

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO. STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 158

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 158

Witness

Seamus Kenny

Identity

Capt. Quartermaster, 4th Bn. Dublin
Bde. 1916.

Subject

- (a) Formation of 4th Bn. Dublin Bde. 1913.
- (b) Howth Gun-running.
- (c) Marrowbone Lane area, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MR. SEAMUS KENNY

151 Emmet Road, Inchicore, Dublin

I joined the Volunteers on 13th November, 1913. I was not associated with the G.A.A. or the Gaelic League, but I had a good Irish home atmosphere. I joined in a little Hall in Camden Street, I do not know the address but I think it is a shop now. I was not sworn in by anybody there but I signed my name in a book. The only man I can remember there was our instructor, an ex-Sergeant of the British Army who was training us. He was on the Reserve and he was killed in the 1914 war. I do not know whether he was a Volunteer or not but he was training us. There were only about a couple of dozen in Camden Street when I joined, and then recruits began to come in, every other night. We used drill there two or three nights a week.

We were only beginning and there were no officers elected or appointed until we went to Larkfield. We did not stop long in Camden Street. We were transferred to Larkfield in Kimmage after about six or eight months in Camden Street.

There were more Volunteers in Larkfield and we were divided up into Companies and Battalions; "A", "B", "C" and "D" Companies. "F" Company was Inchicore and I think "E" was Rathfarnham. "A" Company was Monday night's drill. I belonged to "B" Company, which was Tuesday night's drill. Wednesday was free for drilling. Thursday night was "C" Company, Tommy Carty's Company, and "D" Company was French-Mullen and Dan McCarthy. Seamus Murphy was Captain of "A" Company, the Monday night crowd, George Irvine was "B", Tommy Carty was "C" and French-Mullen was "D". We had up to fifty Volunteers in our Company in 1913. Up to the split we had

a big crowd. On the night of the split we were asked who was going the different ways. The others stepped out and we stood fast.

I bought all the military books I could lay my hands on and I got promotion rapidly. I was appointed 1st Lieut. of "B" Company, 4th Battalion, on the Tuesday previous to the Howth gun-running. About three months after that I was taken out of the Company and appointed Battalion Quartermaster. Willie Cosgrave was appointed 1st Lieut. in my place after I was appointed Battalion Q.M., and Phil Cosgrave, Willie's brother, was appointed 2nd Lieut. in Willie's place. Mick Staines was Brigade Q.M. and he used ask me about paint, I do not know why or what for. I often had £200 or £300 given to me in Bank of England five pound notes to buy stuff. I bought guns wherever I could get them, and pikes from Dónal Ó Buachalla in Maynooth. I got receipts for everything and had dealings in all sorts of things and supplied them to the Battalion Council, to Commandant Ceannt. He used be highly pleased. De Valera said on one or two occasions that he often wished he had a Q.M. like me for his Battalion. I had a business training in Todd Burns, where I worked, and I kept receipts and everything else for them.

We got some guns in Richmond Barracks, and it was very risky. The Third Royal Irish were stationed in Richmond Barracks, and they used drink in Willie Cosgrave's public-house in James's Street, just opposite the South Dublin Union. Willie was there at the time, and he used give me the tip. The soldiers would be in and he would give them a few pints. They would leave their rifles out in the field and cover them with grass. It was a risky thing for me to go and collect them with the sentries all round the place. I did it, myself and Martin O'Flaherty. We used take them asunder, take the

stocks from the barrels. We would tie them round our necks, put the barrels down the legs of our trousers and link one another and walk arm in arm round by the old police station at Kilmainham. We used bring them to Martin O'Flaherty's house in Rialto street, and then we would distribute them and have them delivered to Headquarters, which was somewhere in Parnell Square.

On another occasion Willie Cosgrave told me about a house in James's Street, Muldowneys, Watery Lane. There was a house opposite with steps going up to it. He told me that there was a soldier home from the War. He was a deserter. Willie Cosgrave told me that he left his whole kit, rifle and all, in this house and that I should go down and get the rifle. I went along and brought a man with a bag and a bicycle with me. I left the man with the bicycle outside and I went into the house and introduced myself to the old man inside. I think he was an old Fenian from the West of Ireland. We got talking and he gave me the rifle. I do not think there was any ammunition, but all I wanted was the rifle which I got. I sent off the man on the bicycle, with the rifle in the bag.

In 1914 I used be in Kimmage every night. I never missed a night because somebody always wanted something. I devoted all my time to Larkfield, between drilling and training and all. I put my heart and soul into it. We used be out on manoeuvres every Sunday from the time we went to Larkfield until the Rebellion. We had field exercises, platoon exercises mostly. The biggest was to Ticknock Mountain. The whole Brigade would be out, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions. Ceannt, Pearse and Cathal Brugha superintended these exercises, and I think De Valera would be there. There was a good sprinkling from the Executive.

We had to bring our rations and I used bring bottles of stout and soup. I employed a horse and car belonging to 'Moggy' Keogh of Cork Street to convey the stout from the city to the exercises. He used bring up the rear of the crowd.

We had to put up J.J. Walsh in Larkfield after he was run out of Cork in 1914 or 1915. I remember him well in a navy suit and white collar and tie. We had to put up the Liverpool Irish as well, and get blankets and bedding for them on instructions from Commandant Ceannt. A section of them came first and more came afterwards. I think they came in 1916, or late in 1915.

I took part in the Howth gun-running in 1914. We were mobilised for four o'clock on Sunday morning for the Howth gun-running. We were to bring our rations with us. The majority of the men did not know where they were going but I knew what the mission was. It was a tough march. We got Mass somewhere out there. The roads were not very good, they were very stoney, and within a mile of Howth we got orders to go at the double and we had to run. We got to Howth and there was a vessel out in the Bay. The crowd of people assembled did not know where we came from. Amongst this crowd were coastguards who tried to interfere, but they were quietly tied to posts. The telephone wires were cut by this time. We were sent down to the Quay and each Company got their consignment of rifles. We had about four horses and carts to carry the ammunition, which was very heavy.

When all was finished we got orders to fall in and march back to Dublin with our rifles and ammunition. I think some of the ammunition was divided amongst the Volunteers

to carry along with the rifles, but I am not sure.

Eamonn Ceannt was in charge of our Unit and there were other leaders there as well.

On our way back to Dublin we were met at a bend of the road by the Scottish Borderers, who stopped us. The officers were in front and some of the men got down on their knees ready to fire. In the meantime two or three tramloads of police came along. The police got off the trams and stood against the wall, but they were lenient towards us and did not interfere with us at all. The soldiers did not fire at us either.

We then got orders to disperse as well as we could with our guns, so we started over the fields and got back to town with our rifles, and they got nothing. I do not think we lost anything. Every man in my Company got a rifle and there were up to fifty men in the Company.

All the Battalions mobilised for the Howth gun running. Eamonn Ceannt was my Commandant, he was Commandant of the 4th Battalion. I cannot be definite about Pearse being there.

There was nothing of any significance between the Howth gun-running and Easter Week, 1916, except the weekly manoeuvres and drilling and training. I was still Battn.Q.M.

The other crowd went over to John Redmond. They had Italian rifles but they had no ammunition and I think our fellows raided and took the rifles from them.

I joined the I.R.B. about eighteen months before the Rebellion. I was sworn in in a cellar in Parnell Street by Captain George Irvine.

From that up to the Rebellion there was nothing of great importance. We continued training and drilling up to the Rebellion.

Just before the Rebellion we had our own hand grenades made by our own Engineers and Eamonn Ceannt told me to get six or seven men on my staff and distribute the hand-grenades to the different places. I had Phil Cosgrave and five or six other fellows, I forget their names but they were all keen on getting on my staff. Phil Cosgrave was my principal man. On Good Friday and Easter Saturday, which was a half day with me and the last day I was in Todd Burns, we got the old cab to distribute the hand-grenades and we left them in different places. I remember the South Dublin Union was the last place we left them at, and we left some at Watkins Distillery. We probably left some at the Four Courts but I am not sure now. We were afraid sometimes that the cab would explode with its load. I think we collected the hand-grenades for delivery to the different places at some shop in Camden Street or it might have been No. 2 Dawson Street. After we delivered the last of them we went to Confession.

On Easter Saturday Eamonn Ceannt issued the mobilisation order for Sunday morning, he sent couriers out with it. I was to mobilise at Larkfield on Sunday morning, and then the mobilisation order was cancelled on Sunday morning. Dan McCarthy and a few of us were knocking about on Sunday morning, and I went up to Ceannt's house; we were great friends. He lived then in Dolphinsbarn, beside the Chapel. He told me not to stir from home so I went home and remained at home until that Sunday evening when at about seven o'clock, after tea, a knock came to the door and there was a courier at the door who told me that Commandant Ceannt wanted me. I was living in Reuben Street with my married sister at the time. I went up

to Ceannt's place, knocked at his parlour door and went in. He had a map before him and two 'Bulldogs'. He detailed me what I was to do. I was to get so many rifles for the different places, for Ardee Street distillery, Watkins Brewery, South Dublin Union and Marrowbone Lane distillery. I was detailed to have my men ready, and as the other men would pass along they would halt and we would pass out the stuff to them. Joe McGrath and a few more officers were there with me giving a hand to dish out the stuff marked in chalk 1, 2, 3, 4. We were surrounded by special police who had been trained in the Depot to go out to the War, but the men went on to their destinations, either to the South Dublin Union, Ardee Street or Watkins brewery.

We were left behind and we had some stuff still which we could not carry. Keogh would not give us his pony and car at first so we sent up a couple of men with guns and we got the car and loaded it up with the stuff. We set out and met the people coming from Mass; some of them knelt and blessed us and more of them cursed us.

We got into Marrowbone Lane Distillery as fast as we could, and the fighting started. When we got in there we had no water supply. There was a big tank in the centre of the distillery and a few of the lads got into it, Ned O'Neill was one, and they cleaned it up and we filled it full of water. The glass on all the windows was broken and bags put into them, sand-bags. We had fellows out on outpost and digging trenches in the yard of the distillery.

The fighting started from the top windows. The military were on the far side of the Grand Canal, taking shelter behind trees. Whenever they put up their heads they were knocked out. Our lads were good shots. They had two guns and when one got too hot they would pick up another gun.

The people used to bring in bread and cakes to us, but our grub was getting very short. One day there were four or five cattle being brought to the market and the sentries on duty at the front gate went out and took them in, because we were hungry. We had three or four butchers with us and we had plenty soup and meat after that.

We took over the distillery on Monday morning. The fighting started right from the minute we went in and it continued through the whole week. We were surrounded there, and Cork Street had special policemen. Con Butler and Paddy McGrath, Joe McGrath's brother, he is dead since, and the best shots were put on the roof. At night time the fellows were at the digging of trenches in the yard, and others were on outpost duty protecting them and we would have their food ready for them. Captain Seamus Murphy's wife was there cooking and some of the Cumann na mBan girls were giving her a hand. She was a great woman and a great cook.

I remember one incident during that time. Con O'Hanlon was a grocer's curate in a public-house alongside James's Street Church, and he came up to us for something to eat. I remember he had his rifle over his shoulder and a head of cabbage in his mouth and he crawled on his hands and knees into the distillery and said "Q.M., give me plenty soup and potatoes and I'll fight like a divil".

Another incident during that week concerned a lady who used sit on the canal banks every morning. She would go away and return about four o'clock in the evening and we thought she might be a spy. One evening the fellows on outpost duty brought her in to one of the out-offices, blindfolded, and got the Cumann na mBan girls to search her. She used come to the canal every day and we did not know whether she was a man or a woman. They found a lot of pawn-tickets on her. She was

asked what brought her up there under the cross-fire, and she said she had no work and she used go there to rest herself. She was blindfolded again and let go.

During the week, about Wednesday or Thursday, Con Colbert's crowd in Ardee Street distillery had no food and were dying with hunger, and they sent word to us would we take them in and we said yes. They came at about four o'clock that morning.

During the week some of the fellows began to cry when they heard shots, because they were a long time from Confession, and we sent word to Mount Argus for a priest to come and hear their Confessions. Father Ciaran and another priest came down from Mount Argus, and they gave us all Agnus Deis.

On the following Sunday we heard of the surrender. A British officer and Eamonn Ceannt came along and they had the white flag. I think there was a priest with them. One of our fellows got on his knees to shoot the British officer but another of our men took the rifle from him. He was a gateman in Guinness's brewery. Ceannt came to our place in Marrowbone Lane with the British officer, and that was the last I saw of Ceannt. We did not wait to see who else came with them, we hopped it. I did not surrender, and Joe did not surrender either. We had our plans made during the week.

We got away. I had a rifle that I got from the I.R.B. and I carried that with me. We crossed the wall, we had a tunnel made underneath. I had my own rifle during the week and I brought it away with me. I had a revolver as well. My bicycle was left behind in the distillery. We went into a house in Cork Street, but the people in the house were very uneasy, and I sent word to my married sister to bring down my clothes as I was still in uniform. She brought me my clothes and I went into a room and changed into them and she brought

back my uniform in a parcel under her clothes.

We left that house and rambled up to Joe McGrath's house. We did not stop there long, but we got something to eat. We went from house to house and eventually nobody would keep us. We rambled across to Dolphinsbarn and got behind Bailey Son & Gibon's printing place, and Joe said to me "Maybe they have room in your house and we could get into it". I said that we had plenty room, and he said to send word to my sister to put in the dog so that it would not be barking in the yard. I lived at 42 Reuben Street. We stole across Cork Street, down the Back of the Pipes, across the wall, into the yard and into my house, myself and Joe and Paddy McGrath.

We stopped in my house that night and the following morning Joe made a suggestion that we should get some safe place to hide because we knew that the house would be raided. We made a hide-out at the coal-hole, about three feet under the floor, and we made a nice little door and put a nail inside with a string so that when we got in we could pull the door after us. We were lucky to have it, because the house was raided next morning. We were not long getting in. We could hear the noise and the rap on the door, and my sister delayed opening the door so that we could get in to safety. When the raiders went away we came out, but we stopped there for portion of the day and at night. We could not sleep. It was a hot night and the only company we had was a mouse running up and down the gas-pipe.

Eventually, as my sister was about to have her first child, Joe and Paddy had to leave and I remained under the floor. I could not stick it much longer and a morning or two afterwards I took my courage in my hands, got up early, dressed myself, got Tom Cullen to dismantle my rifle, made it up into a parcel, put on my bowler hat and made for Kingsbridge

Station. I walked in to the Station and got my ticket. The platform was full of soldiers and detectives. I got into a carriage, sat down and put my parcel containing my rifle under the seat. When I arrived at my destination, Belmont station in West Offaly, I took a short cut across a gentleman's place, Perry's place. I did not go around by the village. I came out on the high road again and I saw an R.I.C. man coming along on a bicycle, and I said to myself "If I run now I am caught", so I kept walking. He bid me good day and I bid him good day. I kept going and then I looked back and he was down off his bicycle looking after me. I kept going and then he went ahead. I went across the ditch and got home the back way. I went in the kitchen door, my father was alive then, and they all got a terrible surprise when I came in.

I was sitting down having a bite to eat when a cousin of mine came down to know was Jim home. They said I was, and he said "Will you tell him to get away quick. The police heard he is after getting off the train at Belmont Station." I had to pack up and go on the bog and I was on the bog for a long time, sleeping in out-houses.

Before Easter Week, 1916, I did not know the plans for the Rising, nor did I receive instructions to provide any of the positions occupied by the Battalion with provisions.

We used, after I went back to Offaly, collect bottles and glass during the day, put them into sacks, break them up into small pieces and spread the pieces on the roads to pierce the tyres of the police and soldiers, and then we would ambush them at night. We felled trees and dug trenches on the roads. That was my career in the country. We used to ambush the Black and Tans too.

There was one fellow called George stationed in

Shannonbridge who gave us any amount of .303 ammunition. He was very decent.

During this time I went home one time for a change of clothing. They have a shop at home, and I was sitting in the kitchen having a cup of tea, when a lorry drove up with Black and Tans and 'Peelers'. They came into the shop and into the kitchen and saw me at the table. They questioned me very hard and I was taken outside the door by the Tans and put up against the wall. They were half drunk and they were about to shoot me when an old policeman from Shannonbridge, who knew my father well, interceded for me and I was let go. I was a wanted man. Some information came to their ears and they discovered my rank and all about me.

I came back to Dublin twice before 1922. Joe McGrath was Minister for Industry and Commerce at the time of the Provisional Government. I could not get my job back and I was looking for a rank in the Army. Joe McGrath was in Dame Street. I was sick in the meantime, and I have a certificate from Dr. Maher of Ferbane.

I went to see Joe McGrath and he told me to go to Beggar's Bush to D.P. Walsh, I think he was Captain Walsh, but he put me off, he did not know me, and he told me to call again. I went two or three times and I told Joe it was not any use.

I had no I.R.B. activities after 1916, everybody was in the I.R.B. after that. I got fed up with it. I was on the run and I took part in the fighting against the Black and Tans in West Offaly and I was forgotten when I came back to Dublin. I went to Phil Cosgrave after Walsh disappointed me and Phil told me to join the National Army or I would not get a pension.

SIGNED

Seamus Keany

WITNESSES

Pack. J. Hannally Captain

DATE

27th October, 1948

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