

ROINN COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 513

Witness

Thomas Furlong,
John Street,
Kilkenny

Identity

Member of I.R.B. Wexford, 1908 -
Member of I.R.B., Kilkenny 1909 -

Subject

- (a) His national associations 1909 - 1916:
- (b) Capture of "Confidential" papers,
including a "secret code" from the Military Barracks, Kilkenny, 1916

File No. S 1386

Statement by Thomas Furlong
John Street, Kilkenny WS 513

About 1908 I joined the I.R.B. in Wexford. I was sworn in by Seán T. O'Kelly. Amongst those present were Ned Foley, Watt Foley, Bob Brennan, John Barker, Seán Sinnott and myself. After being sworn in we elected Ned Foley as Centre. Meetings were held every month. The principal matters discussed at the meetings were the spreading of the organisation and the suitability of persons proposed for membership.

About 1909 I came to Kilkenny. Although there had been an I.R.B. Circle in Kilkenny it was now dormant. About 1912 Seán McDermott came to me with a letter of introduction from Ned Foley, I.R.B. Centre in Wexford. McDermott discussed with me the possibility of restarting the Kilkenny Circle. He asked me to get those I knew to come together and restart the circle. I knew that Peter de Loughrey was an old I.R.B. man and I sent McDermott to him. Subsequently De Loughrey called a meeting at which the following were present, Peter de Loughrey, Pat Corcoran, Ned McSweeney, Tom Stallard, Tom Hennessy and myself. Seán McDermott spoke a few words. De Loughrey was elected Centre, and Pat Corcoran Deputy Centre. Meetings which were held frequently were concerned chiefly with the spreading of the organisation

At the formation of the Volunteers in 1913, we got instructions from Dublin to capture as many key positions as possible in the Volunteers. A public meeting for the purpose of starting the Volunteers was held at the Parade and was addressed by Roger Casement.

Some I.R.B. men, including de Loughrey, succeeded in getting on to the County Committee. When the split occurred the vast majority went with Redmond; only sixteen remained loyal to the Executive, about half of whom were I.R.B. men. Gradually the strength increased until eventually we had three companies. I was a member of "B" Company. The officers of "B" Company were Tom Tracy, Captain; Jimmie Lalor and Martin Cassidy, Lieutenants. We were visited frequently by Liam Mellows and J.J. O'Connell (Ginger). About the spring of 1916, Eamon Kelly came as organiser. Late 1915, the firm for which I was working, got the contract for painting and decorating the offices and officers' quarters in Kilkenny Military Barracks. I was superintending the work. During the course of the job I sent word to the Barrack Sergeant that I wanted possession of the Commanding Officer's office for the purpose of painting, etc. While I was in the commanding Officer's office waiting for the Sergeant to come to hand it over to me, I made a hasty survey of it. I noticed a press which was unlocked. On opening the press I saw an envelope marked "secret". Inside it was another envelope marked "very secret"; inside it was another envelope on which the following was printed, 'this document must not be allowed into the hands of any person under the rank of Officer Commanding Barracks, or County Inspector of the R.I.C'. I replaced the envelopes and put them back in the press, and then nailed the door. When the Sergeant arrived to hand over the office he tried to open the press, and, thinking it was locked, told me to carry on with the work. At dinner time I reported the matter to Pat Corcoran. He told me to bring out the Document at all costs, "even", he said, "if it is to cost you your life". I brought the envelopes out that evening and handed them to Pat Corcoran. He gave them to Ginger O'Connell, who happened to be in Kilkenny and staying at de Loughrey's. O'Connell copied the documents and gave the copies to Seán McDermott, who brought them to Dublin. Two days later I replaced the documents in

the press. The documents included a secret code with instructions how to use it, and the key for deciphering it. O'Connell told me it was the most important thing; they had got and that they had been trying to get it for a long time. I heard later that Volunteer Headquarters used the key and by means of it learned of the orders which had been issued for the arrest of Mellows.

I also brought out of Kilkenny Military Barracks a large quantity of maps. I put the maps in large distemper drums and covered them with dried distemper. Thomas McDonagh sent word requesting me to get him a set of 4-inch maps covering an area from Leighlin Bridge [5] to the midlands. I succeeded in getting them and sent them on to him. I also took out "Confidential reports from the War Front", and gave them to Ginger O'Connell who had asked me to get them for him.

During Holy Week, 1916, orders were issued to the Volunteers to parade on Easter Sunday with arms and full equipment, which included 24 hours' rations and field dressings. On Holy Saturday I went to Wexford with Peter de Loughrey, Jimmie Lalor and Pat Corcoran and brought back a quantity of gelignite. We mobilised on Easter Sunday as ordered, and were under arms all day. We were dismissed between 6 and 7 o'clock that evening when Pat Corcoran arrived back from Dublin with word that the Rising was off, we mobilised again on Easter Monday and remained under arms waiting instructions until Wednesday evening, when we were disbanded on orders from O'Connell.

The plans, as far as I know, were that the Kilkenny Volunteers were to go via the Scollop Gap and link up with the Wexford Volunteers.

I was arrested about the middle of the following week and brought to Kilkenny Gaol. The following morning I was brought by rail to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. After about a week I was sent to Wakefield prison. I was released early in June 1916.

Signed: Thomas Furlong