

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉ TA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,756

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,756.

Witness

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9, St. Mary's Road,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin.

Identity.

O/C, Galway Brigade, 1917-1919.

Subject.

'A' Company, 4th Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1915-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 229.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY SEAMUS MURPHY

9 St. Mary's Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin.

I was in the Rathmines Branch of the Gaelic League when I was about fourteen years of age. John Hogan was our teacher. There was nothing outstanding during my association with the Rathmines Gaelic League except that it strengthened the spirit which my father had fostered in me.

The next thing I remember is the meeting in the Rotunda in 1913, for which I was selected by Sean Fitzgibbon to be one of the stewards. Considerable care was being exercised about this meeting, because there were rumours of trouble, that some persons might come to interrupt and create disturbance at the meeting. My being selected as a steward arose from my contacts with Sean Fitzgibbon in an organisation of which I cannot recollect the name now but I think it was called Éire Óg. This organisation had rooms in Camden Street. Classes in Irish, as well as an odd céilidhe were held there, and papers were read by the members there. Sean Fitzgibbon and Maeve Kavanagh were connected with that organisation.

As a result of the meeting in the Rotunda the Volunteers were formed and I became attached to the 4th Battalion, whose Headquarters were at Kimmage.

For some months we were being initiated into the military art of drilling by ex-British Army Sergeants, amongst whom were Sergeant-Major Merry and Sergeant Bosonnett.

In a sense we were all Privates in that period, and general peace and unity prevailed amongst the Volunteers, although various shades of political opinion were represented there. I think it was due chiefly to the Northern question

Lord Carson's action, that we had these different views, some of us had much broader views so far as the country was concerned.

Some time afterwards it was decided to organise the Battalion into Companies and to appoint officers. This was done by democratic methods of election by all members. I have a distinct recollection of the meeting of "A" Company of the 4th Battalion at which Eamon Ceannt was elected Captain. This election was not unopposed, as Michael Dowling for some reason - I gather some political reason - strongly opposed the election of Eamon Ceannt. Michael Dowling was a very good Gael.

I have a strong recollection of Eamon Ceannt, with a dogged expression and standing with his back against the wall, answering Michael Dowling's points. I can only express an opinion which is founded on very poor recollection in regard to the points raised by Michael Dowling, but I have the notion that they may have been due to opposition to the I.R.B. Eventually Eamon Ceannt was elected Captain of the Company, and I was elected Lieutenant.

From that time onwards the 4th Battalion Companies trained under the direction of their officers, who were assisted by the ex-British Army Sergeants. The training was mostly drilling, which in the beginning was confined to forming fours and so on. There were some implements used for rifle drill. Later on, around the grounds of Kimmage, there was some skirmishing - extended order - under the direction of the British Army Sergeants.

As I have already stated there was evidence of excellent unity amongst all members of the Volunteers, mainly, I think, to resist Carson, but, in regard to a small number of these, perhaps a more intense desire to use the opportunity to

fight for the country generally. This unity was disturbed when John Redmond took a certain stand with regard to the first world war, in respect of joining the British Army in support of England in the war, on the plea that she was fighting for small nations.

About this time the ideas of certain members of the Volunteers in our Battalion were expanding. They were, to my mind, beginning to fancy themselves as having the character of a regular army. This section was less practical in their outlook than another section, whose main purpose was to learn how to use a rifle, and then to acquire one. In connection with the first section I recollect that Mr. McGonagle was very keen on having a Cavalry Corps attached to the 4th Battalion. In fact, I believe that a Cavalry Corps of sorts was established, and I remember through information from Sergeant-Major Clancy that he did train some to ride horses.

The first section was very keen on the panoply of uniform, and my recollection is fairly sound that there commenced at that time an aspect of ridicule by what I would call the very Irish section of the Battalion against this rather impracticable outlook with regard to Cavalry, uniforms and swords, which was being fostered by a section of the Battalion.

At some period not long after Eamon Ceannt's election as Captain, arrangements were made for the election of Battalion officers. At the moment I have to content myself with the meagre information that Eamon Ceannt became our Battalion Commandant and Cathal Brugha became Vice-Commandant. I do not know at what stage I became Battalion Adjutant, but it followed my becoming Captain of the Company.

The election of Eamon Ceannt as Commandant of the

Battalion involved a change in the officership of "A" Company, and I became Captain, elected by the Company.

Eamon Ceannt spoke to me on several occasions when returning home from meetings of the Volunteers about possible trouble due to Redmond's attitude. I should like to mention that some time before this, Eamon Ceannt inducted me into the I.R.B. Into willing ears Ceannt poured his very strong opinion about Redmond's attitude, and about the difficulties, on account of the political followers Redmond had amongst those in the Battalion, of continuing with the same unity.

Returning to the question of the I.R.B., I was brought into the Circle which was presided over by Bulmer Hobson (I think it was the Teeling Circle), whose meeting place was in Parnell Square.

The strain created by the growing difference of opinion between the two sections of the Volunteers, what I would call the strongly Irish section and the followers of Redmond, became very marked. Eamon Ceannt was at this time a member of the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers, which met in offices in, at that time, Brunswick Street. Ceannt informed me from time to time of disputes in the Provisional Committee and of the possibility of a coming rift. All this culminated in an instruction given to me by my Commandant that at a certain full meeting of the Battalion for drill at Kimmage, I was to take his place and form the Volunteers into column of companies formation. Ceannt told me that I was to address the entire parade, point out to them that Mr. Redmond was taking a line, in pledging the Volunteers for services with the British, contrary to the intention behind the formation of the Volunteers in 1913, and that the time had come to declare definitely one way or the other "Are you for England or are you for Ireland". I remember that distinctly.

Being unused to this sort of work I complied reluctantly with my Commandant's order, and, as instructed, addressed the assembled Volunteers. My recollection seems clear that there was silence for a while as the whole thing was unexpected, it was not part of the usual routine of the Battalion parades, and the clear rift which the question instigated caused a certain amount of consternation. Having delivered my little speech, to bring the matter to a head I pointed to a spot on the ground and said, "Those of you present who are for Ireland, form up over there". Again there was a natural hesitation and then the break-away commenced. As well as I can recollect about half of the parade lined up at the spot indicated, and with considerable enthusiasm. Some of the officers of the Battalion who had not lined up there, came to me and spoke angrily about my authority for this action. One officer I remember in particular, Captain Walsh of "D" Company, made some very strong remarks to me, in response to which I told him he was a liar, an act which occasioned a courtmartial subsequently. At this time the strength of the Battalion was about 150.

Continuing as instructed, I formed the Companies which had lined up for Ireland into "column of fours". While disorganised and confused the remaining sections of the Battalion stood around in no particular formation, and the rest of us marched out of Kimmage to Brunswick Street, now Pearse Street.

I had been instructed to form up the Battalion in line facing the offices of the Provisional Committee; to leave the men there and go into the offices and inform the Provisional Committee, which was then sitting, of the action taken, and to tell them that in the street below were so many Volunteers who would not fight for England but who were

prepared to die for Ireland. Willie Cosgrave was alright; Sean McCarthy was alright; Captain Walsh was the only one who went with the Redmondites, but he was a great man afterwards in the Black and Tan period.

As well as I can recollect, and I think I am fairly certain about it, I was met on the stairs by my Commandant who was very pleased and a little bit excited. He brought me in to face the meeting of the Provisional Committee presided over by John D. Nugent. At this meeting also was Mr. Meredith, the late Judge Meredith. Were it not for the excitement and enthusiasm of the time I would have, for want of experience, shirked this duty.

I delivered my message, and, as well as I can remember, it was received with silence. Commandant Ceannt remained to face the barrage and I returned to the street, where I called the Battalion to attention and marched them off to some point, either for dismissal or perhaps to go back to Kimmage. There was extraordinary enthusiasm manifested by the men that night; in fact, all were in strong fighting form.

Nothing happened then except that where Officers or N.C.O.s had gone the other way, their positions had to be filled. The issue was now very clear, and there was complete unanimity amongst those remaining members as to their purpose in being in the Volunteers.

A Battalion Council was formed, composed, as well as I remember, of Commandant Ceannt, Cathal Brugha as Vice-Commandant, myself as Adjutant, Harry Nicholls as Engineering Director, Seamus Kenny as Battalion Quartermaster, later myself as Director for Entrenchments, and intensive training commenced.

About that time efforts were being made to obtain

uniforms, to give, as far as possible, the aspect of a regular army to the Volunteers, and, in the event of capture, their treatment as Prisoners of War and not as guerillas. That was the idea behind getting the uniforms at this time, not the fanciful idea they had before.

Arrangements were also made about this time to acquire rifles, and a little scheme was commenced by which each man contributed one shilling a week towards the eventual purchase of a rifle. There was no difficulty in getting these subscriptions, the men were only too eager to get possession of rifles. I am aware that some men gave up their little luxury of a "pint" or some other amenity in order to help to acquire arms.

An interesting recollection I have is the question of practice for the men in shooting from a rifle, to learn to aim, etc., and a scheme was brought about - I am not sure by whom, but the three men concerned in it were Commandant Ceannt, Larry Kettle, and the Manager of the Greenmount Oil Company, whose name I forget, to make use of the Rifle Club which met at the Greenmount Oil Works, where a miniature rifle range had been erected. By some means some old .22 bore Martini rifles had been secured and those of us who possessed these would meet every Sunday and practice shooting at the target at the Greenmount Oil Works.

At that time there were various manoeuvres carried out, inter-Company and sometimes inter-Battalion. I remember the 4th Battalion assembling with a day's rations at the old tram depot in Dartry one Sunday at about 4 a.m., to march to attack a position held by other city Battalions around the Three Rock Mountain.

Some time at the beginning of 1916, or perhaps at the

end of 1915, Commandant Ceannt hinted to me, as we walked home from a parade meeting, of the necessity to be prepared for serious work. Later on, coming towards St. Patrick's Day, I was speaking to him one evening and he was greatly perturbed. He told me definitely that Connolly wanted an immediate Rising, I think it would be about St. Patrick's Day 1916, and that they were having considerable trouble over the matter. Just about this time Ceannt had indicated a sort of general plan. He referred, as well as I remember, to the occupation of the South Dublin Union, and in particular to Marrowbone Lane, as our defensive posts. He was beginning to confide in me, without being too detailed, as to the serious work ahead.

I remember Eamon Ceannt describing with enthusiasm how from the South Dublin Union we could control or stop the troops entering the city from Richmond Barracks. I am not prepared to state that he did not convey this information in a way which indicated that it would not apply at a particular time, but when the opportunity arose. He gave me the information but at the same time he did not indicate that it would come at a certain time, it was more a hypothetical situation.

With regard to Marrowbone Lane his idea, as well as I remember, was that its occupation would control the situation if the troops attempted to use any by-road, such as Cork Street, they could be seen from the end of Marrowbone Lane. Also it overlooked the back of the South Dublin Union.

From this on there were tense periods and constant contact between the officers, and, in regard to myself, visits to the Commandant's house. He lived at that time on the South Circular Road. I remember on one occasion calling

at Ceannt's house for some instructions. I was sitting waiting in the hall when a messenger arrived with a letter. As well as I remember Mrs. Ceannt brought the message upstairs to her husband, who came down in a very great hurry, told me he could not wait and dashed out.

Martin Conlon was in the I.R.B. Circle that I joined in the early days. At that time I was not much in touch with those people, but I certainly sat and listened at every meeting, but I do not think I have much to say about them. My recollection is that there was not an awful lot done at those meetings. I got the impression one time that myself and the other members were brought there just as a routine matter and that the real work was done by two or three men. In other words I felt we were regarded as courtiers. I was not in any of the inner matters at all so I cannot say much about them. The idea was not to have them as active members of the I.R.B., but to be able to say that there were so many of the I.R.B. in the Volunteer movement.

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