

ORIGINAL

W.S. 751

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 751

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 751

Witness

Colm O'Lochlainn,
9 Fleet Street,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Executive
of Irish Volunteers.

Captain Intelligence Section,
Irish Volunteers, 1916.

Subject.

His journey to Kerry on Good Friday, 1916,
for purpose of dismantling wireless station.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No .S. 85

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY MR. COLM O'LOCHLAINN

Col.

The Sign of the Three Candles,
Fleet St., Dublin.

On Holy Thursday evening in 1916 Ginger O'Connell called to see me at my father's house in Rathgar, to say goodbye. I had received instructions earlier that same evening from Joseph Plunkett to proceed the following day (Good Friday) in charge of a party to dismantle the wireless station ^{near Cahira} ~~at Waterville~~, and distribute the equipment to various centres. I told Ginger where I was going and he informed me he was off the following morning to take charge of the Volunteers of the Kilkenny and Carlow districts. He told me that a rising had been planned to start on Easter Sunday; when I asked him what he was going to do, he said that with the poor forces at his disposal he could see no other course than to dig in at Scolloge Gap and hold out there until wiped out. He could see no hope of success. Ginger had already seen me on the previous Tuesday night, but at that time he knew very little about what was going to take place, and wanted to know if I knew anything to confirm the rumours in circulation.

Ginger also informed me on Holy Thursday that he proposed breaking his journey the following day and calling round by Fermoy to visit Miss Josephine Ahern (now Mrs. Josephine MacNeill) as he had a day to spare. Mrs. MacNeill can no doubt verify this visit.

Though I was a captain on the staff of the Director of Intelligence I had not been told of the planned rising, or expected landing of arms. Plunkett had discussed nothing with me but the wireless station job, and had definitely stated "we have done nothing and intend to do nothing without the absolute approval of John MacNeill".

I travelled down the following morning (Good Friday) by mail train to Killarney. Denis Daly, Con Keating, Dan Sheehan and Chas. Monaghan travelled down with me on this train too, the three latter in a different carriage. On our way to Kingsbridge Station that morning about 7 o'clock a.m. we met Michael Collins at the Ballast Office. He introduced me to Daly who remained with me all that day and night. Collins kept my bicycle.

I insert here a descriptive account of my journey to Kerry on Good Friday 1916, written by me some years ago, but only recently published:

A NIGHT IN KERRY.

"At last we gained the crest of the Pass. Our climb was over. Hours it had seemed to Denny and myself. Shoving her the last few yards, as the engine failed, raced and spluttered, and now we hung over the hood behind, hearts thumping, heads throbbing, throats choking, lungs gasping in the thankfulness of victory and utter exhaustion. 'She'll do there till the light comes' said Tom, and he knocked off the steaming engine. Denny and I only grunted. Life was too sweet just then and breath too short.

"It had been a long day - a gaspy sort of day - surprises at every hand's turn - and here in the heel of it, the mountains of Kerry, dark night, and the Pass of Bealach Oisin. Good Friday it was, in the year of glory 1916, and I had made an early start. As I jumped off my old Lucania at O'Connell Bridge, Collins stepped out from the path. "Here" says Mick, "I'll take the bike. Here's your ticket. You have your orders. There's the tram," and the expedition started. (I asked for that bike later and he said it finished up in a barricade at Abbey St. corner). There were five of us in all. I was in charge, a captain on the special staff of the Director of Intelligence, Joe Plunkett. Orders clear enough; get to Killarney, meet two Limerick cars there, swap code-words with the chauffeurs, make for

Cahirciveen, enter Wireless School (said to be unguarded), dismantle transmitters and receivers, remove two portable sets (Con Keating knew all about them), sprinkle some petrol around, light up and light out for Tralee. Austin Stack to meet us there at 5 a.m. with farm cart to get one set; back to Limerick, board an early train at Long Pavement; take the second set to Athenry. 'Give it to George' said Sean McDermott 'the boots at the hotel. He's all right, he's a member of the organisation. And then get back to Dublin any way ye can!'

And so it came to pass that about 7.30 that April evening two cars stood outside Killarney station and five passengers alighted from the train. The magic words so oft rehearsed "Are you John?". "Yes, William sent me" seemed in broad daylight a trifle too cloak-and-daggery, and we decided to drop it - anyway there were only two cars there - both with Limerick numbers. Over goes Con and the rest of us walked quietly through the town, the cars overtaking us at the College. Denny Daly and myself took the first and away we went along the Killorglin road, the other car following about a quarter of a mile astern. The map (I have it still) said fourteen miles, but I have little recollection of that journey. To me the Kerry landscape was made up of hedgerows slipping past, with here and there grey stone walls and white gateposts, while the cool twilight deepened into the night. And I remember looking back every few minutes and seeing the headlights of the other car gleaming on the road or flashing in the sky as it topped a rise. And then we ran into the town of Killorglin and I saw no more flashes during that night. Three miles or more we must have gone before I missed them. We had hurried through Killorglin - it wasn't a healthy place for Denny; the R.I.C. knew him too well - but now we slowed down hoping every moment to see the other car turn the corner; and sometimes we climbed and again ran downhill and all the time our eyes were straining through the darkness for that

following flash that never came. Near Mountain Stage station we stopped altogether and waited for over an hour, finally deciding that tyre or engine trouble must have stranded them and that we had better go ahead anyway and get the job done. So, proceeding quietly towards the by-road east of Cahirciveen where the College stands, we heard a police whistle and saw in the gleam of its headlights two R.I.C. men swinging a lantern. I remember grasping the .32 Savage I had borrowed from Joe Plunkett (my own Webley being a bit heavy for travelling) while I heard Denny say "Will we shoot"? "No", says I "let someone else start the war. Talk will do these fellows". And so it did. Plausible speech and ready addresses in Limerick, cigarettes and a fill of tobacco got us through the most perfunctory search of the car and an apology that would have done credit to a maitre d'hotel. Medical students we were, moryah, bound to Waterville for Easter Week, boots in the square box, clothes in the portmanteau. "Goodnight gintlemen, sorry to trouble ye". The car moved off. Two men yawned. Three men breathed again!

Half a mile a long we stopped to see what really was in the box and the bag. Oh! sergeant! that box contained two jemmies, a keyhole saw and a few other such trinkets. The bag held an assorted collection of electrical appliances, two hatchets and a heavy hammer. Over the edge went the lot; owners having no further use for same. The job was off - a few words let drop by the sergeant had let out that a platoon of soldiers had come to guard the college and that all police units were on patrol. Nothing to do now but get out of Kerry, and no way out but Bealach Oisin - feet up. So for an hour we climbed in the darkness up that narrow pass through the mountain bogland until at the last Tom gave up and said "She'll never do it". Right enough, she was slipping and spitting and racing and faltering and stumbling and once she got one hind wheel into a gully and nearly turned over, and

then we pushed and heaved and slipped and swore and called on the Lord and groaned and grunted until we arrived at last where the story begins.

Then we slept, or I think we did, huddled together in the back of the car, and the gods of the mountain awoke and the wild horsemen of the hill came riding and the weavers of the mist hung their curtain round about. All blue and silver with gleams of purple and rose they were, these magic curtains and I saw the forms of heroes astride upon the hills with horses and with hounds. Curog MacDaire, maybe, or Oisín himself or Finn in his eternal following of Grainne and of Diarmuid, who knows? Not I, indeed, for the chill of morning awoke us to a new struggle for life and for liberty and we saw Loch A'Chumhais shining below in the glen.

So it happened that two dog-tired and disappointed lads lay full length on the seat of the 7.10 leaving Killarney, while two miles out the road a weary chauffeur was struggling with a burst tyre and a broken front spring, the fruits of injudicious mountain climbing.

But how we got home - how I met Liam Lynch and he told me of Roger being taken - how for the third time in three days I said goodbye to Ginger - how I found Jim Ryan and Sean Figzgibbon on the train - how we tried to stop the war - these things don't come into the story at all, so must await another telling.

For this story has an ending of its own, the stark and terrible ending of a saga or a folk tale. It was in Belfast a full month afterwards that I read a newspaper yarn of a car in the river at Killorglin and three men drowned. Then at last I knew how my boys' Odyssey had ended. Chuadar sanán t-áth agus mise an bóthar. Báthadh iad san acht tháinig mise slán! They took the ford and I the high road; they were drowned and I came safe. Beannacht dilis Dé ortha trúir. (Conn Céitinn, Cathal Ó Monacháin agus Domhnall Ó Síocháin).

I travelled back to Dublin on Easter Saturday morning by train from Killarney and when the train arrived at Mallow Junction I saw Sean Fitzgibbon, Dr. Jim Ryan, Ginger O'Connell and Liam Lynch there. Ginger O'Connell was on his way to Waterford. Liam Lynch had been in Kerry and was on his way back to Cork to take charge there. It was from him I learned for the first time that the arms ship had been seized and Casement (of whose coming no one was aware) had been captured. Sean Fitzgibbon had been in Tralee for some days on a mission solely connected with the distribution of arms when landed. He also had been kept in ignorance of the intended rising. He told me this himself and both he and Dr. Jim Ryan travelled back with me to Dublin. I do not know where Dr. Jim Ryan had been.

When we got to Dublin, we first called to Volunteer H.Q. at No. 2 Dawson Street, and saw Thomas McDonagh. He was very curt with us and gave us no information whatever. We were looking for Bulmer Hobson but could not find him there. McDonagh was engaged burning a lot of papers. Daly and Jim Ryan then left us, I think. Fitzgibbon and I then went to O'Rahilly's house at 40 Herbert Park and met The O'Rahilly there. He did not know where Hobson was either, but he drove us in his car to Hobson's house off Marlborough Road, but we got no answer there. The O'Rahilly immediately drove us out to Eoin MacNeill's house at Woodtown Park, Rathfarnham. We told MacNeill what had happened and what news we had. MacNeill immediately came out with us and drove to Sgoil Eanna to see Pearse. After some conversation with Pearse in the hall of St. Enda's, MacNeill and Pearse came out to the steps of the house and it was there I heard Pearse say to MacNeill "We have used you and your name and influence for what it was worth. You can issue what orders you like now, our men wont obey you". MacNeill said he would do as his conscience and his common sense bade him, and if Pearse had any more to say he could

meet him at 9 p.m. that evening at Dr. Seamus Ó Ceallaigh's house at 53, Rathgar Road. We (O'Rahilly, Fitzgibbon and I) then drove MacNeill home, and we also promised to meet him at Ó Ceallaigh's.

As far as I remember, the couriers who were sent out by MacNeill on Easter Sunday morning with the countermanding order were as follow:

Tullamore	Arthur Griffith
Limerick	The O'Rahilly
Cork	Dr. J. Ryan
Dundalk and) Coalisland)	Colm Ó Lochlainn
Waterford	<i>Seán</i> Fitzgibbon

Signed:

Colm O'Lochlainn

Colm O'Lochlainn.

Date:

19 11 52

19.11.52

Witness:

William Ivory Bond

(William Ivory, Comd't.)

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