

W.S. 799

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 799

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 799.....

Witness

Liam S. Gogan,
18 Terenure Road, East,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Provisional Committee of
Irish Volunteers, 1913-1914;

Member of Executive of Irish Vol's.
1914-1916.

Subject.

Comment on Piaras Beaslai's
published article on

"Founding of The Volunteers".

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.137.....

Form B.S.M. 2

Founding Of The Volunteers

MR. L. S. GOGAN writes:—Mr. Béaslaí's account of the founding of the Volunteers and their subsequent, and from the point of view of Irish history, peculiar destiny, is by far the best and most sympathetic account so far published. However, in the nature of things no one person could pretend to a full possession of all relevant facts in a movement of the kind and a few of these points, pending the arrival of my own recollections, can be of interest.

THE I.R.B.

First, Mr. Béaslaí gives far too much significance to the status of the I.R.B. Without the new framework, it can be taken for granted that the I.R.B. would have got nowhere, and it was only afterwards when it became a kind of officers' corps that it served really a useful purpose. The effective background of the movement was, of course, the Gaelic League, then a national organisation of enormous potency, and that this was so is illustrated by the names of MacNeill, Pearse and The O'Rahilly and, indeed, of Mr. Béaslaí himself.

This, however, does not exclude from positions of real importance in the general build-up men of real importance and ability, like Mr. Laurence Kettle, Peadar Macken (Labour), or the few A.O.H. people, to say nothing of members of the then shadowy body of Sinn Féin, like Fitzgibbon and Kent, the latter also Gaelic League. Besides, we have to include Plunkett and MacDonagh and some others who could be given no specific labels.

MACNEILL'S CHAIRMANSHIP

In one article Mr. Béaslaí adm-adv-erts on MacNeill's chairmanship. Perhaps he does not mean what I thought he meant, but MacNeill's position as such was in fact as complete as could be desired. However, if what he meant was that MacNeill had no business walking away with the movement just before the Rising and behaving as if he was the G.O.C., I agree that no such office was vested in him, as far as I know.

This now brings me to the question of initiating that decisive act: First in regard to the strategy involved, he is doubtless correct in putting it down to Joseph Plunkett; but Eimar O'Duffy, a testy but able little man with a Clongowes and British officers training corps background, has to be included. In fact these problems were a special interest with what perhaps might be called (from Count Plunkett's residence at the time) the Elgin Road or even the "Irish Review group." It came as surprise to me to read that the night operations carried out in the city some time before the Rising and regarded by all as a practice for the real thing was just a bit of fun on Mr. Béaslaí's part. I always thought it was a planned affair and that Eimar was the effective author.

To return to the special point. The background of the outbreak was an early decision of the Provisional Committee that any attempt on the part of the British executive to suppress the Volunteers was to be met with resistance. Out of this arose the absurd pike-making proposal; but absurd or not, it shows the existence of this policy-making decision. This proposal was not the invention of the few I.R.B. people on the Committee, but of the Committee as a whole and was unanimously arrived at.

THE O'RAHILLY

The position of The O'Rahilly in the "call-off" is to me obscure. He gave me to understand two or three weeks before the actual Rising that all was set for this event. It was consequently a matter of surprise to me when he followed MacNeill's instructions in participating in that step. Was this obeying the order of a man whom he considered his commander or his own personal decision that the guns on the Aud. so painfully sought after and so frivolously sacrificed, were an essential factor? His heroic self-sacrifice was evidence of sound motivations. But clearly, the Rising was no monopoly of the I.R.B. This is not to be taken as in any way diminishing the part played by the members. Quite the contrary. But a disproportion not in accord with historical fact is quite clearly present in Mr. Béaslaí's writing in this regard. It may come as a surprise to him to know that the late M. J. Judge, who was rather a *bete noire* of the I.R.B. group, and then more or less "in Coventry" was ready to take a hand in the Rising.

ASSISTANT SECRETARYSHIP

The affair of the Assistant Secretaryship which very nearly finished the organisation before it became one is interestingly referred to by Mr. Béaslaí. It became, during the early meetings at Wynn's Hotel, far more pivotal than the business of organising an Irish army and one is forced to describe the squabbles as "typically Irish."

I never knew the names of the two candidates who started the furore. One I recall as being described in the crude parlance of the day as "a Hib from Belfast." According to Mr. Béaslaí the other was the heroic Liam Mellowes. He also gives one to understand that Mr. Bulmer Hobson resisted his candidature. Yet my memory of the debates is that the antagonists on one side were Mr. Hobson and Colonel Moore and on the other Mr. Judge and Mr. Lennon, both members of the A.O.H. It arose, of course from the notion that whoever became assistant secretary would exert excessive control.

It was to put a stop to this initial and dangerous hysteria that I volunteered to take the post which I held till, much the worse for wear, I resigned the following May. It was only then that Mellowes took over and only for a few weeks. I may add that on that occasion I urged MacNeill to oppose his appointment. The latter asked: "Why, is it because he is too closely associated with Hobson?"—surely a symptomatic reply? My reason was quite otherwise. Mellowes was easily the most successful and most reliable of Volunteer organisers we possessed and had, in fact, to be released for these duties immediately afterwards. Hence, Mr. Béaslaí's account of this rather critical affair seems somewhat blurred to me.

NOMINEE CRISIS

Again, his interpretation of the Nominee crisis is scarcely wholly correct. This move did not begin with Redmond as he suggests. It began with the Committee, or rather its Chairman (MacNeill) and was by no means poo-pooed. It began by his writing to Redmond to suggest that the time had arrived for closer collaboration between the Volunteers, then grown to enormous numbers and the Irish Party, as the one holding or claiming to hold Irish allegiance. The suggestion was that Redmond would be given three agreed representatives on the Committee, one of whom was to be the late Dr. Michael Davitt.

It was as a result of this correspondence that Redmond came back with his outrageous proposal backed with a threat of disruption. This reply is completely out of tone with current affairs and we can presume that a stronger power than Redmond's was involved. Thus, while the initiative in the matter was certainly not Redmond's, it is likely that the violent steps taken were not wholly his either.

CITY HALL MEETING

Again I think Mr. Béaslaí errs in saying that these people brandished revolvers at the meeting which brought the short lived association to a close in the Council Chamber of the City Hall. I think I had rather a better view, having chosen to sit amongst the "Nominees" in pursuance of a long-established habit of mine. The gentleman sitting beside me who ought on several grounds to have known better, assuming I was of "theirs," did show me a revolver and indicated his keen readiness to use it. And, no doubt, there were others weapons present!

Mr. Béaslaí, however, might well have recorded, also, that at the previous joint meeting The O'Rahilly, our Hon. Treasurer, who had orders to produce his financial papers for the inspection of his new and rather overpowering opposite number, had thought it wise to do so under the protection of artillery!

I still remember with horror the blow delivered at Pearse, in the City Hall, and have often wondered if he was not, then receiving his new accolade as leader.

Much too much of a fuss has been made of the incident of the Nominees for all the organisation lost, in effect, was a vast overhead of unarmed men, and when the new count was taken there were still available 13,000 active Irish Volunteers, if my memory is correct, for most of whom there were still no weapons!

I hope this will not be taken in any way as diminishing the standing of Mr. Béaslaí's account. Few were more intimate from the start with the essential factors. He had a high degree of sensibility too, which made for exact appreciation and his services to his organisation were immense. Would that the results had been less uneven!

L. S. Gogan
10 Feb '63

It can be noted in addition that I advised against Davitt on this occasion. We had come on the platform for the foundation meeting at the Rotunda Rink, then later opposed the formation of the College Volunteer Corps (unsuccessfully). I thought this adequate grounds for avoiding him.

LS
10/12/53

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 799