

W.S. 1, 244

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1244

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,244.....

Witness

S. Ua Ruairc (Joseph O'Rourke),
54 Herberton Road,
Dublin.

Identity.

Sec. I.R.B. Circle, Dublin, 1912-1917;
A/Centre I.R.B. Circle, 1917-1919.

Subject.

Activities of an I.R.B. Circle, Dublin, 1911 -
G.P.O. and O'Connell St., Dublin, Easter Week,
1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT BY MR. JOSEPH O'ROURKE,

54, Herberton Road, Dublin.

I was born in May, 1893, in Dublin, my father being from the West of Ireland.

In 1898, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's visit, I was brought to the opposition children's party organised by Maud Gonne in Clonturk Park.

I started to learn Irish out of O'Growney (by myself) when I was attending a Convent School in Wicklow.

I went to Westland Row Christian Brothers' School in 1904 at the age of 11. In 1908 I went as a monitor to O'Connell Schools, North Richmond St. There I met Mr. Samuel Stephenson, who brought me into the Gaelic League, Coláiste Connacht, McHale Branch (over a fish and chip shop in Dorset St.). In this branch I met the people who influenced my national aspirations - Domhnall and Donnchadh O'Hannigan, Seán Tallon, the Meade family, Douglas Hyde, etc. In 1911, while still a monitor in Richmond St., I was recruited by Donnchadh O'Hannigan into the I.R.B. and was sworn in in November, 1911, by George Irvine. Our Circle, No. 17, was known as the Clarence Mangan Literary and Debating Society. Centre was George Irvine, Deputy Centre was Domhnall O'Hannigan, Secretary Chr. O'Kelly (Seán T.'s brother). Seán T. O'Kelly also appeared periodically in our branch as a visitor. There were five sections, each numbering about 10 members. We met in the Dublin Typographical Institute, Lr. Gardiner St., and later in 41, Parnell Square. Our first activities were the distribution of Saoirse na

hÉireann (Irish Freedom) and propaganda leaflets, which we collected from the Irish Freedom office in Findlater's Place. We also had a monthly subscription (Guarantee Fund) of 1s. for the paper, which was collected by the Treasurer, Paddy Whelan (brother-in-law of Gerry Boland). We had also to attend meetings of Sinn Féin in Harcourt St. and elsewhere (addressed by 'Sean Gall', Arthur Griffith, Sceilg, The O'Rahilly and various others of similar convictions). Our attendance was principally to augment the meagre attendance. We then started drilling in secluded places, such as King James Castle on the Tolka, Larkfield, and the Dublin Mountains. The drill instructors were Fianna Éireann officers, such as Ml. Lonergan, Con Colbert and Paddy Doyle. The O'Rahilly lectured on the works of service rifles, using a magazine Lee Metford.

In 1912 (August or September) I succeeded Chr. O'Kelly as Secretary of the Circle, and I met the late Cathal Kickham, who presided at the Secretaries' meetings, and Liam Cullen, who was also a Secretary, and Comdt. Tom Hunter who was a visiting Centre. Cullen and Hunter recruited me into the Munitions Section, which dealt with the procurement by them mainly of small arms. The purchases were arranged by Lawlor of Fownes St. and a partner of his named Grant, "The Gun-runner", who lived in S.C.Rd., and various private sources. At the beginning I was not in touch with these sources, but later I was directly concerned in handling the lots of sometimes 50 or 60, mainly American automatic pistols, Harrington & Richardson, Savage and Colt. These arrived in on the B. & F. boats, but later we got German automatics from Swedish Timber Ships bringing timber to T. & C. Martin Ltd., and occasionally at this time a rifle

would be bought from a soldier out of one of the barracks. Many of these military deals were arranged by members of the Grocers' & Vintners' Assistants' Association 'under the counter', notably one named Walsh (Seumas?) of Mooney's pub in Parnell St. Another source was Dunne of Mullinahack, who arranged deals in the "Brazen Head" in Bridge St.

At every meeting of the Circle there was supposed to be a visiting Centre to see we were doing our stuff. About August or September, 1913, the visitors were suggesting the idea of an open military organisation and requesting us to support the idea when it was officially launched. We were mobilised to attend the initial meeting in November, 1913, in the Rotunda Rink at which the Volunteers were started. I joined the 2nd Battalion, which had its headquarters in the Father Mathew Park, Fairview. 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion, whose O/C was Capt. Tom Hunter, was my unit. Tom Hunter, of course, later became Comdt. of the battalion. We later had to attend the meetings of other companies to enable them to have enough to drill with, e.g. at Colmcille Branch, Blackhall Place, and at 41, Parnell Square. The munitions that we continued to import were paid for by the I.R.B. and were always under the control of the I.R.B.

The Volunteer movement split directly as a result of John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge in which he appealed to Irishmen of military age to join the British Army. The 2nd Battalion also split - two thirds remaining Republican and one third going with Redmond. The latter were the Claude Road A.O.H., John D. Nugent's and Joe Devlin's contingents who had come in to the

Volunteers when the Irish party sent the word round - just prior to the split, to my recollection. I was in town on the morning of the Howth gun-running, but observing British military activity, I cycled out to the Howth Road and met the Volunteers ~~and~~ ^{IN} column ^{OF ROUTE} returning from Howth at about the Green Lanes, and was a witness of the subsequent proceedings. When the column moved to the right to the Malahide Road I followed, and after the first fracas I parked my bicycle and met Tom Hunter, Eamon Kent, Bulmer Hobson and Leo Henderson at the farmyard entrance to the Christian Brothers' grounds. I subsequently guided them across country to Whitehall tram terminus (the rifles being hidden in shrubberies on the Christian Brothers' grounds and recovered the same night by a flotilla of Thompson's taxis requisitioned by Liam Cullen, with various I.R.B. men in charge of each). We took the tram to Dorset St. and adjourned to a basement in 12, Hardwicke St. where the batons for the column had been manufactured originally from wheel spokes, and then the recovery of the arms was arranged. When the rifles were recovered out lot was dumped in a stable off Mountjoy St. and subsequently a portion of them was handed over to the Volunteers - ours going to 'D' Company, 2nd Battalion.

During the Kilcool gun-running my station was on the beach at Greystones, where if I observed any activity on the railway or at sea I was to create a diversion. At 3 a.m. I left my position and reached town without incident. The guns from Kilcool were parked in Stillorgan Waterworks, which the following morning was garrisoned by R.I.C. to prevent the Germans poisoning them! I believe they even sat on the cases but never located the guns.

The next item of activity was examining such arms as were possessed by the National Volunteers and appropriating those of them that were fit for military service. e.g., I helped to remove 45 rifles from Tinahely, Co. Wicklow, only 5 of which happened to be of use.

Another incident was in connection with the transfer of shotguns to Wexford and rifles in exchange from Wexford to Dublin. The Volunteers in Wexford had a number of rifles which they were anxious to exchange for shotguns and revolvers. We arranged for the exchange and instructed the Wexford Volunteers to bring the rifles to Pearse's, The Hermitage, Rathfarnham, where the exchange could be effected. This would obviate the necessity for the car going through the city. However, these instructions were not carried out and the motor car (Reg. No. ME 70), the property of Rev. Fr. Michael Murphy, C.C., Ferns, now P.P., Cloghbawn, Co. Wexford, containing the rifles was driven to Michael O'Hanrahan's house at Phibsborough. We made the exchange and I gave the driver and his companion a route to travel so as to avoid going through the centre of the city. They proceeded through the centre of the city and found themselves in a traffic jam at College Green where repairs were being carried out on the permanent way. Johnny Barton, the 'G' man, happened to be passing at the time, and seeing the car with the Wexford registration number, looked into it and saw the contents. Thereupon the shotguns and revolvers were seized.

Fr. Murphy, an enthusiastic supporter, had offered the use of his car for this job. In case anything should go wrong and the car with its contents be captured by the police, it was arranged in order to save Fr. Murphy from being asked any awkward questions or implicated in any way, that after a certain time he should report to the R.I.C. that his car was missing.

I was on the night guard on O'Donovan Rossa's remains in the City Hall. I rejoined the Volunteer Company for the parade the following morning. My section was on guard at one of the outer gates (Finglas), where we remained on guard until 6 p.m.

M.J. Judge was captain of Frank Fahy's company (1st Battalion) ~~and~~ ^{WHICH} had stored their arms in his builder's yard. When he fell out with the Provisional Committee (of which he was a member) due to his estimate for repairs to Volunteer H.Q. at 4, Kildare St., I took over this dump of arms by a subterfuge (except for his personal automatic pistol which he later used to shoot a striker who was obstructing him removing cement from the docks, for which shooting he got six months).

I went down with a cycling contingent to Bodenstown also in 1915. I might mention that the Secretary of the Circle was also ex officio a delegate to the Wolfe Tone Memorial Association and was expected to attend their meetings.

During the winter of 1915 we were getting in several cargoes of arms, some of them through Grant, "The Gun-runner", some of them through Lawlor of Fownes St., some through McQuillan of Capel St., and one (arranged for in Birmingham by Art O'Connor) which I took over from a man named Burroughs. I arranged to meet him at Wynn's Hotel. He arrived masquerading as a commercial traveller, with all the stuff in travellers' skips and cases. He was a member of the G.R.s and at the time was wearing a G.R. arm band. The munitions section came and shifted the stuff in cars, and I talked with Burroughs until they got away. He explained to me that "he had to pay his income tax", and

anyway, due to a personal incident during the Boer War which he related, he had no cause to love the British military. Tom Clarke paid for this lot by writing an order to Mrs. Clarke on a paper snuff bag, which I duly presented to Mrs. Clarke in Richmond Road. She asked me would it be O.K. in cash and gave me between £500 and £600, which I handed over to Burroughs. This was shortly before the Rising.

Copies of Casement's pamphlet "Germany, Ireland and the Freedom of the Seas" were disguised as horticultural catalogues by Diarmuid Lynch. Joe Lynch and I brought some to the G.P.O., where I handed them across the counter in bulk, addressed to various parts of the country.

About the beginning of Lent ^{1916,} Liam Cullen and I were warned that an armed outbreak was projected and practically inevitable, and that if all went well it would certainly take place before midsummer. We got a rumour that immediately the Germans had the European situation in hands, they would declare the Kingdom of Poland independent, and that immediately thereafter they would be prepared to supply us with modern weapons for our purposes which would come in submarines or be dumped off shore to be picked up by fishing boats or other small craft. We were told that the provisional plan of campaign was this: that ^{THE} First and Second Battalions should seize the Broadstone, Amiens St. and Kingsbridge stations and entrain with all the available rolling stock for Athlone, and that ^{THE} 3rd and 4th Battalions would divide between Harcourt St. and Westland Row stations, similarly taking all the available rolling stock to Enniscorthy, and cutting some strategic bridges behind ^{THEM?} Cullen and I were to arrange a

concentration of 5-ton lorries at Enniscorthy, whence we should proceed across country via the Scullogue Gap to Limerick, picking up whatever strength was available en route and destroying rolling stock behind us. The Northern Ireland Volunteers were to concentrate on Sligo, and those from Cork and Kerry should concentrate on Limerick, and that having crossed the Shannon we should then and there fortify the west bank of the Shannon and defend it as long as possible in hopes of assistance from abroad. That was the military situation as it was presented to us.

The warning that an armed outbreak was projected and the provisional plans for it could not have originated from anyone less than a Centre - possibly McDermott or Luke Kennedy. Such arrangements as we made during Lent went to these ends. Early in Holy Week something went wrong: a change in conditions occurred, and we were then told that if the original plan was not feasible we would have to take public buildings in Dublin and proceed with street fighting. But even to the last we clung to the idea that the first plan was going through. From the Monday night in Holy Week I was based in the neighbourhood of Nth. Frederick St., sometimes in the Keating Branch, sometimes in the McHale Branch, sometimes in 12, Hardwicke St., and sometimes on the opposite side of the road in the Dun Emer Guild, under the stage of whose theatre we had a considerable dump of ammunition. On Good Friday McDermott came to No. 12, Hardwicke St. and ordered me to get a taxi from Liam Cullen of Thompson's. When the car came McDermott told me that this car was going down to Fenit to pick up a message from a submarine, and he handed me five sovereigns and a short list of instructions which I was to memorise and destroy. Two more were to go with me, and

we were about to depart when McDermott came out and said; ^{To ME} "I had better keep you in Dublin; I will let Monahan go in your place". I handed over the money and the list of instructions to Monahan. Either in Limerick or Tralee they changed cars and the Thompson car came back to Dublin. The car in which they continued their journey ran into the sea at Ballykissane. I had not time to read the instructions, but it instructed me to contact Stack and Con Collins in Tralee and I think it was to the effect also that the car was to pick up whoever came ashore from the submarine. From that on I was engaged bringing messages from one headquarters to another. Among others, I went to the G.P.O. and picked up a poste ~~R~~estante telegram from Stack which said "books have arrived" - books meaning rifles. On Easter Sunday morning the 'Independent' came out with the revoking of the general mobilisation, and after contact was established between the various headquarters it was decided to go on with the revolt on Easter Monday.

On Easter Monday I was at 12, Hardwicke St. when at 12 noon I was awakened by the sound of gunfire down town. I got up and decided to go down to O'Connell St. I walked down to the G.P.O. where I saw Liam Cullen, who told me that the first mobilisation of 2nd Battalion had been small but those who had turned up, including my two brothers, had gone to Jacob's under Comdt. Hunter, but that they were trying to organise a second mobilisation of the battalion area under Tom Weafer, Leo and Frank Henderson, and that as I had an expert knowledge of the locality I had better start from there. I went home to Drumcondra, collected my rifle and ammunition, destroyed all the papers that were left and went ^{To} Father Mathew Park via Richmond Road.

On my way I met several Volunteers, whom I notified of the arrangements. When I got to the park I found Comdt. Tom Weafer of 'E' Coy., 2nd Battalion, in charge, and in a matter of four hours we collected about 54 men, cleared out all the remaining dumps in the neighbourhood and came into the G.P.O. along Ballybough, Summerhill, Marlboro St. and Earl St. route. When we got here we were informed that half of us were to go to the far side of O'Connell St. with Comdt. Weafer, and the other half, of which I was one, were to go out and occupy Fairview village, all of which was done. I went to Fairview, and the section with me, about 12 men, put in the night in Gilbey's on the corner of Richmond Road. The following day (Tuesday) we deployed around the Tolka Bridge in Fairview to await an attack by about a company of soldiers which was marching into town from the direction of Clontarf. There were over 100 in the company, with 2 machine-guns but apparently no rifles. They attempted to rush the bridge and fire was concentrated on them from the road junction between Clonliffe Road and North Strand. We were told that the towers of the Manure Works were occupied by members of the Citizen Army. When the soldiers were rushing the bridge one of the M.G. troop was hit on the bridge. He was carrying the tripod. The gun of that unit and the crew got across the bridge and got into some new houses in course of construction on East Wall Road. We got into the houses on the next parallel road to East Wall Road and engaged the M.G.s from there. Both the M.G.s were silenced (water jacket of Maxim pierced). Then the enemy retired across the Tolka to the sloblands to the main body in Fairview Park. After a couple of hours we were reformed in the street (North Strand) and were told that two of our number, one of them Paddy Shortis, had been killed. We then advanced

in to the City on what I think was a recall order brought by an officer on a motor bike. This time we marched in files on each side of the road. There was some shooting at the elevated railway going into Amiens St. station as we crossed over Newcomen Bridge, but after that nothing until we got into Foley St. We were told there was an enemy garrison in Amiens St. railway station, to avoid which we entered Foley St. and went through back streets to Marlboro St. One of our men was wounded by an accidental discharge of a rifle on to his foot. We went up by Brooks Thomas to Clery's and saw the garrison in the back of Clery's. When we got to O'Connell St. there were upended and destroyed trams and festoons of live wires all over the street. We were then instructed to cross to O'Connell St. in irregular rushes. The door was not opened when we reached the G.P.O. and the Clery's garrison started shooting at us with shotguns. We sheltered behind the colonnade. Immediately the door was opened Connolly rushed out into the middle of the street and roared at them to stop firing. A small number, including myself, were sent into the Coliseum Theatre and were ordered to drill the walls outward and inwards on the second floor. We worked at this for some time, but having drilled from the Waxworks into McDowell's on the first floor, found the levels did not coincide. Eventually a sniping post covering Moore St. was established in a dentist's parlour and fire maintained on the soldiers in Parnell St. Food having become short, extra supplies were brought by my section from Messrs. H. Williams & Co. Mrs. Wyse Power's shop was also searched for food but there was none left.

The next incident I recall was the engaging of enemy snipers on the Catholic Club in O'Connell St. and Bolton St. Technical Schools where there was a machine-gun. These were silenced. On the news of Comdt. Weafer's death in the bank on the opposite side of O'Connell St. (where he had been engaging snipers from the Ballast Office, etc.), I was sent to find his brother Paddy who was at Arnott's, our extreme outpost. I was then detailed to watch prisoners in the canteen of the G.P.O. which was already on fire. After about an hour they were brought down to be released. On their way to the markets off Moore St. these had to cross Moore Lane, and one of them, a soldier, was shot from the Rotunda Hospital, from which a soldier attired in a nurse's uniform or apron was firing, and was laid on a mattress next to Connolly in Moore St. corner of Moore Lane. A policeman was the last on the line of prisoners. He refused to cross Moore Lane and he was released and went into Wells the chemist. The last across Moore Lane after myself was McDermott, Tom Clarke and Dermot Lynch. I passed through the room where the H.Q. was and on up the line to O'Hanlon's, the fish shop. I helped to punch a hole into an oil merchant's next door. Then there were Volunteers collecting for O'Rahilly's charge. I was not allowed to go on account of a sprained foot and volunteered to cover them, but by the time I had reached a window the charge was over. There were two dead soldiers and two dead civilians outside O'Hanlon's. McDermott came in and said the game was up and that the soldiers were going wild and killing civilians in all directions and, as a result, we would have to surrender. This was Friday night or early hours of Saturday morning. About 12 noon we surrendered and were marched to the Rotunda Gardens.

When we got there, there were calls for a Captain Cherry, who eventually appeared, and looking us over walked up to Ned Daly and said "That's the leader. Give me four reliable men". Four men were detailed. Ned asked if anyone had a handkerchief. One of the soldiers flicked a khaki handkerchief out of his sleeve and kicked it over towards him. Cherry was watching and kicked the soldier ^{ALL} over the place, and then called for "four reliable sergeants", who were then detailed to mount guard over Ned Daly.

On the Sunday morning we were marched via Lord Edward St. and Thomas St. to Richmond Barracks where we laid down. The Somerset Light Infantry were in charge. We were handed out bowls of plain water for each to take a sip. On Sunday night we were told we were going away and ^{THAT} there was ^{TO BE} a boat in the middle of the night. We were about 25 in a room and I was in a room with McDermott. Men had been picked out but not McDermott. We went out to "fall in" in the barrack square, and as we went out there were three or four cases of army beef and biscuits, and as we marched out we were each handed a couple of biscuits and every second man got a tin of bully beef. While I was accepting these I heard a voice, that of Johnny Barton, the "G" man, saying: "Ah no, Johnny, you're not leaving us. You are to stay here". So McDermott just stepped out of the ranks and stood beside him, and the rest of us went on. We marched into Kilmainham and via St. John's Road and Sth. Quays to O'Connell Bridge, thence to L.N.W.R. station. Through the tunnel there we went into the boat.

We went to Stafford Jail (E.13, Stafford) and to Hut 13 in North Camp, Frongoch. I was released in September, 1916. Some of the Wexford prisoners, Pat

Keegan among them, told me they had been approached in the Camp and asked to join the I.R.B. They were told of the general instruction to ~~allege~~^{PLEAD} religious scruples and refuse; as they were in the I.R.B. already they did not see the force of being sworn in again. They were told it was Collins who was doing the organising.

When I reached home in September, 1916, I first went down to the National Aid to record my return. I was given some articles of clothing and a pair of boots and told that a visitor would call on me at my home address and see if I was in want of money. I was also told there was a Labour Exchange opened in South William St., to which I went. I found there, among others, Cathal Kickham. He recognised me immediately and asked me if I knew how my Circle had gone through the rising and if anyone of them had been killed. I told him we had had very heavy casualties; quite a number of the killed were in our Circle and about five or six were doing sentences of life imprisonment. I asked him "What do we do now"? He said, "see if you can get in touch with any of the lads who have come back, and if you find any number of them get in touch with me. I looked around and picked up about 20, which Kickham said would do for a quorum. I also got in touch with Domhnall O'Hannigan and we held a meeting in 41, Parnell Square and Kickham took the chair. When I went in to pay for the room James Stritch (caretaker) said: "What, you again!" It was decided unanimously that George Irvine would have to be retained as Centre as long as he was alive. Domhnall O'Hannigan was elected Deputy Centre. I was re-elected Secretary. Kickham told me to keep the crowd together as well as I could

and they would be welcome at Sth. William St. to whatever was going, and to hold the meetings on the same date and he would try and get a visitor for us. By this time I was also a second Deputy Centre and I had to operate as Centre and Secretary. The first sign of life in the organisation was a meeting of the Wolfe Tone Memorial Association. It was held in December, 1916. There was a dispute about the use of a fund of £3,000, out of which was paid the cost of some of the munitions expended in 1916. Round about January we got a visitor - Luke Kennedy. Val Jackson also operated as a visitor about that time.

In May, 1917, or June there was a Centres' Board meeting called for the Typographical Inst., Gardiner St., and the presiding man was John Murphy of Clanbrassil St. The reports of reorganisation at the Secretaries' meeting held previously had been accepted and the Centres' Board meeting notified. Domhnall O'Hannigan was at sea and George Irvine was still in jail, and there was a quorum of about 17. Two or three of the men came to me before the meeting and asked if I remembered about the unauthorised recruitment in Frongoch, and I said yes. They said they had been approached on the prospects of admitting two new circles en bloc to the Dublin Centres' Board and asked me what I thought about it. I said I didn't think much of it. "You were a Secretary the same as myself and you know the care that was taken about admitting individual members, and this proposal does not sound good policy to me." This was before the meeting. When the meeting was called to order and the ordinary business was completed, the Chairman got up and made a speech, the sense of which was: "As you may or may not know, among your comrades in arms in Frongoch certain individuals

organised a branch of the I.R.B. in order that the fight should be carried on, and these men were tried in the furnace of action and we now propose that these two Circles should be admitted en bloc and attached to this Centres' Board". Two or three people got up and spoke in favour, and as it appeared that nobody was going to object to it I got up and pointed out that any infringement of the Constitution or suspension of the Standing Orders would automatically release us from our obligations to the organisation, and that while I had nothing to say against these men and they would be welcome as individuals entering under the normal recruitment procedure, that I for one could not assent to their admission en bloc. I sat down and there was another speech in favour, and then somebody took my side and pointed out that we were entitled to all the safety precautions the organisation could give us, which was little enough in the circumstances. There was a third speech to the same effect. The Chairman stood up and said he was ashamed at us doubting the bona fides of these proved men, and a vote was taken (secret ballot) and the Chairman's motion was passed by 9 to 8 votes against. The Chairman then said that "by a strange coincidence the men to whom I refer are actually in the building, and if it is the will of the meeting I will introduce them." I said "could you not dissolve this meeting of the Centres' Board and reorganise it as a meeting of the Wolfe Tone Memorial Association before doing so". He said it was not necessary, that the sense of the meeting was with him. Then Collins came in and I think Frank Kelly with him (London Frank Kelly, now in the E.S.B.). We were then, of course, snowed under and the majority was against us. We then got a "pep talk" from Collins to "get on with it".

I had thought of approaching the Supreme Council to get the decision reversed, but as only the remains of the Supreme Council was left I believed it would have been no use.

Signed:

Joe O'Rourke

Joe O'Rourke.

Date:

16.9.55

(S. Ua Ruairc)

Jos. O'Rourke.

Witness:

Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.

(Investigator)

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY T913-21

BUIO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1244