

W.S. 1,035

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1035

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Sean Cody,
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Skerries,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'G' Coy. 1st Batt'n. Dublin Bgde.
1913 - .

Subject.

Church St. Dublin,
Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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No. W.S. 1035

STATEMENT BY MR. SEÁN CODY,

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and

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I joined the Irish Volunteers in November 1913. I was present at the meeting held in the Rotunda Concert Hall at which were present, amongst others, Padraig Pearse, Tom Clarke, Eoin McNeill, and I remember well a very fiery speech made by a Belfast priest called, I believe, Father Fullerton. A few days after the meeting men were enrolled, and I remember the evening I joined the queue extended a good distance around the outside railings of the Rotunda Gardens towards Findlater's Church. Standing behind me that evening was Tom Byrne, who had served with the Irish Brigade in South Africa and later with distinction in the Irish Republican Army.

At the enrolment all signed a declaration to fight for the freedom of Ireland. On signing the form we were given a blue coloured membership card on which was printed the aims and objects of the Irish Volunteers, and I believe the subscription was 1/3d or 1/6d each week towards the cost of providing arms, equipment and ammunition.

About a week later drilling commenced. I was sent to drill at 41 Parnell Square under Seán Colbert who was an excellent instructor having been trained in the Fianna. There were other instructors, too, ex members of the British Army.

Later on when residing on the south side of the City I attended for drill at Donnybrook, and the instructor there was Eamonn de Valera (later An Taoiseach).

At a later stage I was placed as a member of G. Company First Battalion. I was number 28 and attended weekly drill parades at the Gaelic League Hall, Blackhall Place. At Blackhall Street the Company were supplied with drill purpose rifles made from wood. First aid lectures were also given weekly, and anybody who wished could become a member of the Red Cross Corps.

At first the members of the Company were drilled by ex-British soldiers and later on we elected our own officers and section leaders.

Strict voluntary discipline was easy to enforce because of the spirit of comradeship between all officers and men of the Company.

The subscription towards cost of equipment was 1/3d, taken up weekly by the Company Adjutant. Equipment was also procured by the men themselves as many shops commenced to sell surplus foreign army stuff, one supplier being Padraig Gleeson who had a shop in Mary St., and also Lawler's of Fownes St.

Not many Volunteers had uniform in the early stages, but by degrees members got hats and puttees and later, when we could afford it, the green uniform and cap with the harp badge. I believe the present badge was first worn about or near the Rising.

Nearly every week we had route marches and extended drill exercises, usually in the Dublin mountains or

out around Finglas and St. John's Castle. I remember one route march of the whole Dublin Brigade on a Sunday morning. Mass was heard by the Volunteers at Rathfarnham Church, which was packed to capacity and many unable to gain entrance to the church heard Mass in the grounds outside, and the following morning the 'Irish Times' in large headlines had the caption "Four thousand men miss Mass".

During this time the Volunteer Headquarters were doing everything possible to obtain arms for the men. We ourselves lost no opportunity of securing anything in the way of a serviceable gun, rifle or revolver, and also many old bayonets came to light and a good many .22 rifles were available for target practice. Lee-Enfield rifles were also procured from British soldiers for a small payment and I succeeded in obtaining two in this manner, taking one from Portobello Barracks to Drumcondra slung across my shoulder whilst riding on a bicycle. Many revolvers were also procured in this manner. This method of getting arms proceeded until the Howth gun-running in July 1914, in which G. Company participated. Great numbers of new recruits joined the Volunteers as a result of this and training of the new men was carried out by ex members of the British Army who were paid for the work, but by degrees their services were dispensed with as trained men from the Volunteers became available to take their place. Revolver practice was carried out in various safe places, usually the cellars underneath drill halls. Competitions in rifle and revolver target practice, both Company and inter-Company, were carried out frequently.

About this time a split took place in the ranks of the Volunteers due to the attitude of Mr. John Redmond who was a member of the British Parliament and anxious for Ireland's full participation in the war against Germany then being fought on the continent. At a special parade of G. Company the position was explained to the men, and as a result the great majority adhered to the Provisional Executive Committee of the Irish Volunteers as established at Rotunda meeting in November 1913.

From this time onwards drillings were more frequent and section leaders called the roll at each meeting and absentees were noted and excuses for non-attendance demanded from them. Field work was engaged in on the Dublin Mountains and all were warned to be in readiness for mobilisation on short notice. Once I remember the First Battalion being ordered to mobilise at Ballymun Church gates at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning when the snow was thick on the ground. On that particular day we took part in field exercises with the Fingal Brigade under Commandant Tom Ashe.

Lectures in street fighting and the construction of barricades and road blocks from all available materials were given to us at regular intervals by officers from Headquarters' Staff, and all men were expected to acquaint themselves with the layout of streets, important buildings, entrances to factories, position of windows and any information which could be of use in the course of a Rising.

On Whit Sunday 1915 we visited Limerick and there met a fine body of Volunteers who, I believe, came from

Cork. During our visit we paraded through the streets of the City and by the Treaty Stone, and on many occasions were attacked by a crowd of hooligans (men and women) who rushed through the ranks of Volunteers trying to break them up, but although all carried rifles there was no retaliation from the Volunteers and many people expressed their appreciation of the Irish Volunteers and their high standard of discipline and conduct. During the march through Limerick of the Volunteers groups of Royal Irish Constabulary (police) stood looking on in evident agreement with these rowdies, and at the railway station in the evening when the Dublin Brigade was entraining for home, a savage attack with stones and bottles was again made by this crowd and the police who were supposed to preserve the peace stood looking on with evident approval.

From now on test mobilisation became more frequent and took place at different points in the City, at night-time generally, and on all such occasions we were accompanied by twenty or more Dublin Metropolitan Police. The police marched behind the Volunteers and were obliged sometimes to march on the double to keep in touch with us, and as the police were made up of rather older men they never seemed to enjoy our exercises. I should mention that on these exercises the taking over of posts and strong points were demonstrated by the section leaders of the various Companies of the battalion and sometimes lectures were given by our officers.

When the remains of O'Donovan Rossa was brought from America in August 1915 the coffin lay in state in

the City Hall under a guard of honour from the First Battalion and G. Company had three members on duty there, during which time thousands of Dublin citizens passed by the bier. The Volunteers marched to Glasnevin cemetery for the funeral and the great majority taking part were uniformed and carried arms and equipment. The procession was headed by St. James's Brass and Reed Band and made a fine display.

At this time many of our officers were in prison and arrests and deportations were everyday occurrences and in many cases employers dismissed men who were suspected of being Irish Volunteers or in sympathy with Sinn Féin, but the effect of all this was continued increases in the numbers joining the ranks and many of those who left the ranks at the time of the split returned. I should mention here that at this time, too, firms engaged in war work for Britain were supplied with badges having the British coat of arms stamped on them with the inscription "War Work". These were distributed to the workers. I refused to accept one and was told of the consequence - dismissal - but I was not dismissed.

On St. Patrick's Day 1916 the Dublin Brigade practically fully armed, uniformed and equipped paraded through the City of Dublin and held that portion of Dame St. from the City Hall to the Bank of Ireland for over an hour, during which time no traffic was allowed to break the ranks of the Volunteers, Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan. I remember seeing on that day British soldiers with horse drawn vehicles conveying war material from North Wall under heavy armed guards

being stopped and ordered to proceed on alternative routes and having no choice but to obey the directions of our men. A large force of armed police were simply powerless to intervene and I cannot recollect a single incident to mar the fine demonstration and the high standard of discipline and training displayed by the combined republican forces.

At this time a great feeling of comradeship had developed between individual Volunteers and they could be seen in small groups chatting or walking, and it was felt by all that soon something big would take place.

One of my pals was Charlie Monaghan, who was sent to Kerry to meet Roger Casement. I was speaking to him before he left Dublin and I noticed that on his leather body-belt he carried a wire-cutter's pliers and other small tools. He gave no inkling of anything being about to happen.

With other members of G. Company I was at Headquarters in Blackhall St. on Good Friday night, where we were engaged on taking parcels to various addresses in the City. We knew at this time about the test mobilisation and manoeuvres for Easter Sunday. In common with all the Volunteers I was at early Mass and Holy Communion on Easter Sunday morning. I wore my uniform and remained at home after breakfast awaiting the order to report, but nobody called. Later I decided to go into the City from Fairview and attended 11.30 Mass in the Pro-Cathedral kneeling beside Seán MacDiarmada. On coming out from Mass Father Flanagan, Administrator, called me over and told me to go home and take off my uniform. Instead of going home, however, I decided to go to 41 Parnell Square,

Headquarters of the 1st Battalion, where I expected to meet some of my comrades. There was nobody I knew in the building and on coming out I met Brian O'Higgins wearing full uniform and full kit. I had a chat with Brian and felt from his conversation that a rising was near. Brian O'Higgins handed me a letter written by Eoin McNeill countermanding the order to mobilise. I believe the letter was addressed to Rev. Fr. Flanagan, Administrator Pro Cathedral, and it stated that priests and all those with any influence with the Irish Volunteers should advise the men to go home and take off their uniforms. I took leave of Brian O'Higgins and went home and did not leave the house for the remainder of the day.

On Easter Monday I was up early and waited for the order to mobilise. During a short absence from the house, however, word was left that I was to report to Headquarters, Blackhall St., immediately. I lost no time in getting my equipment ready, including my short Lee Enfield rifle and revolver and also ammunition. On my way down North Strand I was joined by a Volunteer, Seán Óg Ó Ceallaigh, who accompanied me as far as Liberty Hall. On our way we saw Tom Ennis driving a horse drawn dray loaded with boxes which we took to contain ammunition. We also met a British recruiting sergeant who gave a very sharp glance at my rifle, but I believe now he understood why I had my hand in my uniform pocket in which I had my revolver. It was a strict order to all Volunteers never to part with their weapons without defending them, and I took the precaution of having my hand on the revolver in case I should have to use it.

In front of Liberty Hall the Citizen Army were lined

up in deep formation and on the steps of the hall James Connolly and Countess de Markievicz were being photographed.

On the way up the Quays I came abreast of a section of Lancers (British horse soldiers) who were escorting war material from the North Wall. At Arran Quay Church I took a side street for the hall and arrived just before noon to find the 1st Battalion in formation ready to march out. I saw Commandant Ned Daly and Lieutenant Laffan of my own Company - "G". The Captain of "G" Company, Captain Alwright, was absent. Roll call was over so I fell in with my own Company.

We left the hall and marched up Queen St. and by a side street into North Brunswick St., where we were halted near the junction of Upper Church St. beside Doyle's coach factory.

Sentries were posted at various points on the street to cover and protect the remainder of the Volunteers who were awaiting orders to take over selected positions, defensive and offensive. I was on duty near the corner of Church St. and North Brunswick St. with orders to arrest any members of the enemy forces or others who might attempt to cross our lines. I remember a British cavalry soldier coming along and calling on him to halt. He explained that he was on his way to Fairyhouse Races, but I handed him over under arrest and he was detained in the North Dublin Union where he did fatigue duty for the Irish Republican Army together with other prisoners also under detention.

St. John's Convent, North Brunswick St., was used

as a temporary headquarters for the Battalion, but headquarters was later transferred to Father Mathew Hall, Church St. By this time the main body of Volunteers had been posted to positions on the streets and selected strong points, and "G" Company's headquarters was Doyle's coach factory at the junction of Brunswick St. and Upper Church St.

I should state here that it is very difficult now in 1954 to recall accurately the events of Easter Week 1916 and this, my account, must be subject to the fallibility of human memory after the passing of so many years.

I would say that "G" Company had not more than fifty men under the command of Lieutenant N. Laffan - afterwards promoted Captain by Commandant N. Daly. We were also joined later by Denis O'Callaghan, Paddy Holohan and a few of those who had taken part in the raid on the Magazine Fort in the Park and a few Volunteers from Kildare who marched to Dublin. When Lieutenant Laffan was wounded Paddy Holohan took over command of the Company near the end of the week.

Due to our small numbers all hands were engaged in the erection of barricades, taking over of houses and the commanding of necessary materials such as carts, drays etc. for the erection of road blocks and barricades.

Command positions were loop holed, such as the upper storey of Monk's Bakery and the gate lodge of the North Dublin Union. It was necessary also to question people passing through our lines and the people living in the area had to be provided with bread and other food.

About this time a burst of firing rang out when the Lancers before mentioned were fired upon down near the end of Church St. In the action which opened the fighting one British soldier was killed and the remainder occupied an old ruin and were kept under cover for the remainder of the week.

We held old ruins in Lisburn St., and when information was received that the British occupied the Linen Hall Barracks nearby preparations were made to attack and capture same.

Captain Denis O'Callaghan collected a number of Volunteers from "G." Company with others for this operation. In the coach factory we secured oil and drums of tar in order to burn the barracks. The taking of the barracks was a very easy operation as the British soldiers surrendered without resistance. We burned the barracks and so fiercely did it blaze that it was found necessary to lay a line of hose to spray the adjoining tenements with water. During this task we were fired upon by snipers from the King's Inns, a large stone building not far away.

The Broadstone Railway Station where British soldiers from Athlone would arrive, was to have been occupied early during the week but due to lack of men this was not possible, and it was later occupied by large British forces and our officers then decided on an attack with the object of delaying any attack on our positions in Church St. and the adjoining points held by us. For this operation Volunteers were called for and twelve men got ready for the attack, under D. O'Callaghan and Paddy Holohan. We paraded in the grounds of our headquarters

and were spoken to by Commandant Daly and also blessed by Rev. Fr. Albert, O.S.F., and another Franciscan friar. Having received our orders we approached the station by Church St. and Constitution Hill, marching in single file under the cover of the houses on our left. Near the square in front of the station we prepared for action, and on rushing into the open space in front of the building opened fire on all exits and approaches. The British replied and after about ten minutes fighting we withdrew, being unable to get into the building as we were outnumbered by at least twenty to one. We had one Volunteer wounded.

On our return I had the misfortune to become detached from my comrades and remember meeting a lady in a side street who invited me to come up to her room which was on the top flat where she said I could get a good view of the British occupying the Broadstone. I followed the lady, and seeing British soldiers in the railway sheds and behind piles of sleepers I opened fire and used up all my ammunition. There was no replying fire until I was back on the street below again when the whole house was peppered with rifle fire. I got back safely to my unit and on my way back could see British soldiers from the Broadstone taking up positions on the bridge in front of the building.

The fire at the Linen Hall Barracks, together with the glare from fires in the O'Connell St. direction, lit up our positions, and the British kept up heavy rifle fire on our posts during the whole night. On Thursday the British advanced from Bolton St. up North King St. firing from all directions, and severe fighting was taking

place at the barricade near Reilly's public house which held Lieutenant Shouldice's men, and immediately north of this post we of "G" Company and others were burrowing our way through party walls of houses to come nearer to the junction of North King St. and Church St. We pushed out windows and under the shining example and command of Paddy Holohan kept up a terrific fire on the barricade through which the British were advancing. On several occasions there was a temporary cease fire shouted by Paddy Holohan to allow the British to remove their dead and wounded.

During the night of Thursday, I think, we were attacked as it seemed from all sides, and when dawn arrived we could hear the voices of British soldiers all down North King St. towards Bolton St.

Later that Friday the British had manned the barricade but were driven off by our concentrated fire, in which the Howth Mauser rifles did great work, and the British suffered many casualties in dead and wounded and left behind a number of rifles which were quickly collected and taken into Reilly's pub (Fort).

In their attack up North King St. the British were supported by two armoured cars and succeeded in breaking into a number of houses from where they directed heavy fire into Reilly's Fort and on our position next door.

By now we were cut off and after a consultation between ourselves decided to fight on. At this time the British were in possession of Reilly's Fort, practically next door to our position. We could hear revolver shots

in the Fort and as is now known the British shot a number of people who were found in the Fort, all of whom had no connection with the Volunteers or the fighting.

On Saturday morning we observed a number of people advancing up Church St. under a white flag towards our post. As they came closer I recognised Rev. Fathers Albert and Augustine of Church St. They were accompanied by a British officer.

We were informed by the British officer that the fighting had ceased and that practically all had surrendered and we were asked to do likewise. After a short consultation between our men we decided that we would not surrender until we had received written orders from Commandant Pearse. This decision was conveyed to the British officer by Paddy Holohan and he agreed to procure the written direction. A truce was observed by us during the time the priests and British officer were away to obtain the written orders from Commandant Pearse.

The two priests and the British officer returned later and handed the order written by P.H. Pearse to one of our officers. The order was written on a sheet of paper and the signature of P.H. Pearse was examined and verified by Garry Holohan and we then agreed to surrender. We fell in in single file on the street and numbered about thirty-seven men and three officers. We succeeded in handing over to friends nearly all our small arms and ammunition, and all rifles were put out of action and made useless for further firing.

We were now marched under a very heavy escort of British soldiers down North King St., Capel St. to Dublin Castle, where we were kept under heavy guard for

four hours before being marched to a British barrack on the South Circular Road. "G" Company of the 1st Battalion was the last to surrender.

During the week's fighting there was little time available to prepare food due to our small numbers and the many posts to be manned both by night and day, and sincere appreciation was felt by all the Volunteers in the Church St. and North Brunswick St. area for the nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul at Saint John's Convent who prepared food for as many men as could find time to eat it and this appreciation extends also to the Master of the North Dublin Workhouse who by night and day carried the food prepared by the nuns to the men on the barricades and in house positions.

Signed:

Sean Cody, 28^g Coy
1st Batt. Dublin Bde. Irish Vol.
2nd Volunteers

Date:

8 Nov. 1954

Sean Cody, 28 'G' Coy.

1st Batt'n. Dublin Bde. Irish Vol.

Witness:

Sarah Cody
M. F. Ryan Comdt.

M F. Ryan, Comd't.

