

W.S. 892

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 892

Witness

Very Rev. T.J. Shanley,
216 West 68th Street, N.Y.,
New York (23),
U.S.A.

Identity.

Close associate of
leaders of Independence Movement in
Ireland and the U.S.A.

Subject.

Mr. de Valera's trip to Paris
for the Irish Race Convention, January 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by

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The Very Reverend Father Timothy Shanley, P.P.

1922

Early in January, I received a telegram signed by Harry Boland and Liam Mellows. It was sent to my home Post Office, Dromod, and relayed to Drumlesh, Co. Longford, where I was staying with Canon Keville for a few days. The telegram read: "Please meet us to-morrow 10.30 at the Mansion House, Dublin".

I took the late train and arrived in Dublin about 1.0 a.m. I met Harry and Liam as directed. Harry said to me "The Chief (de Valera) has asked me to request you to go with him to Paris disguised as a Priest. He shall not ask for a passport from the British and you shall have to secure one for him. "Tim, will you come?"

"I shall, by all means. When?"

"To-night".

I had only a very small bag with a few shirts and collars, so I got busy buying a bag and more things for travelling. Harry said "We shall leave to-night for London".

We got on the boat and went to the dining room where a number of those who supported the treaty were dining. They knew we were bound also for Paris. We arrived in London on the following morning and were met by Seán Nunan, who took us to his house. Harry Boland left us immediately on his way to Paris. After breakfast in Seán's house, we got busy about procuring the passport

for the Chief. Eamon Martin took Dev., Seán and myself to a photographer near Charing Cross station. It was up one flight; going up the stairs de Valera slipped off his tie, put a Roman Collar on and walked into the photographer. Both of us had our photo taken. Eamon Martin called back a few hours afterwards and while the photographer was in another room attending to the photos, stole the negative so that it could not be traced. Dev. went back to Seán's house. Seán and Eamon Martin took me to the British Passport Office. I had already my own American Passport. I was to get a Passport for myself under the name of Father Walsh. Fr. Walsh was a Holy Ghost Father, a friend of de Valera from Rockwell College days. He gave his black clothes for Dev to wear on this trip. Mr. Martin knew a man the name of Mr. Oliver in the Passport Office. When Eamon asked for him the man behind the desk said "Why, he died about ten days ago". I remember Eamon so distinctly putting on a great act. He said, "Why, he was one of my best friends. I was out of Town and never heard of his death until now. I am shocked beyond words". Seán and I joined in this lamentation so successfully, although we never knew the man, that the gentleman behind the desk said "He was one of my dearest friends and I would be so happy to do any favour for you, gentlemen".

Eamon said, "This Priest, Fr. Walsh, has had two operations within the past six weeks in Dublin and his doctor has ordered him to the South of France for the sunshine and rest". I answered all the necessary questions for the passport and handed him my photographs. I felt it was no place for me to linger and I asked Eamon to ask him if I might leave as I had some shopping to do. The official was very co-operative, telling us it was not necessary to stay but if Mr. Martin would remain, he could

have the passport in about one half-hour.

Seán and I left to meet De Valera. Eamon after getting the passport brought it to some expert who took my photo off and put on Dev's, dressed in his priestly garb. That night Seán Nunan, Seán McBride, Dev and myself left by train for New Haven. De Valera and I were all alone in the carriage; the two Seáns in the one behind. Each of them had a six-shooter ready to fight it out if we were arrested. During our train journey, Dev and I whiled away the time singing Irish songs; neither one of us would get a prize in any singing contest. When the train stopped at Lincoln, Dev said to me "The last time I was on that platform, I was handcuffed to a fellow-Irishman on our way to Lincoln jail". When we arrived at New Haven it was pouring rain and no one paid attention to us as ^{we/}got on the boat. We went at once to our cabin. I took the higher berth, Dev the lower. We slept very soundly although the two Seáns warned me that Dev was a bad sailor and not to be surprised if he got sick in the night. Fortunately, he did not, neither did I, because we were both exhausted after our day's work.

When we arrived in Dieppe we knew we were in a friendly country, so our worries were over for the time being. Harry Boland had told me in Dublin it was not necessary for me to have a visa for my American Passport going from Ireland to France. When I told the French official what was told to me in Dublin, he said it was not the case. So I had to take the boat back to New Haven to have my passport vised by the French official there. I arrived in Paris the following day. Harry Boland, as I said, had gone a day ahead to prepare the way for Dev. Some of those who voted for the Treaty were asking

Harry, "Why didn't Dev come, seeing that he called this Irish Race Convention?". Harry said, "He would not ask for a British Passport".

Dev got into the hotel quietly and remained in his room until lunch-time. Harry had already tipped off the band to play "The Soldier's Song", Ireland's National Anthem, and when Harry brought Dev accompanied by his friends, into the dining room, what an ovation he got from the French people dining there because they recognised him at once. Those who voted for the Treaty were just stunned.

As a result of the passing of the Treaty, an equal number was selected in Dublin for and against the Treaty to represent Ireland at the Irish Race Convention in Paris. A very heated discussion took place about a resolution proposed by Mr. Cleary, Australia.

"The objects of the Organisation should be:"

"To aid the people of Ireland in the attainment of their full political cultural and economic ideals".

Mr. P. J. Kelly (England) seconded.

Mr. O'Sheehan (Scotland) moved an amendment:

"That the word 'National' be put in before the word 'Political'".

I spoke in favour of this resolution:

"I am here from the United States as one who has taken a very active interest in the Irish cause. I am here to add my voice to that of the Countess Markievicz in putting these words in that resolution - 'full national aspirations'. If I went back to America and went before an audience there of our people

I would be only hissed off the stage if I said that I remained in that Congress and that the Congress was not prepared to put in those words, because say what you will - and I am not saying this as a matter of any boast for America - I believe we have been the greatest friends of Ireland. We have over a million members in the American Association for the recognition of the Republic of Ireland. I had the honour to be selected as one of the five National Directors of that organisation. In three months we held a Convention in Chicago, where we had 5,300 delegates. I know what I am talking about when I say that I would be hissed off the stage if those words 'full national aspirations' were not inserted. Because the people of New York and outside New York stand for the full independence of Ireland. At the meeting we were giving to Miss MacSwiney, I did not mince my words when I asked the people to give money not for food but for munitions to keep the boys in Ireland on the field. I remember at that gathering the women took off their jewels and their gold bangles and gave them to us and we collected over thirty thousand dollars in one night. Now I have heard a lot about cultural development that should come from Congress. Personally, I believe that is only secondary. The primary thing is, to my mind, that Ireland becomes absolutely independent and until that time comes we, who are out of Ireland, are going to do our bit; and personally I am going back to America for one purpose and one alone, to go on the public platform to ask for money - and I'm going to get it - for guns and munitions to send to the men in Ireland who are prepared to carry out that fight for Ireland's absolute independence. (Applause). I was interested in the White Cross. I asked for funds for the White Cross and helped to organise it, but I know this from my personal experience,

that where I would only get ten cents to buy bread for women and children, I would get five dollars to put guns and munitions into the hands of Ireland's fighting men. They came from America and forgot ---" A Delegate --- "Where?".

Father Shanley --- "In Ireland. I met officers of the American Army in Ireland. I know thousands of men in New York City who have won distinguished honours in the service of their country, who could not go to Ireland because they were told there were not sufficient munitions in Ireland for them to carry on. But, if we did not send the men we sent the munitions and we sent the guns, and I resent very much the imputation that American men did not go to Ireland. I have met those officers in a certain hotel in Ireland within the last month and I met them the night before they left for Ireland".

Madame Markievicz ---- "I met them in Ireland".

Chairman --- "I wish the Delegates would not interrupt. Each does not know what happened in relation to other countries".

Father Shanley --- "I shall go back to America for one purpose, and one alone, and I will be ashamed to go back unless this Congress passes that resolution that they are going to carry on until Ireland has full and international recognition as an Irish Republic. I will not be a welcome visitor in America if I go back with anything less from this Congress, and, therefore, with all my soul I second that proposal of Countess Markievicz, and I give you my word of honour that I will go back and carry on as I have carried on in the past and I will do my best to see that money, guns, and munitions are put into the hands of young Irishmen of to-day and to-morrow". (Applause).

The resolution was carried.

When the Convention ended on Saturday, 28th January, 1922, the question of getting Dev out of France became quite a problem. Seán Nunan arranged at the desk of the Grand Hotel where we were staying, for a four-day trip to the battlefields. On Sunday, after an early Mass, about fourteen, in three cars, set out for Rheims and the neighbourhood. We were anxious to cover as much ground as possible; we did not even stop for lunch, and arrived in Chateau Thierry hungry and tired, late in the evening. We went to the one hotel there and were seated in the balcony. The only others in the dining-room were a few American soldiers who looked after the American Soldiers' Cemetery. The Proprietress of the hotel came to the balcony to greet us. The Countess Markievicz, Mary McSweeney and others tried their French on her. To our surprise she said "I know you are from Ireland; so am I, from Athlone. Now sit down and make yourselves happy, for you are my guests, but I have one request - I want you all to sign your names in Gaelic", which we gladly did. When she saw Mr. de Valera was with us her joy was unbounded. We found out she was a nurse in the War and married a British Officer, who was afterwards killed. From her savings she bought the small hotel.

(In 1932, when I was travelling with Patrick McGovern, Mrs. McGovern, their daughter Mrs. Joseph V. Gallagher and Father John Murphy we were to pass through Chateau Thierry. I asked the chauffeur if he would stop at a little hotel I visited in 1922. He said "The lady who owned that hotel sold it and bought a larger one where we are going to have lunch". When I went in, I saw her in the distance. She came to greet us, so I addressed her "How do you do, Miss Athlone". She was surprised to know how I found out

about her being from Athlone. "I met you", I said, "ten years ago. Have you a guest-book? Please bring down the one of January 1922". When she handed it to me, I went to the page with the signatures. "I was in that party", I said, "and there is my name". She was naturally overjoyed and insisted on treating us to champagne).

We all left for Paris about midnight, and after a few hours' sleep, Dev and I were all set for Ireland. The four-day trip was a decoy as we were watched closely by British Scotland Yard men from London, one in particular, O'Donnell from Waterford, whom Seán McGrath scared to death in the lobby of the Grand Hotel, when he told him he was no longer under the protection of the British flag and made himself scarce around: we never saw him afterwards. Seán Nunan, Seán McBride, Dev and myself left early by a back route from the Hotel for Notre Dame Cathedral, and there, behind a confessional box, Dev changed his collar and put on a Roman collar.

All four hailed a taxi for the Depot to catch a train for Antwerp. We bade goodbye to Seán Nunan and Seán McBride and tried to be as much at ease on the journey as possible. The train was stalled at Brussels because of fog and could not catch the boat. We got into a private hotel near the station, had our meal in the double room, checked out and took an automobile for Malines and Louvain. We spent all day in the car, and arrived in time to catch the boat. Dev asked me to leave him there and suggested that I go to Calais by car, catch the boat to Dover and meet him in London next day. He was afraid if we were arrested that I would get into trouble with my Superiors in New York. I assured him there was no danger of that, and then I said to him, "I was asked by

Harry Boland and Liam Mellows to do a job - take you to Paris and back. I am not going to leave you alone half way home. If you are alone on this boat the British if they know who you are, could very readily take you from your cabin, tie a weight around your neck and throw you overboard and then give out the story you committed suicide because you were defeated politically over the Treaty. You are a thorn in their side just like Parnell. You would be a good riddance. Whatever reason they might give for you to commit suicide, they surely could not say I followed your example". He said, "That thought never entered my mind. You better stay with me".

We boarded the train at New Haven and just before we reached London he went to the men's room and changed his collar to a civilian one, put a scarf around his neck and we passed through the Customs successfully. Seán Nunan was waiting for us on the platform. We went to Seán's house for breakfast and then realising the danger of staying, Seán suggested we travel on the subway to Westminster Abbey and just gauk around. Seán put us on the train, promising to meet us at our destination. Mr. de Valera was very hard to disguise as a Priest, and many a laugh we had when he looked into the mirror and would ask me what kind of a Priest did he look like. I don't think my answers were a bit complimentary. Travelling now on the subway in civilian clothes was dangerous as his picture was naturally in every British newspaper for years. I was sitting beside him on a seat for two facing in the direction of the train; to my right on a side seat some distance away were two men facing us. I was naturally on the alert for any sign of recognition and to my surprise I saw the two men nudge each other. I read their lips and I knew they indicated

de Valera. I whispered to him, "You are recognised on this train, do not look up, when we come to the second next station, when I give you a kick in the shins follow me. We shall walk, not forward but the reverse". I knew if we ran out at the next station the two men might think we got panicky.

Dev was apparently oblivious of everything around him and I looked down over his shoulder to see what he was reading and there he was reading a book on trigonometry! Many a laugh we had about this later. We got into a taxi and met Seán Nunan and Seán McBride at the place appointed. I told them about our train experience, so they took charge of Dev until train time. It was better for us to separate, so I took a taxi; it was raining very hard and I asked the taxi man to drive me through Hyde Park and other places of interest until I had supper in a small restaurant near Euston Station. I boarded the train in a carriage a few from Dev. Word evidently was passed around at Holyhead the day before by Harry Boland, for the porters formed a guard of honour from the train to the boat. The following morning we met on the deck and the officer who arrested Dev in Dublin a few weeks before the Truce was a passenger; he recognised Dev and spoke to him about the incident.

I shall never forget the smile of Harry Boland's face when we greeted him from the deck at Dún Laoghaire.

I shall never forget the handshake he and Liam Mellows gave me "Welcome, Father Tim, you did a grand job, God bless you".

Dev, Harry, Seán Nunan, Seán McBride and myself drove into Dublin, had breakfast and parted -----

Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

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