

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BUREAU STAIRS IRELAND 1913-21  
No. W.S. 203

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. .... 203 .....

**Witness**

Mr. Edward O'Neill,  
14 Ring St.,  
Inchicore, Dublin.

**Identity**

- (i) Member of Sinn Féin.
- (ii) " " I.R.B.
- (iii) Lieut. Irish Volunteers,  
4th Battn. Dublin Brigade.

**Subject**

- (i) Preparation for Rising 1916.
- (ii) South Dublin Union and  
Marrowbone Lane Easter Week 1916.
- (iii) Dispatch work for Michael Collins  
between Dublin and Cork.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

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File No. S. 993. ....

Form BSM 2

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STATEMENT BY EDWARD O'NEILL,

14, RING STREET, INCHICORE.

I joined the Inchicore Branch of Sinn Fein in 1904. I had a good Irish home atmosphere as my mother was an old Co. Wicklow lady and an admirer of the Fenians up to the time of her death. My father's grandfather was a '67 man from Tallaght, but my father himself was always a parliamentarian. It was due to my mother's influence that I joined Sinn Fein and the Irish Ireland movement.

Others associated with me in the Sinn Fein Club were Peadar Doyle, Paddy Carroll, Alderman James McCann, Joe Doran, Ned Burgess and my brother Sean, Father Jim O'Shea and Father Matthews. Both these priests belonged to the Oblate Fathers, Inchicore.

We held all the functions in connection with Sinn Fein in the Workmen's Club, Inchicore, and in Paddy Carroll's house (now Black-lion publichouse). We learned the Irish language, did Irish dancing and singing, and produced several Irish dramas. Meetings were held at irregular intervals. I always continued membership of Sinn Fein.

Late in 1913 or early in 1914 I joined the Wolfe Tone Circle of the I.R.B. Seamus Kenny (now employed in Frawley's Drapery establishment, Thomas St.) was Head Centre then. I was sworn in by him at night in the open air on the Neas Road. Other members of this circle at the time I joined were, Con Butler, Paddy Byrne, Billy Kelly, Joe O'Gorman, Jim Fitzpatrick, Jack Rooney, Joe Bowman, Dan and Paddy Troy, brothers.

My work in the I.R.B. was that of organising and getting other whom I considered suitable to join it. When I contacted persons whom I considered suitable, and when they consented to join, I proposed them at the following meeting of the Circle. Some time later I would be told by the visitor to bring them along to the next meeting. Meanwhile, inquiries were made about the man proposed for membership to ensure that there was nothing against him. By the

Visitor I mean the representative that attended every Circle meeting from headquarters.

I was a young member of the I.R.B. and, therefore, was not let into the inner circle or its secrets. Notwithstanding this, however, I got to know some of their activities that I was not supposed to know. All young members were kept on the outer fringe and were not summoned to special meetings; this applied to me.

I joined the Volunteers at the formation in 1913 in Inchicore. We formed F/Coy. with Captain Con Colbert (a Fianna boy at the time), Bob Holland and a few others. Con was an I.R.B. man; we knew one another. The first place we drilled was at Woodfield, Inchicore. The Redmondite Volunteers started in 1914 and they mustered a fairly good company at the Courthouse, Kilmainham, where they had a rifle range. They used .22 rifles for practice. We went down one night and took their rifles and a row followed. One Sunday there was a mobilisation at 4 a.m. of the whole crowd - 800 marched from Inchicore to Lamb Doyle's in the Dublin mountains. Shortly after that the split came. A meeting of the whole company was called by irresponsibles and those following John Redmond were asked to come one way and a very small minority of us remained steadfast for MacNeill under Con Colbert. I would say that only 15 or 20 of us remained under Colbert, including five families, all related to each other - my three brothers and myself, four Powers, brothers-in-law, two Carthys and two Troys. Soon afterwards our numbers expanded and we still remained and trained in Inchicore. Tom Young, Liam Power and I were appointed section leaders. Con Colbert was appointed Captain, Christy Byrne and Larry Murtagh were Lieutenants.

We trained morning and night all the time right up to the Rising. Captain Daly was the instructor for the officers. Those of us who were going on for officer rank were taken out through the fields and he taught us field-craft and observations and everything in connection with military training. Then we had to write an

exercise on what we learned and he corrected it. We got a fairly good training in musketry. I was the musketry instructor. I got my knowledge of musketry from Seamus McEvoy who worked in Kavanagh's the gunsmiths in Dame St., beside where Callaghan's is now. He and I had access to the loft in Lawlor's, Fownes St., where a large quantity of revolver spare parts were kept. We used to go to Boylan's of Dunboyne and to Lawless's of Saucers-town for field training on Saturday and Sunday. When we procured rifles after the Howth gun-running we went out every Sunday morning to Greenhills, near an old ruin, which we named Prospect House.

We got a lot of pikes made on the railway. They were stored at the brickworks on the second lock and hidden there in preparation for the Rising. We also had a depot at the Oblate Church, Inchicore, where we kept our foodstuffs stored there in tins. Two motor bikes were also hidden in the Crib. Peadar Doyle was our quartermaster. Father Matthews used to be out with us at night during training exercises, but he was not a Volunteer.

I was mobilised for the Howth gun-running in the Company area. We got down to the different places where we were told to go. I was not near any shootings that took place on that day. Guns were being thrown everywhere. In a field of wheat at Artane some of the rifles were hidden. Bowman, Gorman, Jim Moran and myself went home and had a meeting to ourselves and we decided to go back and look for the hidden rifles and we found them. At 8 o/c. at night we hired a cab in Dublin and drove out to collect them and bring them home with us to the company. There was desolation over then, but we kept them ourselves.

About a year before the Rising I was sent to Borris to assist Dr. Dundon to organise a company of Volunteers there. We organised a fairly good company at a place known as Blacklion, outside Bagenalstown. I stayed about a week there and I met "Ginger" O'Connell and Martin Kavanagh during my stay. I got in touch there with Jim Finn who is now employed on contract work in Guinness's Brewery.

An engine driver named John Collins, and a goods fireman named Dan Murphy, both employed on the railway, were very useful to us. They brought us petrol in two-gallon tins. Murphy would give us the 'tip' in the morning about the train movements during the day. We usually met his train in the vicinity of Ballyfermot; he would slow down and give us the full tins which were then taken in sacks to Burke's of James's St. when Phil Cosgrave would take them. The tins would be collected later by Joseph Mary Plunkett in his motor-bike and sidecar and taken to safety.

About ten or twelve weeks before the Rising Ceannt told us what to expect. He took a crowd of us out one Sunday beyond Blessington; he sat on a stone wall and got us all around him. He told us what to prepare for and said "Get guns and ammunition, honest if you can, but get them". He often hinted to us afterwards in support of what he said on that occasion and urged us to keep going ahead. Con Colbert urged us on in the same way.

I was at home when the mobilisation order for the Rising came, but I cannot remember who delivered it. I put on my full equipment took my ammunition and walked out. I told my wife I was going on parade and said I would be back. I did not go back, but went to Emerald Square, off Cork St., where we were ordered to mobilise. I got instructions there from Con Colbert to mobilise other men for Marrowbone Lane and for Roe's Distillery.

A consignment of arms which had reached Keogh's Yard in Cork St. had to be assembled. I stayed up all night at the work of assembling it. Joe McGrath came over in the morning. Martin Kavanagh took charge of the truck that conveyed the arms to the right centres and he saw that the guns were properly placed and distributed.

During the Rising I was first in the South Dublin Union, but went later under orders to Colbert in Marrowbone Lane. I had charge of the whole bottom floor as I was section leader in the Volunteers and acting lieutenant at that time. We remained there until the

fighting was over. We had 14 Cumann na mBan there at the time. There was no shortage of food as we held up a baker's van and took its contents. Cattle on their way to the market were taken into the building and slaughtered to provide food.

On Easter Sunday at about 7 p.m. we heard of the surrender. We came outside the gate at Marrowbone Lane. Colonel Lowe of the British came down with a force of military behind him. Lieut. William Cosgrave and Commandant Ceannt were walking with him. Ceannt said "All the rest had surrendered 15 or 20 minutes before we surrendered". Then all walked out. We fell in. We were marched down to Patrick's Park, filed up and our revolvers taken from us. I had an American revolver - they could not work it. I was asked how to use it.

We were then taken to Richmond Barracks and kept there until Tuesday. De Valera came on Tuesday morning. He was on the square by himself. We were all brought out on Tuesday evening, formed up and told to march. We marched out the gate. We got a hostile reception. We were told there were graves dug in the Old Men's Home for us. We went down along the quays. Things quietened down further on. We went to the North Wall and were put on a boat. Joe Edelstein was with us and he was supposed to be a spy, so he was thrown off the boat by us.

When I was off the boat I found I was in Knutsford Jail. There I was elected Captain of my own company. Food was very bad. For about a fortnight we were not let out at all. From Knutsford we went to Frongoch and then to Wormwood Scrubbs, back to Frongoch and then home.

The first thing we did after coming home was to start another circle of the I.R.B. in James's St. in 1917. We called it the Con Colbert Circle. We were instructed not to carry on this circle and we obeyed. We started organising and drilling every night in the fields. One night Garry Byrne from headquarters came up and swore me in as lieutenant in the fields. He administered the oath

to confirm my Lieutenant's appointment in the Company. It still ran as F/Coy. until it got too big. Then it was split into two companies and called "F" and "I". Tom Halloran was Captain of "I" Company.

I was an Intelligence Officer for Michael Collins and dealt with all dispatches for him between Dublin and Cork. A man named Jack Good, whom I never met, had charge of the Cork end of things. A similar arrangements existed at both ends. The system was that the dispatches were brought from either end on a goods train on the G.S.R., each of us knowing a man on the train who would deliver them to us. When I got the dispatches I brought them to Michael Collins at No. 6 Harcourt St. I have no copies of any of these dispatches, Sometimes I delivered them to Collins personally and on other occasions I delivered them to Dermot Hegarty.

Jim Soye and Mark Foley were two engine drivers. These two helped with the bringing of the dispatches. Soye was my principal man.

The dispatches were usually enclosed in two or three envelopes. For example, in the case of a dispatch from Cork to Michael Collins the dispatch would be written and put into an envelope. The envelope would be addressed, perhaps to me; that envelope would be sealed and put into another envelope and addressed to someone else; that envelope again put into another envelope and addressed to someone else - sometimes there would be three or more envelopes covering the same dispatch. The dispatch would be delivered to the various addresses; according as each person to whom it was addressed received it, he would deliver it to the next person.

We also sent dispatches by Sinn Fein post. We had our own stamps. There was a house named Egan's on the quays where we got them. There was a dispatch sent from Egan's to Limerick by bicycle system. Miss Egan brought the dispatch to Inchicore where Andy Healy was waiting for it. It was addressed to Mick Costelloe, Clondalkin. He was not there, but his wife took it and she went on

her bicycle to Rathcoole to deliver it to someone else and, in turn, it was delivered to another person and so on until it reached Limerick. It took only eleven hours to have the dispatch delivered to Limerick by this means.

I was employed as an engineer in Dollard's Printing Works and later in the same capacity in Cahill's Printing Works. Seamus Murphy was Manager of a printing firm in Eyre Square, Galway, at the time. The monthly periodical called "The Maynooth Mission to China" was being printed by Seamus Murphy and was used as a cover for propaganda by the Volunteers. The authorities at the time got to know about this and a raid was carried out by the British military and all the printing machines were smashed by them. I was sent to Galway by Michael Collins to put the machines in working order again, which I did.

While I was in Dollard's we did a lot of printing. Two men named Mick Flanagan and Tom Phillips, compositors, worked in different printing offices in town. During the day they used set up the work and at night it was brought to the Wood Printing Works, Temple Bar, and printed there. I was responsible for it. In the morning Sean O'Murthuile, Erskine Childers and Mick Collins used come for the work. The men in the Printing Works would parcel up the stuff that had been printed during the night and Childers would take it away on a bicycle. Most of this printing was for Collins.

Signed:

Date:

Witness:

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Albena Bobby S 993 4/1/49

I enclose herewith, for your approval, one typed copy of <sup>the</sup> your statement that you very kindly consented to make at this Bureau.

When you have read it over I shall call to see you and if you wish to make any additions or alterations, I shall be only too happy to facilitate you in this respect.

I shall <sup>conspire</sup> ~~try~~ to let you have one or two copies of your statement if necessary.

Best wishes for a happy New Year. I hope you are keeping the asthma at bay.  
Yrs very sincerely  
Grace Cobb