

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 818

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 818

Witness

Captain Jack Stafford,
83 Kincora Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B., Dublin, 1910 - ;
Member of 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1913 - ;
Member of A.S.U. Dublin, 1921.

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Dublin, 1910-1921;
- (b) Hibernian Bank, O'Connell St., Dublin,
Easter Week 1916;
- (c) A.S.U. Dublin, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1478

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY CAPTAIN JACK STAFFORD,
83, Kincora Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

In 1910 I was sworn into the I.R.B. by James Buggy and was posted to the "Holts". The Centre was C. J. Kickham and there were about 60 members (including Gerry Boland, T.D., now Minister for Justice, and his brother, Harry, killed during the Civil War). A short time later a split occurred in this Circle (I think it was about something Bulmer Hobson had done) and our membership was reduced to about 20. We met monthly at 41 Parnell Square and, as far as I could see, very little attempt was made to procure arms. Sometime in 1912 the younger members of the I.R.B. were being drilled by Con Colbert and Seán Heuston at the hall at 41 Parnell Square and this was continued up to the formation of the Volunteers.

In November or October, 1913, a meeting was called for the Rotunda to form the Irish Volunteers, which was a great success. Speeches were made and those who wished to enrol were asked to hand in their names. I handed in my name and was posted to B. Company, 2nd Battalion. This Company, about 40 strong, met at Father Mathew Park, Fairview, and was formed into four sections. Very few of us knew any drill and the Company was taken charge of by a Mr. Kerrigan who was a British Reserve Soldier. He instructed us up to the time of the split, when he went with the Redmond Volunteers. The Company met at least once per week for training and usually on Sundays for a route march or manoeuvres with the Battalion. About this time elections for Company officers were held. Tom Hunter was elected O.C., B. Company, and later on was Battalion O.C.

On a Sunday in July, 1914, the 2nd Battalion was mobilised and marched from Fairview to Howth. On arriving at Howth, the Battalion marched up the East Pier. At the same time a yacht entered the harbour and those on board the yacht proceeded to hand out rifles to the Volunteers. My Company was halted a short way up the pier and were given batons in order to protect the Volunteers unloading the yacht, but there was no interference. We all received rifles (but no

ammunition) and, after a short halt, marched back towards Dublin. On arriving at Howth Road, near Clontarf Road, we found the road held by British soldiers assisted by a number of D.M.P. There was a short scuffle between the leading Volunteers and the British soldiers. The Volunteers broke up formation and proceeded to their homes by different routes. These British soldiers (Scottish Borderers), on their way back to barracks, opened fire on civilians at Bachelor's Walk, killing a number.

Soon after this, on the outbreak of World War I., a split occurred in the Volunteers. One section went with the Redmondites and called themselves the Irish National Volunteers. These did not last long as they were encouraged to join the British Army. This split did not affect my Company, but other Companies were badly depleted. We continued drilling as usual and a miniature rifle range was provided at Father Mathew Park, and a service rifle range was provided by the Citizen Army in a field nearby. We could also use this range.

The Company was now fairly well equipped, as it was easy to purchase rifles and other equipment from British Tommies who stole them out of their barracks. We continued drilling and carrying out manoeuvres, fully armed, and there was no interference by the British forces. The week before Easter, 1916, Tomás McDonagh (who was Battalion O.C.) lectured us on street-fighting and instructed us to be prepared for any emergency.

I was mobilised for Easter Sunday, 1916, at St. Stephen's Green. I lived in Drumcondra and, on my way across town, I found that the mobilisation had been cancelled and a notice appeared in the morning's paper, signed by Eoin McNeill, cancelling the mobilisation. This upset all arrangements for the Rising.

The Company was again mobilised for Easter Monday. I, with a number of others, did not receive the order. On Easter Monday morning I visited my mother-in-law (Mrs. Ellis) at Blessington Street.

She informed me that her sons had been mobilised; Sam, who was in my Company, had gone to Stephen's Green and Seán, who was a member of C. Company, 1st Battalion, had gone to Church Street. I got a bicycle, cycled over to Stephen's Green and found less than half the Company there, together with other Companies of the 2nd Battalion and some Citizen Army men. I reported to Tom Hunter who was in charge of my Company. He told me to go home and get my rifle and ammunition and report back to Jacobs Factory, as they were going to take it over. On my way home I passed the G.P.O. The Citizen Army and Volunteers were taking over this building and smashing all the windows. On arriving home, I got into uniform and, strapping my rifle on the bicycle, proceeded towards the city. On reaching Clonliffe Road, I met other Volunteers who informed me that half the 2nd Battalion were at Father Mathew Park. I reported there and found this correct. Frank Henderson, who was in charge, ordered us to go home, as he believed only the Citizen Army had broken out into revolt. I told him that this was not so, but he would not believe me. He informed us that we would be mobilised later. I then intended to report at Jacobs Factory and, on my way over, I fell in with a group of Volunteers at Summerhill under Seamus Devoy and went with them to the G.P.O.

On arriving at the G.P.O. we were ordered to take over the Hibernian Bank at the corner of Abbey Street and O'Connell Street. We then built a barricade across the road at Abbey Street. Next door to the bank in O'Connell Street, the Cumann na mBan had provided a Red Cross station. On the other corner of Abbey Street a wireless station had been rigged up and this was broadcasting the news of the Rising. (I think by Liam Daly). We proceeded to lay in stocks of food which we commandeered from the D.B.C. and all utensils were filled with water. There were about ten of us in this garrison and Tom Weafer was in charge. All Monday night the looters were out in force. Shop windows were broken and the

contents looted. We tried to stop them by firing over their heads but without success.

On Tuesday we came under enemy fire from the Ballast Office and Tom Weafer was killed with the first few shots. We barricaded the windows with furniture and carpets, but these caused more trouble than use as the bullets cut them to pieces. There was a small balcony on the O'Connell Street side of the Bank. I got out on this, as it gave a good field of fire up Westmoreland Street. The enemy fire was now heavy and bullets were striking all parts of the building. One bullet struck the butt of my rifle, splintering it and cutting my hand, so I thought it time to move inside the building. Liberty Hall was being shelled from the Liffey and the buildings in Abbey Street had gone on fire, which soon approached the Bank. We evacuated this post through holes bored in the walls and over roofs. During this time we got scattered and lost touch with one another. I did not surrender but laid low till I could reach home.

Late in 1916 when the first batch of prisoners were released, B. Company was reorganised with Leo Henderson as Company O.C. and we proceeded to drill secretly. We were also purchasing rifles. A number were obtained from the Ulster Volunteers. As time went on, the Company strength increased and a number of revolvers were obtained (some purchased from British Tommies). We drilled in a hall near Clonliffe Chapel and sometime in 1918 this hall was surrounded by police led by a Detective called "Dog" Smyth. Twelve Volunteers were arrested and lodged in Mountjoy Jail but, after a short period, succeeded in escaping. Later on "Dog" Smyth was shot dead near his own home.

Paddy Daly was now O.C., B. Company, Leo Henderson having gone to Brigade Headquarters. The Company was now strong, about 60 members, and was a recruiting ground for the I.R.B. I was now Secretary of my Circle. The Secretaries of all Circles met every month under Luke Kennedy. The names of all proposed members had to go through all the Circles.

During 1920 this Company was engaged on raids for arms, ambushes, patrols etc. Tommy Kilcoyne was now O.C., B. Company, Paddy Daly having taken over O.C., A.S.U. About this time I was in Intelligence and, together with other I.O's., received a lecture by Michael Collins in the Engineers' Hall, Lower Gardiner Street. Detective Officers Ned Broy, McNamara and some others in Dublin Castle were engaged on Intelligence for Michael Collins.

Dan Breen and Seán Treacy were tracked to Professor Carolan's house in Drumcondra and, after a fight in which a number of British were killed, escaped. A short time later a British ex-soldier, named Pike, was shot dead outside a publichouse near Fleming's, Drumcondra. This man was undoubtedly a British spy. The 2nd Battalion was mobilised the evening after the Breen and Treacy fight, as it was expected that the Tans from Gormanstown Camp would come in and burn down houses in Drumcondra. We were to attack them and fight our way across country. This was called off and the Tans did not come.

Early in 1921 I was attached to the A.S.U. for special jobs. Two Detectives, Detective-Sergeant Bruton and Detective Coffey, were to be shot, (These were the last two of their class and who never came out of Dublin Castle until after curfew) also a Frenchman, called "Parley Voo", who was with the Auxies in the Wicklow Hotel. Information was received that Bruton and Coffey went to 8 o'clock Mass on Sundays to the Chapel on the Quays near the Castle. We took up positions before 8 o'clock. Some men were to shoot them as they came towards the chapel. Joe Leonard and myself were to get between them and the Castle in case they tried to retreat. This went on for five or six Sunday mornings but we never got them as, when we were ready for them, they did not come out or went to some other chapel, nor did we get "Parley Voo". I believed he returned to France when he learned the I.R.A. were after him.

Dick McKee (Brigade O.C.) and Peadar Clancy (Brigade Vice O.C.) were tracked down and arrested in a house in Gloucester Street and

were subsequently killed by the Auxies. An ex-British military policeman named Ryan living with his family in a room in Corporation Street, was found to be a British spy with plenty of money, though he never worked. He was alleged to have supplied the information of where Clancy was staying. He was found shot dead near his own home.

On Bloody Sunday morning I was mobilised to meet under the canal bridge at Mount Street, in order to help wipe out the British Intelligence Officers who were lodged in private houses. There were, I think, six of us under Joe Leonard and our area was Mount Street. Nine o'clock was zero hour. When the operation was completed, we went to the South Wall and other units of the 2nd Battalion, who had been operating around Leeson Street, joined us there. We crossed the Liffey by boat to the North Wall. This was necessary as we were all from the north side of the city. I think there were 18 British I.O's killed that morning.

My brother-in-law, Sam Ellis, carried on a cabinet-making business at the rear of his mother's house in Eccles Street. In the evenings his workshop was used for filling and detonating hand grenades. The premises were raided by British soldiers and 50 grenades were seized. He was arrested and lodged in Mountjoy Jail. After a while all the Volunteers there went on hunger strike. They were released and Sam went on the run. The Tans were continually raiding Mrs. Ellis's house for Sam, so she had to give up the place and came to live with me at Wellpark Avenue, Drumcondra.

About 2 o'clock on the morning after Bloody Sunday violent knocking came on the front door. My wife went down and opened the door and I heard the following conversation: My wife said, "My God, you're Tans!" One of the Tans said, "Who lives here?"; she - "We do"; he - "Where do Ellis's live?"; she - "My mother is here"; he - "Where is Sammy?"; she - "I don't know"; he - "Is your husband here?"; she - "Yes. He is in bed"; he - "Well, he will do". They came tramping up the stairs and I got out of bed. One of them asked where was Sammy.

I told them I did not know. A gun was shoved into my ribs and another fellow said, "Don't finish him here! Bring him out. Come on, get down the stairs!" I asked them to let me put my trousers on (as I had only a shirt on). He said, "You do not need trousers where you are going". As I went down the stairs, one of them kept tapping me on the head with a gun, saying, "Think! Think!. They brought me out on to the road and I thought it was all up with me, but they then brought me back and into the sittingroom and kept shoving revolvers into my ribs and hurling questions at me. They said that they knew I had nothing to do with the shooting but that Sammy had. This interrogation lasted for over an hour. After a while the shock wore off me and I began to answer snappy, and finally told them that I did not give a damn whether they shot me or not. When leaving, they told us not to go to bed as they would be back; but they did not come back.

At the time of the Truce my Company had very little arms. All the rifles had previously been collected and sent to the country units; and nearly all our revolvers had been lost in the Custom house.

SIGNED:

J. Stafford

(J. Stafford)

DATE:

3rd March 1953.

3rd March, 1953.

WITNESS:

J. Kearns Comd't.

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