

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉ 1913-21

No. W.S. 426

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 426.....

Witness

Sean O'Sullivan,
19 Idrone Terrace,
Blackrock,

Co. Dublin.

Identity

Member of I R.B.
(a) Manchester 1916, and
(b) Dublin, 1917.

Member of 4th Battalion Irish Volunteers
1918.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1916 - Truce;
- (b) Munition Factory, Parnell St.,
Dublin, 1919 - .

Conditions, if any, stipulated by -Witness

Nil

File No. S.1567.....

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN O'SULLIVAN,

19 Idrone Terrace, Blackrock, Dublin.

I joined the I.R.B. in Manchester, England, in 1916. The Circle was known as the Manchester Circle. Matt Lawless, Tom MacGormack, Michael Ryan, Manchester, and G. Lynch were some of the members at the time.

Meetings were principally held for the purpose of assisting the prisoners in Frongoch. Socials were organised in aid of the Arms Fund and for the purchase of foodstuffs for the internees.

I came to Dublin at the end of 1916. In 1917 I was transferred to the McDermott Circle of which Michael Collins was Centre. They met in 46 Parnell Square. On the re-organisation of the Volunteers I joined "B" Company, 4th Battalion. Captain Tom Boylan was Company Officer.

Some time during this year I was approached by Andy Redmond who worked in White's, The Coombe, to know if I could put him in touch with anyone who would purchase arms through a soldier who was stationed in Islandbridge. I communicated with Phil Cosgrave (deceased) who was Quartermaster of the 4th Battalion. He gave me authority to purchase arms. I purchased a rifle and some small arms, and handed them over to Captain G. Byrne of "C" Company, 4th Battalion, as requested by the Battalion Quartermaster.

In January, 1918, I went to Armagh for the South Armagh Election and helped in the election work, such as canvassing. Later it was found necessary to bring up large numbers of Volunteers to protect the speakers against intimidation. I joined the 4th Battalion Unit when it arrived. The Volunteers were under the command of Acting Commandant Kelly.

On return from Armagh we continued the weekly parades, drill, etc. On the formation of the Engineers I was transferred to them under Captain Seán McGlynn. We generally met in 34 Camden Street. The training of the Engineers consisted chiefly of lectures and the use of explosives, road blocking, demolition of railways and bridges.

During 1918 I started working with the firm of Heron & Lawless, Cycle Agents and Repairers. They were in 198 Parnell Street. The firm had decided to make special strong cycle carriers of their own design and I was employed in the manufacture of these carriers. Matt Furlong and Joe Vize who were members of the McDermott I.R.B. Circle, came down to inspect the premises at 198 Parnell Street, and discussed with us the suitability of the premises for use as a munitions factory. It was decided that the place was suitable, and taken over by the Dublin Brigade.

Matt Furlong started soon after and took charge of the formation of the factory. He was a skilled Engineer. The first job was the installation of a furnace necessary for the melting of the metals. The next problem was to get the necessary machinery.

Some time previously I had been to Larkfield, Kimmage, an old mill owned by Count Plunkett, and I had remembered seeing shafts and pulleys which had been used in the mill. We started up negotiations with the Plunketts and we purchased these from them.

A few days after Matt Furlong started, Tom Young came along as a moulder. His father was a moulder in the College of Science and was of tremendous assistance to us.

When the plant was ready and the machinery and power installed, we started casting. The castings were for hand-grenades. The patterns were made outside.

About March, 1919, the first grenade was finished. I brought it over to Mick Lynch, Vice Brigadier of the Dublin Brigade, at the time, to the Mansion House. It was the first spring-made bomb. The question then came of the loading and testing of the grenades. Mick Lynch asked me did I know Paddy McGrath, and would I bring over the bomb to him for a test. I brought it over to O'Hara's, Aungier Street, where Paddy was employed at the time. We tested the grenade one night at the rear of the premises. There was a big old bath at the rear of the premises. We put an iron sheet on top of the bath and as many sacks as possible all around and let the bomb off. We collected the fragments of the bomb and examined them to see if the burst was even. We were satisfied that it was.

I reported back to the Brigade that the test proved very satisfactory. We got seriously into production then and made strenuous efforts to increase

the number manufactured each week. We set ourselves a target for output. This meant we had to augment the staff.

Paddy McHugh was the next to come in, also Jim Coughlan and Gay McGrath. In addition we had the assistance and help of two members of the Squad - part time - Tom Keogh and Michael Keogh.

We installed a warning signal in the basement where the factory was carried on. This was a special lamp which was switched on and off again, to warn us that Corporation or factory inspectors were on the premises and to cover up anything or hide anything. If it was a raid by the enemy the signal was to leave the light on. In case the light from it would brighten up the place too much we used take the bulb out and cover it up with sand. The switch for this lamp was located in the cycle shop on the ground floor. Christy O'Reilly, a cycle mechanic, worked in the cycle shop. He was also a Volunteer in the Dublin Brigade.

When production was going well in 1919 the place was raided by members of the "G" Division. They spent a considerable time searching. Joe Lawless was there when the raid took place, and managed to switch on the warning light of an enemy raid. We hid everything as best we could. The grenade cases were in a special hiding place in the ground. At the time of the raid work was going on, on the moulding of the necks of the bombs which were made of brass. They asked a few questions about them. We ignored them, appearing to

be very busy, and Joe made a remark they were fittings for some plumbing work. They apparently believed this. The raid was still going on when they found a bag of Verey lights under a desk upstairs in the cycle shop which evidently took over their attention because shortly afterwards they all cleared upstairs and arrested Joe. Joe had lent his car for the raid on Collinstown Aerodrome, which had taken place a short time previously. One day he was searching in the car for something. He found the Verey lights under the seat and he brought them in to us. He asked us what they were. I had seen these Verey light cartridges, and told him what they were and asked him not to leave them there. Joe evidently forgot to bring them out.

Previous to the raid we had been informed that we would possibly be warned of any contemplated enemy raids, but this raid evidently proved there was no such assurance. We decided to arm ourselves. Each man had his revolver and used keep a stack of bombs ready for use.

In order not to leave many finished grenades on the premises we used take them out each day to dumps. We had special bandoliers made to hold actually twelve grenades which were fitted round the body so that we could cycle away with them. I brought my grenades to a man named Raul who was employed by a firm in Mary Street. This firm had a warehouse in Stafford Street where we would deposit them each day so as not to have a supply in the munitions factory in case of a raid. Tom Young and Matt Furlong used take the grenades to different dumps. We filled them in three different places. One of the filling places was in

Dominick Street; a second in Eccles Street and another at Tom Keogh's house on the North Strand.

While filling in Dominick Street one day Tom Keogh and I heard a big commotion up and down the house which was a tenement. We did not know for two days after that the military had raided. The reason for the raid was as follows. The caretaker had been on the streets after curfew and arrested, and in order to find out who he was they raided next day. He was then released. When Mick Lynch informed us of the raid, I went along to the house and saw the man himself. He told me the military had raided, but they did not search all the premises, only his rooms, which was very fortunate for Tom Keogh and myself.

An amusing incident occurred some time later. Tom Kettrick came for grenades one day. I made an appointment to meet him at 46 Parnell Square with about fifty grenades. Tom had bought an attache case made of compressed cardboard. It was on a Saturday evening. Tom was bringing them to the hotel and was going back to the West on the Monday morning. I handed them over to him and he packed them in his new case. He had a hack outside and as he got up on the car I handed the case to him and it burst open, the weight being too much for such a case. All the grenades fell down off the hack. Tom got down and we had to pack them back into the case again. Being a bright summer's evening many witnessed the incident, including, of course, the old Jarvie. However, Tom got them safely away and we heard more later of how they were used against the enemy.

In 1920 in addition to the grenades, we started

making the trench mortars. We used go out to test the shells. We went out to Dunboyne one night for a test. At that time the munitions had been handed over to G.H.Q. by the Dublin Brigade and Peadar Clancy was made Director of Munitions. During the test one of the shells burst in the gun and Matt Furlong who was firing it was badly wounded. Peadar Clancy who was present at the time, had to come to Dublin from Dunboyne and get permission to get the city ambulance out. Matt was very badly hit but was conscious all the time. He was taken to the Mater Hospital about 12 o'clock that night. He died a few days afterwards as gangrene set in. This was at the time that Dan Breen was in the hospital. It was raided by the Tans and military, and when they saw Matt's remains they thought it was the remains of Dan Breen.

After Peadar Clancy's death on Bloody Sunday whilst a prisoner in Dublin Castle, the munitions were taken over by Seán MacMahon, Quartermaster General, until G.H.Q. appointed Seán Russell some months later, as Director.

The munitions factory in Parnell Street was again raided in November, 1920, at night. The whole area was cordoned off. The military and auxiliaries remained on the premises the whole night apparently with the intention of capturing the staff when they arrived in the morning. A young fellow who had left his bicycle there for repairs, called that morning to collect it. When he saw the auxiliaries inside, he made an effort to run away from them. They opened fire on him and wounded him. That gave us the warning as Parnell Street was crowded when we arrived near the premises. None of us knew who

was inside as a few of us had our own keys. We kept outside until we collected all the stuff and got rid of our bicycles, mixing in the crowds. They seized everything, took away the plant and the premises were closed down. It was our idea at the time that they had only stumbled on to this through an area raid.

Joe Lawless has since secured written information that they had definite orders from Intelligence, London, to raid it. Only for the blundering of the shooting of this boy we would all have walked into it.

It was then necessary to get other premises. Luke Street had been taken over before the Parnell Street raid. After this raid we decided to open a number of small factories. We had an old place in Denzille Lane which was used for the casting of the aluminium caps. This was subsequently captured. One man had a very narrow escape when the Tans raided it. He was just coming down from the loft at the time. One of the Tans asked him his name and what he was doing there and if there was anything in the place. "That is the only stuff I see in the yard", he said, pointing to a heap of scrap, and walked out. The man asked some woman in the street for a hat or a cap. He got a cap and walked away.

I should have mentioned we got a lot of our supplies of coke for the furnace through Andy Clerkin, Coal Merchant. Luke Street factory was known as Keen & Co., Engineers. In addition we opened a shop in Percy Place under the name of Dunne Bros. We took it over as a Plumbers' Shop. Gabriel McGrath and I were Dunne Bros. Jim Kirby, a plumber, was also in Percy

Place, in case the firm was asked to do any plumbing work. A big garage had been opened opposite our shop. Mick Keogh, Jim Kirby, Gabriel McGrath and I were working in the shop one day when the Tans pulled up at the garage opposite to service one of their cars. They jumped off at our big gate, came into yard, lit cigarettes and chatted to one another. We had a special arrangement made for getting in through a house which would let us out into Haddington Road in case of a raid, but did not avail of it. They came in and had a general look round and stayed about half an hour; then they cleared away.

In addition to this we established a place in Crown Alley and took over Baker's Iron Works. We established a very nice foundry there. I was sent back to Percy Place when the foundry started. We had another place at the rere of Mountjoy Square over a garage named Condrons. We did the assembling of the grenades there.

Amongst the workers up to the time of the Truce were :-

Parnell Street: Myself,
 Matt Furlong (deceased)
 Christy O'Reilly
 Michael Keogh (deceased)
 Tom Keogh (deceased)
 Tom Young
 Paddy McHugh
 Jimmy Coughlan
 Gabriel McGrath

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SIGNED

Seán O'Sullivan

DATE

21/9/50

WITNESS

Seán Brennan Comdt.