

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 188

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.....188.....

Witness

Mr. Sean O'Keefe
18 St. Aidan's Park, Marino, Dublin.
Identity

Officer in 3rd Battn. 1917-1921;
Quartermaster from 1913.

Subject

- (a) 3rd Battn. Dublin Brigade 1913-1916.
- (b) Cutting of Cross-Channel Cable
Easter Monday 1916.
- (c) Boland's Mills Area.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. S. 626.

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Seán O'Keefe

18 St. Aidan's Park, Marino.

I was present at the meeting held in the Rotunda in November, 1913, at which the Irish Volunteers were formed. I signed an enrolment form at the meeting. A short time afterwards I was notified to attend at 41 Parnell Square. I was attached to "B" Company, 3rd Battalion. We held two or three parades at 41 Parnell Square. We then moved to Tara Street Baths. After a couple of meetings at Tara Street an election of officers was held. The following were elected.

Captain	The O'Rahilly
1st Lieutenant	McCann
2nd Lieutenant	Charlie Murphy

Liam Raftus, now Town Clerk, Waterford, was appointed Secretary. Tom Fitzgerald (senior), Great Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street) was appointed Treasurer.

Early in 1914 we had a parade to Sandymount Castle where the Company was reviewed by L. J. Kettle. About March, 1914, the Company Headquarters moved to Camden Row. The Company held weekly parades and was drilled by an ex British Sergeant Major named Brosney, who was paid for his services. The Company took part in the Howth Gun-running. I was not present as I was away on holidays at that time. Shortly afterwards the Company paraded to Larkfield, where some members were issued with Howth rifles.

Shortly after the outbreak of war in 1914 a number of the men joined the British Army, including one of our officers - McCann, who was an ex Sergeant of the Royal

Engineers. John Redmond's appeal to Irishmen to join the British Army caused a split in the Volunteers. The Company was about 100 strong when the split occurred. A special parade of the Company was held to decide which side we would take. The O'Rahilly having addressed the parade said: "Those who stand for Ireland remain fast; those who are following John Redmond, fall out". Only about 18 to 20 remained.

We held an election of officers immediately after the split. The following were elected:

Captain	Seán McMahon
1st Lieutenant	Seán Quinn
2nd Lieutenant	Jimmie Fitzgerald

I was given the dual post of Adjutant and Quartermaster. The O'Rahilly did not seek re-election as he had been appointed Director of Purchases on G.H.Q. staff; in addition he spent a lot of his time organising the Volunteers in various parts of the country. Charlie Murphy did not seek re-election; he also had gone to Headquarters. I cannot say what appointment he held at Headquarters.

We continued to parade at Camden Row and I took charge of any recruits coming in and the Company was drilled by Seán Quinn. We got an instructor from G.H.Q. named Paddy Maguire. We had a miniature range in Camden Row. We used both an air rifle and a .22 and we paid for the ammunition ourselves. The Company took part in route marches and inter-Company manoeuvres and secured some arms by one means or another from British soldiers home on leave. In some cases soldiers whom we knew, gave us their rifles; in others, we bought them. The price we paid varied between £1 and £3 for each rifle. In a few cases where soldiers were not prepared to give or sell a "row was picked" and in the melee which

followed the rifle disappeared. We also got ammunition like this.

About the end of March, 1916, the Company mounted guard at Volunteer Headquarters, 2 Dawson Street. The three Company Officers, about 11 men and myself formed this guard. We reported at about 8 p.m. and remained until 7 o'clock in the morning. Captain McMahon instructed us not to allow anyone to enter the building unless he was recognised and had authority to do so. We were to prevent police or other unauthorised persons from entering by use of force if necessary. It was an armed guard. I was not told the reason for this guard. We were relieved by a unit of the 2nd Battalion. I understood this guard was continued right up to the Rising, each unit in the Brigade taking its turn to supply the guard.

About six weeks before the Rising, Company Captain Seán MacMahon came to me and told me that things were moving and getting serious. He asked me what funds were in the Company. He instructed me to purchase all the equipment I could at Lawlers of Fownes Street, including haversacks, kit-bags, ground sheets, blankets, leather shoulder straps and belts, and to sell them to members of the Company and with the money so obtained to continue to buy more.

I was instructed by Captain Seán MacMahon to report on Tuesday of Holy Week, 1916, at the Columcille Hall to collect some shotguns and shotgun ammunition. It was handed to me by Michael Staines and I brought it back to 144 Pearse Street. I went again on Holy Thursday and Good Friday and got more. I was accompanied on each occasion by six men. As far as I can remember we got altogether between 40 and 50 shotguns and about 1,400 shotgun cartridges. This was for the 3rd Battalion. On Good Friday or Holy Saturday I issued 6 or 7 shotguns and about 200 cartridges to Dick Carroll, Quartermaster of "C" Company.

From Tuesday of Holy Week we had an armed guard at Company Headquarters, 144 Pearse Street. Commandant De Valera also used 144 as 3rd Battalion Headquarters. This guard continued up to the Rising. I was in charge of the guard and the instructions given to me by Captain Seán MacMahon were to resist any unauthorised person from entering the building by force of arms if necessary. At a Company parade held during Holy Week the Company Captain issued an order for a full mobilisation for Easter Sunday. The instructions were to parade at Company Headquarters at 12 noon, carry arms and ammunition, wear uniform and equipment, and bring 24 hours' rations.

On Easter Sunday morning I accompanied Seán MacMahon to Liberty Hall. I remained just inside the hall and Captain MacMahon came out shortly afterwards with some parcels. I left them at my brother's place at Lombard Street. The parcels contained a key for opening a manhole, and a large cable cutter.

The Company paraded at 144 Pearse Street on Easter Sunday morning about 12 o'clock and remained until 4 o'clock in the afternoon and were dismissed by the Company Captain and instructed to remain convenient to our homes; that another mobilisation would be issued that evening or early on Monday morning. I remained on guard at 144 Pearse Street all night. I was in charge of the guard. Others present included as far as I remember, Peadar Macken, Tom Fulham.

At about 9 o'clock on Easter Monday morning Captain Seán MacMahon who also stayed overnight at 144 Pearse Street, came to me and told me to set the mobilisation for the Company in motion. I mobilised the four section commanders, who in turn mobilised their squad leaders and they then mobilised the men of their respective squads. The order was to parade

at 144 Great Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street) at 11 a.m. and bring full equipment, ammunition, rifles and 24 hours' rations.

After mobilising the section commanders I was permitted to go home for one hour to settle up some domestic affairs. I knew a rising was to take place but was never definitely told. I reported back to Captain MacMahon to 144 Pearse Street at about 11 o'clock. He told me to pick out four men to protect the Citizen Army man named King who was to cut the channel cable at Lombard Street.

I selected Joe McDermott, Peadar Macken (who was killed in action later that week), Con Griffin and Christy Lynch. We proceeded to Lombard Street and I collected the cable cutter and manhole key which I had left at my brother's place the previous morning. I placed a man at each corner of Westland Row and Pearse Street. I placed another man at the corner of Lombard Street-Pearse Street and took up position myself at the other corner of Lombard Street-Pearse Street (city side). I detailed Christy Lynch to assist King. The manhole was situated in Lombard Street just a few yards from the junction of Pearse Street. The operation took only a few minutes to complete. Having cut the cable King left to report back to his own unit. I met him afterwards in Frongoch. King was employed in the Engineering Branch of the Post Office and wore blue dungarees similar to those worn by employees of the Post Office at that time. The cutting of this cable was considered most important as it served telephonic communication between Dublin and London.

After the cutting of the channel cable was completed I was about to proceed to Headquarters when I saw Lieutenant Quinn with a party taking over Westland Row Station. I returned to 144 Pearse Street. Seán MacMahon and

J. Fitzgerald were still on duty looking after the Battalion stores. Captain MacMahon detailed me to take charge of a party to keep the portion of Pearse Street between the junction of Sandwith Street and Erne Street clear while the stores were being removed from Headquarters.

Whilst on duty in the street a section commander, Paddy Doyle of Milltown, arrived with 18 or 20 men who were mostly armed with pikes. We exchanged greeting. That was the last time I spoke to Paddy Doyle who died later in the week at his post in Clanwilliam House defending Mount Street Bridge. Whilst we were on duty in the street we took Supt. Lowe of the Detective Division, prisoner. He was prisoner at 144 Pearse Street until the evacuation was complete and was then released.

Telephone installations in the locality had been destroyed. A member of "B" Company commandeered a motor van, the property of the Junior Army and Navy Stores, from the garage at Creighton Street. We loaded the stores in this van and also on an ass and cart, the property of the Walsh Bros. of James' Street, who were members of our Company and survivors of Clanwilliam House, and brought the stores into Bolands from Clarence Street entrance, (now Macken Street) where they were unloaded. The stores included rifles, shotguns, shotgun ammunition and spare .303 and revolver ammunition. The material was stored in bread vans for speedy evacuation in case of necessity.

I then went to assist Lieutenant Simon Donnelly who was loopholing and sandbagging the wall at Boland's field (now built on) at the junction of Lower Grand Canal Street and Grand Canal Quay. This gave us command over Grand Canal bridge which had been barricaded with overturned bread vans, and also for communications with Clanwilliam House. Having completed that task I then went to Robert's yard where I remained on duty there until relieved on Tuesday morning, and reported to Captain

Seán MacMahon and Commandant De Valera who were on Westland Row Railway overlooking the slip at Sandwith Street. The Commandant said: "I believe you know this area very well". I said: "I do". He told me that he wanted me to take over Oriel House and asked me if I could get to it without exposing myself to the enemy. He also instructed me to place a man in the house at the corner of Merrion Square-Clare Street and also to occupy the corner house at Merrion Row/Merrion Street and to connect up with the Shelbourne Hotel. Before setting out on this task the Commandant told me that I was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. He said: "You are taking charge of this operation and you are the Lieutenant in charge".

I proceeded to carry out this task and had arrived at the lane at the rear of Oriel House when a Volunteer came up and told us to report back to the railway immediately. On arriving back at the railway Captain Seán MacMahon told me the operation was cancelled. Captain MacMahon also told me that they had got word that the Shelbourne Hotel was in the hands of the enemy.

I remained on duty at the railway line and after nightfall Lieutenant Quinn procured some fog signals from the Milesman's Hot and proceeded along the line towards Tara Street and placed the fog signals on the line so as to warn us of the approach of any train; it was expected that the British might be sending an armoured train from the North.

On Wednesday we strengthened our positions by barricading the railway timber yard and we dug several trenches across the railway line and put up barbed wire entanglements in front of them. Late on Wednesday night all available men in the area except those holding positions or on sentry were ordered to report at the railway line near Barrow Street bridge. We were lined up facing towards Dún Laoghaire. Every man was armed with some weapon. We remained there for about two hours and were then ordered to

return to our original positions. The Commandant then instructed the men to have a sleep, the first they had for the week, and he took over patrolling the railway line himself.

On Thursday there was great activity on the railway line. We put up extra barbed wire entanglements from Eene Street to South Lotts Road on the railway line. There were ten or twelve sentries posted along the line from the station to Barrow Street.

I posted the men on the railway at night and returned about an hour afterwards to inspect the posts. I carried my rifle at the ready with my finger on the trigger and I tripped over some of the barbed wire entanglements and I accidentally fired my rifle, thereupon two of our sentries opened fire and wounded me in the arm. I was assisted to the Dispensary, Grand Canal Street, by Seán Byrne, and at about 4 or 5 in the morning I was transferred to Sir Patrick's Dun's Hospital for treatment. In Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital there were five other of our wounded men - Christie Murphy, Paddy Sullivan, Leo Casey, - Cooper, Willie Browne. When I got to the hospital I was put on a mattress on the floor in the Accident Department. I had been attended by our first aid man, Seán Byrne, who applied a tourniquet to my arm. Later when Surgeon Smyley attended to me he asked me who put on the tourniquet. I told him "our first aid man", and Surgeon Smyley then said: "He knew his job". He could not have done any more for you".

On Monday we were transferred to Ballsbridge and after a short time we were put in an ambulance and sent to Richmond Barracks. Before going in the ambulance the British Officer warned us against attempting to escape as we would be shot.

On arrival at Richmond Barracks we were put in the barrack room occupied by other prisoners and were left there

without any attention for two days. On Wednesday my arm was very sore and one of our officers, Tim Finn, complained to the British Sergeant, and as result of his complaint I was brought for treatment to the dressing station in the Barracks and was attended to by a civilian doctor named Lynch. When he saw my wound he said: "You are a bad case, you should be in hospital". I told him that there were others worse than I was. Eventually he had three others, Scollin, W. Browne and Murphy, and myself removed to the Castle Hospital.

I was a patient in the Castle Hospital until about the end of July when I was transferred to Kilmainham Prison. I remained there for three weeks and was then transferred to Frongoch. After a few days in Frongoch I was sent to London to appear before the Sankey Commission. One of the questions asked me was: "Did I know what I was going out to on Easter Monday morning, or did I think I was going on manoeuvres?". I replied that I knew what we were going to.

I returned to Frongoch and at the end of another week I was released and returned home towards the end of August 1916.

Signed

Sean O'Keefe

Date

February 4th 1949

Witness

Sean Brennan Comdt.
4th February 1949

