

45 8.912

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILITAIRE 1913-21
No. W.S. 912

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 912

Witness

John O'Malley,
1594 Union Port Road,
Bronx (62),
New York.

Identity.

Friend of leaders of the Irish Party
in New York, 1919.

Subject.

Trip to Germany in 1919 for purchase
of arms.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2216

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO. STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 912

"Do Chum Gloire De agus Onora na hEireann"

New York. September 21st 1953.

A narrative from a shipmate of Barney Downs.

Father Tim Shanley has asked ^{me} to jot down a few lines on the above subject:.

At the end of the ^{YEAR} 1919 I found myself in New York City. I had spent the previous summer visiting my uncles in the West of Ireland and had resumed my regular occupation - that of Assistant Steward - plying the Western Ocean in various ships and companies wherever one could get a job. While in N.Y. I became acquainted with a Joseph O'Byrne who lived ~~lived~~ on West 24th Street. Joe was a kindly man who had had something to do with the Rebellion at home and he was well versed in the highs and lows of Irish Politics both old and new. Between trips I would call on him and one time he suggested that I could be useful in the Cause. To this I agreed, on condition that it would be with the new crowd. I made it understood that I wanted none of the Devoy Clann na Gael nor any of the professional Irishmen that New York was so full of. I sailed away as usual and on my return Joe (I am not too sure, at this late date, of the name Joseph, it might ^{have} been James) informed me that 'they' were interested and would like to see me. Joe took me up to ~~Fl~~ Fifth Ave and introduced me to Sean Nunan. After the usual amenities he said he was sorry that Harry Boland was away but was expected back that evening. Could I return later? This I did. Upon my return I was taken to a room in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel where the Irish Mission was staying. Here I met Harry Boland and after some questioning I was asked what I was doing. I answered that I was employed in a stand-by gang at the Chelsea Piers. A number of ships were coming out of the shipyard after the War and were being put back into their regular trade and as a member of the gang I could almost pick out the ship that I wanted to sail on. This seemingly pleased H.B. However nothing was decided at the moment and I was told to keep in touch with S.N. at 711. 411

Checking back later I was told that H.B. had a job for me and I was to see him as soon as possible. Upon reporting I was asked to try and get a berth on the "Manchuria" which was sailing on the Hamburg run. This was accomplished and I signed on as a waiter in the first class Saloon. On reporting back to H.B. I was given instructions regarding whom I was to work with:.

- #1. That I would be approached by a crew member on board before the vessel reached her destination.
- #2. That when in Hamburg I was to have nothing to do with the ex-P.O.W's who had joined up with Roger Casements Irish Brigade and who were now down on their uppers. Keep away from them at all costs.
- #3. That the other party on board was in charge and that I was to assist him to the best of my ability. If I needed cash for any proper purpose I was to get it from him.

The vessel sailed and I went about my duties unconcerned. However I did pick out the man I thought was 'it' and later on I knew I was right. This ship took 14 days to get to Hamburg and it was not until we were passing the Isle of Heligoland, about 12 days out, that I was approached. I was sitting out on the Poop deck just before lunch when I noticed one of the deck gang hovering about sort of aimlessly. It was the man I had already picked out and to make things easy for him, I whistled a couple of bars of 'Slieve na MBan'. He looked at me and said 'Thats a fine old song' 'Yes' said I, 'Folks go to gaol for singing it, where I come from'. He replied 'Your'e Maille, arent you'

and I said, 'Yes, I am your man'. We arranged to meet late that night after my work was done. We did just that, he gave me his name and told me of his position on board- the ship's Bosun - and then all that was expected of us. He reiterated H.B.'s ^{orders} regarding the ex-P.O.W.'s. We still had another day to go; Hamburg being about 70 miles up the river. We arranged that we would go ashore with the rest of crew as we did not want to be noticed together. The ship docked in due course and along with each and everybody else on board we were processed by the State Security, Customs and what - not. Later when most of the crew were leaving, I moved with the crowd and he did the same. I kept my distance and he did like ^{wise} I followed until I was able to get the nudge from him and without any words being spoken we found ourselves on a side street alone. We looked around and found a quiet Bar, we went and ordered a couple of beers, sat in a booth and talked.

Barney had an address where he might be able to pick up some shells. He needed a certain kind, which were hard to get. He also was interested in Luger type of weapon which the German Army had developed during the late War. This was indeed a tall order. Here we were in a foreign country, none of us able to speak the language, looking for hardware. This city of Hamburg, the year 1920, was a hungry, starving city, where people were dying by the hundreds, with suicides galore, a city full of refugees, mostly of the Russian nobility: Ex officers and men of the armies of the defeated Central Powers, Spies, Informers and degenerates of every kind, a cesspool of filth and we were here to do business. 'Barney' I said 'only a miracle can help us' Barney agreed. Believe it or not there was a miracle. We finished our beer, got up and went looking for the address that was committed to Barney's memory. After a while we located the place, but it had closed for the night so we knew would have to call again.

Now for the miracle ! We had been here about four days and I was beginning to understand the lay-out of the port, with its ferries, bridges and the like, when while walking thru St Pauli I was accosted by a man who, it seems, had recently arrived from America. He wasn't the panhandler type. I guess he just wanted to speak to someone in the English language - we had a nice chat - he said that he had been active in the Labor Movement in the States and said that he knew Jim Larkin personally and he was familiar with Ireland's problems. We spoke on the futility of trying to fight a modern equipped army with your bare hands, during the conversation I intimated that if he knew of any modern equipment would he let me know for I knew of a person who was interested. He mentioned the Ex P.O.W.'s as a source. 'No not them' and I informed him that they were out of the picture as far as the Irish in Ireland were concerned. He thanked me for the information and said that he knew of some people who would be interested in these remarks. Before leaving him he asked me to see him later that evening which I did. Going back to the ship I looked up Barney and reported the incident and the conversation. Barney told me to follow it thru. Before I left him he reminded me of our position, to date we had accomplished nothing, the shells had been ordered but had not arrived and we had but five days remaining before sailing, shore leave may be stopped any day, well, things looked desperate.

I kept my date with the stranger, with Barney staying on the ship in case I needed him, my new found friend was waiting for me and without wasting any unnecessary words took ^{me} to a desolated part of the city, but fortunately it was not too far from the ship. There we met about six or eight men all about the same age - tough looking citizens to be sure - There were no introductions at all. I was asked some questions which were translated into other tongues, I answered as best I could without unduly committing myself. After all I was taking a chance which might mean my life. Evidently I made the right answers for there was brought out of its hiding place a sub-machine weapon of the type desired. There was no dickering as to the price. 250 Marks was asked and it was agreed to immediately. Not having the money with me I explained that

I would go to the ship, get the cash, and return as soon as possible. Not to waste time one of the men was ordered to accompany me as far as the Police Gate. It did not take long to get to the ship. This person evidently knew his way around, for we did not use the ferry at all. Barney was waiting as arranged and I reported everything and recommended that we spend the money. He gave me the necessary cash and wish^{ed} me luck. My guide was waiting for me and we went back to the place. On arrival I was met by my new found friend and also another man whom I had not seen before. The money was passed and to my surprise this last individual said he would deliver the weapon himself to the ship. For this I was very thankful. It was a major problem that was in the back of my mind as to how I was to get it on board. We left this place and proceeded to the ship. As we neared the Police barrier he suggested that I drop behind, which I did. He went thru without any trouble. As for me I got the usual once over and was let pass. He was waiting for me in the shadows and we made our way to the ship without any further ado. On arrival there I took him thru one of the cargo ports so as to avoid the watch on deck, into the working alleyway and to Barney's room. Barney took possession of this most valued item and escorted our benefactor off the ship. Needless to say both Barney and myself were very grateful and he told me not to take any more chances like this one again. for we did not know with whom we were doing business.

There were other interesting moments while we were here but they will await telling.

In due time the vessel sailed and with it ourselves and our precious cargo, safely stowed. Now we had nothing to worry about for the next two-weeks. I relaxed and went about my seagoing duties (they were easy ! only 14 hours a day. two sittings of eight, three meals a day and two dollars per diem.) Barney and me kept away from each other until about three days from Gotham. We then met and talked of the responsibility entailed. Our cargo had to be landed or destroyed - it could not be abandoned - with this in our minds we sailed into the harbor with Customs, Searchers, 'G' men and the like. Barney had remarked to me that if there were a certain ship in port on our arrival, we need not be overly concerned but there was no such ship.

The searchers were on board three days but they were not looking for our stuff - it was the dope (narcotics. diamonds) etc, that this type of ship was known to trade in. When they had left and we seemed to be in the clear, Barney went to work. The ship's anchor chain locker was the place and it was necessary to move tons of chain to recover the cargo. This was done by the simple suggestion to one of the Junior Mates (who was in charge for the day) by Barney, who reported that the anchor chain was all snarled up and needed to be stowed correctly. The Mate fell for it, everything was recovered. Our next detail, to get it ashore. The entire crew was being searched at the Pier Gate each and every time they left the ship day or night so it was fool-hardy to try and land it ourselves.

I had noticed one of the longshoremen - he turned out to be a hatch boss - whom I knew slightly. I had seen him collecting tickets at affairs given by the Columcille Council of the DeValera group of St Columbia Church on West 25th St. I took another chance and spoke to him. I told him it was for Ireland and for her sake please help us - he did. It was then about 11.30 am in the morning. The lunch hour was approaching and I took him to Barney, within 30 minutes everything that we had brought with us was landed safely. That evening Barney and myself picked up our cargo from this patriot's home - all intact - and deposited it in a safer place.

Within a week, the cargo and Barney was on its way to where it was used effectively to further the cause of Irish Freedom.

Note: This particular item was first used by the forces of unrest in the Saar Basin during the year 1919. So said the person who delivered it to the ship.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 912



*This document was written
by John O'Malley Post-Road
1594 Union Brook (62)*

Rev: Fr T. Shanley
St. Matthews R.C. Church
216 West 68th Street
New York City

*For
Museum
records*