

ORIGINAL

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-21
BURO STAIRE MLEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.369

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,369.....

Witness

James Nolan (Seumas O Nuallain),
38 Bothar an Bhainbh,
Cabrach,
Ath Cliath.

Identity.

Adjutant Fianna Sluagh;
Company Intelligence Officer, Oglai gh na h-Eireann.

Subject.

Fianna Sluagh, Waterford City,
1912-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY SEIMAS Ó NUALLÁIN,
38 Bothar an Bhainbh, Cabhrach, Ath Cliath.

I was born in the year 1900 in the city of Waterford. My parents were in business in the city. I was educated at Mount Sion Christian Brothers' school in Waterford, and, at a very early age, on the death of my mother, I was reared in the home of my uncle, Willie Walsh of Waterford.

My uncle was then and for many years afterwards a very well-known referee of Gaelic games. He was Head Centre of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Waterford, and was a man steeped in the true Gaelic tradition. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that from my earliest years I absorbed that Gaelic spirit typified by my uncle in his daily life.

When I was about ten years old, I joined a Gaelic League class in Waterford which was then being conducted by Liam Raftis, the present City Manager, a man who took part in the Easter Rising of 1916 in Dublin.

I became proficient in Irish step-dancing, and remember winning my first medal for dancing at a Feis held in Kilkenny in 1911. In, I think, the same year, I competed and won a prize in the paper, "Irish Freedom", edited by Seán Mac Diarmada. The competition was a historical one based on Irish history.

Sometime about the year 1912, the John Mitchel hurling club was started in Waterford. This club,

was, in reality, a cloak for the activities of Sinn Fein and the I.R.B. in the city. I can remember the pride I felt when allowed to carry the club jerseys on the occasion of a match.

Later on, my step-dancing brought me into the Counties Wexford and Kilkenny where I got to know people who were prominent in the G.A.A. movement and, subsequently, in the Volunteer movement.

In the year 1912, during the many walks I had with Willie Walsh, my uncle, he hinted occasionally that things might be soon stirring in Ireland again and that even young lads like myself would be catered for. Naturally enough, I did not realise the full significance of my uncle's words at the time, but later on in that year I had reason to remember what he said when I learned that a Sluagh of Fianna Eireann was being established in Waterford city.

My first connection with the Fianna occurred in the latter half of the year 1912, when I attended a meeting in the Gaelic League hall, William Street, Waterford, to inaugurate the movement. Amongst those present at that first meeting were Tom Walsh, a son of the proprietor of the "Munster Express" newspaper, Paddy Heron, Tom Barr and John (Bismark) Power. There were about sixteen of us lads in the hall where we were addressed by Liam Mellowes who explained the objects of the Fianna, after which the Sluagh officers were appointed.

So far as my memory serves me, the first officers were: Captain, Tom Barry; Second Officer, Paddy Heron; and myself as Secretary, or perhaps more correctly described as Adjutant.

Our first public appearance was on the occasion of a procession in the city to honour the Manchester Martyrs in November 1912. We paraded in the Fianna uniform, it being the first time that uniform was seen in public in Waterford city. By that time, Tommy McDonald, afterwards O/C of the Fianna in the city, had joined us.

We met for weekly drills in the hall in William Street, and at a Feis held in Waterford in July, 1913, gave a drill and first-aid display in the grounds of the Presentation Convent.

Liam Mellowes used to visit Waterford regularly at this time, giving instruction to us in first-aid and general organisation. In the course of his organising duties, he brought me with him to New Ross, Co. Wexford, Carrick-ón-Suir, Co. Tipperary, and Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. In the latter town, the Fianna organiser was George Lennon who was, in later years, to become O/C of the West Waterford I.R.A. Flying Column.

As a result of these frequent visits by Mellowes, I got to know him well. He was a quiet, sincere type of fellow, but playful at times. He was a keen traditional fiddler and was the first man I ever heard play the well-known ballad of the Wexford Rising of 1798, named "Boulavogue". This ballad was a great favourite of his.

Mellowes always stayed at the house of my Uncle Willie (where I lived) whenever he came to Waterford. As I came to know him (Mellowes), he would often chat in confidential fashion to me about what might happen in Ireland in the near future. He told me that,

sooner or later; we of the Fianna would be called upon to continue the work where the Fenians had left off. He also mentioned the I.R.B. and hinted that, when I was a little older, I might be considered for membership.

All this time, the John Mitchel G.A.A. club was functioning and ran periodic concerts in the city at which addresses were delivered by speakers from Dublin. Amongst such were Bulmer Hobson, Seán Mac Diarmada and Padraig Pearse. At these concerts I either danced or played the fiddle for dancing. I remember on one of these occasions when I danced, Liam Mellows appeared on the platform in Volunteer uniform and played for me. I remember Liam coming home to our house - my Uncle Willie's - after the concert with Seán Mac Diarmada who had given a lecture the same night. Mac Diarmada stayed for the night at the Metropole Hotel, Waterford. The following morning Mellows cycled to Kilmacow, about five miles north of Waterford, to get the train for Dublin. MacDiarmada boarded a train at Waterford, North, but, immediately he did so, a detective named Purcell 'phoned this information to Kilkenny. However, MacDiarmada saw what happened, switched trains (unnoticed by the detective) and travelled to Dublin via New Ross, thus avoiding Kilkenny. When the police searched the train at Kilkenny, Mac Diarmada was not, of course, on it. This incident occurred in 1915. When Mellows came to Waterford, he invariably left the train at either Kilmacow, Co. Kilkenny, on the Great Southern and Western route, or at Glenmore, Co. Kilkenny (four miles from Waterford) on the Dublin and South Eastern route, and cycled the rest of the journey. In this manner, he evaded the attentions of detectives who were always on

duty at Waterford station.

During the year 1913, the National Volunteers were started in Waterford. One evening, Liam Mellowes appeared and took charge of a Volunteer Company drilling in the Butter Market. I remember he put two of us from the Fianna in charge of sections, to give us a bit of experience, I suppose.

The year 1914 was spent in organising and general training. The Fianna were then about thirty strong, and it was late in that year, so far as I can remember, that Tommy McDonald was appointed O/C of the Waterford Fianna.

I recollect that in the year 1915 John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party in the British House of Commons, was billed to address a National Volunteer parade in the city. An invitation to participate was sent by the National Executive of the Volunteers, to the Fianna. Quite a number of the parents of the lads in the Sluagh were anxious that their boys should take part in this parade, but I thought it advisable to consult Willie Walsh on the matter first. As a result, I told Tommy McDonald, our O/C, that it would not be right for us to accept the invitation. After a discussion, we decided to wire Fianna Headquarters in Dublin for directions. Padraig Ó Riain was General Secretary at the time. A.P. Reynolds was also a member of the Fianna Executive. The reply came back to the effect that the Fianna should not attend recruiting meetings whether held by Redmond or Kitchener (the latter was a British Army General under whose name a recruiting campaign for the British Army,

then engaged in war with Germany, was being waged).

Conjointly with that telegram from Fianna Headquarters, came a quantity of anti-recruiting pamphlets, and I was to bring these, together with the reply from Headquarters, to Tommy McDonald. The lads were ready to march off to join the main parade when we stopped them. As a result of this, some of their parents, who were not quite aware of the real purpose for which the Fianna was founded, withdrew their boys from the Fianna. We lost seven or eight lads as a result. I remember also that we wrote to the newspapers at the time, explaining why we did not take part in the general parade of the National Volunteers.

It was in the late summer of 1915 when our Sluagh availed of an excursion to Dublin to visit the home of Madame Markievicz at Surrey House, Leinster Road, Rathmines. We were all excited at the prospect, and more so when Sean Matthews presented us with a silk tricolour which, in addition to our Fianna flag, we brought to Dublin. Sean Matthews was an officer in the Irish Volunteers in Waterford then, and he was also a member of the I.R.B.

On arriving in Dublin, we were met at Kingsbridge railway station by the Dublin Fianna band and we marched to Rathmines, bearing the tricolour and Fianna flags. When we reached Surrey House, our tricolour flag was displayed from one of the windows. The Dublin boys wanted to retain it, but we considered it Meagher's flag, and being the Thomas Francis Meagher Sluagh, we naturally would not part with it. In passing, I may claim that this was the first time, to my knowledge,

that the tricolour was carried publicly through the streets of Dublin.

Fianna activities - drilling and training - were continued, and about six of us were instructed in the use of the rifle in the Irish Volunteer hall, Thomas Street, Waterford. Peadar Woods of Waterford was the local Commandant at that time, early 1916.

In February, 1916, I was initiated into the I.R.B. by my uncle, Willie Walsh, and, young as I was, I sensed that things were coming to a head.

In March, 1916, on the Sunday prior to St. Patrick's Day, I was instructed with some others of the Fianna to remove six cases of .303 ammunition which were deposited down at The Island, beyond Ballinakill, a mile south of Waterford, on the river Suir. We had a trek-cart and arrived at the appointed place about 4 p.m. We manoeuvred around a bit so as not to arouse suspicion. Then, at an opportune moment, we secured the six cases, put them on the cart and pulled it into the city and on to the Volunteer hall, Thomas Street, Waterford. These cases were subsequently removed by motor, later that same night, and brought to Cork city in readiness for the St. Patrick's Day parade there at which trouble was expected. I do not know from where this ammunition came in the first instance.

Meanwhile, various people prominent in the Sinn Féin and Volunteer movements used call to Willie Walsh's house. Amongst those who called, whose names I now remember, were Diarmuid Lynch, "Ginger" O'Connell, a Volunteer Organiser, Sean Hegarty and Liam Mellowes.

Early in Holy Week of 1916, rumours began stirring, and a few callers, unknown to me, came to Willie Walsh's. Even I was unaware of the purpose of their visits. However, on Holy Thursday of that week, Peadar Woods hinted to me that the Fianna would be called upon for serious duty before the week was out. I was at a loss to know what exactly he meant by this, but I neither asked for, or received further information.

On Holy Thursday, 1916, a despatch rider on a motor bicycle from Dublin called to Willie Walsh's house and saw Willie. I believe that this man brought along the plans for the Rising although I cannot state definitely that such was actually the case. Willie left the house that night and, on his return later the same night, he concealed a .38 bulldog revolver in football boots, wrapped around with togs and a belt. The bundle was thrown under a bed in the house.

On Easter Saturday, 1916, Willie went to Dublin to attend a G.A.A. Congress which was being held on Easter Sunday. When in Dublin, he was to obtain verification of the details of the proposed Rising and send word to Sean Matthews in Waterford as to what was happening.

Between the time of the departure for Dublin (on Easter Saturday 1916) of Willie Walsh and Easter Monday, considerable confusion arose as to what really was to happen in view of McNeill's countermanding order which appeared in the papers on Easter Sunday. I believe that this order of McNeill's was conveyed to the Waterford Volunteers by a despatch on Easter

Saturday 1916, but I cannot say now who brought it.

On Easter Monday 1916, rumours were rife about some rioting in Dublin, and at about 7 or 8 p.m. that night I remember Sean Matthews, Peadar Woods, Kieran Corbett and Tom McCarthy, all members of the local Volunteer Executive, meeting in our house to discuss the situation. No military action by the Volunteers resulted from that meeting, and the Fianna were not called on for duty during the week of the Rising. On Easter Tuesday, I tried to get to Wexford or Enniscorthy, but my bicycle punctured at Glenmore about five miles from Waterford, and I had to return.

Nothing happened until May 3rd, 1916, when Willie Walsh arrived by train from Dublin along with Dan Fraher and Philly Walsh of Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. They were arrested at Waterford railway station and lodged in Ballybricken gaol.

A friendly R.I.C. man tipped us off that our houses would be raided and to destroy any documents we had relating to the Fianna or Volunteers. We removed two rifles and some ammunition to a safe place, and destroyed any documents we had. Cormac McGinley, a well-known violinist, was staying with us in 102 Grace Dieu Road at the time, and was very helpful on this occasion.

The Fianna Sluagh in Waterford remained intact, but inactive, until the general reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers took place following the general release of prisoners from British gaols in December 1916.

The year 1917 was spent in general training.

We had a membership of about thirty at the time under the command of Tommy McDonald. A Fianna pipers' band was started.

Early in 1918, I transferred from the Fianna to the Volunteers, and became a member of C. Company, Waterford City Battalion. The Captain was my uncle, Willie Walsh. Other officers were Matty Knox and Larry Colfer. Our strength was about twenty men. We had very little arms, just a Howth rifle and a few revolvers.

I was on street duty during the famous parliamentary election of March, 1918, which was contested by Doctor Vincent White of Waterford, representing Sinn Féin, and Captain Willie Redmond, representing the Irish (Home Rule) Party. Our house at Grace Dieu was Sinn Féin Headquarters for the West Ward.

During that stormy election, in common with many other Volunteers who came in to Waterford from outside counties, I was assaulted by the Ballybricken pig-buyer element who, to a man, supported Redmond in that election. The blackguardism carried on by this mob, together with British ex soldiers and their families, is quite indescribable.

During the menace of conscription in mid 1918, the numerical strength of our Volunteer Company grew very considerably, and it was about this period I was appointed a Section Commander in C. Company. When the conscription crisis passed, the numbers in the Company dwindled until it was back to about twenty or twenty-five.

Such arms as we had in the Company were kept in the farmhouse of Power's in Grace Dieu, Waterford, but later - in 1919 - because of the danger of a raid, the idea of a dump was mooted, and, two fields away from Power's, a double-banked ditch was located as being a suitable site. Three months were spent constructing the dump. The work was done at night. A portion of the bank was hollowed out and boarded on the inside and outside. The lot was then covered with grass sods and was almost impossible to discover. Willie Walsh, Matty Knox, George Giles, John Creed and the two Power men were the only ones who knew of this dump. It was used as the main Battalion dump. Ours was the 1st Battalion, East Waterford Brigade.

At this period - 1919 - Sean Matthews was Battalion Commandant, and Paddy Brazil, Battalion Adjutant.

The first man to do anything constructive in the way of getting small arms and ammunition was Doctor Vincent White of Waterford, to whom I have already referred in connection with the Parliamentary Election of 1918. He brought supplies in small quantities to Willie Walsh's house, and I took them to the dump. I don't know where Doctor White got the stuff.

Late in 1918 I was employed on the staff of the Clyde Shipping Company, Waterford, and when there I was told by somebody in the Volunteers, whom I cannot remember, that I was ideally circumstanced for seeing that certain consignments reached their proper destination.

When the staff of the Director of Purchases was

formed in I.R.A. Headquarters, Dublin, I was approached by Joe Vize and authorised to recruit a staff, preferably not Volunteers, who would be prepared to bring small quantities of small arms, ammunition and potassium chlorate via the Clyde Shipping boats which plied from London, Glasgow and Liverpool to Waterford. This work was to be carried out by me without the knowledge of the local Volunteers.

I was given a list of firms in England and Scotland who would be sending consignments of goods to reputable merchants in Counties Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny and Tipperary. Having access to the ships' manifests in my capacity as manifest clerk, I was aware before the ships' arrival in Waterford whether any such cargo or items were being carried. All I had to do then was to see they were sent for delivery through the usual channels - by rail or by carters. In the case of a few special consignments, these packages or cases might be called for at the Company's stores, but this only happened on a few occasions, as the continuance of such a practice might only arouse suspicion.

The manifests of each ship's cargo were scrutinised by two members of the R.I.C. who were on constant duty at the boats. How easy it was to hoodwink them, can be seen by the fact that I, or one of my agents, also employed by the Clyde Shipping Company, was able to carry small parcels of ammunition openly from the ships' stores addressed to the Chief Officers of others of the Company's boats which had already arrived or would arrive in Waterford! This method was adopted by the simple expedient of retaining Company's labels

addressed to officers of various ships and attaching them, as occasion demanded, to the parcels which contained the potassium chlorate or ammunition, as the case might be.

Those who assisted me in this task of getting in stuff were six Irishmen, four Scotchmen, a Welshman and two Englishmen. What they did was to call to specified addresses in Liverpool, Glasgow, Plymouth, Southampton, London and Greenock for parcels to which they would attach the prepared labels.

My chief assistant, to whom I divulged the personnel of the organisation was Dick Kiely, a checker in the Clyde Shipping Company, Waterford, who would take over in the event of my arrest. He was also given the names of the firms for which a special look-out should be kept on the ships' manifests, and it was his job to see that the packets reached their destination when landed at Waterford Quay.

My principal agents on the Clyde ships were two Scotchmen named Gillespie and MacGlashin.

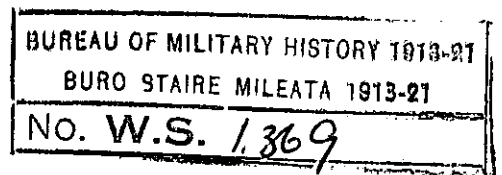
At the receiving end was the person to whom the parcel was consigned, or a member of his staff who was either a Volunteer working for the Brigade or a Company Quartermaster for the particular area, or a member of the Intelligence Staff in that area.

None of the stuff which came in on the ships went to the Waterford Brigade except two consignments, one of which was sent to Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford, and one to Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

Nobody on the Brigade Staff in Waterford was aware of my position in this special assignment of mine. Suspicion arose later, but was lulled when, in my official capacity as Intelligence Officer for C. Company, I was able to give and receive information which was used by the Battalion staff. I was in a position to include the General Post Office, Waterford, in my activities and was contacted immediately by a member of the Post Office staff when any message to or from the British garrison was issued through the Post Office (invariably in code).

I continued all the time on this work until the Truce of July, 1921.

SIGNED: Seamus O Nuallain
(Seamus O Nuallain)
DATE: 10 Marza 1956
10 Marta, 1956.



WITNESS T. O'Gorman
(T. O'Gorman)