

888 S. M.

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21.

No. W.S. 888

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 888

Witness

Liam S. Ó Rioghbhardain,
71 St. Lawrence Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of R.I.C.,
1913-1918.

Subject.

Attitude of R.I.C., Co. Mayo,
to the national struggle for independence
1917-1918.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2189

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by

Liam S. O'Riordan,

71, St. Laurence Road,

Clontarf, Dublin.

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I was born on the 24th May, 1894, in Limerick.

From 2nd September, 1912, to the 26th April, 1918, I served in the R.I.C. I should like to remove the common belief that Recruits at the Depot had to be good Britishers. That is utterly untrue. There was never a mention of religion, politics or nationality. There was never the slightest British propaganda by subtlety or a suggestion of that. The training was strictly confined to the educational side which covered police duties, for example the Licensing Acts. In fact, all the necessary Laws were imparted to us. On the physical side there was drill for all, part of which for some reason I was excluded from, i.e. gymnasium. There was, however, instruction and drill in the use of the rifle. I was not instructed in the use of the baton. But I never fired a shot out of the rifle. I just carried it. It was used for the purpose of training and deportment. We went through the form of loading and unloading the magazine. I cannot recall ever having put a bullet into it. Furthermore, I could not have done this as I am unable to close my left eye. I was really never taught to shoot from a rifle. We were taught to take aim. After six months' training we were assigned to our various counties.

On the appointment of each trained recruit to his County he was given a rifle and 10 rounds of

ammunition. As an item of interest we were supposed to keep the ammunition clean. This we did with Brasso and a pin when the County Inspector came around. There was also ordinary drill but the only firearms practice was with the revolver once a year. One revolver was supplied to each barrack. Once a year we fired about 20 rounds at three targets. The theory was that we had revolver practice once a year firing some 20 rounds at three targets and the best of the three counted. In my experience what actually happened was that we arranged the three targets unevenly one under the other and fired one round which went through the three of them. No one inquired where was the rest of the ammunition which was left lying at the Barrack. There was no check-up on the empty cartridges.

I was assigned to the district of Ballina in Mayo. The station was Newtowncloghans about five miles from Ballina. It was a three-man and Sergeant station. And there peace reigned for there was no question of politics or agrarian trouble. My duties were confined to normal police duties. After a year or so there I was transferred to Bonniclon. Here, there were still no political duties. The chief interest there was the suppression of the potheen industry. I was here for a period of two years after which I was removed to Murrisk at the foot of Croaghpatrick. It was here we heard the first murmurings of police duty in connection with the National Movement and Secret Societies.

If there were any Volunteers in Murrisk we police had no knowledge of them. I recollect cycling into Westport on my own during Easter Week 1916 to see if I could get any news. I had heard that there were

disturbances in Dublin. Murrisk is about six miles from Westport. I remember speaking to Jack Finnerty, a shop assistant, whom I had known in Ballina, and a man named Connolly a chemist at Westport. But I do not recall having received any definite information. All I remember hearing was that there were serious disturbances in Dublin. I heard there was some disturbance in Galway which was not far away.

I think 1917 was the first time I did any political duty. I was sent out to inquire if there was a Sinn Féin club in a place called Kilsallagh. I heard there was and that there would be about 10 to 20 members of the Sinn Féin organisation there. I did not, however, report this information to the Sergeant. I said I could not find out any definite information and that there did not seem to be any Sinn Féin activity there.

Somewhere about the middle of 1917 an order was issued that the barrack door was to be constantly closed and barred after dark. Iron shutters were to be used. A rifle was to be placed on a table in the barrackroom in readiness. The guard was supposed to stay up all night when that order was issued. A local man agreed with us to see how Pat Callinan, the Sergeant, would react to an attack on the barracks. Pat was sleeping upstairs and the local man threw a stone through his window one night. Pat gallantly challenged them "all to come on".

On one or two nights in succession we went out to look for submarines. This would have been at the end of 1917 or early 1918. We brought rifles on that occasion with us. This was the only activity I can recall in connection with the Volunteers. The

Sergeant was with me and we saw nothing. Murrisk was quiet but I'd say there may have been activity on the Westport side and at Louisburgh. Later on, when I resigned, I heard that the man - Mr. Foy - who gave me a reference in connection with my application for a pension, was Secretary of the Sinn Féin club about 200 yards away. Our Sergeant was rigorously opposed to everything pro-German and Irish. He was chiefly taken up with watching the German casualties in the newspapers and gloating over them.

Lord Wimbourne and Sir Joseph O'Byrne made two appeals to the R. I. C. to join the British Army as they were trained. One appeal came when I was in Bonniclon and the other when I was in Murrisk. This would have been prior to 1918. We told the Sergeant that we would be thinking over the appeal. So he said "Must we send off another batch of cowards now"? I remember him saying, "Three fine young men and too cowardly to fight."

The second appeal was a very strong and urgent one for recruits and it was around early 1918. The first one occurred in Bonniclon and the Sergeant there was entirely of the opposite view to that of the Sergeant in Murrisk. He advised us to ask our mothers - evasion. A little later this recruitment from the R. I. C. was stopped. Of course it was nearing the end of the war.

On the "Reek Sunday" in July somebody hoisted a tricolour flag on the top of Croaghpatrick. This must have been in 1917. This flag was removed by the police and there was also a ban on national songs with seditious words and on seditious speeches. But there was very little of these in evidence in Murrisk.

In the early spring of 1918 plans were being made

by the authorities but we were not fully informed what these plans were, in the event of a round-up of the conscripts. About this period it was most unpleasant for me being a policeman in uniform, although the people of the district seemed to regard the situation with a calm indifference and showed no animosity towards the police. Neither did they seem to take a great interest in whether or not they were going to be conscripted. This indifference to British rule and its acceptance was in a measure responsible for bringing about in me a revulsion of feeling. I felt I should do something.

Following the meeting of the Bishops in Maynooth and De Valera's address there I made up my mind that I had spent too long in the police force and that I would take some active steps to indicate my feelings in the matter and to justify myself. Three constables of us in the station held a consultation. We then decided to resign. The names of the other two constables were P. J. Lydon, a Galway man, and O'Donnell of Donegal. I forget the latter's Christian name. I do not know what grounds Lydon gave for his resignation but he did resign. I'd say they were to the authorities obnoxious grounds. I do know that O'Donnell wanted a parliament in College Green and he would not serve under any other government. And for myself, I stated that the Bishops had just declared that the enforcing of conscription was immoral and unjustifiable, and that being a Catholic I could no longer take any action which would help towards the enforcement of conscription. Furthermore, I added that this had brought to my notice my oath of office which precluded one from joining any society except the Society of Freemasons. I said then that, being

a Catholic and having noted the terms of my oath of office, I could no longer conscientiously discharge my duties as a policeman. The resignations were handed to the Sergeant at Murrisk and he said, "Three nice bloody cowards", and he despatched me to Westport to Head Constable Allen, with the resignations. Allen was very enraged particularly as earlier in the day or the previous day he had, for some reason which I cannot recall, outlined to me his idea of dealing with Sinn Féin and the patriotic movement.

I went back then to Murrisk and at about 2 a.m. a police van - the first I had seen - arrived with three constables to take our place and the arms were taken from us and we were brought to Castlebar, the County Headquarters, in the van. We arrived in Castlebar at about 5 a.m., the arms, as well as I remember, having been handed in on the route at Westport, which was the District headquarters. News of our arrival got abroad and rumour stated that we were in the gaol and it created quite a stir, and a small number of people collected outside. Lydon had pleaded illness and we encouraged him to stay in bed until he'd consult the doctor at Westport. The question of the police doctor was mentioned but we claimed that Lydon should have the attendance of an independent doctor. He was not brought to Castlebar. O'Donnell and I were. We were kept in what is now called restrictive custody for three days in the barrack in Castlebar. We were, however, allowed to walk outside for exercise. I learned afterwards from a Constable Skehan, who was clerk to the County Inspector in Castlebar, that I could expect to receive a clerical appointment in the County Inspector's office.

I was informed by him that the reason we were kept for three days was that Head Constable Allen and David Addie Steadman, the County Inspector (a Scotchman), had recommended our deportation which, apparently, was not approved or carried out.

We were allowed to return to Murrisk, without restraint or any escort, to take our belongings away. This we did. Lydon had gone home to his fiancée's house in Lecanvey near Murrisk.

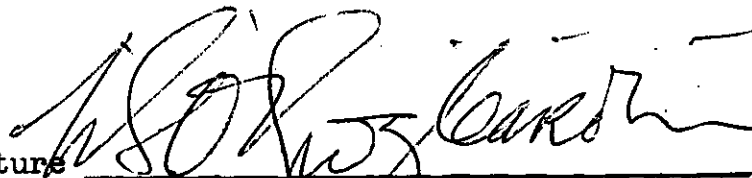
I wrote to my mother at the time we were thinking of resigning and I said "If we cannot do anything else with the arms we are thinking of taking them with us". I remember well she wrote back and said "Leave in peace and don't steal anything." Jim Foy wrote a testimonial as to the genuineness of my resignation.

On my return home I asked my brother, who was a member of the I.R.A. in Cork to which the family had moved, to let them know that I was anxious to join and that whatever little training I had in the matter of rifles might be of advantage and would be at their disposal. He brought back the message not to do anything now, that it was too soon and the I.R.A. might be suspicious of me. This so disappointed me that I never again attempted to join the I.R.A.

I took up insurance work then in Cork and was sent to work in Mayo where I had lived during the time I was in the R.I.C., and I know I was followed by the R.I.C. in the various places I went. That annoyed me too, having been put off earlier by the I.R.A. on the other hand.

I took up an agency for the City of Dublin Insurance Company but I was not satisfied with the national outlook of its directors. So I applied to the New Ireland Insurance Company and on the 23rd May, 1919, I got an appointment with it. I have been with that Company ever since. My present position is sub-Manager. I started as a Superintendent.

Signature



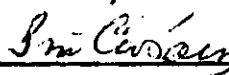
Date



(L.S. O Rioghbhardain)

21st Sept. 1953.

Witness



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