

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 809

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 809

Witness

Major David Joseph Conroy,
Auxiliary Services,
Union Defence Forces,
Voortrekkerhoogte,
South Africa.

Identity.

Adjutant, 5th Battalion,
West Clare Brigade,
1920-1921.

Subject.

National activities, West Clare,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2126

Form B.S.M. 2

CONFIDENTIAL

To Bureau of Military History, 26 Westland Row, Dublin, Ireland.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
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Testimony by Major David Joseph CONROY, Inspector-in-Charge, Auxiliary Services, Union Defence Forces, Voortrekkerhoogte, South Africa, in connection with his association with the National Movement in Ireland from 1917 to 1921. Statement made at Voortrekkerhoogte, S. Africa on 9th February, 1953.

I, DAVID CONROY (also known in South Africa as DAVID JOSEPH CONROY) was born at Galway, Ireland on 26th April, 1899 where my father was Manager of the City Gasworks. My mother's name was Mary (nee Hickey) a native of Kilkee, Co. Clare, and my father (who was also born in Galway City) was named PATRICK. My mother died in November, 1905 and my father in February, 1908. On death of latter I went to live with my uncle (Patrick Hickey) and aunt (Bridget Hickey later married to John Kelly of Limerick in 1916) at Kilkee Co. Clare.

I first went to school at the Convent of Mercy Galway and attended the National School at Kilkee (Principal James McGreene) until about 1913/14. I was a student at St. Mary's College, Galway from September 1915 to Easter 1918.

I, of course, remember the Home Rule and Volunteer activities around 1912-14, and attended the big Redmond Volunteer Rally that was held in Dublin (Phoenix Park) on Easter Sunday, 1915 as a spectator. From an early age I was interested in the Volunteer movement.

Many of my contemporaries at St. Marys were later members of the Volunteers (Irish Republican Army) and some of them, e.g. Michael Joseph O'Hara, of Sligo, and Thomas Woods of N. Clare (now in charge of the Detective Division of Civic Guards), attained some prominence in the movement.

My relations were all strong Redmonites and like many others of my generation I was influenced by the propaganda of the 1914/18 War and indeed it was only after the Rising of 1916 that I realised that there was a duty on me to assist in the fight for complete Irish independence. I attribute much of this resurgence of national feeling to the atmosphere of St. Marys and in particular to the influence of some of the Priests on the College Staff (notably Fathers Thomas Burke and Michael Grogan). Father Burke (who was also Diocesan Examiner) had two motor cycles. I remember him training some boys to ride them so that one day they could act as Volunteer Despatch Riders if required. One student named D. Buckley, from Co. Limerick (whose father was a School Teacher if I remember correctly) constantly rebuked many of us who used to sing many of the so called "patriotic" English songs popular in the War, and indeed brought our real Irish ideas to the surface.

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We must have disciplined them fairly well because on one of our Sunday("crocodile")walks the President, V.Rev. Joseph Canon Mitchell M.A., remarked to me how well the boys were walking, and I know he had a shrewd idea of the reason. He made no remarks on the drilling, which he must have known of, though his position if any of us were arrested would have been awkward. We had seen the R.I.C. keeping the grounds under observation a few times

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At the time of Fahy's accident I was in Dublin where I attended a series of lectures on engineering(explosives in particular) given, if I remember correctly, by Rory O'Connor and his staff. This was about October or November, 1920. We had representatives from all over the country at these lectures which were daily held in different places in Dublin.

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Kilkee
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(Major D.J.Conroy).

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I remember the excitement caused when after raiding the office of the local Revenue Official ("The Gauger") we found that similar action had been taken in well over 200 offices all over Ireland the same night. We destroyed only documents in connection with Income Tax. Talty, Tom Murrinan, Tom Prendergast and another Murrinan took part in raid. We had great difficulty in reassuring the official's wife who was English that we meant not harm to her or her husband and children. His name was Kenny. A good fellow who showed no signs of fear and gave as good to Murrinan (Tom) as he got when latter abused him for being an English official. I am sure that he recognised us all. He knew me well. I saw Nelson (then a Sergt.) of the local R.I.C. visit Kenny following day, but though we took "avoiding action" we were not worried by authorities then.

Perhaps the case of the local Postman may throw a little light on some I.R.A. activities and interest the Bureau.

The Postman, George Stapleton, unfortunately became mentally deranged. The R.I.C. were sent for to take steps to send him to Mental Home at Ennis. At this time the R.I.C. had ceased to perform all normal Police work and they refused to assist in any way. Stapleton's relatives appealed to us as the patient was violent and had to be restrained.

To page "4".

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4-9

CONFIDENTIAL

(Major D.J. Conroy)

+ His
brother
"Joe"

We got a motor car, secured the patient, and I, Talty, one of the Marrinans (not Tom), and another took him to the Mental Home at Ennis where our real troubles began. The Resident Medical Superintendent (Dr. O'Meara I think) received us kindly but he had certain strict legal formalities to overcome before he could relieve us of the patient. He feared an action for damages. He agreed patient ^{should} be detained. After much argument he agreed that if his staff found the patient running around their grounds they would have no option but to take possession of him. George was released. The R.M.S. took his chance and we were relieved of our responsibility. They told us that we had made history at their institution that day as this was first case of it's kind they had. Both staff and patients knew who we were and were much excited. We were shown around the premises. One patient told me that he was a better Republican than I was and in response to a query told me that he had "never kissed the King". I told him for that matter neither had I. He laughed, put his tongue out to it's full extent, put his finger to it and said "Didn't you ever do that to a Stamp?". The Stamps then bore the effigy of England's King. Dr. O'Meara did tell us that he would later get two of the local Justices of the Peace to sign certain documents regarding detention of the patient. However he relieved us of our responsibility before he had a single document to support him though I think we had some kind of a certificate from Dr. C.C. Hickey (now Father Hickey) the Dispensary Doctor at Kilkee.

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In 1919 and 1920 I found myself interested in the Labour Movement too and for a time was Secretary for the Kilkee Branch of the Irish Transport and General Works Union which I can say was brought into existence quietly by local I.R.A. and which was useful to latter work.

I stood for the Kilkee District on the Republican/Labour Ticket at the Local Government Elections in 1920 for the Kilrush Rural District Council and Poor Law Guardians. I was duly elected and it was decided at a preliminary meeting of the Council to elect Dan Sheedy of Cooraclare, who was a Commandant in the I.R.A., as Chairman of the Council. This was done and I, being the next highest in rank to Sheedy on the Council was appointed Vice-Chairman. In pursuance of their policy the British shortly afterwards arrested Sheedy. I then assumed Chairmanship and anticipating arrest I went definitely "on the run" after the first meeting at which I presided.

I then at least acquired a certain "nuisance" value as the British Military from Kilrush made several raids for me in and around Kilkee. On one of these raids in February 1921 the soldiers did much damage to my Aunt's home (only occupied that very stormy night by her and my 17 year old sister) at 14 Grattan Street, Kilkee. For this damage my Aunt subsequently got some compensation from Judge M. Bodkin at Clare County Court.

My health was indifferent for some months and I was treated by Dr. P.C. Hickey (on some of his periodical visits on leave from his Ship to Kilkee. His son Dr. C.C. Hickey (now a Priest) also saw me. Being "on the run" did not help my condition, and I went to Limerick on a small boat from Cappagh, and thence to Dublin where in February 1921 I contacted some I.R.A. Officers (one I remember who assisted me was named Henderson - "Leo" I think he was called) and they had me examined by a Doctor, who was, if I remember correctly, attached to the South Dublin Union, and named O'Donnell. He advised to go and rest and recuperate with some cousins I had in London. There I was treated by a Doctor Smythe (ex Ulster) who had served in S. Africa in Boer War. He advised me to go to that Country where he hoped the dry climate would benefit me and at end of April 1921 I did what he advised. In Capetown I later met, in 1921, Mr. Patrick J. Little T.D., on a mission here, and reported to him, the Truce was now on, and had that been broken I may have returned to Ireland.....

This is end of statement

9/2/1953

Appendix

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM

DR. D. P. MARAIS
(M.D., F.R.C.P.E.)
TELEPHONE 2-4632.

THE SOUTHERN LIFE BUILDINGS,
101, ST. GEORGE'S STREET,
CAPE TOWN.

6th. January 1953.

ORIGINAL

I have to certify that I saw and examined
Mr. D. Conroy on the 12th. of January 1923.
He had recovered from a pulmonary tuber-
culosis, but was suffering from a relapse with pleurisy.
His general condition was satisfactory and he was recommended
to go to Beaufort West for its dry climate where, under
careful treatment, he made a satisfactory recovery.

David P. Marais

M.D., F.R.C.P.E.

CONFIDENTIAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIPE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 809

STATEMENT BY MAJOR D.J. CONROY,
Union Defence Forces, Voortrekkerhoogte, South Africa.

To Bureau of Military History, 26 Westland Row, Dublin,
Ireland.

Testimony by Major David Joseph CONROY, Inspector-in-Charge,
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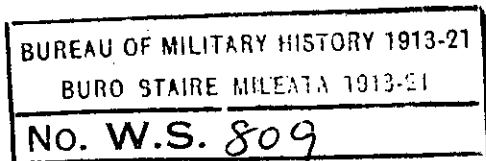
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This is end of statement.

(SIGNED) D.J. CONROY...

9/2/1953.



A P P E N D I X

From

Dr. D.P. MARAIS
(M.D., F.R.C.P.E.)

THE SOUTHERN LIFE BUILDINGS,
101, St. George's Street,
CAPETOWN.

Telephone 2-4632.

6th January 1953.

I have to certify that I saw and examined Mr.
D. Conroy on the 12th. of January 1923.

He had recovered from a pulmonary tuberculosis,
but was suffering from a relapse with pleurisy. His
general condition was satisfactory and he was
recommended to go to Beaufort West for its dry climate
where, under careful treatment, he made a satisfactory
recovery.

(Signed) DAVID P. MARAIS

M.D., F.R.C.P.E.

