

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21	BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,764	

ROIENN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

**STATEMENT BY WITNESS.**

**DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,764.**

**Witness**

Dr. Vincent White,  
21, Broad St.,  
Waterford.

**Identity.**

President, Sinn Féin, Waterford City;  
Mayor of Waterford City, 1920-  
Member of Dáil Éireann, 1921-  
Honorary Medical Officer, I.R.A.,  
East Waterford Brigade, 1920-21.

**Subject.**

Witness's personal account of his  
activities in the National Movement  
from 1916 to 1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nal.

File No 3,020. ....

Form B S.M. 2



"Sugson",  
Tramore,  
Waterford  
Dec 21st '58

Dear Cork,

On Sunday Nov 30th, Dr Vincent White of Waterford called on me, and asked me to co-operate with him in preparing a statement of his national activities 1916-1921, for the Bureau of Military History. He stressed that the matter was very urgent. I had attended both Parliamentary Elections in Waterford City in which he was ~~for~~<sup>(1918)</sup> a candidate, and he instanced during our conversation that I would be the most

2

suitable to co-operate with him  
in having the job done. At the  
time I was very busy working on  
a literary job which ~~had~~ to be  
soon published, but I could  
see at a glance that Dr White  
was visibly failing, and I  
immediately undertook to  
co-operate with him in the job.  
I worked at that statement  
until Dec 13th. My method  
~~was~~ consisting of several  
interviews with Dr White  
who was a sick man, lying on  
his feet. My last three  
interviews took place with  
him while he was in bed.  
I read at each session  
the section I had then  
completed, and he would  
then suggest the necessary  
changes or amendments  
to the story. I was with  
him on Friday with just

3

and read the final instalment  
in the statement for him. He  
was perfectly clear in mind,  
and asked me to call in on  
the following evening the 13th  
inst, when he would have a  
local journalist Mr D. E.  
Keohan present, and would  
ask the latter to type the  
statement for him. I was  
with Dr White at the  
arranged interview and  
handed over the statement  
to Mr Keohan, the latter  
was to have it ready in  
the day for Dr White's  
signature to be affixed.  
On the following day 14th  
inst, Dr White died. I  
have arranged with Mr  
Keohan that the

4

statement will be typed  
after Christmas, when I  
will sign my name to it  
as will also Mr. Leckie,  
attesting the fact that  
Dr. White's death prevented  
him from signing it, and  
I will then forward it to you.

M. S.

Sincerely  
Timothy White

To. The Secretary  
Bureau of Military History

1913 - 1925

26 Westland Row

a copy of this letter has been  
placed on file S. 2384 - "Winding up  
of Bureau". Off 29/12/58.

COPY/

"DUNAN",  
TRAMORE,  
CO. WATERFORD.

Decr. 21st, '58.

A Chara,

On Sunday, Nov. 30th, Dr. Vincent White of Waterford called on me, and asked me to co-operate with him in preparing a statement of his national activities, 1916-1921, for the Bureau of Military History. He stressed that the matter was very urgent. I had directed both Parliamentary Elections in Waterford City, in which he was Sinn Fein candidate (1918), and he instanced during our conversation that I would be thus most suitable to co-operate with him in having the job done. At the time, I was very busy working on a literary job which is to be soon published, but I could see at a glance that Dr. White was visibly failing, and I immediately undertook to co-operate with him in the job.

I worked at that statement until Decr. 13th, my method consisting of several interviews with Dr. White, who was a sick man but on his feet. My last three interviews took place with him while he was in bed. I read at each "session" the section I had then completed, and he would then suggest the necessary changes or amendments to the story. I was with him on Friday, 12th inst., and read the final instalment in the statement for him. He was perfectly clear in mind, and asked me to call in, on the following evening, the 13th inst., when he would have a local journalist, Mr. D.E. Keohan,

present, and would ask the latter to type the statement for him.

I was with Dr. White at the arranged interview, and handed over the statement to Mr. Keohan. The latter was to have it ready in three days, for Dr. White's signature to be appended.

On the following day, 14th inst., Dr. White died. I have arranged with Mr. Keohan that this statement will be typed after Christmas, when I will sign my name to it, as will also Mr. Keohan, attesting the fact that Dr. White's death prevented him from signing it, and I will then forward it to you.

Mise,

Do Chara,

(Sd.) NICHOLAS WHITTLE.

To: The Secretary,  
Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921,  
26 Westland Row,  
Dublin.

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1,764

STATEMENT OF DR. VINCENT JOSEPH WHITE,

21, Broad Street, Waterford,

being a personal account of his activities in the  
National Movement from 1916 to 1921.

About the month of September, 1916, I joined what was then called the Waterford City Branch of the Liberty League, which had been formed some time previously by Count Plunkett. Weekly meetings were held in a small hall at the rere of Walter Bishop's shop in Michael St., between twenty and thirty members being present. These included about twelve men who had been members of Sinn Féin in Waterford since its foundation. By 1917, the attendances had grown so much that, early in that year, the organisation transferred to permanent premises at Colbeck St., Waterford. In the meantime, following the release of the Republican prisoners from gaol, the name of the organisation was changed to that of Sinn Féin.

It was during 1917 that the Gaelic League Oireachtas was held in Waterford, when practically all the prominent people in the Sinn Féin Movement, in the Irish Volunteers and in the Gaelic League throughout the country came to the Gaelic hosting in Waterford. This was the first great fillip that the Irish Republican Movement got in Waterford, as the attendance at the Oireachtas during the week was very much larger than usual - in fact, I think it broke all previous records. Thus, the people of Waterford were given an opportunity of seeing the strength of the Gaelic Movement, which, in large part, was also their National Movement.

Another event of importance that year was the public meeting which was held by Eamon de Valera in the autumn. The meeting, which was to have been held in Waterford City, was proclaimed and was then held at Ballinaneeshagh, a point about one and a half miles from the city. All this time, I was a member of the Waterford Sinn Féin Executive.

On the death of John Redmond, who represented the Waterford City Constituency in the English House of Commons, I was selected to stand as the Sinn Féin candidate for the seat. John Redmond's son, William, who at the time was serving as a Captain in the English Army on service in the first European War, was selected as the nominee of the Irish Parliamentary Party. From the moment of the opening of the election campaign, life took on a quick tempo in Waterford City, as did my own life daily from that onwards. We (the Sinn Féin Party) had been looked upon as mere "paper-weights" by the Redmondite Party in Waterford, and they viewed the contest as one between David and Goliath. Because of the strength of purpose shown by our comparatively small organisation in Waterford, they became, so to speak, "rattled" from the beginning, and they showed this in their efforts to shout down our speakers at public meetings.

The first of these meetings was held on The Mall, and the principal speaker with me was Seán Milroy. At that meeting every effort was made to drown our voices; indeed, the presence of a small band of local Irish Volunteers was the only barrier which prevented the mob from entirely dominating the meeting. A few days afterwards, the majority of the leaders of Sinn Féin arrived in Waterford to take part in the election campaign. They included Eamon de Valera, Arthur Griffith, Count Plunkett,

Darrell Figgis, James O'Meara, Dublin; Joseph McGrath, Dublin, etc. A few days after their arrival, and following on several incidents in which our canvassers were attacked when engaged in election work, it was decided to bring units of the Irish Volunteers from outside counties to do police duty. I should point out here that the Royal Irish Constabulary, whose duty it was to police the streets, took no notice whatever of members of our organisation being attacked, as they also ignored the organised efforts to break up our public meetings.

Eamon de Valera was averse to bringing in outside units of Irish Volunteers until the following incident happened: Nicholas Whittle, the local Director of Elections, was told by Dan MacCarthy, the Director of the Election, to have a canvasser ready who would accompany Eamon de Valera on a tour of business houses in Waterford City. This was duly done, and de Valera and Dan Grant, of Waterford City, left to start the canvass, the selected district being Broad St. and Michael St. As they left the election rooms, Comdt. Kelly of Dublin, who had been sent down by the Irish Volunteer Executive to act as O/C over the Volunteers on election duty, turned to Nicholas Whittle and enquired: "Is the district where Dev. is going to canvass a hostile one"? Nicholas Whittle replied: "It is bordering on a hostile district". Whereupon, Comdt. Kelly called in four Volunteers and told them to accompany the two canvassers but to keep about ten yards behind them.

A few minutes later, de Valera burst into the room in a very angry mood. "Did you order these Volunteers to accompany me"? he asked Comdt. Kelly. "I did", the latter replied, adding, by way of explanation, "Nicholas Whittle here

tells me that the streets you are to canvass are bordering on a hostile district". De Valera instantly replied: "I have no need of a bodyguard in any part of Ireland. Please do not let this happen again". Comdt. Kelly said: "Very well, Mr. de Valera", and Dev. and his fellow-canvasser again set out about their job. A few moments later Comdt. Kelly called in the four Volunteers again and said: "Go out again and follow up Mr. de Valera. Keep about twenty yards behind him, so that, if he looks back, he won't know he has a bodyguard. If he gets into trouble, double up and rush to his assistance.

The four Volunteers did as they were bid, and, after a quarter of an hour had elapsed, we heard shouting and noise in the street outside. On looking out the window, we saw Dev. surrounded by the four Volunteers and Dan Grant, and, behind, followed a yelling mob. Dev. came up to the election rooms, his hat bulged and dirty, and the officer of the bodyguard had in his hand a three-corner-shaped block of timber, weighing more than a pound, which had been flung at Dev's head and had missed him by inches. This had taken place in Michael St. The result of the incident was that Dev. began to have other ideas about the need of having a bodyguard in Waterford.

For my own part, I can say that life for me had taken a new turn altogether. For years, I had led the ordinary life of a medical practitioner in my native city, like my father and my grandfather before me. Now, I found myself going through the streets hooted at and jeered at by as motley a collection as one could find in Ireland. The pig-buyers of Ballybricken were the ringleaders of this group, which embraced every shoneen in Waterford, and also that very dangerous element - the ex-British soldier type and his relatives. In regard to the latter class, it is of particular

interest to recall the number of spies shot by the I.R.A. during the Anglo-Irish war (1919-1921) throughout the whole country, the bulk of them coming from the ex-British soldier class.

As I say, I was hooted at and jeered at daily in the streets during that election, and, indeed, for many a day after it. For my own part, I felt that I had been honoured by being selected to be the standard-bearer of the Irish Republic in Waterford and simply took all opposition in my stride. I knew my native city well enough to realise that the pig-buyers of Ballybricken were just as representative of Waterford as a band of foreigners. I knew my native city and county well enough to realise that our people had long been known as quiet, inoffensive, decent types. But they could also be strong and determined when their rights were infringed upon. Thus, all this noise and mob hysteria during the election was new to me. It was certainly not typical of Waterford, and its presence served but to act as an incentive to the Irish Republicans of the city to re-double their efforts to over-ride all opposition and ensure that Waterford was going to march with Ireland in the new national Advance which had sprung out of Easter Week.

In writing of the opposition which I met personally every day from the Redmondite supporters, I must not omit to record the splendid loyalty shown me by the Republicans of Waterford. It was very real and deep-rooted; it was of such a staunch character that I could well afford to smile at the opposition which sought to bar our way.

As I write, myriad of incidents float before my mind. I recall a public meeting on The Mall which was dispersed by English soldiers, their method of dispersal being to use the butt-ends of their rifles on the bodies of our people.

Indeed, one English warrior on that occasion dealt with myself so forcibly that I had a reminder of it in my back for a long time afterwards.

I recall another public meeting at which I was speaking on the Quay close to the Market-house at which de Valera was the principal speaker, when every possible device - stones, bottles and sticks, accompanied by all sorts of noises - was used to break up the gathering and drown the voices of the speakers. The Irish Volunteers doing duty that night had certainly a very busy time as they moved through the great mass of people dealing summarily with the unruly ones present. It is of interest to mention that on that same night a public meeting in support of the Redmondite candidate was being held in the Railway Square, Manor St., at the same hour. I stress this fact, as it revealed that the Redmondite Party had divided their followers into two sections, one to attend their own meeting and the other to be present at ours with a view to breaking it up. I learned afterwards that, on returning from the Redmondite meeting (which concluded before ours) a large contingent, accompanied by two bands, halted outside the Sinn Féin election rooms in Colbeck St. and smashed the windows with stones. Their final act was to try to set fire to the Tricolour flag which was being flown from an uppermost window, one man being hoisted on the shoulders of two or three others and endeavouring to set it on fire by means of a lighted torch. This incident took place within thirty yards of the house where Thomas Francis Meagher, the first bearer of Ireland's Tricolour, lived. In fact, it was in that house he was taken prisoner by the English soldiery prior to the Rising of '48.

A Waterford man, all these things hurt me as deeply as they hurt our local followers. Yes, it was surely

necessary for Pearse and his fellow-patriots to die in Easter Week to rescue a people that had well-nigh forgotten they had a country. One of the bands playing music while our flag was being insulted that night was called the "Thomas Francis Meagher Fife and Drum Band". That band was founded following the death of poor Meagher in America. Another band taking part in the musical interlude while the effort was being made to burn Meagher's flag was called the "Erin's Hope Fife and Drum Band". That band was founded in honour of the Irish-American Fenians who crossed the Atlantic in the brigantine, "Erin's Hope", and who landed near Helvick, Dungarvan, to take part in the Fenian Rising. All this shows how necessary was Easter Week and its sacrifices, as it indicates how necessary was our every effort to rouse our people in Waterford City to a sense of the splendid dignity of Irish nationality which many of them had forgotten. A patriot was once described as "a man with his eye on the next generation". Our efforts were on behalf of the coming generations in Ireland and in our own City and County of Waterford.

There is another incident in that by-election which remains vivid in my mind. On one occasion, I was driving through the City on a jarvey-car with Eamon de Valera and Seán Milroy, who was sitting on the same side as myself. De Valera was on the opposite side and the jarvey was in the driver's seat. I have a recollection of hearing the usual election slogans shouted as we drove down Michael St. Some were yelling "Up White", while others were countering with "Up Redmond". The three of us on the car were chatting animatedly together. I was partly inclined on my seat saying something to de Valera when I felt a stinging pain

in the back of my head. Then, I had a feeling that I was falling through the air down into a deep well. My next recollection is waking up in the Waterford Infirmary and suffering sharp pains in the head. I motioned to the nurse by the bedside whom I knew and enquired of her what had happened. She replied, "Rest yourself for a bit, doctor; there's nothing to worry about". Later that evening, I learned that, as we drove down Michael St., a gentleman called "Poker" Power, an ex-British soldier, had stepped on to the roadway and struck me with a stick with full force on the back of the head. I was also told that Séan Milroy, assisted by Dev. had a tough job trying to prevent me from falling off the car as the jarvey hurried towards the Infirmary where I had six stitches inserted in my head. The sequel was that I had to lay confined to bed for more than a week, during which period the election took place amidst a regular riot of violence engineered by the Redmondite mobs.

As I lay in bed after that election, many things flitted through my mind. I had been defeated in the election following a magnificent, sustained effort by the Irish Republicans of Waterford to capture the seat for Sinn Féin. The odds, however, were heavy against them. Intimidation and physical violence, accompanied by a blind sense of loyalty to the late John Redmond - these factors, allied to ignorant prejudice against our young movement had proved too formidable a handicap for us. Then, I would recall the speeches of John Redmond in the early part of the European War then raging, when he urged all Irishmen to join the English Army as a national duty. Yes, and I would reflect on that very vital fact that the Ballybricken pig-buyers, who had been the mainstay of Captain Redmond's election machine, had, each and all, given a deaf ear to John Redmond's plea for Irish recruits for the British Army. Those men were fierce advocates of

John Redmond and his policy on the hustings at election time, but they all fought shy of answering his call to carry a gun in the service of England. True, John Redmond's brother, Willie, had joined the English Army and had been killed in action in France. John Redmond's son, William, had also joined the English Army - in fact, he had come straight from the trenches in France to contest the election against me. On reflection, this all conveyed to me one very clear viewpoint: the Waterford pig-buyer, political fraternity were about the biggest bunch of frauds and humbugs to be found in Ireland.

The result of the Parliamentary Bye-Election for Waterford City in March, 1918, was: -

Captain William Redmond, Irish Parliamentary Party	-	1,242
Dr. Vincent White, Sinn Féin	-	<u>764</u>
Majority	-	478.

But there was another thought that used to cross my mind occasionally. Frequently, I used to be approached by some well-meaning citizens who would say: "Do you know, Dr. White, you are a foolish man to be wasting your time by going into politics. You have a nice practice, as had your father, in the city and county. Why throw your splendid prospects aside now and go off with this new Sinn Féin Party which is only going to land you into trouble. I assured these good people that I realised full well what I was doing, pointing out to them that I had a country as well as a doctor's practice. This left them more perplexed than ever, before I was given up by them in despair. Being human, however, the thought, as I lay in that bed nursing my stitched head, would come to me at times: "Are you a damned fool, White,

to be taking all this bother and trouble on yourself when there is no need? Why not continue at your medical profession and take life nice and easy?".

Well, the Lord himself was tempted, and, I suppose, it was but human and natural that I should have such thoughts. But then I would suddenly remember the splendid band of staunch supporters who had such faith in me and in the national ideal that I represented, and then all contrary thoughts would instantly disappear. Looking back now forty years, I can still remember by name very many of the splendid men and women who followed me as their standard-bearer at that time. Several of them had little of this world's goods, but they were princely in their national outlook and in their adherence to it. How often have I happened on poor men and women, who, although on the verge of hunger, were more concerned about the fate of our country and my personal safety during the troubled period, than they were about their own daily efforts to eke out a livelihood. Looking back on it all now, the public affronts which I so often received at the hands of the ignorant shoneens of Waterford, pale into insignificance before the recollection of the magnificent spirit of the supporters who stood four-square behind me.

Here I would like to return, briefly, to the assault with the stick which rendered me unconscious. During my period of convalescence, I learned that as "Poker" Power, after delivering his fell blow, was looking after the jarvey-car, he suddenly felt a clenched fist deal him an uppercut which sent him sprawling on his back on the road. "Poker" quickly jumped to his feet to take on his assailant - but this time without his stick. The two men faced each other

in a sparring attitude. Alas for the "Poker" Power. The man he was attempting to fight was Ned Fitzgerald, an ex-British soldier and champion, at his weight, of the British Army. He gave "Poker" the "father and mother of a hiding", inflicting markings that "Poker" carried on his countenance for several days afterwards. Poor Ned Fitzgerald was a solid backer of the Sinn Féin cause. He was one of a few of his brand among the Waterford ex-British soldiers, fine, manly fellows, whose wearing of an English uniform never for a moment dulled their Irish national outlook.

After my first Parliamentary election bid, my next important recollection of 1918 is that it was the year in which occurred the epidemic of the "Great 'Flu". I was the sole dispensary doctor in Waterford City at the time, and night and day I had to be on my feet answering what seemed an endless line of calls. Hushed now were the political jibes which had been flung at me as I went into houses in lanes and alley-ways seeking to bring succour to the many victims of that terrible malady which was raging throughout Europe and was leaving behind it a grim tale of many deaths. I had scarcely finished my battle against the 'flu, when I was called again to move into another battle zone: to stand as the Sinn Féin candidate in the Parliamentary General Election in December of that year. The setting of the stage was more or less the same as it had been in the by-election - the same candidates and the meetings, canvassing, etc., all taking on the same pattern as before.

There were, however, two aspects which showed a difference. Firstly, we realised that our supporters had increased very appreciably since the bye-election. The conscription threat by England, which had intervened between the two, had helped to open many people's eyes on national

matters in Waterford. The increasing support which we were now being accorded was reflected in the larger numbers attending our meetings. One of them, held on The Mall and addressed by Father Michael O'Flanagan, the then Vice-President of Sinn Féin, was the largest public meeting to be held in the city for years. I might add that, due to the jailings of all the leaders, we were short somewhat of what I might term the "big figures" on our platforms and had to make the most of the speakers available. Father O'Flanagan was an outstanding public speaker - he had the honour some years before of delivering an address in the presence of the then reigning Pope.

Side by side with the increase in the number of our supporters, we now possessed a very fine brass and reed band which we called the "Thomas Francis Meagher Brass Band". This was brought into being through the efforts of a very fine worker in our organisation - John Gallagher, a man born of Irish parents in Liverpool and who was now resident in Waterford. Our opposite number, the Redmondite Party, had three bands on their side. Well, in this election, we too, had a good brass band to play in parades to our public meetings. In speaking of bands, I must not forget to mention the Fianna Boy Scouts' Pipers' Band, which had been doing valiant work for us at every public function held under Sinn Féin auspices for years.

The second aspect which showed a difference between the bye-election and this general election was that the leaders of the Redmondite Party had come to realise that they were pitted against no "light-weight" political party in this contest. Rather had they come to appreciate that we were a rapidly growing Party and that they would "have their hands full", so to speak, to defeat us on this occasion.

It has just occurred to me that, in my previous descriptions of the activities of the period, I may have been giving the impression that life had become more or less a daily battle with me. On the contrary, I had gathered around me as fine a group of personal friends as any man could wish to possess. I had met them all in the Sinn Féin Movement, and it was a tonic to be amongst them. Often have I attended Céilidhe Mór in the Large Room of the Waterford City Hall when seated beside me were Father John Kelleher of St. John's College, some of the Franciscan Fathers from the local Friary, and groups of friends from the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers. I used take an especial pleasure in these céilidhe for a very good reason. As I sat there, I could clearly recall those days when this same Large Room was the Mecca of the English ascendancy class and their imitators in the city and county when they attended the Hunt Ball, Charity Ball and all the other social functions; when carriages rolled to the entrance door of the City Hall and the occupants stepped on to a rich carpet leading to the great stairway. In those days, the Gaelic League was holding its céilidhe in a backroom in William St. Yes, it used to do me good to sit at those Gaelic functions in the City Hall and to realise that that Gaelic Ireland which had so long been trampled underfoot was at last again on the ascendant and restored to its rightful place in the social life of our city.

It was customary at these functions for members of the Committee to ask me to say a few words. I usually spoke from the band platform. I see that scene before me still - the girls dressed in their Irish costumes, the young men seated around gazing at me intently. Those functions meant much to me; they showed the new Ireland which had emerged out of the 1916 Rising.

To get back, however, to the General Election: Our friends, the Redmondites, had begun to resort to the same forcible tactics as in the bye-election. Several of our canvassers and those sent out to display posters had been beaten up in cruel fashion. We immediately countered these attacks by bringing in Irish Volunteer units from Cork, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Wexford and Clare. We were determined, at any cost, to uphold the rights of free speech and free movement on the highway for our people, despite the threat of the stick, the stone and bottle - and, again, despite the dirty tactics of the R.I.C., who always managed to look the other way when attempts were made to assault our followers. In this latter connection, our Volunteers doing police duty at our public meetings had established a much firmer control over the mob. Thus, did the election campaign continue daily I was often amused to see wives of ex-soldiers, to whom I had ministered during the 'flu epidemic, with their lungs now so fully restored that they were able to yell after me as I passed: "To hell with White! Up Redmond every time"! It was, as I say, amusing, but it was also somewhat ironic.

At about 9.30 p.m. on the eve of polling day, all arrangements for the morrow had been completed. The personating agents' papers had all been signed; they had got their instructions for their duties, and the "outside men" for the booths had all been satisfactorily allotted their respective tasks. Finally, all the Volunteers who were to do duty outside the booths had been assigned to their stations. There was an air of confidence in the election rooms; it looked as if on the face of things Sinn Féin was going to triumph for the first time in an election in Waterford City.

It was just at this point that Nicholas Whittle, who was Director of Elections, received a message that an R.I.C. Sergeant was on the premises and wished to interview him. Nicholas immediately left the office in the election rooms and went out into an adjoining room where Sergeant Farrell of the R.I.C. awaited him. "I have been sent here by the District Inspector", he said, "to enquire how many Volunteers are in the city"? Spurring cautiously, Nicholas replied: "I cannot tell you. I am Director of Elections here and my job is concerned only with the administrative side of the election, the personating agents, the manning of the booths, the providing of transport for our voters, etc. Outside of that, I would know nothing about the Volunteers or how many of them are in the city".

"Couldn't you guess"? suggested the bould sergeant.

"I could not", Nicholas came back, adding, "You would have a better idea of that than myself".

At this, Sergeant Farrell became quite angry. "Well", he snapped, "whether you do or don't know, I want to tell you this: The District Inspector sent me here to warn you that, if the Volunteers come on the streets to-morrow and are the cause of friction, then, they are going to be driven off the streets by force".

Nicholas Whittle did not like the threat. "What do you mean", he asked Sergeant Farrell", by stating that 'if the Volunteers are the cause of friction' "?.

"I mean", the Sergeant said, "if they interfere with voters and prevent them from going to the polling booths".

"Well", Nicholas told him, "although I have nothing directly to do with the Volunteers, I can certainly vouch for it that they will not interfere with any voter that is seeking to register his or her vote".

"They did it in the last election", said the Sergeant.

"They did not", Nicholas contradicted. "On the contrary", he said, "it was your crowd, the police, who stood by and saw our followers being interfered with when on their way to the polling booths. And when this happened, the police did nothing", he added.

With that, Sergeant Farrell turned to leave. Before doing so, he warned: "Remember now the instructions from the District Inspector". And, on this note, the interview abruptly ended.

On the following polling day, the R.I.C. proceeded to put the threat into execution. Possés of them, armed with rifles and bayonets, arrived in the forenoon to seal up certain depots in the city where it was known the Volunteers were being housed - at the factory of Mr. Pierce Durand in Parnell St. and the large Volunteer Hall in Thomas St. These buildings were surrounded and no man was allowed to leave. The nett result was that, in the early afternoon, a position had been created which allowed organised mobs to dominate the entrances to the various polling stations. And, for the "ladies and gentlemen" who comprised the said mobs, several owners of licensed premises were paid to keep "open house", with consequences that can be readily understood. When, accompanied by Patrick W. Kenny of Kingsmeadow, who was my election agent, I went to Mount Sion Schools, where three or four polling booths were located, I had an extraordinary experience. I should interpose here

that the law of the Ballot Act operating at the time set out that a candidate and his duly accredited election agent had the right of free access to every booth from the opening of same in the morning until it was closed down at night.

But, as Patrick W. Kenny and I were entering the gateway to Mount Sion, we were immediately set upon. Mr. Kenny was beaten severely about the head with a stick. I also received a blow on the head, although not as serious as his. Mob rule now held sway in the area. And, if a candidate and his election agent were assaulted in seeking admittance to these booths, what earthly chance had many of those who were going to vote for Sinn Féin of exercising the franchise. Later that evening, a unit of Irish Volunteers who had been "lying low" at the rear of the Metropole Hotel in Mary St., and whose presence was unknown to the R.I.C., marched out and proceeded "at the double" to the Mount Sion polling booths. They had bided their time during the evening, waiting for "zero hour" to be reached in the mob situation, when they could intervene and seek to restore order. Alas!, they had only reached outside the booths in Barrack St. when they were confronted by a strong posse of R.I.C., armed with rifles and bayonets and re-inforced by a contingent of armed English troops from the nearby barracks. This composite armed force charged the Volunteers, who stood in ranks, their only weapons being sticks which they carried to prevent Sinn Féin voters from being assaulted. Thus, did election day peter out on that occasion. The final scene came later when the officer in charge of the Volunteers in the city, accompanied by the Director of Elections and another Volunteer drove in a car to make a last visit to the polling booths and to contact whatever "outside men" for Sinn Féin were still on duty. On this tour, the three carried revolvers for their own personal safety.

To allow of postal votes being received from voters serving with the English Army in the European War, the counting of the votes was delayed for some days. When the count did take place, we were not satisfied with the result, as we felt we had then sufficient numerical strength behind us to be the dominant party in the city.

The result of the Parliamentary General Election for Waterford City in December, 1918, was: -

Captain William Redmond, Irish Parliamentary Party	-	4,915
Dr. Vincent White, Sinn Féin	-	<u>4,441.</u>
Majority	-	474.

It may be well to mention that the reason for the increased electorate in the General Election was due to the fact that an Electoral Bill had become law between the Bye-Election in March, 1918, and the General Election in December, 1918, extending the franchise to persons of both sexes over the age of 21 years. The bye-election had been fought on a limited register of male voters only. Further, the area of Waterford City constituency had been enlarged in the General Election to include the rural districts around Waterford City, comprising roughly a circuit of from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 miles. The election area in the bye-election held in March, 1918, comprised Waterford City only.

Twelve months afterwards, we got another opportunity of testing and proving that strength. The occasion was the Waterford Municipal Elections in January, 1920. At that election, Sinn Féin "swept the boards" and elected a majority to the City Council, by whom I was elected Mayor. The bogey called "Redmondism" had at last been driven into its rightful corner. On the occasion of my installation as Mayor of my

native city, I discarded the wearing of the usual red robe and donned, instead, a robe of green Irish poplin with yellow facings and lined with white. I did so the better to illustrate the fact that Waterford City was now marching truly with the new risen Ireland. Our victory in that election was a great gratification to our followers who had so loyally fought out the Republican issue in two successive Parliamentary elections and had now witnessed their long-sustained efforts being crowned by victory.

I remember clearly the day I was elected Mayor and the gold, Mayoral Chain was placed on my shoulders. Immediately, I pointed to the maces and other English insignia that lay on the table before me and called out in a loud voice: "Remove that bauble"! Poor Johnny Harrison, who had been the mail-bearer to many occupants of the Mayoral Chair in the past, promptly proceeded to remove these symbols of Irish slavery amidst a thunder of cheering that echoed out on the street below. It was, indeed, a proud day for me when I signed the declaration of loyalty of the Waterford City Corporation to the Republican Dáil of Ireland. The wheel had come round now in its full circle; Waterford City had pledged its loyalty to the Irish Republican Government, and, from the flag-staff over the City Hall, flew the Irish Tricolour, the flag beloved of that great Irishman and Waterford-man who first presented it to the Nation - Thomas Francis Meagher. Those are great and grand days to look back upon, those grim days of sustained and splendid effort followed at last by the triumphal hour of victory.

From now on, my life took on a complete change in the daily programme of my activities. In addition to attending to my medical duties, I found myself on no less than fourteen committees, the majority of which were sub-committees of the

Waterford Corporation. I was Chairman on most of them and I have very clear recollections of the events associated with them. In brief, our job was to tear asunder the old order of things, which had been set up generations before by the English regime of public administration. We had to start from the beginning to build up our own scheme of local administration which reflected back the clear concept of justice for every citizen. It was all part of the work of Nation-building which was proceeding at the time throughout the country at the hands of the Sinn Féin organisation. It was splendid work, but oh!, it was weary work. How often have I presided at Council and Committee meetings in the City Hall when I was obliged to listen to certain "wind-bags", wasting their time as well as our time in lengthy perorations. In Sinn Féin, as well as in the very best groups of people, we had our quota of what I term "wind-bags". They had to be handled as efficiently as possible. Amongst the methods I had of dealing with such types was the following: I had made a practice of bringing with me to these meetings a small box of that well-known popular toffee of the period, called "N.K.M.". When a lull occurred in one of those perorations to which I have referred, I used graciously pass the orator a nice piece of toffee. When he had begun to masticate it, he found it adhering so firmly to his teeth that he was no longer able to continue his remarks. Yes, I have a profound respect for "N.K.M." toffee; it frequently did good national work for us in that it helped us to get on with our work.

During the month of March, 1920, I decided to travel to Cork and have a talk with my counterpart there, the late Tomás MacCurtain, Lord Mayor of the Leeside City. When I had been with him for only a short time in his office, I

noticed that he was not in his usual cheerful mood; he appeared to me to be gloomy and thoughtful.

"What's wrong with you, Tomás; you don't seem to be in your usual good form", I said to him.

Taking an envelope from his pocket, he handed it to me, saying: "Read that. If you were after getting one of those, you would not be in very good form".

I read the contents of the note in the envelope. It was a death-warning, sent him by the British Forces - and, of course, it had an anonymous signature. When I said to him: "I hope you are not sleeping at home after having received this", he merely shook his head and murmured some inaudible reply. Next day, I had a 'phone call from the Cork City Hall and was shocked to learn that Tomás MacCurtain had been murdered in his own home by the Black and Tans the previous night.

I will always remember poor MacCurtain's funeral. The Sinn Féin members of the Waterford Corporation and a goodly following of citizens travelled with me to Cork to attend the obsequies. We had our Brass Band with us to play funeral marches during the procession to the place of interment. I stood with Count Plunkett and Arthur Griffith by a wall close to the grave in the thronged cemetery. There must have been about 2,000 armed English troops and police in a circle about the huge gathering. Four pipers' bands passed in with the remains, playing simultaneously "Wrap the Green Flag Round Me". There was a deep tensity in the atmosphere. As the remains were being lowered into their last resting-place, I was wondering if a last volley would be fired. Suddenly, I saw the muzzles of six rifles appearing as if out of nowhere; and the last military

tribute was paid Tomás by six of his gallant Volunteer comrades, all of whom got clear away. The fact that the six rifles were also removed to a place of safety proved that, at that time, there was a state of organisation and efficiency among the Cork Volunteers that was unsurpassed. On joining the train in Cork for Waterford that night, I found Glanmire Station literally seething with people who had come to see us off. In response to repeated calls from the great crowd, I addressed them from one of the carriage windows. On opening my post in Waterford the following day, I found inside an envelope bearing the Clonmel postmark, this typewritten notice:

"Prepare for death, you are a doomed man.

Rory of the Hills".

The notice was surmounted by a skull and cross-bones.

Thence onwards, life took on for me a new phase. I went around armed daily, and slept in various houses of supporters in the city and its environs. The odd time I would sleep in my own house, I was always given an armed guard of Irish Volunteers. And so life went on with me throughout 1920. I have a recollection through it all of attending the annual Feis held in the grounds of the Presentation Convent that year. There was a very large attendance, and, as I took my seat on the platform, I was, of course, wearing my Mayoral robe, the colours of which embraced those of our National Flag. By this time, the old political catch-cry of "Up Redmond" had, to all intents and purposes, ended. Sinn Féin were now rapidly switching over from political to military activities. In Waterford, the issue had now changed from Redmondism versus Sinn Féin to Irish Republicanism versus the English Army of Occupation. Not, indeed, that the

Redmondites had at last discovered that they had a country. No, that was not the reason for the quietude among the pro-English groups in Waterford. The real cause was that the Irish Volunteers were now known to be in possession of arms and ammunition and appeared to be in no mood to brook any aggressiveness on the part of the civilian English garrison in Waterford. Following the death of Terence MacSwiney in Brixton Prison in the autumn of 1920, the I.R.A. (as the Irish Volunteers were now called after the setting up of Dáil Éireann) made it known in Waterford City that all shops would close as a mark of respect to his memory. To implement this decision, a number of I.R.A. companies paraded through the streets. This was a signal to the ex-British soldier and his confreres to come out on the streets with a view to provoking trouble. Well, on that day, they got all the trouble they wanted - the I.R.A. literally beat them off the streets. In several instances, they even chased them into their homes where they had sought refuge. There, they demonstrated to them in very forcible fashion who were now masters in Waterford. Finally, as night was falling, a number of I.R.A. men, acting on their own initiative, smashed plate glass windows in the shops of business people who were known to be anti-Republican. This was done, I understand, without orders, but I can well understand the minds and temper of the men who did it. For years, they had seen the windows of Republican sympathisers' premises smashed ad lib by the Redmondite mobs, while the R.I.C. looked on complacently. I had the windows of my own shop in Broad St. "stove in" so frequently by those mobs that, in the end, I merely covered one window with a hoarding. The young men in the I.R.A. had begun to realise that Republicanism was now the dominant force in Waterford, and, if they did get a bit out of hand on this occasion, it is certainly understandable.

Scarcely had the year, 1920, merged into 1921, when units from the 4th Battalion (Waterford City Battalion) of the I.R.A. went into action, accompanied by units of the I.R.A. from different districts throughout the county. That was on January 7th, 1921. This was the first major action in the area against British Forces and comprised a feint attack on Tramore Police Barracks with a view to drawing the British military out from Waterford and then ambushing them. The ambush took place between Ballinattin and the Metal Bridge on the Waterford/Tramore road. It is still spoken of as "The Tramore Ambush". Due to the accidental discharge of a shot from the gun of one of the ambushers, the plans miscarried, a group of the I.R.A., being finally surrounded on the Ballinattin road by the British Forces in the closing stages of the action. That this group fought their way out of this encirclement by a superior number of British troops is a tribute to the I.R.A. on the occasion. Michael McGrath, of Poleberry, Waterford, a very fine type of fellow whom I knew very well and who had done herculean work during the election campaigns in the city, was killed that night, as also was Thomas O'Brien, of Duhill, Co. Waterford, another splendid Gael and staunch I.R.A. man. Nicholas Whittle, who directed the elections in 1918, was wounded, being hit three times in the body, while Michael Wyley, a member of a family that had done great work for Sinn Féin in Waterford, also received wounds in both legs. The official casualties returned by the British on their side were one soldier and one R.I.C. man wounded. These casualties, as ascertained by the Divisional Intelligence Department of the I.R.A., were eight killed and thirteen wounded.

I recall being at a meeting of the Mental Hospital Committee of Management during January, 1921, when, ostensibly, in the course of my duty as Chairman of the Committee, I visited the infirmary attached to the Mental Hospital. The real purpose of my visit was to see Nicholas Whittle and Michael Wyley who were being nursed there for their wounds. I found both of them gradually improving and had a short word with each. At the time, they were in the safest place in the whole country - the place which would be least suspected. A short time afterwards, they were removed into the county as the I.R.A. felt that the place was beginning to become suspect. They were removed by car at 5 p.m. on a Monday evening; the following morning at 4 o'clock, the Mental Hospital buildings were surrounded by British troops. Their minute search, however, was without avail; the birds had flown!

Later, when a General Election took place in July, 1921, I was returned unopposed as Republican T.D. for Waterford City. In the course of a visit to Dublin in the autumn of that year, I met Liam Mellows, who came to see me one day. He appeared to be very pre-occupied. He confided to me that a cargo of guns and ammunition was to be run from Germany to Ireland to help to arm the I.R.A. and that the Waterford coast had been decided upon as the place of disembarkation, at Helvick Head or a point near Ardmore. He further told me that he was relying on my co-operation when the cargo arrived to ensure that it was safely landed and that the guns and ammunition were transferred by lorry to prepared dumps in the Comeragh Mountains. I pointed out to Liam that I resided at Waterford, which was over thirty miles from Helvick or Ardmore. However, we finally decided that, should the cargo be run in near Waterford,

I was to look after it. This time, I was certainly getting a new type of job. Gun-running was very far removed from my trying to speak at a public election meeting in Waterford a couple of years before while groups of men and women on the outskirts of the crowd howled and hewed like hyenas to prevent me from being heard and were only rendered silent when they were summarily bundled out of the way with the aid of a few skeps of a stick from the quick-moving Volunteers. It was all so different now - no shouting or screaming mobs. Instead, it was hard-thinking and daily tension. Day after day, I went about with a shut mouth and with only one name in my mind, that of Captain McGuinness, who, Liam Mellows told me, would be in command of the gun-running ship.

I was about to leave my home in Broad St. on a Sunday morning in November, when a man approached me and enquired: "Are you Dr. White"? I replied that I was. There was something about the man which prompted me to ask: "Are you McGuinness"? A smile of relief crossed his face as he answered: "I am". We returned to my house where I learned from him that he had been off the Co. Waterford coast for days, looking out for signals which had failed to appear. Finally, he told me that shortage of food and water had compelled him to run for Waterford Harbour, where, he said, his ship was now lying in a creek off The Island in the Suir. The poor fellow was obviously exhausted. I learned from him that he had had no sleep for four nights and that he had walked into Waterford from The Island. Before I rushed off to attend the last Mass of the day, I brought him a drink and bundled him into my own bed. On my return home, I could see that poor McGuinness was "dead to the world". He was in a deep sleep and thought it would be unkind to awaken him. But it was necessary and that's all there was for it. Once awake, he was as intent

on his job as ever, and we talked over a plan. Briefly, it was that McGuinness would lie low all day in my house, and that I would, in the meantime, contact Jerry Cronin, the O/C of the I.R.A. City Battalion, and get him to muster a fleet of lorries and cars to transport the arms and ammunition from the "Frieda" - that was the name of the German ship - to the prepared dumping places in the Comeraghs. In the interval, I would arrange with Larry McCarthy, who owned a few rowing boats and who was himself as true as steel, to convey Captain McGuinness and myself down the river that night to The Island, where we would board the "Frieda".

Fortunately, it was a wet, drizzly night. McGuinness and I went to the Corporation Yard (near Waterpark College) which opened on to the Suir. Larry McCarthy was there awaiting us with his boat. As we glided down the river in the darkness, I could see the lighted windows of the houses in Newtown gleaming above us. To any prying eyes, we looked just a boat being rowed down the river on ordinary, everyday routine. I was delighted when, on reaching The Island, I heard McGuinness say: "Our ship is still in position, all is well". A few moments later, we were hauled aboard the "Frieda", where I was introduced to the members of the crew by McGuinness as the "Burgomaster of Waterford". Instantly, a large jar was produced and some of its contents poured into a large glass for me. When the glasses of McGuinness and the members of the crew had been similarly "charged", one of them gave the toast: "To the Burgomaster of Waterford". I lifted the glass to my lips and took a draught. My breath practically stopped - I had not been in the habit of drinking schnapps. When the toast had been duly honoured, I so manipulated my glass so as to ensure that the remainder of its contents spilled on the deck. One sip of schnapps was just enough for me. But, we had toasted the

ending of a great adventure: the successful running of a cargo of guns and ammunition to Ireland from Germany under the very bows of watching English naval patrol vessels.

After the little ceremony, the night's work for us began in earnest. Jerry Cronin quickly had his team in action, and the entire cargo was gradually carried off, until the "Frieda" was left with an empty hold. As I watched the last lorry climb up the hill with its precious load, destined for the Comeragh hide-outs, I was a satisfied and happy man. The gun-running venture had been carried out by our men without a hitch.

I returned to Waterford that night with Captain McGuinness, and, in my home in Broad St., we talked at our leisure. It was the end of a big occasion. It was the second successful gun-running exploit following the landing of arms at Howth a year before the Rising of 1916.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1,764

The above statement was prepared in manuscript by Nicholas Whittle, of Tramore, Co. Waterford, in collaboration with and under the direction of the late Dr. White, who, on the night before his death, having finally checked it over, released it to be copied by his confidential typist, Declan E. Keohan, of 34, Morley Terrace, Waterford.

We, the undersigned, were both present on the occasion and heard Dr. White say that, when the typewritten copy had been completed, he would sign it and forward it to the Irish Bureau of Military History. His unexpected death on the following morning will explain the absence of his personal signature. We now attest that the above typewritten statement is an exact and true copy of the original draft, of which Dr. White fully approved.

Signed:

(Nicholas Whittle)

Nicholas Whittle  
(Declan E. Keohan)

Date: 21<sup>st</sup> February 1959.