

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 627

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 627

Witness

Seamus Reader,
71 Pigeon House Road,
Coastguard Station,
Ringsend,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Fianna Eireann, Glasgow, 1911 - ;
Member of I.R.B. Glasgow, 1914 - .

Subject.

- (a) Fianna Eireann, Glasgow, 1911 - ;
- (b) I.R.B. Glasgow, 1914 - ;
- (c) Transport of ammunition from Glasgow to Ireland January 1915.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.283

Form B.S.M. 2.

C O N T E N T S.

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STATEMENT BY SEUMAS READER,

71 Pigeonhouse Road, Coastguard Station,
Ringsend, Dublin.

I was born in Glasgow. As long as I can remember from my earliest years I had a good national background. I remember hearing rebel songs such as "The Wearing of the Green", "Who Fears to Speak of '98", etc. being sung. In my home and the homes of my boy companions were pictures of Robert Emmet and of the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy.

When I was about nine or ten years old there was the Boys' Brigade, purely for protestants, attached to the Church of England and other churches. The Roman Catholic Church had nothing to do with it. They drilled with dummy rifles.

In the district where I lived - Townhead, Glasgow - there was a Wolfe Tone Flute Band and another called the Emmet Flute Band. I can remember as a boy following that band. In another district there was a Pipe Band called the Rory O'Moore Pipe Band. Although these bands were under the A. O. H. the followers of the Wolfe Tone Band were mostly republican. At that time I was only interested in the band, following them everywhere. They had very fine uniforms which would appeal to a boy. These bands were used for trips and excursions. I can remember my mother warning me never to take part in these bands - they were sort of a recruiting ground for the Fenians.

The Wolfe Tone Band met in Albion Street, Glasgow; the Emmet Band in Turner Street. There were also Sunday Schools. They were not attached to churches, they were formed by the Socialist Party but they were not on the same system as Church Sunday School. One man very prominent in Scotland, Tom Anderson, spent a lot of his money and time on these Sunday Schools. In Glasgow there were a number of Boy Scout troops and patrols, also the Clarion Scouts. I joined the 7th Group and later transferred to the 56th Group of the Baden Powell Scouts and eventually was promoted Patrol Leader.

There was a youth organisation called the Fingallians. These Fingallians were in Govan. They had their clubs. Tom Anderson acted on the south side of Glasgow where the Young Irelanders and Gaelic League met. Out of these Fingallians really developed the ^{Scottish} Fianna. The Fingallians and Fianna were not secret organisations.

In 1911 my young brother came to me and told me he had joined a Scouts' Organisation better than I had joined, and he said they had swords. It was Na Fianna Éireann. These scouts met in Anne Street. At first my brother did not know much about them, but after a few weeks he told me what they were doing. He also told me about their uniforms and soon I went down to the Fianna. In the Fianna hall the first man I met was Seumas Dempsey from Belfast. He took me gently, told me what they were for, and as I already had a background I joined the Fianna. Willie Nelson was the name of the Sluagh. We had to live up to the reputation of this boy. I took the Fianna declaration. I was not long in the Fianna when I was made

a scout leader on account of my previous training with the Baden Powell Scouts.

The first man to start the Fianna was Tom Gillespie in High Street, Glasgow, with the assistance of the Gaelic League, the Young Irelanders and a circle of the I.R.B. Seán Hanley was Centre of the Govan Circle of the I.R.B. Then Joe Robinson came over from Ireland to organise the Fianna. He organised a section or two in Govan. Anne Street was headquarters of the Volunteers at the time.

I took a keen interest in the Fianna. Robinson used tell us what they were going to do and what they were doing. We spent all our week-ends with the Fianna. When I joined Joe Robinson, Seumas Dempsey, Alec Carmichael, Seumas McGallogly and George Rafferty were officers in the Fianna. There was a crowd of senior members who called themselves a Board of Works. Seán Hanley, Seumas McNulty, Seán Hegarty and others were on this Board.

During 1911, 1912 and 1913, I was being trained and tutored in the Fianna. I came over to Ireland in 1912. We brought boys over and bought equipment for camping purposes. In Glasgow we used to attend Gaelic classes. During 1913 and 1914 we came backwards and forwards to the camp. I came over a number of times. Countess Markievicz used bring me around Dublin with her. Our camp was in the grounds of Mrs. Reddin near Artane, Co. Dublin.

By this time I was Captain of the Willie Nelson Sluagh. We paraded with the Volunteers. It was arranged by Robinson that any of the Volunteer Section Leaders who would come along to the Fianna officers' classes would get taught there. I instructed at these classes and therefore I became popular with the Volunteers. Pat O'Neill asked me to join the I.R.B. I was sworn in by O'Neill in the presence of O'Donnell who was Centre. O'Neill was Sub-Centre.

In 1914 I was brought into the I.R.B. I was sent over to Ireland with detonators. I went to the Countess and while over I was brought to premises in Wellington Lane so that I would know them as I would have to go there again. I was also brought to a portmanteau shop on Rathmines Road. I think it was named Lennons. I knew I was to be given some special work. The old hands in the scouts would be the ones to be picked. I knew there was something going on outside. I used to help the caretaker D. Canning, who was an old '67 man, to clean the Sinn Féin hall, London Street, Glasgow, and so I knew that important meetings were being held there. In the afternoons we would play dominos. We had carpenters and plumbers in the Fianna and used do repairs for them. In that way I was getting in touch with F. McDonnell and P. O'Neill.

Each time I came over to Dublin alone I brought over five boxes containing small detonators, revolver ammunition, about twenty-five rounds in each.

There were four Companies of Volunteers in Scotland, one in each of the following areas - Paisley, Glasgow and

district, Govan and Maryhill, and were known as the West of Scotland Regiment. There were over one hundred men in each Company. When the 'split' occurred following the famous speech made at Woodenbridge by John Redmond, out of the four Companies only about one hundred remained loyal to the Volunteer Executive. These were re-organised into one Company under Captain Joe Robinson. This was known as "A" Company.

Early in 1915, Robinson started sending over stuff. He was solely in command then. Cathal O'Shannon was in Glasgow during one of my visits to Ireland. It was proposed that I should get a commission in the Volunteers, being in the Fianna and knowing scouting, drilling and musketry. I was made a Lieutenant in the Volunteers. Seumas Dempsey had been Captain of "C" Company in the Irish National Volunteers. Robinson was in charge as far as Fianna and Volunteers were concerned.

A raid took place in 1915 after the split on Uddington Colliery Magazine. Quite a number of men took part in this raid, among them were Robinson, Carmichael, Hagerty, Friel, Cormick, Turner, Eamon Murray (Dublin) and myself. We got a fair amount of detonators, two types. We carried revolvers. We carried out the stuff in haversacks.

When I was in Dublin someone gave me a "bulldog", but it was taken off me as it was very big. I got a postcard from Dublin asking me to call to Kearney's as there would be a box of chocolates there for me, but when I got there it was a small box of ammunition and a split new revolver.

It was decided to raid the Admiralty Yard for arms. The Cumann na mBan were brought in with the Volunteers for this raid. These included Una McKeown, Margaret Skinnider, Molly Maguire. Volunteers were: Joe Robinson, Hagerty, Seumas McGallogly. These were supposed to be boy and girl friends and went out together so as not to arouse suspicion. I was summoned to go to the shipyard. There was supposed to be somebody there to meet us. When we went on the raid I had my revolver and a pliers. Friel, Carmichael, Pat O'Neill and I were told by Joe Robinson to go over this yard and if there was any danger a rope would be pulled. We went over into the yard. It was dark at the time. There were all sorts of steel plates, doors, etc. around. We waited for a long time but nobody turned up. We had flashlamps so we decided to investigate. I was seated on a wall. I was asked to come over here that there was something there like a gun. It looked like a 12-pounder. I went over. I saw a label on it and it had the word "danger" written on it. I took the label off, put it down and started to read it. It was not a gun at all, it was a fire extinguisher. We got nothing out of this raid.

I gave military readings to the I.R.B. out of scout and military manuals. These readings were followed by discussions on the subjects I had read. Before this we were training in Bishopshigg. In most cases I did the work of the instructor.

Previous to my arrest I was in No. 2 Dawson Street when the Volunteers were there. It must have been some flag day because I got a job of putting pins in square cards.

In bringing stuff back and forward there was a practice whereby some of the stuff that was given to us by miners would be taken over and given to the Citizen Army in Dublin.

I was instructed never to discuss I.R.B. matters with the Countess. I was often sent to Tom Clarke's shop with I.R.B. dispatches.

In 1915, Seán McGarry came over as an I.R.B. official. I used take him to where he was to stay, to any meetings or to any addresses. That made me keep in touch with the I.R.B. proper. All expenses were paid. McDermott had been in Glasgow and was thought a lot of over there. While in Ireland I met Seumas McGowan, Bob De Paor, Miss Molony. During our time here we went round taking down recruiting posters.

Eamon Murray was a member of the Dublin Fianna. He came over to Scotland and took part in one of the raids, I think November or December 1915. He was a member of the Surrey House cliche. At that time the brothers Flanagan, the brothers Seumas and Seán Rice, Raferty and Seumas Dempsey and others came over to Ireland. They were mostly Belfast men.

In Glasgow we made bombs and had lectures on the kind of fuse to be used. I never saw any of these ones being sent off. They were made in Kimmage later on and at the same time they were also working in Liberty Hall.

I.R.B. men that came back and forward from the Supreme Council were men such as McGarry, Bulmer Hobson and "Casey" McCormick.

Important men about this period were, McDonnell, Pat McNeill, T. P. Daly, Liam Pedlar, Charlie Kerrigan, Dan Brannock, Paddy MacElroy, Mr. Mulholland, Patrick McGowan, Liam Gribbin, Willie Oswell, Con Fibbs, Tom White, Dinny Cannon, McCullough: the last two were '67 men.

During this time I was coming backwards and forwards to Surrey House. Most of the talking I had with Connolly was in Surrey House in the morning or at night. He more or less told me about the Rising. In November and December, I knew definitely from the Countess and Connolly that there was going to be a rising or a fight. Connolly told me to be prepared for things that would be expected of me. He talked about Trade Unionism and how they were going to run the fight, what was going to happen and what to expect. He gave me the impression and Joe Robinson verified it, that I would be fighting in Ulster. I wanted to go with the Dublin boys. Connolly never told me the direct plans. I knew especially in December that something would be happening soon. We were told to rush up stuff and brush up our training in the use of explosives.

We did not always come direct to Dublin. Sometimes we went via Belfast. Donnelly's, who were important members of both the Fianna and the Volunteers in Belfast, lived in one of the converted army huts.

When I was in Belfast my anxiety was to get to Dublin as quickly as possible. On arrival in Dublin at

Amiens Street there would sometimes be someone to meet us and sometimes not. We left some small bags of explosives in D. McCullough's father's shop and S. Dempsey's aunt's house in Belfast.

On a Saturday evening about the middle of January 1915, we carried out a raid on Hamilton Coal Mines Magazine. Those taking part in the raid were - Joe Robinson, McGalloglys (Seán and Seumas), Frank Scullin, Friel, Carmichael, Cormick, Turner and some others and myself. Seán McGallogly had the key of the Magazine and he had no trouble in getting in. Each of us carried away a large quantity of gelnite and detonators. We locked all doors before we left and left the place as we got it, and we brought the stuff to the Volunteer Hall. There we had a cup of tea and then started packing the explosives in large tin trunks and portmanteaux. Robinson announced that we were going to Belfast that night. He had already arranged the journey. We got the train at Glasgow and proceeded to Ardrossan; there we carried the stuff to the boat and from Ardrossan went to Belfast. On arrival in Belfast we engaged a jarvey and loaded the car with the explosives. We went right to Connolly's house in Belfast. The Connollys were annoyed at the stuff being brought to the house in such a large quantity. I told them we would get it out for the next train. We afterwards procured a car and loaded it with the explosives which were in two portmanteaux and a big tin trunk and went to the station. None of the Belfast Volunteers assisted us in the removal of the stuff although they were instructed to do so.

On arrival in Dublin, Cormick, Turner and I engaged another car. We intended bringing the explosives to

Tobins of Wellington Lane, but I forgot the address to which I was to bring the explosives as I had not got it in writing, so we decided to take them to Surrey House. The jarvey drove us as far as Leinster Road and I proceeded to Surrey House alone. It was dark in the evening. The windows of Surrey House were open and I got in through the window. Inside I met Theo Fitzgerald. I told him the fix I was in. He said he knew the Tobins, and after giving me some money he came down with me to the car and we all drove to Wellington Lane. We kept some explosives in a bag for Madam. Immediately the explosives were delivered to Tobins they started distributing them.

I remained on in Surrey House Sunday and Monday. On Tuesday a messenger came and said I was to go to Seán McDermott in D'Olier Street. I went to see McDermott. He congratulated me on the job I had done and he gave me five pounds. I said I hoped it would be the last time I would have to come over as I was anxious to stay here and did not want to go back. He said it was very important that I should return as there were two messages being sent back, one for the Irish Volunteers and one for the I.R.B., and there will be an explanation given. The message for the I.R.B. was in connection with the sending over of any members who had practical experience of blasting in any shape or form. The Volunteer letter referred to the sending over of men who were in danger of being called up at once or men with military experience or any instructors in the British reserve that could be sent over. The principal thing was that everybody that could was to get over.

I had the two despatches. One was to be delivered to McDonnell, the other to Joe Robinson. I was very downhearted. McDermott said, "You need not worry, you will be back here the following week-end. When you arrive in Glasgow, you deliver the messages, and you will come back here with other people. You will arrive in Dublin on Sunday and there will be a great welcome for you, and there will be a Fianna pipe band sent down to welcome you".

I left Dublin on Wednesday night for Glasgow. When I was aboard ship I hid myself in a lifeboat as I knew I was going to be sick. I had my loaded revolver on me - a 5 Chamber revolver - and the despatches and five pounds.

On arrival in Glasgow I got off the boat but could see no one. I decided I would go to Carmichael's house. Mrs. Carmichael was there and she was making complaints about explosives being left in the house. While I was there a Detective from Dublin Castle came in and questioned me. I was having a meal and had my coat on the back of the chair with the despatches in one pocket and my revolver in the other. I admitted there were explosives in the house (Mrs. Carmichael had told me they were in the house). I was asked to get ready and I was arrested. I took an old coat belonging to Mr. Carmichael and put it on me and I threw my own coat into a bed enclosure which contained the despatches. I was brought to a local police station and charged by the "G" man from Dublin Castle with the theft of explosives. I was questioned as to where I was for the week-end and I said

I was in Dublin visiting my aunt. Later on I was questioned by the British and I stated I had been in Dublin in connection with the making of arrangements for a summer camp, and I admitted bringing ammunition over and said that I was asked to do so by two men whom I could identify but did not know their names. For want of evidence I was never tried but it was decided to intern me under the Defence of the Realm Act. I was kept three months in Duke Street Prison, six weeks in Edinburgh Castle and four weeks in Carlton Jail. Then I was taken to Reading Jail and was released at Christmas 1916.

I should mention here that the Carmichaels discovered the despatches in my coat and they were delivered safely to the I.R.B. and to the Irish Volunteers.

Before our arrest there were I.R.B. Circles in Glasgow, Motherwell, Kiloyth, Paisley, Port Glasgow and Govan.

SIGNED

Seumas Reader
SEUMAS READER

DATE

28/12/51
28/12/51.

WITNESS

Sean Brennan Comdt.

(Sean Brennan, Comd't.)

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