

N.S. 1,005

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MILITARIA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1005

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,005

**Witness**

Liam Walsh,  
11 Griffith Place,  
Waterford.

**Identity.**

Member of I.R.B., Port Laoise, 1909 - ;  
Captain 'C' Coy. Waterford Batt'n. 1918 -

**Subject.**

National activities, Port Laoise and  
Waterford, 1909-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. S.2278

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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NO. W.S. 1005

STATEMENT OF LIAM WALSH

11, Griffith Place, Waterford.

I was born in Waterford on 19th December 1879. I came of Fenian stock, my grandfather being an old Fenian.

My first connection with the National Movement was through the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League, which I joined about the year 1900.

About the year 1909, I was at a hurling match in Maryboro' (now Port Laoise) when I met M.F. Crowe of Limerick, a prominent G.A.A. official at the time. He was an organiser for the Irish Republican Brotherhood and he had a chat with me about joining. I agreed to join so he swore me in there and then, gave me a copy of the oath and told me to start enrolling new members down in the Waterford area. I was appointed Head Centre by Crowe for Waterford.

I administered the oath to the thirty-one men whose names are on the list with this statement. I selected these men because I believed them to be nationally sound reliable men who were then connected with the Gaelic Athletic Association or the Gaelic League in Waterford. The oath was usually administered by me at G.A.A. matches where I used meet these men. We held our meetings at intervals of six months or so in the old Sinn Fein rooms in Colbeck St., Waterford.

I remember attending several meetings of the Munster Circle I.R.B. in Limerick, Tralee, Cork and Dungarvan. I also remember meeting well-known men like Austin Stack of Kerry, Sean MacDiarmada, executed in Easter Week, Austin Brennan of Clare and George Clancy, the Mayor of Limerick (who was afterwards murdered by "Black and Tans"), at the I.R.B. meetings. At these meetings we used to discuss ways and means of contacting Irish Ireland organisations with a view to swearing-in likely candidates, so that when a favourable opportunity arose

an armed rising would be started in Ireland.

In Waterford city I started the Mitchell Hurling Club which really was intended as a cloak for I.R.B. activities in that city.

I often contacted Tom Clarke and Sean MacDiarmada at meetings in Dublin. Sean MacDiarmada often said to me that, if it came to a showdown, the backbone of the fighters would come from the I.R.B.

As regards the question of arms, I had a revolver and a .22 rifle. We did not succeed in getting any arms at that stage.

In 1913, Liam Mellows came to Waterford with a letter of introduction to me from Sean MacDiarmada. He proceeded to organise a branch of the Fianna in Waterford city and I roped in any likely young fellows I knew whose people had National ideas. A lot of these Fianna chaps subsequently joined the Irish Volunteers in Waterford.

In common with all the other members of the I.R.B. in Waterford, I joined the National Volunteers on their establishment in the city in 1914. A man named Bob Kelly (known as 'Colonel' Kelly) was officer-in-charge at that time. He was an ironmonger by occupation.

Before the Howth gun-running in July 1914, an incident occurred which I would like to have recorded.

A few days before the guns were run in at Howth, a message was received by Sean Matthews, a prominent I.R.B. man in Waterford, telling him that a boat with arms for the Volunteers would be coming in at Waterford and asking to have arrangements made to take delivery of the arms. The message was in the form of a letter from a Society in Bristol, England, called the Irish-American Society, and the peculiar thing about it was that the letter Sean Matthews got appeared to have been opened and closed again by someone. The name of the boat was something like Naragan. I can't remember properly.

Anyhow, we talked it over and decided to go look for the

boat on the appointed date. We went down the river in a few row-boats and landed on The Island, which is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the quays at Waterford - that would be from the bridge over the quays near Waterford railway station. We were no length there when R.I.C. men came over to the Island in boats. We were not armed and the R.I.C. didn't interfere with us. I thought it peculiar that they should come over to the Island the same time as ourselves. Anyhow, we waited on a bit and as no ship bearing the name "Naragan" came, we returned in our boats to the quay, Waterford, and dispersed without any bother from the police.

I learned afterwards that the letter from Bristol was a decoy to throw the British off the track of the Howth gun-running and make them think that the guns were being run-in at Waterford instead of at Howth.

The British probably opened the letter addressed to Sean Matthews and closed it again. This would account for their presence in the Island the same evening as ourselves. It was obvious they were on the lookout for the arms ship the same as we were. They had their gunboat called "The Heather" patrolling up and down outside Waterford Harbour, but she was only wasting her time, because no arms at all were landed at Waterford. The decoy letter drew her away from Howth where the guns were actually landed a day or so later.

Before the actual split took place between the National Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers in late 1914, myself and about 30 others of my company had left the National Volunteers and formed a little unit of our own. It happened that instructions were given by a local leader of the National Volunteers to help the British garrison in moving a number of horses from the military barracks in Waterford out to the country. I refused to take part in this and advised the men in my company to have nothing to do with it. They sided with me, so we all then left the National Volunteers.

When the split in the Volunteers did take place, I was appointed delegate to the Volunteer Convention which was held in Abbey St. Dublin on 25th October 1912<sup>\*</sup>. On returning from the Convention we formed our own small companies in the Waterford City Battalion. I was captain of C/Company. Our strength was about 30 men at that time. The battalion strength about 150. We had very little arms then, but we were always on the lookout for some. Myself and John Power of Grace Dieu, Waterford, had revolvers. We occasionally picked up a rifle or two from deserters from the British army. I remember on one occasion meeting a British soldier on leave and bringing him into a publichouse for a drink. He had a service rifle with him. When he wasn't looking I threw an overcoat I had with me over his rifle which he laid aside whilst having his drink, and walked off with the gun under the coat without his noticing anything.

On another occasion, I came across a British army deserter from Limerick. I sounded him and found him to be sincere nationally. I put him up for awhile in a house I owned and then smuggled him by train to Limerick dressed in a civvy suit I got for him. He left his service rifle and kit behind him with me.

Early in Easter Week 1916, there were rumours that the Rising was to come off on Good Friday. I got a dispatch from Dublin per the late Peter de Loughry (an I.R.B. man). It came about 5 p.m. by motor bike and said that the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday. About 4 p.m. on Easter Saturday a dispatch came from Eoin MacNeill countermanding manoeuvres for Easter Sunday. I was at a loss to know what it was all about so I called on the principal officers of the battalion to discuss the matter. The men I consulted were Peadar Woods, J.D. Walsh, Sean Matthews and P. Brazil. After a long talk it was decided that I should go up to Dublin, see Eoin MacNeill and find out what exactly was to happen. I might add that I was a county delegate to the annual G.A.A. Convention which was

being held in Dublin in Croke House, Jones's Road, on Easter Sunday; that is why I was selected to call on MacNeill when I was up at the Convention.

On Saturday, the 22nd April 1916, I went by the 6 o'clock evening train to Dublin and, on arrival there, I went to MacNeill's house in Rathfarnham and saw MacNeill. He was alone when I got there and I told him about the two dispatches which I had received and asked what was the meaning of it all - was the Rising on or off? MacNeill told me that, in his view, the Rising would be a holocaust if it took place and that was why he called it off. We hadn't enough arms or ammunition to put up any sort of fight at that time, he said.

I should explain here that I had arranged to wire Peadar Woods in Waterford "going to Fairyhouse Races" if I learned that the Rising was off and, if the Rising was on, I was to wire him "Going to Waterford".

On Easter Sunday 1916, I met Harry Boland at the G.A.A. Convention and asked him if he had any definite news about the Rising. He told me he wasn't sure as to what was going to happen. He couldn't give me any definite information. We waited until 2 a.m. on Easter Monday in Croke House, the residence of Luke O'Toole, at that time the Secretary of the G.A.A., for any further information, but none came.

On Easter Monday 1916, I thought that all operations were off so I wired Peadar Woods at Waterford about 10.30 a.m. saying "Going to Fairyhouse today". I met J.J. Nowlan who was President of the G.A.A. then and a Kilkenny man, and went for a walk. We decided to go home on an afternoon train. When we came back to town (Dublin) after our walk about 1.30 p.m. we heard that the Rising had started and when we came to Usher's Quay we heard shooting down around the Four Courts.

We had dinner in a house on the quays in the neighbourhood of Usher's Quay and then we went up to Kingsbridge railway

station with a view to getting home as we didn't know what might be happening there. At Kingsbridge there was a big crowd of passengers. After waiting a long time we were all informed that there would be no trains going out that day, so we went off to the house of a friend nearby and slept there on Easter Monday night.

The following morning we made our way across to Phibsboro' on the north-west side of the city, and went to the house of Harry Kenny in Connaught St. Phibsboro'. Harry was a Kilkenny man and a great G.A.A. man. He put us up for Tuesday night and for the rest of that week until the Rising finished I stayed with J.J. Nowlan in the house of people by the name of Liddy near Harry Kenny's house, and friends of his.

During Easter Week I made several attempts to get in to the city but was stopped by cordons of British military who would not allow me to pass through.

I returned to Waterford by train on Monday, May 1st, 1916, and immediately on my arrival in Waterford, I was arrested at the railway station by a detective named Organ and handed over to the British military. I was then brought to the military barracks at Ballybricken, Waterford, questioned, searched and kept in Ballybricken for about three weeks when I was released unconditionally. The reason for my unconditional release was because Colonel Tristram of the British military and County Inspector of the R.I.C. Hetreed, didn't want any trouble in Waterford, so they released all Waterford prisoners in May 1916.

During the year 1917 we kept the Volunteer organisation going as before. Things were very quiet since 1916 and we were just marking time. We engaged in drilling and routine training.

Early in 1918 things began to liven up when the famous by-election in Waterford took place between Dr. White representing Sinn Fein and Captain W. Redmond representing the Irish Part

or "The Redmondite Party", as it was called, after John Redmond, the leader.

The position in Waterford at that time was that any Sinn Feiner who was known couldn't go down the town for fear of assault. The districts around Michael St. and the Lower Yellow Road were the worst. Sinn Fein election speakers and canvassers were beaten up by Redmondite mobs, mostly of the British soldier type, and their dependants, who were well primed with free drink. They behaved just like savages at times and the Volunteers in Waterford were not strong enough numerically to cope with such rowdyism. We had to bring in Volunteers from Tipperary, Cork, Clare, Limerick, Kilkenny and Wexford to help us to keep some sort of order and to protect our supporters from savage assault by the Redmondite mobs.

During the election I did a lot of canvassing around the Redmondite quarter at the request of Larry Ginnell, then an M.P., and John McDonagh, brother of Tomás, who was executed in Easter Week. I stopped about fifty people voting in the names of dead people for the Redmondite candidate. In the polling booth, where I was, one of the Volunteers from Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, a man named Murphy, was arrested with a revolver on him, as it was alleged that he had previously shot a supporter of Redmond called Thompson. Murphy was subsequently sentenced to three months in gaol for carrying arms.

I remember during the election escorting Arthur Griffith from the election rooms across to the Metropole Hotel in Bridge St., Waterford. Griffith was shocked at the behaviour of the Redmondite crowd and said to me that he couldn't believe that there were people of that mentality in Ireland.

At that time (late 1918) I was captain of C/Company of the Waterford City Battalion, Irish Volunteers. Our strength was about thirty-six. I had some arms - a few revolvers, a few service rifles, a "Howth" rifle and a quantity of gelignite



taken from County Council quarries by some of the quarry men who were sympathetic to the Volunteers.

In the autumn of 1918, Dick Whelan, a clerk in the railway at Waterford, who was O/C. of Communications, told me of a sealed railway wagon being consigned to the British military at Fermoy. I contacted the following members of my company with the view to holding up the train and capturing the contents of the sealed wagon, which might have arms or ammunition in it - John Creed, Georgie Gyles, Liam Colfer, Tom McCarty, P. & J. Power and Peter Walsh. We met at Madden's Lane, Grace Dieu, about a mile and a half north west of Waterford railway station, at 7.30 p.m. I was armed with a revolver and one other man was similarly armed. We went through the fields and came to the railway cabin junction at Grace Dieu. Here we got a red signal lamp. We then went up the line for about three quarters of a mile from Grace Dieu into a railway cutting and awaited the arrival of the train. When the train came in sight, John Creed got out on the line and waved the red signal lamp. The train slowed down and then stopped. I had the wagon number from Dick Whelan, so we proceeded to break the seal on the wagon and force open the door. We discovered it full of bacon, flour, sugar and other provisions all going to the British military at Fermoy. We dumped the stuff out and when we had the wagon emptied I went up to the driver and told him to pull away, which he did without any fuss, as most of the engine drivers were sympathetic towards us. This, to my knowledge, was the first action taken to disrupt military communications in the Waterford area at this period.

In 1919, we continued training, drilling and general organisation. During the year I was still captain of C/Company and had about fifty men on the roll. We had very little arms or ammunition, but were always on the lookout for rifles to buy from British soldiers. I remember buying two rifles from British "tommies". These rifles, together with a few revolvers

and some gelignite were placed in dumps in my district, i.e., the Grace Dieu district of Waterford. One such dump consisted of a compartment dug out of a double ditch covered with water-proof and approached by dropping from an overhanging branch of a tree down into the middle of the double ditch. The rifles and revolvers were kept in the dump. The gelignite was kept in a separate dugout at the back of a house of one of our men, John Power of Grace Dieu.

In 1919, we staged another train hold-up similar to the one I have mentioned already. This time the railway wagon contained flour and sundry merchandise consigned to British military in Fermoy. I took the same men of my company as previously and we dumped the stuff into the river Suir. I was armed with a revolver on this occasion. A few others also had revolvers. There was no military guard on the train and we had no opposition.

In 1920, things began to get a bit hot. The police and military began to get more active and we had to watch our steps. In the spring of that year I learned of another railway wagon consigned to His Majesty's dockyards in Haulbowline and decided to raid the train and capture the stuff. We used the same methods as formerly to stop the train at Grace Dieu and broke the seals of the wagon. The same men were on the job, armed as before. To our great disappointment all we found were three enormous crates containing stoves and flues for use in military huts. We smashed the stoves with hammers and crowbars taken from a railway workman's box. Although the Devonshire Regiment of British military were out raiding in the Grace Dieu area of Waterford that night we got away safely.

On the night of Easter Saturday, 1920, raids on the Income Tax offices in Waterford were planned. I was in charge of the same party of men who took part with me in the train hold-ups; in addition, I had with me Paddy Hearne who was an officer in the Waterford City Fianna Éireann. We raided an office at the

corner of Parnell St., Waterford, which is in the centre of the city, and about fifty yards from an R.I.C. Barracks. One of the party (and myself) was armed with a Webley revolver. We prised open the door and, by midnight, had removed a large quantity of ledgers and papers of various kinds dealing with income tax. These were taken up to the Gaelic Sports Field, about three quarters of a mile away. Petrol was poured on them and they were all destroyed by fire. Although R.I.C. patrols passed the Income Tax office frequently whilst we were inside, they had no suspicion of what was going on and we completed the job without an interruption. This raid was carried out on orders from G.H.Q. It was part of a general raid carried out all over the country to disrupt the collection of income tax by the British Government.

About the month of May 1920, I got a dispatch from railwayman Dick Whelan to go to Dublin. I went up and saw Mick Collins, Harry Boland, Diarmuid O'Hegarty and Gearoid O'Sullivan in Vaughan's Hotel, Parnell Square, Dublin. Mick Collins and Harry Boland said they were not satisfied with the way things were going in Waterford and suggested that the Brigade Council be reorganised. I was appointed O/C. of the East Waterford Brigade. Billy Kane was appointed Vice O/C. but later on we came to a decision that Paddy Paul, a drill instructor, should take over if I was arrested. This did actually come about when I was arrested later that year.

On my return to Waterford I set about the work of reorganisation. Companies of I.R.A. were formed in Kilmacthomas Kill, Dunhill, Ballyduff, Kilmeadon, Collynane, Ballymacaw, Passage East and Tramore, all situated in the East Waterford Brigade area.

Vacated police barracks were destroyed by fire in the following districts:- Callaghane, Holycross, Ballyduff and Kill. This work was carried out by the local I.R.A. units.

Ginger O'Connell from G.H.Q. came down to Waterford about

mid 1920 and gave a series of lectures in guerilla warfare. Leo Henderson, a G.H.Q. officer, also came down to inspect the companies.

About the month of June 1920, many raids for arms were carried out. These raids were made on houses of the gentry and also houses of farmers who might have shotguns. We got about a dozen shotguns altogether in these raids plus a German Mauser and boxes of cartridges. All this stuff was put in the Grace Dieu dump about 4 o'clock in the morning following the raids. I might add that the exact whereabouts of this dump was known to only three of us, viz: John Creed, Georgie Gyles (both of C/Company) and myself. Once a week the dump was visited by Creed, Gyles and me to oil and grease the guns. We had half a dozen Mills bombs in the dump at John Power's at Grace Dieu (a separate dump to ours) but I can't remember how we came by these Mills bombs. I remember Dr. Whyte coming to me one night and handing over a wooden box full of .303 ammunition - a couple of hundred rounds. These were put in Power's dump at Grace Dieu. I must say I considered Dr. Whyte a brave man. At this time he was Mayor of Waterford and he had received letters threatening to kill him.

On Bloody Sunday, 21.11.1920, I was down with the Callaghane Company (about 4 miles from the city) giving instruction in the use of hand-grenades. The following day I was arrested at my place of business, Messrs. Phelan's, Sack & Bag Merchants, Sallypark, Waterford. The military arrested me (the Devonshires) I was pointed out to them by a man named Whyte, a local R.I.C. man. The O/C. of the Devons was Paul Anderson, a Wexford-man, who lived in Ferrybank, Waterford. I was first brought to the military barracks, Waterford, kept there about half an hour and then transferred to Ballybricken Gaol, Waterford, where I was detained for about three weeks. While I was in gaol I was treated all right. I was put in a separate cell and allowed half-an-hour's exercise each day. At the same time, the follow-

ing members of Waterford I.R.A. were in gaol with me :-  
 Dick Whelan, Tom Kirwan, Paddy Brazil, Ned Egan, Mick Ryan,  
 J.D. Walsh and Mick O'Neill.

After three weeks in Ballybrieken gaol we were transferred by lorry to Kilworth military camp, Co. Cork. Eight of us were in the lorry handcuffed in pairs. We were accompanied by two Crossley tenders in each of which there were approximately a dozen armed British tommies. We left Waterford about 8.30 in the morning and, when about six miles westwards from the city at a place named Ballyduff, shots came down from a hill. There was a cart across the road. The military got out of the tenders and lined the road, returning the fire from the hill alongside. Bullets flew in all directions and we lay flat in the lorry to escape being hit. The action lasted about ten minutes so far as I can recollect.

The captain of the British military - the Devonshire regiment - in charge of the escort - a man named McNamara from Limerick - was wounded in the thigh and a 'tommy' had a finger blown off. When the firing was over two of the 'tommies' helped McNamara into our lorry and, with that, another small fair-haired officer approached the lorry with a gun in each hand. It was quite obvious that he was going to finish us off. McNamara, however, ordered him back to his Crossley and said that he (McNamara) was responsible for the prisoners and that nothing would happen to them while he was in charge. The small fair-haired officer withdrew very reluctantly. When we got under way again, McNamara, who was lying wounded alongside me in the lorry said: "How did you like that scrap?" "Not at all comfortable" said I. "Ye are lucky men I can tell you" says he, "it's just your luck I'm in charge; otherwise that little fellow I just ordered back would make sure ye'd never see home again". I learned afterwards that we were ambushed that day by a few of

our own Waterford I.R.A. men amongst whom were Jimmy Power of Ballycraddock, O/C. of the 2nd Battalion, and Paddy Paul, O/C. of the 4th Battalion (my own battalion).

The convoy of prisoners then went on to Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, where we pulled into the barracks and a doctor was sent for to dress McNamara's wound. In the meantime, we were standing handcuffed in the lorry when an old woman came over to us with some bread. The R.I.C. sergeant ordered her back and got the length and breadth of the old woman's tongue.

We were subsequently brought to Fermoy military barracks and then on to Kilworth. After three days in Kilworth I was ordered to pack up and was shifted to Cork Gaol. Patrick St., Cork, was smouldering after the big Cork fire as we passed through. After a day in Cork, we were put aboard the British gunboat "The Heather" and brought to Belfast. We got a hot reception there from the Orangemen who threw lumps of coal at us. We went by train from Belfast to Ballykinlar, Co. Down, where I was interned until the general release in 1921.

Before concluding, I would like to pay a tribute to Sergeant Greene of the Waterford R.I.C. This man sent out messages to me many times warning me of raids and probable arrests. His information always proved to be correct. He was subsequently found shot in one of the city police barracks and it was said that he committed suicide. It was also rumoured that he was implicated in the murder of Lord Mayor MacCurtain of Cork. In fairness to his name I wish to state that I am firmly convinced that he was shot by the British who, very possibly, discovered that he was passing information to the I.R.A. with whom he was in sympathy.

I.R.B. men sworn in by Liam Walsh (see page 1,  
fourth paragraph of statement:-

Sean Matthews	Michael Quinn
J.D. Walsh	Thomas McDonnell
Thomas O'Neill	John Power
P. Brazil	M. Noonan
Michael Ryan	L. Colfer
T. Casey	D. Colfer
M. Dillon	George Gyles
Jim Morrissey	Michael O'Neill
Thomas McElroy	Frank Drohan
Thomas McCarthy	A. Kirwan
W. McCarthy	E. Fitzgerald
Michael Cooper	Pax Whelan (Dungarvan)
Tom O'Gorman	M. Fraher do.
Michael O'Gorman	J. Ginnell (Cappoquin)
Peter Walsh	J. Harpur
	Peter Raftis

Signed: Liam Walsh

Date: 13.9.54

(Liam Walsh)

13.9.54

WITNESS:

T. O'Gorman  
(T. O'Gorman)

