

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 816

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 816.....

Witness

Liam Langley,
23 Blackheath Park,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Vice-President Fianna Eireann,
Tuam, 1915-1916;

O/C. 1st Batt'n. Dublin Brigade,
Fianna Eireann, 1917-1921.

Subject.

Arrest of Sean MacDiarmuid
by R.I.C. in Tuam, Co. Galway, May 1915.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.127.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY LIAM LANGLEY,

23, Blackheath Park, Clontarf, Dublin.

SEÁN MacDIARMUID.

These notes are written to elucidate an incident in the life of Seán MacDiarmuid referred to by Donagh MacDonagh in an interesting series of talks on "The Men of the Proclamation" given over Radio Éireann during Easter Week 1952. The reference was to Seán's arrest by the R.I.C. in May, 1915 at Tuam, County Galway.

At that time things had begun to go badly with the Irish Ireland Movement in Tuam as elsewhere in the county. After a very successful three years during which were established troops of Fianna Éireann, Circles of I.R.B. and a Corps of Irish Volunteers, an opposition element began to show itself. Encouraged by a recruiting campaign launched by the Irish Parliamentary Party on behalf of the British Army, enemies emerged from everywhere. Pastors, parents, merchants and employers were approached and pressed to withdraw support from the national organisations. Cases were reported where they went even further, a Fianna uniform, the property of the organisation, having been burnt to ashes by the employer of the Fianna boy concerned. They partly succeeded in breaking up the local branch of the Gaelic League when the Secretary was wrongfully impeached with leading a protest demonstration during a visit of representatives of the British Lady Lieutenant Aberdeen on a lecture tour connected with the W.N.H.A.

Further instances could be given of open hostility to everyone with Irish Ireland sympathies. What was once a stronghold of the Independence Movement was rapidly becoming a pro-British garrison town. Great Southern railway officials were warned and ordered to leave the Irish Volunteers or else - . . . Open parades of the bodies could not be held and we were compelled to use the machinery provided by the I.R.B. to run the organisations.

Such was the state of things, when on a fine Sunday morning in May, 1915, Liam Mellowes paid me one of his surprise visits. He had with him Seán MacDiarmuid. They had motored from Athenry where they were to attend an I.R.B. meeting that evening. They came down to see if they could help us in Tuam in any way. We accordingly had a long car placed in the Square and as the people moved across after last Mass at the Cathedral we proceeded with our impromptu meeting.

On the platform with me were Liam Mellowes, Jim Moloney, J. D. Costello and, helping the Fianna boys in the distribution of literature, were Sam Browne, the Connolly brothers, W. Stockwell &c. It fell to my lot to introduce the first speaker, Seán MacDiarmuid. He made an impassioned appeal to the young men to join up with their fellow countrymen in the ranks of the Irish Volunteers, to help such organisations as Fianna Eireann and to oppose recruiting stunts for the British Forces by every means available. There were some words of applause and one could see from the earnest faces of the listeners that his advice would be taken to heart.

There was an R.I.C. uniform visible here and there and one person in the crowd kept up a continuous heckling all through. This man was not from the district. He happened to be in charge of a job being carried out for a Dublin firm of contractors at the Palace of the Protestant Bishop and I understood was a member of the local Board of Erin Club. He made such a row for one small man that the R.I.C. made it an excuse for interference, and no sooner had Seán

finished his speech than the local D.I. of the R.I.C. came on the platform and, escorted by uniformed members of the force, proceeded to arrest Seán and conveyed him to the Tuam Police Station. Just before the prisoner was removed he managed, in shaking hands with those around, to pass over an automatic pistol that he carried. We proceeded with the meeting, Liam Mellowes being the next speaker, and a couple of the local Volunteer Officers wound it up. I then went with Liam Mellowes to see Seán at the police barracks.

We found him in the 'day room', seated on a form in front of a cheerful turf fire. There was one constable on guard. He had his back turned to us, looking through the window that overlooked the street and apparently lost in the enjoyment of the fragrant weed. We seated ourselves beside Seán who proceeded to prepare a pipe he had in his hands. He winked and asked us for a match at the same time shaking his head to indicate 'no'. The constable was asked of course Seán had already seen him light a paper in the fire for a similar purpose and the desired answer was given: 'light a piece of paper', thus enabling Seán to get rid of an incriminating document.

Before we parted Sean also managed to transfer a notebook he carried in his breast pocket and I proceeded with Liam and Jim Moloney on our twenty mile drive to Athenry. Our friends there were somewhat surprised when they saw us and learned what had happened to the delegate from headquarters. As far as I can remember we had amongst others at that meeting, George Nichols, Larry Lardner, Dick Murphy, Stephen Jordan, Joe Howley, and some from Galway City. It was at that meeting I was given charge of five districts centred in Tuam and it was on this basis I worked until after Easter 1916.

After the meeting I was given an urgent message to bring to Seán and, accompanied by Jim Moloney, we set out on two borrowed bicycles for Tuam. Owing to a puncture my companion had to drop out of the race and I managed to reach the police barracks just before closing time. When brought upstairs I was astonished to find Seán all wrapped-up in bed. I understood he had some kind of a seizure which necessitated medical attention and Constable Gibbons had made him comfortable in his own bed. They were chatting away when I entered and the constable was retiring when Seán called him back assuring him that we had nothing to talk about that he couldn't hear. Having delivered my message I bade Seán good night, wishing him 'happy dreams' and promising to return in the morning.

I called shortly after breakfast on the following morning to find Seán just finishing a shave and wash, getting ready for escort to Dublin soon afterwards. He gave me to understand that Constable Toby Gibbons had been very kind to him and that he considered him one of the finest men he had ever met in that uniform. He also told me that the priest that had called to see him happened to be an old friend, Father John Heneghan, who, I understood, had spent a couple of hours by his bedside. This was the priest to whom my men went for confession on that night of Easter Week a year later. He blessed each one saying he could not go himself but his heart would be with us. This was the same priest who, as a Superior of the Irish Missionaries in Manila, was done to death by Japanese soldiers during the second world war.

After bidding farewell to Seán on that morning I met another R.I.C. man who informed me that the prisoner was about to be transferred to Dublin for trial under D.O.R.A. charged with making a seditious speech. I asked him what evidence would be given and he informed me that although there was no shorthand writer present that he himself had taken mental notes of the speech and he

afterwards went back to the barracks and wrote his report. I immediately sent a despatch to Bulmer Hobson giving this information and Tim Healy was employed for the defence. I understand that Tim made great capital of the R.I.C. witness and his "mental notes". Of course Tim's eloquence did not avail and Sean was sentenced to Mountjoy Jail for six months.

It may be of interest to know a little more of two of the individuals mentioned in this narrative and who are now no more.

The man from Dublin who heckled Seán at the Tuam meeting remained pro-British all his life and quarrelled continuously with members of his own family who disagreed with him. I had the pleasure of receiving a son of his into the Fianna in Dublin in 1917. This boy has done and is still doing great work in his profession and Ireland is justly proud of him.

The R.I.C. man that Seán had such esteem for, who had said that a brother of his had not spoken to him since he had joined the force, twelve years previously - unfortunately, he was one of two of that body who succumbed to bullet wounds in Galway hospital during the Black and Tan campaign.

Signed: _____

Liam Langley
(Liam Langley)

Date: _____

19.3.53
19.3.53

Witness: _____

Sean Brennan Comdt.
(Sean Brennan) Comd't.

