

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
· BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 393

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 393

Witness

Mr. Seamus S. O'Sullivan,
The Bungalow,
Revington Park,
Limerick.

Identity

Lieutenant 'B' Company
1st Battalion Dublin Brigade I.V's. 1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1913-1916;
- (b) North Circular Road Bridge and
G.P.O. Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT OF SEAMUS S. O'SULLIVAN,

The Bungalow, Revington Park,
Nth. Circular Road, Limerick.

In November, 1913, I joined the Volunteers in the Rotunda Rink, Dublin, where I first met Ned Daly. I was appointed 1st Lieutenant of "B" Company, 1st Battalion; Ned Daly was elected Officer Commanding the Company; and Paddy Whelan was 2nd Lieutenant. When a little later the Battalion was formed by a grouping of the companies, Ned Daly was appointed Battalion Commandant; Piaras Beaslai was Vice-Commandant; I was Adjutant; and Gerald Griffin was Quartermaster. We were asked to select men to act as deputies in our respective appointments. It was then that I selected Eamon Duggan as Deputy Battalion Adjutant, and E. Morkan was selected as Deputy Quartermaster.

At the time of the split, Ned Daly and I went around the Companies. Ned addressed the Companies. The majority went Redmondite. The Officers Commanding at this time were; McCormack ("A" Company); Tom Byrne ("B" Company); M. J. Judge ("C" Company); Sean Heuston ("D" Company); I cannot remember who commanded "E" Company; Fionán Lynch ("F" Company); and Alright ("G" Company).

Howth Gun-running, 1914 - apart from general arrangements, Daly and I collected a lot of the rifles, which were dumped and lost in fields around.

Early in 1915, I was appointed full-time Organiser, attached to Headquarters Staff, and went to organise North County Dublin. I first went to Rush and Lusk; and

and stayed with Dr. Hayes at Lusk. This territory, at the time, was being organised as the 5th (Auxiliary) Battalion, Dublin Brigade. From there, I went to Skerries and Balbriggan. Later, I went further north, to Drogheda and Dundalk, where I met Seán McEntee, who was then an apprentice in a local electricity undertaking.

About this time, Alf Monahan, who was Organiser in Cavan, was arrested. I was called back to Headquarters, and then sent to Cavan to replace him. Going to Cavan, I was instructed by Bulmer Hobson and received from him maps and lists of Companies that were supposed to exist there.

My headquarters was in Ballinagh, about five miles from Cavan. I found no activity at all in Cavan town. I checked up on the list which Hobson had given me, and found that in most places there were, in fact, no companies at all. There was generally a nucleus, but no drill or meeting. As well as this, I had from Seán McDermott a list of good men (I.R.B. members) to contact; and I looked them up. Some of them were good, but others were no use at all.

In Ballinagh, there was the makings of a good Company. Charlie Fitzpatrick (bandmaster), Phil Baxter and Tommy Fitzpatrick were active. In Ballinagh, there was a lot of activity, buying rifles from Dublin, making buckshot ammunition for shotguns, and purchasing about twenty-six American shotguns from a hardware merchant in Cavan -- McCabe. Most of those went to what was known as the "mountainy" company, in a place called Bruskey. Owen Smith was the Captain there, and he was good. I visited

all the outlying towns like Arvagh, Ballyhaise, Upperlavey, Kingscourt and another place, from which Paul Galligan comes. While I was there, I remember going to Clones to meet Eoin O'Duffy on one occasion to try to get information about the Howth rifles and others, which had got into the hands of J.D. Nugent and company. Duffy did not know where they were, but said that the Administrator in Monaghan town would know. I went to Monaghan, but found the Administrator had been appointed Parish Priest of Glasslough. I contacted him there, and stayed the night with him. He knew where the rifles were, but he said that, as he was one of the trustees in the matter, he could not give me information as to their whereabouts. He did mention that they were a motley collection, including big game rifles. This information was sent to G.H.Q.

I was in Cavan until soon after St. Patrick's Day, 1916, - before Easter - when I was summoned to Dublin by P.H. Pearse. He told me he had a special job for me in Wexford, that, while Wexford was good, it wanted brushing up in training, and that, as I should know how critical things were and if anything should happen, I was to take command of Wexford.

Pearse's reference to the fact that I should know how things were because of a meeting of the Volunteer Executive which I attended, from Cavan, to present a report. At this meeting were Pearse, McDonagh, Ceannt, Hobson, O'Connor, Mellows and others. Hobson brought up a proposal at the meeting to spend a sum of money (£50 or £60) on the manufacture of track carts as transport vehicles for

Volunteer units. A lot of discussion took place on this, regarding the spending of so much money in this way; and, in the middle of this, Pearse asked for my opinion in the matter. I said that I thought, in any emergency, we could always commandeer carts from farmers and traders, and that the money could be spent to better advantage on arms. Prior to this, I was aware that there had been a division among the staff; but at this meeting it made itself plain. Some time before this meeting, I had a discussion with Pearse at St. Enda's when I told him that Hobson had been urging me to send him weekly reports of training and activities, which I had no time to do. Pearse said to this; "Now, listen, the less Hobson knows, the better. Send no reports to him, but report direct to me at St. Enda's any time you come to town".

When sending me to Wexford, Pearse told me to look up Ginger O'Connell and a man, named Kelly, from Headquarters, who had been sent down there. Kelly, who I believe was a medical student, had been sent to Wexford to organise the Volunteers, but had forwarded no reports. O'Connell was sent down to look Kelly up, and, up to then, he had not reported either.

I contacted Bob Brennan in Wexford town. From there, I visited Enniscorthy, New Ross, Gorey, Rathnew and a lot of other villages where I reformed Companies, did some drill and improvised a pike drill from bayonet exercises, as the men had a lot of pikes there. Some of the people I met during that time were Seán Etchingham, Wrafter, Redmond, Foley, Synnott.

In Wrafter's of Enniscorthy, I found some traces of Ginger and Kelly having been there; but, as they had left

some time before, I did not meet them, and I never succeeded in making contact with them. Wrafter had a big provision store, in the basement of which were considerable stocks of arms and ammunition of various kinds, including grenades made from stone-beer bottles.

I was in New Ross on Holy Thursday when I got a wire from Pearse to report to him in Dublin, and I travelled up on that day. I got a loan of a two stroke motor cycle in New Ross, and started for Dublin; but the bike broke down at Rathdrum, where I had to stay the night, travelling on to Dublin next day, Good Friday.

I reported to Pearse at St. Enda's about noon on Good Friday, arriving there on a push bike. He told me that Commandant Ned Daly wanted me in town, as his dispositions had been made, which included me. While I cannot remember what words he used, or that he said anything definite about the rising, he certainly left me under the impression that something serious was about to happen.

When I left Pearse and was on my way to contact Daly, I met Ginger O'Connell on the Rathfarnham Road, going in the direction of St. Enda's. I stopped to talk to him. He said he had heard that I had been looking for him in Wexford and that the reason I could not locate him was that he had worked up into Kilkenny. I told him that Pearse did not know he was in town, and asked if he was going out to him. He said he was. He gave me the impression that he understood that he was to be appointed in charge of Wexford.

Having contacted Ned Daly, we both went to Tom Clarke's shop. By this time, I had recovered the motor-bike, which had been left for repairs in Wayte Bros. Daly also had a motor cycle. At Clarke's shop, I got a letter to deliver to Mrs. Clarke at her house on Richmond Avenue. I delivered the letter; and there I got a parcel containing money and another letter, addressed to Tom Clarke. I got in touch with Daly in Clarke's shop; and, as Tom Clarke was absent at the time, Daly told me to hold on to the letter and parcel for the present. Later that night when it was dark, having had a meal, Daly brought me up to Fleming's Hotel in Gardiner Place where we met Tom Clarke and gave him the parcel and letter. Clarke had got a wound in the arm, through an accidental pistol shot, but was in great spirits.

As we were leaving Fleming's Hotel, Daly informed me that the officers were not to stay in their homes from then on. He and I returned to the Four Courts Hotel, where we stayed the night. I then knew the rising was timed for Sunday. I had discussed matters with Daly, and knew that he was taking over the Four Courts. He had told me that I was to hold three bridges, at North Circular Road, Cabra Road and Cross Guns Bridge on Phibsboro Road. I was to have at least 150 men- principally "B" Company - and enough others to make up the number from other Companies. I understood then that, if I could afford to do so, I was to hold Doyle's Corner. The Battalion Quartermaster was supposed to have arranged to have the two bridges at Cabra and North Circular Road blown up before I took up my position; and barricades were to be erected on the roads covering the bridges. If I had to retire, I was to fall back on Doyle's Corner, and so on, corner by corner, down to the G.P.O.

On Saturday, I was running around with Daly, all day, making contact with various people, to ensure a full turn-out for Easter Sunday.

On Saturday night, we contacted Seán McDermott in Kissane's house, Hardwicke Street. Seán reiterated that the bridges would be blown up and barricades erected, and that he would see that I had 50 extra men. Daly and I then went to the Clarence Hotel where we stayed that night.

On Easter Sunday morning, we left the Clarence Hotel to go to Mass, when we saw the "Independent" placard, stating that Volunteer manoeuvres were cancelled. This news threw us into such a state that I don't remember if we went to Mass at all afterwards. As we were walking along, we met several Volunteers who wanted to know what to do and if the newspaper announcement was true. We told them to parade at Blackhall Place, as arranged, and that any further information we got would be given to them there.

I cannot remember much of what happened immediately afterwards, but we must have got information from somewhere, as, having dismissed the parade at Blackhall Place, we reported to Liberty Hall. This must have been sometime after twelve noon. As far as I remember, there was a conference in progress in another room, at which Connolly and Clarke, among others, were present. I and a number of other officers were told to await the result of this conference in a room overlooking the entrance to Liberty Hall.

While we were waiting, Madame Markievicz came into the room, with a small automatic in her hand, and asked in

a peremptory tone if anyone there knew where Hobson was, or his woman (meaning his secretary at Dawson Street) - "I want to shoot him". No one knew where he was at the time, so she went out.

When the conference, which lasted more than an hour, was finished, Seán McDermott came out and spoke to Daly and myself. I believe it was he told us that action was postponed until the following day at the same time, and to get busy on mobilisation arrangements, which we proceeded to do at once.

I slept at home that night at Arranmore Avenue, N.C.R.

On Monday morning, passing by the Mater Hospital, I saw a man named Sheehan - he was employed by the Dublin Corporation, and was to have been responsible for the demolition of the bridges. I was on a motor-bike and I did not stop to speak to him, but it struck me as queer that he did not seem to be on the demolition job at that time. I arrived at Blackhall Place and met Daly there and all the lads, but I noted that there was a very small muster. I remarked that Alright, the Capt. of G Coy, and McCormack - Capt. of A Coy were absent. Daly addressed the men and told them that this was the "Day" and that he expected them to do honour to the 1st Bn. in the forthcoming clash of arms. I led off the first contingent of fifteen men, and went up Queen St., Constitution Hill and Phibsboro Road to N.C.R. bridge first. When I got there I found that there were neither barricades nor demolition carried out. The Q.M. Griffin did not put in an appearance and I thought that with the few men I had, the best thing I could do would be to occupy a house on the city side of the N.C.R. bridge, and a similar procedure on the Cabra Road Bridge. I put Sergt. J. Corless I/C of Cabra Road

Bridge with about eight men, and I went with the others to N.C.R. Bridge. Arrangements were made for communication between the posts and we had difficulty in getting the occupants out of the houses as naturally they did not understand the situation and did not want to leave. Corless had a particularly bad time in this respect, as the people in the house, which I think was named "Holmstead" were English, and were very ~~obscene~~ ^{ABUSIVE}. We commandeered passing carts to construct a barricade of sorts. Having suitably dispersed the men we made arrangements for feeding them by commandeering butter, bacon and bread from Byrnes' of Phibsboro'. J. K. O'Reilly (author of Wrap the Green Flag 'round me) was one of the Volunteers on the N.C. R. Bridge and also two of his sons - Sammy and Desmond (or Kevin).

Prior to the erection of the barricades a troop - (about 10 or 12) of cavalry appeared, travelling towards the city. At that time I was under the impression that all points and crossings between us and the centre of the city were held, and we were expecting a large body of troops to move on the city, so we allowed this party to pass unmolested as our ammunition was not too plentiful, and we felt sure that they would be dealt with further on. Some of the men grumbled about this decision at the time, but I thought it was the best thing to do at the moment. When the barricades had been erected, some sniping of our position took place from a point somewhere about Charleville Road and my cap was knocked off by a bullet and Vol. Gogan got a slight wound. This sniping went on for some time, and then information reached us that a troop train was coming in on the Western line towards Liffey junction. Sonny Reilly and Corless proffered that they would start up an engine at the Broadstone Stn. and send it down the

line on the up line and in fact they carried out their project. However, there was a cattle train on the line in front of the troop train, and colliding with this some waggons were derailed which did block the line, but did no damage to the troop train. In order to block the line we also cut a telegraph pole which fell across the line at N.C.R. Bridge.

About this time Griffin the Q.M. appeared with a small bundle of dynamite. We took up some paving stones on the centre of the bridge and placed the charge in the hole, attached fuse and perched it as well as we could, but the resulting explosion had about as much effect as a bundle of squibs. During this time we had allowed a cab up to facilitate the evacuation by the occupants of the house we occupied. Some went and some stayed and then a motor car approached from the direction of the Bank which when we stopped it we found to contain James McNeill, brother of Eoin McNeill. He said he was going into the city to his relatives. Enemy sniping was then intensified and we noticed that some of it was coming from the Broadstone Stn. which up to then we considered as unoccupied. Then started the artillery attack on our position. I do not know where the guns were, but shells began to fall on the bridges and near Phibsborough Church and I received information that the British were in occupation of Doyles' Corner, cutting off our retreat into the city. Our position being therefore untenable, and our retreat in body to the city cut off, I ordered the men to disperse and get to the G.P.O. individually as best they could. Some of them said that they would try to get in touch with the Fingal Bn., which we understood was about Finglas. Tom Ashe told me afterwards in a discussion with him on the matter while in jail, that

he had understood that I and my party were to fall back on him and not towards the city as I had understood.

Before giving the orders for the dispersion of the men, and while the artillery was firing I sent a dispatch to Daly at the Four Courts by Seán Howard advising him of our position and asking for reinforcements. No reply having been received to my dispatch after some time, I ordered the abandonment of the posts. The immediate cause of this decision was the artillery attack and intensified rifle fire indicating the closer approach of enemy Infantry.

We moved off in twos and threes. Two others and myself were moving towards Connaught St. when some civilians told us that the enemy were coming up that way. We three separated then so as not to be in a body, and I got into a house in Connaught St. from the rear and the people knew me. They contacted a sister of mine who came to the house and I told her to see how things were outside and if she could, to get to John O'Mahony's house (Flemings' Hotel) in Gardiner Place. She came back with a message from there suggesting that I should get down there. Also Detective Sergt. Lavelle lived in the house next door to where I was in Connaught St., so I borrowed a civil coat and hat to put over my uniform, and went down to O'Mahony's with my sister. When I got there I wrote a report for Comdt. Pearse, which O'Mahony said he would deliver. They gave me food and made me lie down in the Hotel. O'Mahony, having delivered my message brought back a reply that Pearse said I was to report to the G.P.O. I think it was Joe Murray conducted me by devious ways to the G.P.O. in the small hours of the Tuesday morning, when I reported to Pearse as ordered.

He told me that some of my men had got there already including Corless, the two O'Reilly's and Gogan. He then instructed me to take charge of the upper storey and roof of the G.P.O. and relieve Captain Michael Collins. Collins refused to leave his post without a written order which was then obtained by Jack Plunkett when Collins left. From then on I have little to add to the various stories that have been written since, describing the bombardment of the G.P.O. and fighting the creeping flames. In the evacuation Pearse called me and instructed me that I was to be second in charge to The O'Rahilly and that the object was to get the garrison safely out of the G.P.O. and into Williams & Woods Jam Factory. I suggested to O'Rahilly that we should advance through the lane running parallel with O'Connell Street and between Moore Street and O'Connell Street rather than as he intended to move up Moore Street. He overruled me, however, and began the march out into Moore Street in columns of four where enemy fire from a barricade at the Parnell Street end of Moore Street stopped the move and caused casualties, including The O'Rahilly himself. I shouted to the men to take cover and they scattered in all directions some to the right and some to the left.

Before leaving the G.P.O. I remember a man approaching me who I believe was Seán McLoughlin. I think he was in civilian dress but I am not quite sure of this; at any rate he had a band of yellow cloth on his arm which was the colour of the staff marking at the time. He aggressively informed us that he had been appointed Commandant by Pearse. When the surrender came, I was in charge of a party occupying Williams' store in Henry Street (through the back from Salmon Lane). We moved out under the white flag down Salmon

Lane and down Moore Street to the barricade where we surrendered to Lt. Colonel Hutchings of the Sherwood Foresters. Lt. Colonel Hutchings was very formal and polite and dealt only with me as being in charge of the party. He asked me my name and rank, and when I pointed out that of the sixteen in my party, six of these were looters whom we had arrested on the premises and had used for fatigue work, he thereupon instructed a Sergeant to take these away. He himself took my revolver and told me to instruct my men to lay down their arms in a pile in front of our line when we were then marched to the Rotunda.

SIGNED

Samuel S. Sullivan

DATE

1st June 1950.

WITNESS

J. H. ...

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