

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

No. W.S. 168

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.168

Witness

Joseph Melinn

Identity

Lieut. I.V. 1916.

Subject

(a) Landing of Casement and Monteith Easter 1916

(b) Easter Week, 1916. Tralee.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.733.

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STATEMENT OF JOSEPH MELINN, 1 GREENVIEW
TERRACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY.

I joined the I.R.B. in Dublin in 1905. Sean O'Byrne, now Justice of the High Court, was the centre of the circle I was in. I was transferred to a circle in Dunlaoghaire in 1907 and was there during 1907 and 1908. Joe Byrne, recently a Commandant at Portobello Barracks, was centre of the Dunlaoghaire Circle.

In 1909, when I was coming to Tralee to take up the post of Manager at Slattery's Bacon Factory, Sean McDermott gave me a transfer to Tralee and a note of introduction to Austin Stack. Stack was County Centre for Kerry. At that time the membership of the I.R.B. in Kerry was very small. The names I remember are An Seabhad, Thomas O'Reilly, Waterville, Stack and Mick Crowe. About 1910 we started to recruit, but it was a slow and careful process. Stack asked me to join the A.O.H. American Alliance, which had a branch in Tralee, and which we thought would be a good recruiting ground. I did so in 1911. It proved to be a better recruiting ground than the Gaelic League, which was poor from our point of view. When the Volunteers started we had about ten Circles of approximately ten men each in Tralee and neighbourhood. Stack was still County Centre and I was County Secretary. On the Wednesday before Easter Sunday 1916, Stack instructed me to order all the Circles to take all military orders direct from the Volunteer officers from that on. I passed on this order to all the circles in the county.

We also formed the Fianna in Tralee in 1912. I took on this responsibility myself and provided uniforms etc. for them which they afterwards paid for by weekly subscriptions. The only two Fianna that I can remember now are Jeremiah Skinner and William Mullins.

There was no I.R.B. district organisation in the county before 1916. We had periodic visits from representatives of the Supreme Council, Cathal Brugha in 1911, Major McBride in 1914, and Diarmuid Lynch in 1915. These men did not visit circles, they saw only the officers.

The I.R.B. worked quietly in the preparations for the formation of the Volunteers in Tralee and in the organising work that preceded the public meeting. The members approached clubs and individual friends and ensured a favourable atmosphere for the start. I think Tom Slattery presided at the public meeting for the inauguration of the Volunteers, though he was not an I.R.B. man. People of all shades of political opinion attended and joined the Volunteers. The I.R.B. was quite satisfied to let the organisation develop in a natural way; we were well represented and felt that if the necessity arose we could direct and influence the national policy of the new body. Diarmuid Crean was appointed Secretary, a position he retained until he went to Uganda in 1914. He was replaced by Eamon O'Connor who was an I.R.B. man.

Four Companies were formed for the town at the start, and early in 1914 each Company elected its own officers; I was in B. Company. The election of officers in that company resulted as follows:-

Dan Healy,	Captain
Dan Jeffers	1st Lieutenant
Joe Melinn	2nd Lieutenant

There was no change of officers up to Easter 1916. The strength of B/Coy. at the time was about 60.

The split in September 1914, did not too seriously affect the Tralee Battalions at the time. With the exception of C/Coy. strength was not much impaired, notwithstanding that Tom O'Donnell, M.P. had come to the meeting at which the issue was decided and did his best to influence the men in favour of Redmond. Afterwards, however, pressure was put on many men by their employers and as a result there was a falling off in numbers.

I was the first victim of this policy on the part of the employers in Tralee and the first man in Ireland to be discharged from employment by an Irish firm for the sole reason that I refused to discontinue my membership of the Volunteers. I was the Manager of Slattery's Wholesale and Retail Store. After the split Jeremiah

himself had landed from a German submarine early that morning. He told him that Casement was still out near the place where they had landed and he described the place, the country that ^{THEY} had come through into Tralee and the time it had taken them to walk the distance. He said there was a church steeple on their left a short distance inland, that they had passed between it and the sea and that it was near the place where they had left Casement. We concluded from the description that the steeple was that at Ardfert and that the point where they had landed was somewhere on Banna Strand.

Monteith told Stack that Casement wanted to see the O/C. of the Volunteers urgently and that he was anxious to get to Dublin as soon as possible. He gave Stack to understand that Casement was in favour of postponing the Rising. He did not believe the Germans were coming up to scratch. There was no mention, in my hearing anyhow, of a vessel carrying arms being out in the bay.

Stack decided to go out and take Beverley with him. He arranged that Miss Hannah Spicer (now Mrs. Allister, Caherma, Tralee) would take Beverley up Rock St. and out to Ballonagh where he would pick him up in a car. We had not been able to get a suit to fit Monteith; he had no clothes except what he had come in, so he stayed behind at Spicer's.

After Stack, Collins and Beverley left I remained behind to keep touch with Monteith. The only people other than the Spicer family who saw Monteith while he was at Spicer's were Paddy Cahill, who came once, Michael J. O'Connor, Stack, Collins and myself. I discussed with Monteith and Paddy Cahill when he was there what Monteith would do in the event of a raid by the police. Monteith suggested that he would get inside a bed in which Mrs. Spicer was lying ill.

Cahill arranged to send four Volunteers on bicycles out to Banna, Jack McGaley, Mick Hogan, Moss Switzer and Pat Brennan, who was staying with me. Brennan was in charge of the party, and

I told him Casement was out there somewhere. They were given instructions to reconnoitre only and were told to take no action without reporting in again. They reported back about 2 p.m. that Casement had been arrested. I think they told us that he was in the Police Barracks at Ardfert. They were back a long time before Stack came. He did not return to Tralee until evening.

Casement was brought into Tralee about 4 p.m. on a sidecar with an escort of two R.I.C. men. I saw him and saluted him in Irish. He was clean shaven. We got very anxious about Monteith's safety. When Stack came back to Tralee he went to Tom Slattery's and he was having a drink there when Head Constable Murray sent word to him that a man wanted to speak to him at the Barracks. Stack had not been at the Rink since he came back. He went to the Police Barracks and was placed under arrest. I did not see Stack after he leaving Spicer's in the morning until we met in Richmond Barracks, and he then confirmed to me in conversation how he was arrested as stated above. His arrest took place about 7 or 8 o'clock that evening.

After dusk that night we took Monteith out of Spicer's and over to the A.O.H. Hall. The members were Volunteers and acted as a guard for him. They played cards with him; my wife cooked food and sent it down to him. That night, about midnight, he was taken to the Rink. I had no knowledge of what message Cahill sent to Dublin by Partridge and Mullins. All that was done by Cahill, and I knew nothing about it. Stack could not have known anything about it either. I knew Partridge was returning to Dublin that evening because I met him in Paddy Hogan's, but I do not know if he then had a message or got one from Cahill later.

There was a test mobilisation that Friday night. It took only twenty minutes from the time the order was issued until the men were assembled in the Rink. We were marched at the double up town and down by the Rock. I don't know why. There was considerable

excitement and a lot of people thought it was the intention of the Volunteers to rescue Casement. There was no such intention. We knew the Rising was to take place on Sunday and did not want to take premature action. Casement, we thought, would still be in Ireland and could be rescued. He was taken to Dublin by the train leaving Tralee about 11 a.m. on Saturday under police escort.

Monteith took charge at Cahill's request, from the time he arrived in the Rink on Friday night.

On Sunday morning the Tralee men mobilised at the Rink and the Dingle men arrived after marching the thirty miles from their own area. There were about 250 men available in Tralee that day including the Dingle men and a few cyclists from Cahirciveen and some local companies. I do not know what instructions were sent to the various companies in regard to where they were to parade on Easter Sunday. I had no information about the expected arrival of the arms ship. About midday on Sunday a Volunteer officer named Whelan arrived from Limerick with MacNeill's countermanding order. It was then clear that something had gone seriously wrong, and the whole position was uncertain. The men were allowed to go home that night.

On Easter Sunday night, about 9 p.m., I was in charge of the Company of Volunteers who escorted Monteith out of Tralee as far as the Workhouse Gate, where he was taken over by the Ballymacelligott contingent. Cahill and Monteith selected the Company of which I was in charge to do this job.

On Wednesday of Easter Week we had a meeting of officers. Some one from Limerick had brought word that Limerick was taking no action. A dispatch had been sent to Cork to inquire what Cork was doing. Cahill told me afterwards that they got some word from Cork but that it was not encouraging. This meeting of officers on Wednesday decided that it was not possible for us to take any action.

On Saturday Bishop O'Sullivan, who was Dean of Tralee at the

time, took some steps about getting agreement to the surrender of arms. Terence McSwiney was in Tralee and stayed with the Dean. A meeting of officers and some others was held in the Presbytery but I am not sure on what day. There were from twenty to thirty present. It was decided at that meeting to surrender the arms. The understanding was that all the arms would be handed in, but in fact they were not all handed in and those that were were broken up first.

I was arrested in the following week. The R.I.C. had gone to Spicer's and got a little girl there to tell them I had been there on Good Friday when Monteith was there. Michael J. O'Connor was arrested also. Both of us were charged with conspiracy to land German arms. We were taken to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. Stack and Collins were tried on the same charge but in the cases of O'Connor and myself the charges were not proceeded with and we were not tried. We were deported. I was sent to Knutsford and afterwards to Frongoch, from which I was released on Christmas Eve, 1916.

Signed: Joseph Melina

Date: 21/12/48

WITNESS: McLomney

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