

W. S. 1.119.
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.119

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,119

Witness

Joseph McDonough,
2 Blessington St.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company 1st Battalion
Dublin Brigade, 1916-1921.

Subject.

'C' Company 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade,
Easter 1916 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1119

STATEMENT BY JOSEPH McDONOUGH.

2. Blessington St., Dublin.

and

27. St. Peter's Road, Phibsborough. Dublin.

From May until December 1916 there was not much activity in Volunteer circles as the majority of the members of the different units were interned in English gaols and Internment Camps. Those of us who were at liberty, including myself, and who had escaped arrest, continued to keep the movement active as far as it was possible in the circumstances. We kept contact with each other and used the executions of our Leaders as a form of propaganda to unite old comrades and keep the spirit alive. The executions had the effect of turning what could then be regarded as a pro-British population into a population sympathetic to the Cause.

As it was risky to hold meetings in our old places of mobilisation such as 41, Parnell Square and the Columcille Hall in Blackhall Place, we had recourse to the Phoenix Park where we used to meet as members of a football team. Some short time after the general release of the prisoners in December 1916 we held one of our first official meetings in the Phoenix Park and as a result of it, or some subsequent meeting, the Company officers were elected. These were, as far as I can remember, Seán Flood, Company Captain, Seán Prendergast, 1st Lieutenant, and either of the following three as 2nd Lieutenants: Dinny Holmes, Paddy Byrne or Seán Kennedy - I am not sure which.

Nothing very much transpired during the year 1917 other than the fact that the continued detention in custody of the prisoners undergoing penal servitude gave us sufficient fuel to maintain the propaganda at full pressure. We made great play of this and "C" Company, together with other units of the Dublin Brigade, were used to the fullest extent in this activity. I may mention that among the penal servitude prisoners in England were a number of members of my Company, viz. Jack Reid, Tom Walsh, Fred Brooks and the Bevan brothers. These are all I can remember at the moment.

On the release of the above mentioned, among others, from prison in or about June 1917, the Dublin Brigade were mobilised to meet them, and amidst scenes of jubilation the return of our old comrades was received with great pleasure by us and the population in general. It was a remarkable change from the hostile attitude of the Dublin citizens when the Volunteers were being marched to the North Wall after the surrender.

As Frank Fahy and Joe McGuinness had been elected to the Dáil while undergoing penal servitude, their continued officership of the Company was for all purposes impracticable and, while they continued to give us the benefit of their experience and support, circumstances necessitated their replacement by officers who could devote their full time to training. In consequence, permanent appointments to the officership of the Company were made. These were as follows: Company Captain, Seán Flood; 1st Lieutenant, Seán Prendergast; and 2nd Lieutenant either Dinny Holes, Seán Kennedy or Paddy Byrne.

During the latter part of 1917 and for the greater

part of 1918 we met at different places on the north side of the city, namely J.J. Walsh's tobacconist shop at the corner of Blessington St. and Berkeley Road, the Tara Hall in Gloucester St. (headquarters of the Painters' Union), 41, Parnell Square, the Belgrave Hall (63, Mountjoy Square), George Whelan's at the corner of Russell St. and North Circular Road (George was also a member of our Company) and another house about 8 doors away from Walsh's shop.

By this time the Company was fully organised and all the surviving members of the unit had returned to unit membership. A number of recruits had been taken in after the Rising, and on the threat of the imposition of Conscription by the British Government the strength of the Company became so great in numbers that Battalion Headquarters was compelled to organise another Company, to which they gave the designation 'H' Company. Members of this Company subsequently took part in the raid on British Forces in North King St. in which Kevin Barry was captured by the British, courtmartialled and subsequently executed.

This Company ('H') was officered by Seamus Kavanagh as Company Captain, Tommy McGrane 1st Lieutenant, and Joseph Stanley was 2nd Lieutenant.

At this time a Cyclists' Company was formed in the Battalion named 'I' Company to which each Company had to supply a number of men. It was commanded by Capt. Jerry Golden, who had taken part in the battle of Ashbourne during Easter Week. I was one of those detached from 'C' Company. The duties of the Cyclists' Company consisted of supplying scouting parties for the Battalion or the Brigade, as the case might be, while on route marches or manoeuvres, and also for the carrying of dispatches between Brigades. During

the Ashe hunger-strike we carried dispatches as far afield as Lucan, Leixlip and other outlying districts.

The first time we appeared as an organised military body was on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. McDonagh, wife of Thomas McDonagh, one of the executed leaders of Easter Week. There were four of us in uniform on that occasion, namely: J. Sexton, T. McGrath, C. McGinn, ~~626M~~ the 2nd Battalion, and myself from the 1st Battalion. We were detailed for duty as pall bearers at the High Mass in the Pro Cathedral and Guard of Honour in the funeral cortege and at the graveside. In the same year Thomas Ashe died from the effects of forcible feeding while on hunger-strike in Mountjoy Jail, and we also turned out for his funeral as an organised military unit. In fact, the whole Dublin Brigade turned out together with Volunteer units from other parts of the country. It was one of the largest funerals seen in living memory in Dublin, with the possible exception of that of the O'Donovan-Rossa who died in America and whose remains were brought home and buried in Glasnevin in 1915.

When the Armistice between the Warring Powers was signed on the 11th November, 1918, my unit, together with other units of the Dublin Brigade, were on special duty in the city which was completely held by the British Forces of Occupation and their loyal supporters. Practically every house and shop in the city was bedecked with Union Jacks and British bunting, and it could be said that the majority of the population were more British than Irish if appearances counted for anything.

At about 7 o'clock that Monday evening members of the Dublin Brigade, including my own unit, acting on orders from G.H.Q. proceeded to clear the streets of British Military and their supporters. This led to several scuffles between the Volunteers on one side and the British Military, Dublin Metropolitan Police and loyalists on the opposite side. At 11 o'clock that night the city was in the hands of the Irish Volunteers. During the week one of the outstanding figures was the late Peadar Clancy who was subsequently murdered by the British in Dublin Castle in November 1920 together with Dick McKee and Conor Clune. He led and directed the operations from Monday during the ensuing week and while pro-British feeling was running high.

The following month, December, 1918, the general election took place in which the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond suffered an overwhelming defeat at the polls. This election resulted in the almost complete abolition of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the success of the Sinn Féin or Separatist Party.

Prior to and during the elections the members of the Dublin Brigade were actively engaged in propaganda, policing of election meetings and, on the day of the election, policing of the polling booths and keeping the pro-British element under control where attempts had been made to break up election meetings.

I may say, at this stage, that were it not for the whole-hearted efforts and unfailing devotion to the Cause of the members of the Volunteers in Dublin and throughout the country the success of the Sinn Féin Party might not have been as complete as it had been.

On the 10th December, 1918, Richard Coleman died in Usk prison in England from the effects of a hunger-strike and his remains were brought home to Ireland for burial in Glasnevin. His funeral took place on Sunday (which was an exceptionally wet day) to Glasnevin Cemetery, and I with other members of my Company were detailed for duty around the grave in the cemetery. As soon as the funeral was over we were ordered to leave the cemetery grounds by the back entrance going out on to De Courcy Square, as it was felt by those in charge that an attempt would be made to hold up the mourners on the return march to the city. The Volunteers taking part in the funeral cortege were dismissed, as far as I can recollect, in the Lindsay Road vicinity and allowed to make their way back to their homes in their own time. Volunteers carrying arms were placed in front of the units to oppose forcibly any attempt at arrest or interference by the Dublin Metropolitan Police or British Military.

The year 1919 was mainly devoted to intensive training and activity generally associated with the forwarding of the Movement for Independence.

During the year 1920, particularly after the arrival of the Black and Tans in January of that year, the activities of the Dublin Brigade took on a more warlike nature and attacks on Armed Forces were of frequent occurrence in all parts of the city and throughout the country. By virtue of my job as a hairdresser I could not devote my leisure hours to this type of activity, but my premises in Dorset St. were used as a meeting place for members of my own unit together with other units of the Battalion. It was also used as a dump for the arms of the Company.

The Intelligence Section met there frequently under the late Tom Walsh.

When the men of my Company were detailed for armed patrols and any jobs scheduled for the Company area they collected their arms and ammunition from my place, which was one of other places used for the same purpose.

As a hairdresser I was in the way of picking up information of a military nature concerning the movement of enemy troops which I conveyed to the Company Intelligence Officer.

The reason my place was selected as a Company dump and meeting place for members of the Movement was that as it was a Gents' Hairdressing Saloon it was not open to the same suspicion, as would have been the case had a private house been selected for such a purpose. It was known to Volunteers operating throughout the area, including members of the A.S.U.

In the early part of 1920 Captain Seán Flood, who had commanded my Company from its re-formation in 1917, was selected by G.H.Q. for special duty in the Liverpool area and was succeeded by Captain Seán Prendergast, who died about two years ago.

Consequent on the shooting of the British Intelligence Officers in various parts of the city on 21st November, 1920 (Bloody Sunday), a number of our men were arrested on suspicion in common with other members of the Dublin Brigade. Our Brigadier, Dick McKee, and the Vice-Brigadier, Peadar Clancy, who had been 1st Lieutenant of our Company during Easter Week 1916 and later Captain of 'D' Company of the 1st Battalion, were arrested, tortured by the British Secret

Service and murdered in Dublin Castle.

From that date until the Truce on the 11th, July, 1921, our activities became more intense, and ambushes and raids for arms were a daily and nightly occurrence throughout the Dublin Brigade area. During this period the boycott of Belfast goods was in full swing, and I remember on one occasion while attending to our business in Dorset St. a man came in for a haircut, and during the course of the operation he spoke very loudly about the boycott and pushing of the sale of Irish goods, at the same time producing cigarettes and remarking that we should smoke a "good Irish cigarette". As was customary in those days we viewed with suspicion anybody who was too talkative in matters of this nature and we made no comment. About a fortnight or three weeks afterwards, while standing at our shop window I happened to look out and saw on the far side of the street a Crossley tender containing Auxiliaries drawn up, and recognised our customer of the previous occasion.

I carried out the duties of mobilising certain members of the Company, but when things became very hot in the early part of 1921 men engaged on this type of work were required to function in their own areas and mobilise men of the Movement regardless of the Company to which they belonged.

Wednesdays and Saturdays were half-days for members of the Company from their different vocations in life. These days were days of action, and any ambushes or raids for arms etc. which occurred in the area were normally on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

On Whit Saturday night in 1920 the area Eccles St. and Eccles Place was cordoned off by British military and my place was raided. At the time I used two cellars in the premises for storing rubbish of one sort or another, particularly the back cellar which I left open. I had a liking for cats and these animals used the stairway leading to the cellar as a sleeping quarters and for other general purposes. When the military went down to the cellars the 'Tommy' who went to search the open cubbyhole underneath the stairs drew back, put his hand to his mouth and exclaimed, "Blimey, these blasted cats"! Fortunately for me the smell was sufficient to put him off, as if he had had the strength to search he would have discovered the arms' dump of the Company. They had already searched the cellars by this time and in the back cellar, which was open, they discovered a quantity of old scrap brass which I was gathering to be used later on for the purpose of making cartridges. This they brought up with them from the cellar and put away. The officer in the course of his search of the back cellar took down a small tin saucepan which had been hanging on a nail. In doing so he dislodged a packet containing 5 or 6 detonators which, fortunately, he did not see. At this time the place had already been searched by other members of the raiding party without discovering anything. It was only four days later I learned that detonators had been stored there, as my arrangements with the Quartermaster of the Company were such that he would tell me who would be coming and what they would require, and I would put the necessary stuff into this particular saucepan and the men would know where to go and collect it, thereby avoiding disturbing me at my business.

On the occasion of the attack on the Custom House I was one of the party detailed from the 1st Battalion for this job, but owing to my usefulness as the custodian of the arms and ammunition for the Company I was released from this duty.

From that date until the Truce on the 11th July my activities continued along similar lines.

Signed:

Joseph MacDonough

(Joseph MacDonough)

Date:

15/3/55

Witness:

Mr. F. Ryan Comdt
1
(Investigator).

(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.

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