

W.S. 736

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 736

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 736

Witness

Dr. Brian A. Cusack,
Lusk House,
Lusk,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B., London, 1903 - ;
Member of Irish Volunteers, Galway, 1913 - .

Subject.

His national associations
1903-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Dr. Bryan Cusack,

Lusk House, Lusk, Co. Dublin.

The I.R.B. in London:

I joined the British Civil Service in 1900 and took up duty in London. When there I became a member of the Irish National Club which was really a cover for an I.R.B. Circle. This Circle held its meetings in a basement and as other social groups also held meetings there the I.R.B. organisation was not obvious. It was the Galway men in London, principally a man named McDonagh, who got me interested. McDonagh was no relation of Thomas McDonagh of Easter Week fame. McDonagh's brother who was an Excise Officer was also in the organisation. He is now retired and, I think, is living in Dún Laoghaire. This family was from Co. Galway and had a very good National background.

It was Anthony McBride who actually took me into the I.R.B. in London. This was in the year 1903. Amongst the members of that Circle was Michael MacWhite who afterwards held a high position in the Irish Diplomatic Service. On joining the I.R.B. the oath as sworn by that body was subscribed to by me. I was in the same office as McDonagh in the Civil Service. Later I left the Civil Service and took up teaching. I taught at Gravesend in the south of England for about four years.

At this time the standard of organisation of the I.R.B. in London was not of a high nature. Things were a bit slack and the members were prone to do a lot of

talking but very little action. P.S. O'Hegarty who was in the Post Office in Cork was transferred to London. He obtained this post through a competitive examination gaining a very high place on the list. P.S. proved to be the proverbial "New Broom". He soon got control of the I.R.B. in London and tightened up on the organisation and brought things up to a high standard. He kept individuals who were drinking excessively out of the organisation. Mick Collins had been proposed for membership but P.S. kept him on the mat waiting for quite a long time before he was taken in as he - Collins - had been drinking too much. George Nichols was in Galway at this time.

Galway University and the I.R.B. in Galway:

I secured a Scholarship in London University and my father said why not come back and do my course in Ireland. I did as he suggested and took up the study of Medicine at Galway University where after completing a five year course, I qualified in 1915. On arrival in Galway or shortly afterwards I was contacted by the local circle of the I.R.B. Tom Hynes was very active in Galway at this time. Strange as it may seem now there were no Irish games played in the University in Galway then and a large portion of the students and College Staff were antagonistic to them. It had been a Godless College before this. The Bishop of Galway was a very strong supporter of Gaelic Games and was possessed of a very strong National outlook and in conjunction with him we gradually worked up a national spirit in the College. We started the Sigerson Cup Game and got things going nicely and through the social societies with an Irish outlook which were functioning now the whole College element was being quietly nationalised. A Unionist element in the College was suggesting that an Officers Training Corps (Cadets) be started but we put our foot down on this every time it was

put forward.

The start of the Volunteers in Galway:

We had been organising the I.R.B. in Galway and George Nichols and I were secretaries of the first meeting that was summoned to form the Irish Volunteers in Galway. In order to give the movement a good start we were anxious to have some one outstanding, some one whose presence would appeal to the general public - attend and address our meeting. Up to this I had never met Sir Roger Casement although he was in London when I had been living there. I had read many of his articles and writings and I was well aware of his activities in Africa and realised that he always stood up for the underdog. I wrote to Casement in London asking him if he would attend and speak at our meeting and he wired back that he would be delighted to do so.

Casement was over six feet in height and very distinguished looking. He had sallow complexion, coal black hair and wore a suit of Donegal tweed. I met Casement in the street in Galway. I only have turned around twice in my life to look after a person on the street; once was in London to look at a Scottish Chief in full highland regalia and the second was Sir Roger Casement in Galway on this occasion.

On the night of the meeting Casement was in full morning dress. When he addressed the meeting he said "We must organise our people. We do not know at what moment there might be a German Invasion". By this he meant that we must oppose a German invasion. However his audience took the opposite meaning from his words and cheered him lustily as they would welcome a German invasion. This was Casement's first public meeting and it was a very successful one.

He was still "green" as regards politics or the ways of politicians.

We signed on four or five hundred men into the Volunteers that night. This was about three or four weeks after the meeting had taken place in the Rotunda Dublin and training began at once. George Nichols, Louis O'Dea, a solicitor, and I went around organising companies in West and North Galway and in Headford and in Tuam. This work was carried out on Sundays as I was still a medical student and had my lectures and studies to attend to. This brings us to the end of 1913.

The split in the Volunteers.

At the outbreak of World War I most of the Instructors to the Volunteers who were Reservists of the British Army rejoined their units of that Force taking with them a large number of Volunteers. At a subsequent meeting in Dublin I represented what remained of the Irish Volunteers in Galway. I was now studying in Dublin to where I had come some time in 1914 and as such I represented the Galway Volunteers there. We were trying to put the best face we could on things as the Irish Volunteers were now in a very weakened position after the split and withdrawal of the Redmond supporters. At this time I became very friendly with Sean McDermott and I was transferred to his circle of the I.R.B. in the city. I also knew Tom Clarke well. His place was continually being watched by G.Men This circle met in a house in Parnell Square. Sean McDermott asked me to vote for Seamus O'Connor who was in the same circle. O'Connor was a solicitor at the time and I think was a City Sheriff. McDermott wanted

O'Connor to be elected head of the circle. I often had friendly conversations with P.H. Pearse.

My periods in Dublin were short as I only came up for hospital work. I was connected with Galway all the time. I qualified in Galway in 1915 and after some time I crossed to England and took up an appointment as Locum near Bath. Before leaving for England I had left my address with Seán McDermott. In my association with McDermott and Pearse I was well aware from their conversation that it was their intention to stage a rising but I had no idea when it would take place or of their intention to seek German aid.

The Rebellion:

While in Bath I received a wire from Seán McDermott that I was to take ship from Liverpool to New York. I understand that I had been selected as the bearer of a very special communication to John Devoy regarding the Rebellion. I could not get any doctor to take my place, but I wired back to McDermott to say that I would be ready in two or three days. I was not required, however, as they got Nora Connolly to go to New York and I was saved the trip.

I did not become aware that the Rising had started in Ireland until Tuesday of Easter Week. The English papers suppressed the news; they reported, however, that the Holyhead Dublin line was taken over for military purposes and the movement of troops. I wired to the Harbour Master in Rosslare asking if it was possible to cross to Ireland by that route. He replied that I could take my chance. I had been married in Dublin early in 1916 and accompanied by Mrs. Cusack I now set out to get to Ireland and the War there. We travelled via Bristol where we met some Irish priests

who were all strong national supporters.

Finally we got to Rosslare and found everything upside down so to speak there. It took us two days to get from Rosslare to Galway, mostly by train but very slowly. When we reached Ennis every motorcar in the county had been commandeered and were piled in the police barracks. I gave my card at the barracks and asked to see the inspector. He interviewed me. I told him that it was imperative that my wife and I should get to Galway without delay and asked him to release a car so that we might do so. He refused, remarking that even if he did I would probably fall into the hands of the Rebels. Little did he realise that this was my desire at the moment. We secured a horse and car and drove to Galway. We stayed a night at Gort where the McDonagh I mentioned previously, was the Excise Officer. By the time we reached Galway the rebellion had fizzled out there and the people were very quiet and subdued. In Granard, Co. Longford, things were quite different. There was a little Company of Volunteers there. The streets were crowded with people and everyone was imbued with a national spirit. A brother of mine, Paul, was the prime mover there.

After the Rebellion had ended I came up to Dublin and there made a round of the hospitals and checked up on the wounded Volunteers who were patients. I saw poor Cathal Brugha. He was shattered with wounds but he showed no fear. He was possessed of an indomitable spirit. I was friendly with Cathal all through and he was Godfather for my first child. No sooner had he got out of hospital than he was off organising again. I would say he was the most dominant figure in the fight.

While in Dublin after the R_ebellion I helped in getting the National Aid Fund started. We were anxious to get some outstanding personality at the head of the association. Mrs. Wyse-Power suggested Mr. Dillon. Naturally his name was unacceptable to all concerned.

After the Rebellion - Dr. Kathleen Lynn.

I was not arrested after the Rebellion although my younger brother, Paul, was and after a short sojourn my wife and I returned to Bath. We were about a week back in Bath when one morning we heard a taxi pull up outside. This was followed by a knock on the door and on it being opened there was Dr. Kathleen Lynn. Dr. Lynn had been Medical Officer to the Citizen army during the Rebellion and was arrested and deported to Bath. At the door she said to me "I have been deported to the Bath district without means of living". I said "Will you stay here?" and she agreed to do so.

On the second morning following her arrival she saw on the paper where Mrs. French-Mullen had been deported to London so she said "I must go and see her." I pointed out to her that her movements were confined to a certain radius measured from the centre of the town of Bath but that did not make any impression on her. She had scant respect for British Regulations. We took her to Redstock Station and she went to London. On the following morning the Sergeant of Police in Redstock called to see her saying "I have been instructed to see Dr. Lynn". This was very awkward for me.

I read the riot act, so to speak, to the Sergeant and said things had come to a pretty pass when a doctor who was attending to the wounded was pounced upon and

arrested and deported to England and deprived of all means of living. I said Dr. Lynn was receiving medical treatment in consequence of the outrageous treatment she had received at the hands of the British military authorities. I furthermore told him that no one could see her until she was better adding that if he returned in a few days time he might be able to do so. I gave the Sergeant a drink and he was satisfied with my explanation. He returned in the course of a few days and saw Dr. Lynn who, of course, had returned from London before then.

We took Dr. Lynn one day for a drive in the South Downs district which is a very beautiful part of the country. The man who drove the taxi in which we travelled was a Welsh man and of a more intelligent type than his counterpart Englishman. This man said to me, "Doctor, is not that Dr. Lynn in the back of the car?" I said, "It is, but you keep your mouth shut". He did.

I was now offered an appointment as deputy Medical Officer in Dudley, Staffordshire but before leaving Bath I suggested that Dr. Kathleen Lynn would be appointed in my place there and strange as it may seem she, a deportee and rebel was given the appointment. She remained in that position until her sister contracted typhoid and she had to go to her.

The Volunteers and the I.R.B.:

When the Volunteers were the army of the Republic Cathal Brugha always held that it was a dangerous thing to have them take the I.R.B. Oath as well. Cathal was very straight and said that once the Army had pledged itself to the Government of Ireland there was no need for the I.R.B. He would not rejoin the I.R.B. after its existence was made public by the 1916 Proclamation.

Later when the Treaty debate was taking place very strong use was made of our I.R.B. associations to obtain our votes. P.S. O'Hegarty had been dismissed from the British Civil Service for refusing to take the oath of allegiance and was now running a little book shop at the top of South Anne Street. I used to keep in touch with him. When in South Anne Street he applied for admission to an I.R.B. Circle. He told me afterwards that Mick Collins kept him out of it. It was a case of the wheel going round as in London prior to the Rebellion he had kept Collins out for a considerable time.

The German Plot.

I left England and returned to Ireland in 1917 with the intention of starting a private practice in Athlone. I had actually rented apartments there when I met Tom Ruane of Galway. Tom was a prominent I.R.B. man. He informed me that there was a vacancy for a Medical Officer in Thurlaghmore and suggested that I should apply for it and so fight the British Local Government. At this time bribery in the securing of local appointments was rampant and particularly so in Galway County. Ruane said it would cost me nothing and I agreed adding that I had no intention that it would cost me anything. We travelled around interviewing members of the Council and everywhere we went the members of the public whom we mentioned the matter to all said "That will cost you a bit of money doctor".

I dont know what type of persuasion Ruane used but I got the appointment. The British Local Government refused to sanction my appointment on the grounds that I was a man of military age and ordered the vacancy to be advertised again. I applied again and on calling to the Office of the Council one day the Secretary informed

me that there was only one other applicant. This was a doctor named Campbell. He in his application had stated that if the remuneration were increased he would accept the appointment. The Secretary pointed out that this made his application invalid. I wrote to Dr. Campbell asking him not to apply for the vacancy as I had already been appointed to it. He was in England at this time and he replied that he would not and asked me to let him know if I knew of any job here as he would be glad to come over here. I was again appointed and this time the Local Government Department raised no objection.

We now had reorganised the I.R.B. and had it going well again in the Galway area. Stephen Jordan in Athenry was one of our greatest pillars of strength. Then came the "German Plot" and one night they roped in about thirty of us. They knew of course all those who had come back to Galway after the Rebellion and releasees from prisons and internment camps.

About twelve of us were placed in Galway Military Barracks where we were kept for one night and on the following day we were brought to Arbour Hill, Dublin. We were then taken across to Birmingham prison in England where on arrival we were lined up to be searched. George Nicholls called out in a loud voice "Who is going to search us". There was no search carried out. Count Plunkett who was also a prisoner with us felt the confinement very severely and it looked as if his mind was slipping. There were fourteen of us prisoners there and poor George Nicholls was very anxious to get a drop of whisky in. Whisky or spirits were not permitted to be taken into his Majesty's Prisons, but wines and beer was. I wrote to a friend of mine, a very fine character in Galway and who was afterwards shot

by the Auxiliary Police. His name was Michael Walsh. He replied to my letter and stated that he was sending us on some wines. I asked him to include some of the Sherry that Nicholls was fond of. A small case duly arrived with a covering letter and one of the bottles was marked "Sherry - Olorosa". This was whisky and I can assure you was much enjoyed by Count Plunkett and M. Nicholl.

Count Plunkett was very stubborn and could not agree with the Governor but I found it easy to get on with him. He had to do his duty and it was not an easy one. I had the task of checking over all parcels or consignments coming in for us prisoners.

The next consignment of wine to arrive contained two bottles of potheen. I told the Governor that this was an Irish wine. "You don't tell me" was his rejoinder. "I never thought they grew grapes to make wine in Ireland". I said, "That is genuine wine". My explanation was accepted.

The First Dáil - Re-arrest and Internment:

It was now well advanced in the year 1918 and I in my absence in prison had been elected a member of Parliament for North Galway. I was released in 1919 and I can remember the weather was nicely warm at the time and I attended my first meeting of Dáil Éireann at the Mansion House Dublin. The Dáil had not been proclaimed by the British Authorities as yet. There had been two or three meetings of the assembly before I was released.

When the Dáil was proclaimed we held our meetings in John O'Mahoney's house at the corner of Gardiner's Street. John O'Mahoney had two houses there on the right hand side. Walter Cole's house around

the corner was also used.

A lot of this time I was back in Galway but I was more or less on the "Run" all the time. This was the time that the Police began to put up notices which stated "We will burn the houses of Republicans". Then of course they began their killings and Michael Walsh was shot. We were raided then.

I now secured an appointment as Medical Officer at Oldtown in North County Dublin but I was still a T.D. for Galway. My home at Oldtown was raided and I was again arrested and taken to Collinstown Aerodrome which was used as a Military Camp. From there I was taken to Arbour Hill. On the first morning there on coming out of my cell I met Rory O'Connor and then Sceilg. Rory was sent to the Internment Camp at the Curragh and a few days later one of our Warder Policemen told me that Rory had escaped. He had actually walked out the gate of the internment camp.

One day in Arbour Hill one of the Military Police put his hand on my shoulder. I objected to this and I told him so in no uncertain manner. I was taken before the Governor and the next day I was transferred to the Curragh. This was a welcome change as in Arbour Hill we were three to a cell and in the Curragh we had plenty of open air and better conditions. I was kept in internment until after the Truce was signed.

There were a number of doctors in the internment camp in the Curragh as prisoners. A British Medical Officer - an Irishman and a very capable man visited the Camp one day and asked me if I would take charge of all medical institutions within the Camp. I agreed to do so under certain conditions, the principal one of which was that all our sick prisoners be sent for treatment to

Dublin Hospitals. He said "We cannot do that".
However he really did all he could to facilitate us.

When we assembled for the meeting of the Dail after our release I met "Scelig" who had been released from Arbour Hill shortly after I had been transferred from there to the Curragh. Scellig asked me if I was surprised at his release. I said I was. So he said he was released and went on the run.

About a week after that an attempt was made to contact me through a Franciscan priest who was giving a retreat. My reply to that was that the only way they could contact me officially was through the Secretary of the Dail. I more or less went on the run again. There were amusing things happening then.

Signed Brian A Cusack
(Brian A. Cusack)

Date 9th October 1952
9th October 1952.

Witness Matthew Barry Comd't
(Matthew Barry, Comd't)

