

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1485

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1485.

Witness

Liam O'Duffy,
Stranorlar,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Acting O/C, No. 4 Brigade, South Donegal,
for short period.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin activities,
Co. Donegal. 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2145.

Form B.S.M. 2

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No. W.S. 1,485

STATEMENT BY LIAM O'DUFFY,
of Stranorlar, County Donegal.

I was born at Rathmelton (parish of Aughnish), County Donegal, on the 10th March, 1898, my parents being William O'Duffy, carpenter and assistance officer, and Hannah O'Duffy (née MacGarvey), and was the eldest of a family of three.

I received my primary education at the local national school under the tutorship of Mr. Patrick M. Ward, a native of Killybegs, Co. Donegal (son of the late John C. Ward, a noted Gaelic professor), one of the foremost teachers of his time.

On leaving the national school in 1915, I entered the offices of Mr. William Kelly, solicitor, as a clerk.

On the formation of the Irish Volunteers early in that year, I was initiated a member of the Rathmelton company - the company commander being a Mr. James Hynes, an old campaigner.

After the Rising of 1916, the younger members of the Irish Volunteer company seceded from the Redmondite group, and formed a company of the Irish Volunteers.

Early in 1917, I was transferred to the chief offices of my employer in Letterkenny, and received my secondary education from Miss Frances Patterson, who conducted a secondary school there.

In April of that year, a Sinn Féin Cumann was established in Letterkenny by Doctor Joseph McGinty, James Dawson and others, and I was initiated a member.

At that period also, a company of Óglaigh na hÉireann (Irish Volunteers) was formed under the captaincy of James Dawson, and I was taken on as a member, and afterwards appointed a section commander.

During the early part of 1917, Mr. Eamon de Valera, accompanied by Mr. Sean F. McEntee, visited East Donegal on a tour of the constituency and addressed meetings under the auspices of Sinn Féin at certain centres, viz., Letterkenny, Ballybofey, Lifford and Raphoe (then a pro British stronghold). During the progress of the Raphoe meeting, the speakers (including Messrs. de Valera and McEntee) were attacked by British soldiers (natives of the locality, home on furlough) and their relatives: the meeting had to be abandoned. Mr. MacEntee got into communication by telegram with James Dawson, captain of the Letterkenny company of Irish Volunteers (now Superintendent, Garda Síochana, Kilrush, Co. Clare), as a result of which the members of the Letterkenny unit were mobilised in strength and entrained for Raphoe where a successful meeting was held that evening, despite violent opposition from pro-Britishers in the course of which shots were fired by members of the former Ulster Volunteer force. A very considerable number of R.I.C. under the charge of District Inspector Moore was present at the meeting. I was one of those selected by the captain to mobilise the members of the company, and afterwards went to Raphoe.

At that period, the activities of the company consisted in drilling and manoeuvres.

On intimation being received in Letterkenny that the East Cavan parliamentary election had been won by Arthur Griffith for Sinn Féin, a raid was made on the local A.O.H. hall at Glenswilly, near Letterkenny, and the band instruments removed: this band was paraded through the streets of Letterkenny that same night in the Griffith celebrations. I was one of the party who arranged for the seizure of the band, the others being Messrs. Edward Gallagher, John McMonagle and Michael Dawson.

Whilst in Letterkenny, I took part in all the activities of the Irish Volunteer company and the Sinn Féin Cumann, including arrangements re the proposed plebiscite, collections for arms, funds, etc.

When the Sinn Féin executive in East Donegal decided to contest the parliamentary election to be held in 1918, a committee was set up, consisting of Doctor J.P. MacGinley, Charles A. Flattery, solicitor, William Boyle, and myself as assistant secretary. Lists of voters in the area were typewritten by me, and sent to all local Sinn Féin workers in the constituency, so that the voting strength of the movement in each townland was recorded, preparatory to a full canvass.

In November 1918, I took up an appointment in Donegal town with Mr. Peter Joseph Ward, solicitor, then the prospective Sinn Féin candidate for South Donegal.

Immediately on getting settled in the area, I was transferred to the local Irish Volunteer company

in Donegal, and was appointed secretary to the Richard Bonner Cumann, Sinn Féin. Subsequently, I was nominated to fill the post of honorary secretary to the South Donegal Comhairle Ceanntair, Sinn Féin, and was made adjutant of the Donegal Irish Volunteer company.

I also acted as honorary secretary to the constituency committee set up in each constituency in connection with the Dáil loan. I attended with the members of the committee over the entire area, and distributed leaflets in connection therewith, and received a considerable amount from subscribers, all of which was handed over to Mr. Michael Collins, the then Minister for Finance.

After the general election of December 1918, the G.H.Q. of Óglaigh na hEireann decided to reorganise all the Volunteer units throughout the country. In January 1919, at a meeting of all the Irish Volunteer officers available, held in Frosses (Inver), Co. Donegal, a brigade council was formed for the brigade area of South Donegal and portion of Counties Leitrim and Sligo, the staff being:-

Commandant - P.J. Ward, T.D. (Solicitor).

Vice O/C - James Ward, Ballyshannon.

Adjutant - Liam O'Duffy, Donegal.

Quartermaster - Michael Dawson, Mountcharles.

Intelligence Officer - Charles Keeney, Meenabrock,
Dunkineely.

Mr. Ernan Ó Maille, representing G.H.Q., presided at this meeting, and the appointments were subsequently ratified in writing by the Adjutant General, and the officers, then selected, continued to act until the

formation of the first northern division in April 1921.

On my appointment as brigade adjutant, I, in company with Mr. Hugh C. Brady, Killybegs, completely reorganised all the companies and battalions, and all Cumann na mBan branches through the entire area, including Cliffooney, Kinlough and Tullaghan.

From time to time, various H.Q. organisers, including Mr. Michael Staines, E. Ó Maille, Fintan Murphy, visited the area and congratulated us on the excellent state of the organisation in the area.

1920 - April:

On 3rd of this month, I gave orders as brigade adjutant, and personally took part in, a raid on the customs and excise office, Donegal town, where all records relating to customs and inland revenue (including income tax) were taken away and destroyed. Raids were also made same night on the collector of taxes - Mr. John Kennedy - and on the office of the clerk of petty sessions - Mr. Anthony Dunleavy: all records removed from these offices.

The Belfast boycott was rigidly enforced in this area, and I personally interviewed several Belfast travellers, and in several instances took from them the order books containing orders and destroyed same. I also took charge of a raid at Donegal railway station, and removed from the trains certain Belfast newspapers.

1920 - April 17:

I, as brigade adjutant, on orders from O/C, sent out order for destruction of all unoccupied R.I.C.

barracks and posts in area - all of which were destroyed as planned.

I personally took charge of a small party who completely destroyed the unoccupied R.I.C. barracks at Barnesmore Gap (between Donegal and Ballybofey).

1920 - July 1:

I issued order for demolition of, and took charge of party who destroyed by fire, the unoccupied R.I.C. barracks at Pettigo. Pettigo was then a strong pro-British town, and it was intimated by the local loyalists that, if any attempt was made to interfere with the barracks there, armed resistance would be had from the loyalists. On this latter threat being made, it was considered advisable to call the loyalist bluff, and no trace of resistance was met. In the barracks at that time lived the family of the former sergeant in charge (Sergeant Andrews). We removed everything of value in the barracks to the street before destroying the building, but nevertheless the sergeant applied to the then county court at Ballyshannon for a claim under the Malicious Injuries Code, and was awarded compensation. In the course of his evidence, he alleged that his family had been ill-treated by the members of the raiding party. This evidence was perjury and, on my attention being drawn thereto, I at once wrote a letter to a local Ballyshannon newspaper, flatly contradicting this untrue statement. The statement was published, and the military authorities in the area seized the newspaper offices and took away the type.

1920

August 7 Donegal courthouse (immediately adjoining the then R.I.C. barracks) was completely destroyed by fire. I was in charge of the operation: the kerosene used for the destruction of the barracks was seized from the premises of Mr. John Gallen, Merchant, The Diamond, Donegal. The demolition party were all members of the Donegal company, Irish Volunteers.

1920

October 7 On this date, plans were in readiness for an armed attack on the R.I.C. barracks at Ardara, then strongly held by a large force of R.I.C. who had been reinforced by police from outlying stations which had been abandoned. A detachment of the British Rifle Brigade occupied the Market House in the town. The great drawback was the scarcity of rifles. I got in touch with James Dawson, Letterkenny - then Commandant of the East Donegal brigade, as a result of which fourteen Martini-Henry rifles (in good condition), with a quantity of rifle ammunition and a few Mills bombs, were handed over to us. I arranged to have the rifles, etc., conveyed in motor cars to Barnesmore Gap where I met them with a motor car, driven by Volunteer Michael Gallagher, Mountcharles. I was accompanied by Captain Patrick Gallagher and Volunteer Phil Timony, Donegal.

The munitions were conveyed via Altadoo, near Donegal, to Ardara, and handed over by me to Mr. Patrick J. MacHugh, Ardara, the local Battalion O/C, on same night.

These rifles, etc., were used for the attack on Ardara barracks on the following night, but the attack was beaten off.

The Letterkenny party conveying the rifles were:-

Doctor J.P. McGinley, Letterkenny;
Captain James Dawson, Letterkenny;
Doctor John Gormley, Cloghan, Glenfinn.

1920
November & December.

I took part in raid for arms (particularly Ulster Volunteer Force rifles) alleged to be stored in the Rectory at Eddrim Glebe, near Mountcharles; and also at Daisyhill House, near Donegal town.

After the arrest of Mr. P.J. Ward, T.D., Brigade O/C, I informed G.H.Q. of the arrest of the commandant, and I was appointed O/C in his stead, pending his release from Wormwood Scrubbs prison.

On the formation of the Dáil Éireann courts, I was appointed by then Minister for Home Affairs - Mr. Austin Stack - registrar for the district. I held a large number of courts, particularly a lengthy sitting in Donegal town, at which a considerable number of litigants were present, as also a number of solicitors. The court room was raided by a party of the Rifle Brigade (October 1920) under the command of Lieutenant J. Stevens, and a thorough search made, but I had got all the relevant documents hidden, and nothing was seized. In my capacity as registrar to the district courts, I had also to form the parish courts in the area, and appoint the personnel. This I accomplished, and the courts functioned until the formation of the Provisional Government.

From the period from 1919 to my arrest in 1920,

my home and the offices in which I was employed were constantly being raided by military and police, but despite the fact that I had at all times a considerable quantity of seditious literature, I managed to save it from seizure. However, during my incarceration, the material was discovered by the landlord of the offices where I worked, and was destroyed for reasons best known to him.

I was constantly on the run for the greater part of the year 1920. On the 22nd December 1920, I was arrested in the Diamond, Donegal, by members of the R.I.C. (armed) and conveyed to Donegal R.I.C. barracks. Shortly afterwards, I was taken into military custody and conveyed to Donegal workhouse, then occupied by the Rifle Brigade: later, I was conveyed to Strabane workhouse (then occupied by British military), and then to Eglinton barracks, Derry city.

On the 22nd January 1921, I was tried before British (Field) Courtmartial, and sentenced to one year's imprisonment with hard labour under the Restoration of Order Act, 1920, for acting as registrar of a court held under Sinn Féin auspices (an "illegal organisation" within the meaning of the said Act). I was imprisoned in Derry prison until April 1921, and thence to Belfast where I remained until released on 6th November 1921, on the expiration of my sentence.

Whilst in Belfast prison, the prisoners were

subjected to a great deal of ill-treatment and insults from the B. Specials who at times were in occupation of the prison. An abortive attempt by myself and others in June 1921 to escape led to a long term of solitary confinement.

SIGNED:

James O'Dubiazi

DATE:

18th August 1956.

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WITNESS

James Bonway