

WS70 Statement of Dr. James Ryan, T.D., Minister for Health and Minister for Social Welfare.

On Good Friday, 1916, at lunch in the Red Bank Restaurant, Seán McDermott asked me if I would take a despatch to Cork that evening. I was only too glad to get busy at something and readily agreed. I was told to report at his office in D'Olier Street during the afternoon and to be prepared to travel on the night train to Cork. When I arrived at his office Seán McDermott asked me if I was armed. I said, yes. I had a revolver. He then handed me a despatch which was to be delivered to Tomas MacCurtain in Cork. He said it was a very important message and that I should prevent it falling into hostile hands, even if I had to use the revolver to do so. He told me to destroy the message if necessary. I had never been in Cork. Seán McDermott called Brigid Foley into the office to explain to me where Shears Street was. The Volunteer Headquarters was in that street, and there I was to deliver the despatch.

I arrived in Cork by train on Easter Saturday morning about 4.30 a.m. There was no one about at that hour except police on duty, and I failed to find Shears Street. I had tried at the top of Patrick Street, off which I was told it was, and walked back again to St. Patricks Bridge. I thought it possible that the policemen were taking an interest in my movements. I approached two of them on St. Patricks Bridge and said I was looking for a place to sleep. They brought me to the Windsor Hotel, where I offered the Sergeant a drink [2] which he accepted. He had a copy of the "Cork Examiner". Thinking it advisable to give some account of my movements, I said I was going to Tralee on the early train to stay with a student friend over the week-end. The Sergeant said something about Tralee being a "hot shop" at the moment as Casement had been arrested there. That was the first time I had heard of Casement's capture, but I did not pretend to take any particular interest in the matter.

The night porter at the Windsor wanted me to go to bed. He assured me he would call me in time for the train. I said I had some letters to write, and, as soon as I got rid of the Sergeant, went out again to try and find MacCurtain. I met a jarvey and asked him to drive me to Blackpool. The jarvey said "Would it be Tom Curtin you are looking for?" I said yes. He said "I'm your man". We drove to MacCurtain's house in Blackpool, where Mrs. MacCurtain told me I would find him at the Volunteer Hall in Shears Street. On going to the Volunteer Hall I found an armed guard on duty. A member of the guard named Twomey told me that MacCurtain had gone to the Windsor Hotel. I went there and the porter took me up to a bedroom where MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney were in consultation with Captain J.J. O'Connell.

I gave MacCurtain the despatch from Seán McDermott. The pith of the message was that agreement had been reached in Dublin and that the Rising was going ahead. O'Connell's position was affected by the changed plans, but I do not remember clearly what the instructions for him were. My impression is that he was to take charge -[3]-charge of Kilkenny and Waterford. The reply I got for Seán McDermott verbally from MacCurtain was "Tell Seán we will blaze away as long as the stuff lasts". I took that to mean the stuff they had on hands. He certainly said nothing about holding out until arms and ammunition would come from Germany.

My impression is that MacCurtain, MacSwiney and O'Connell then knew that Casement had been arrested, though I do not remember discussing it with them. I am not sure if the question of O'Connell going to Tralee was discussed, or any decision made on it. I do not know if they were aware of the loss of the arms ship. I myself was, of course, unaware of it at that time. I left Cork on the train for Dublin at about 8 a.m. on the same morning.

In Dublin I called to see Seán McDermott to report the delivery of the despatch to MacCurtain and convey his reply. He had many country delegates waiting to see him and it was late in the evening before he reached me. After a brief talk, he, Gearóid O'Sullivan and I walked down town together. Before parting at O'Connell Bridge he instructed Gearóid and myself to report to him at Liberty Hall the following day. We were to be his personal staff and were consequently relieved from parading with our own units.

About ten o'clock on Easter Saturday night I was summoned to Dr. Seamus O'Kelly's house, 54 Rathgar Road, where I learned a number of members of the Volunteer Executive were in conference. After some time the door of the meeting room opened and Eoin MacNeill appeared. He [4] asked me if I had carried a despatch to Cork the previous day and if I knew where to find the leaders there. I answered yes to both questions. Good Well, I was now to go to Cork again, this time by motor. It was urgent and I must deliver these despatches as soon as possible. In his hand he held five or six slips of paper, each in identical terms and signed by him. They were orders cancelling the Sunday manoeuvres. I was to deliver one to Pierce MacCann in Tipperary, one to MacCurtain in Cork, one to the O/C. Tralee, if possible, and the remainder to officers of any groups of Volunteers I might see on parade during the journey.

Eoin MacNeill's brother James, driving his own car, and I left Dublin on this mission about midnight on Easter Saturday. We called to Pierce MacCann at 6 a.m. and gave him the order. He appeared to be

much surprised as he said he had been speaking to MacNeill on Thursday and he was then in favour of the Rising. At Mitchelstown I saw a number of volunteers assembled in a field near the town. I stopped and asked for the officer in charge. He was, I think, Captain O'Neill. I gave him a copy of MacNeill's order. He said that they had already out some wires. I replied that this could not be helped, and that these were his orders now.

We went on to Cork, arriving at Shears Street about noon on Easter Sunday. The Volunteer parade was formed up at the Hall, and was just moving off when we arrived.

I saw MacCurtain and MacSwiney on the street. MacSwiney I knew well, MacCurtain not so well. I gave them the order, and the impression I got was that they expected it. [5]-When I left Dublin I knew that The O'Rahilly was taking similar orders to Limerick. Both of us had been instructed either to try and reach Tralee or send the orders there from Limerick or Cork. When I left MacCurtain and MacSwiney at Shears Street I intended to go on to Tralee, They had decided, immediately on receiving MacNeill's order, to let the arrangements for the day stand as an ordinary parade and allow the men to go on to Macroom. They had told me this and I had said that I would probably see them in Macroom, as I was going on that way to Tralee. I did not, however, see them again on that day.

James MacNeill

and I drove on to Ballyvourney. There the car broke down and we had to return to Macroom and remain there on Sunday night. On Easter Monday morning we decided that James MacNeill would remain over in Macroom to get the car repaired and I would get a train back to Dublin. The train stopped at Port Laoighise where I learned there was fighting in Dublin, and further progress by train was impossible. Travelling partly on foot, partly by motor and partly by horse and jaunting car I arrived in Dublin on Tuesday afternoon and reported to Seán MacDermott at the G.P.O.

Signed Séamus Ó Riain

Date 16/12/47

Witness Florence O'Donoghue