Elections and the replacing of it by an Irish Local Government system and the defeat of Income Tax Collection.

All these required much organisation, travel, consultation and investigation with Cumann, persons, and I.R.A.

The perfection of the organisation of the I.R.A. necessitated a general survey, which I did. This led to organising at General Headquarters of arms requisitioning, factories, ammunition, closer contacts and regular reports, together with frequent visits of Officers to General Headquarters and an effective mail delivery service or dispatch transit.

In 1920 things were stirring and I was placed whole time under Mick Collins, Minister for Finance, to organise the National Loan. I appointed six county organisers and together we produced a great result, placing Munster on top and with a good gold collection.

When this work was finished I went over to Home Affairs under Austin Stack to establish the Courts, which I effectively did throughout the Province. This necessitated establishing a Court in each Parish - District Courts in areas contiguous with the old Petty Sessions districts, and County Courts for each administrative County or portion of a County as circumstances allowed. I may add that all the Solicitors, with whom I came in contact at this period, were very helpful. Of course, the I.R.A. had to protect the functioning of those Courts and carry out their decrees. Whilst engaged on this work I was arrested on Bloody Sunday, interned in Kilworth and subsequently in Ballykinlar, where I remained until the 6th December, 1921.

In 1918 the Conscription Act drove practically all the young men into the ranks of the I.R.A. and there was very little difficulty in organising except that the lack of armament proved

a great obstacle to adequately equipping them and, while giving all of them a good military training, only the selected few could be retained in the actual fighting ranks while the remainder formed the Reserve.

1920 was our great year. All local authorities were captured by Sinn Féin and British Local Government ceased. All Income Tax Offices were burnt throughout Munster and Excise duties ceased as well. British Courts ceased to function and only our Courts were recognised. In short, British Government ceased in Munster and to maintain the Dáil Government was now our function.

Brigade Staffs of I.R.A. were quickly appointed in every county of Munster. Active Service Units were urgently selected in every Brigade area and adequately equipped. They were rapid mobile units and formed the main fighting force with assistance, of course, from the main I.R.A. ranks and reserve for special and big engagements.

The Active Service Units are well known, but those who relieved them and assisted them and were back in their homes and business after important engagements are still in obscurity. To them, as I knew them very well, I say "to you more than the recognised units is due the Nation's gratitude, for unostentatiously you fought the great fight and achievement is yours if not the limelight". Those men had to leave their arms in hiding after battles. The Units possessed their arms constantly. Those unarmed men were at the mercy of the Black and Tans when they came under suspicion and many were cruelly murdered and brutally ill-treated because they had faith, courage and endurance.

The organisation became so strong and active in Munster that two Divisions were formed in Munster - 1st and 2nd Divisions I.R.A. - late in 1920 and early in 1921.

It must not be assumed that we were inactive in jails or internment. We held, in 1921, about 10,000 British troops immobilised. In every jail and internment camp we set up our Military Organisation and operated accordingly. In Ballykinlar, where there were roughly 4,000 men in both Camps, we had constant strikes so that British troops could not be released for service against our fighting units. Paddy Colgan was Commandant in No. 1 Camp and later Joe McGrath. Leo Henderson was Commandant in No. 2 Camp. We had our tragedies here too. Through defiance under threats from British for which there was no justification, Sloane and Tormey were shot dead in No. 1 Camp and Tadg Barry in No. 2. A number of our colleagues died through disease while a number developed T.B. through congestion and lack of facilities which were denied. Military and educational training formed our programme and all the men were kept busy. The British sent in spies amongst us, but we quickly detected them and handed them back to their masters with a threat of disappearance should this practice be resorted to. We discovered they had installed dictaphones where we, the Camp Council, met and these we destroyed. A number of wanted men had to go "on the run" within the Camps and we successfully secreted them, notwithstanding frequent and very intensive identification parades. Hut by hut identification was a frequent move of the British and we would all be ordered to go to our own huts, which we never did, for we all exchanged places and made it impossible for the British to check us. These

frequent annoyances caused many conflicts with the British, so much as that we had to burn a number of huts and threaten to destroy the entire Camp. We were unarmed prisoners but we fought British rifle and bayonet in our own way, with success.

Yes, we kept up the fight as a military organisation and helped our comrades in the fighting line as effectively as if we were by their sides in the ambushes. They could not break our spirits for our creed was that "he who can endure most shall win". This was the spirit which animated Lukeman to take Corri's place at the trials for "Bloody Sunday" and he won through, but young Whelan, fair-haired, smiling and innocent, who assured us that he could prove his innocence as he had an unbreakable alibi and waved us all farewell, did not realise that England wanted a victim and the hangman's rope gave us another martyr.

SIGNATURE: *P. O'Mahony*
(P.C. O'Mahony)
DATE: *3rd November 1952*
3rd November 1952.

WITNESSED BY:

Thomas Halpin
(Thomas Halpin) LIEUT.-COLONEL.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. <i>745</i>