

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 9



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Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21).

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(Dublin).

DOCUMENT Ws. 9.

Statement by

SEÁN CUSACK

On

- (a) The I.R.B. Belfast 1912-1914.
- (b) Formation of the Irish Volunteers,
Belfast, March 1914.
- (c) Mobilisation of the Ulster
Volunteers, Easter 1916.

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No. W.S. 9

WITNESS: SEAN CUSACK,
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In 1912 I was a Reserve Non-commissioned Officer in the British Army and was then living in Belfast. Previous to 1912, I had been in touch with a number of men who served with me in the British Army. We often discussed the political situation in Ireland, and we felt that the constitutional methods of the Irish Parliamentary Party were not likely to produce any good results for the country. We had not, before 1912, any idea of other organisations with advanced ideas of working for the freedom and independence of the country. In 1912 I got to know that a man, named Joseph Healy, of Queenstown (as it was then known) was linked up with the Ancient Order of Hibernians (the Irish-American Alliance). I cannot remember how I got to know this man's name and address, but I got in touch with him. In the correspondence with him I stated that I and others of similar outlook in the North were not satisfied with the political situation, that Sir Edward Carson was organising and training an army of Ulster Volunteers for military action in the field in defence of their political convictions and that the situation in the North produced a great opportunity for men of extreme national outlook to take similar steps in the furthering of the idea that the freedom of Ireland could be procured by military action. My views were that the organisation of a body of men, similar to

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what later became known to me as the Irish Volunteers, should not be established for the purpose of direct action against the Ulster except they - the Ulster Volunteers, should allow themselves to be used by the British Government in action against the objects of the Separatist Movement. Healy, in his reply to me, sent me the printed constitution of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish-American Alliance). He told me to write to him again if I required any further information and that he was taking steps to put me in touch with men of similar views in Belfast. Sometime after the receipt of Healy's letter, two men, whom I did not know at the time, called at my house. They were Frank Booth and Harry Osborne. The men introduced themselves, and stated they wanted a talk with me. We went for a walk. They told me that they knew I had written to Healy re the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish-American Alliance). There was an exchange of views in connection with the political situation generally, with special reference to problems in the North of Ireland. I found out that the views expressed by those two men were similar to my own - that Home Rule was not a measure that would satisfy Irish aspirations, and that its offer to Ireland was only a grudging effort to placate Irish opinion for the time being and would not satisfy the aspirations of men who had the complete freedom of the country as their object.


As a result of this first and subsequent meetings with Osborne and Booth, I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood early in 1912. The meeting,



at which I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was held in Denis McCullough's parents' house, Grosvenor Road. Denis McCullough was, to my knowledge, then a Centre over the Circle which I joined, and the Circle did not include more than twelve men.

From 1912, when I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood, up to March, 1914 - the formation of the Volunteers in Belfast - my activities were confined to attending Circle meetings, supporting other organisations with a good national outlook, such as, Gaelic Athletic Association, Gaelic League, etc. At Circle meetings during this period, the question of arming and procuring military equipment was a continuous subject for discussion.

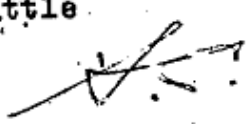
In March, 1914, a meeting was convened, by invitation, in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast. Amongst those present were Denis McCullough, Tom Wilson, Michael Carolan, Seán Neeson, James Tully, and Rory Haskins. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the best way to organise the Volunteers. Some time previous, the Larne Gun-running had taken place, and it was felt by myself and others that this event would make the organisation of the Irish Volunteers in Belfast a comparatively easy job, and that the British authorities' allowing Carson to arm, equip and train his Ulster Volunteers would give the Irish Volunteers a great opportunity to get away with doing likewise. At this preliminary meeting, it was agreed that the Volunteers would be organised on a new idea of organisation, and a suggestion made by



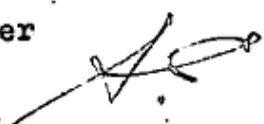
me that two Committees be appointed, one, civil, and the other, military, was agreed on.

The Civil Committee's duties were, principally, the raising of funds for arming and equipment by collections and functions, the providing of premises for meetings and training indoors, and also facilities for outdoor training. The Military Committee's duties were mainly the training and discipline of the men who joined. The senior officer in control of the Volunteers in Belfast was Denis McCullough. He was also in charge of the Civil Committee. ^{In my opinion} ~~He~~ was put in control by virtue of his position in the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Belfast. My position in the Irish Volunteers was defined at this meeting as Chief Instructor on Military Matters.

At the formation of the Irish Volunteers, there was practically no equipment suitable for training men for active service. We were forced to use wooden handles and pieces of wood, shaped like rifles, for drill purposes. The military training at the period was mainly of a theoretical nature. At this time, I was in the fortunate position of being able to procure landscape targets and aiming discs, etc., which I used in the instruction of men selected by me as potential leaders in the military organisation. This type of work was a matter of indoor training and would be considered advanced work in the training of Regular Army men. I regularly took out those potential leaders to the country at week-ends and sometimes oftener, and gave instructions in battle.



practice. The training of the main body of the Volunteers was a matter for those potential leaders under my direction. The handicap occasioned by lack of arms and equipment was keenly felt by all in the Volunteers early in 1914. About mid-1914 a suggestion was made by men who had joined the Volunteers and were supporters of the Irish Party that Joe Devlin, Member of Parliament, should be asked to interest himself in the work of the Volunteers and that he should be asked to review them. As a result of being approached, Mr. Devlin held a review of the Belfast Volunteers in Shawn's Park on the 7th June, 1914. As a direct result of this review, there was a big increase in the ranks of the Volunteers. Men with money and influence then joined, and there was a big increase in the rank and file. Amongst the many men of influence and local standing who joined about this time was a solicitor, named Bernard Campbell, also, another professional man whose name I can't remember. These two men were close friends of Joe Devlin and supporters of the Constitutional Party, and both were appointed to the Civil Committee. Amongst the type who joined after Devlin's review were a number of ex British Army non-commissioned officers. Those men were all of fine character and had a wealth of military experience. A number of them were admitted as members of the Military Committee. The political opinions of those ex non-commissioned officers were different from those of the men who originally started the Volunteers. They were enthusiastic in the idea of fighting against Carson's Ulster



Volunteers, but the idea of fighting for independence seemed hopeless in their eyes.

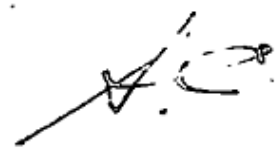
Following the review in Shawn's Park, so large was the influx of men into the Volunteers that premises were opened in Divis Street, Belfast, as an information bureau and enrolment depot for the Volunteers. Premises were also procured, when required, in St. Mary's Hall as had been the procedure since the formation of the Volunteers. It was found, however, that the large numbers of men who had joined the Volunteers made it necessary to hold meetings in St. Mary's Hall much more frequently than previous to Devlin's review. Parades and drills were also held in Willowbank Huts, Falls Road. Those huts were used previous to the 7th June, 1914, for training purposes. The caretaker in St. Mary's Hall, Patrick Smyth, was a sympathetic man, and he would, in addition to the ordinary booking of the hall for public meetings, such as, meetings of the Civil and Military Committees of the Volunteers, allow me to use the hall for drill purposes, on the understanding that discretion and care would be used not to attract the attention of the authorities to what might be looked on, by them, as secret drilling. The Church authorities in Belfast had control of St. Mary's Hall. In the event of the British authorities taking action in

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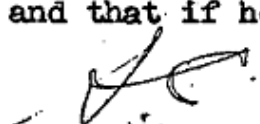
connection with secret meetings and drilling, the hall was liable to be closed down, and the caretaker might endanger his job. His willingness to take this risk was appreciated by me.

The Willowbank huts were used from the formation of the Volunteers for drill purposes. One hut, being vacant, was always available for drill purposes, and the ground surrounding the other hutments was available for drill purposes, as the occupants were friendly disposed. The grounds here were limited in extent, but served a useful purpose on account of their central position. After June, 1914, Shawn's Park had to be used for drilling and training purposes, and this was carried out generally except when weather conditions were unsuitable.

The membership of the Irish Volunteers in Belfast City prior to the 7th June, 1914, was, approximately, 100 men. Shortly after the 7th June, 1914, the numbers joining the Irish Volunteers swelled to such an extent that in a month's time - say, early in July, 1914 - at least 600 men were enrolled.



At the Review at Shawns Park and subsequent parade to Smithfield for dismissal on the 7th June, 1914, Denis McCullough was the Officer Commanding. After the large influx of recruits were admitted and the numbers swelled out of all proportion to the original membership, both Civil and Military Committees had to be enlarged. By virtue of my position as Chief Military Instructor of the Volunteers in Belfast, and as Chairman of the Military Committee which I retained after the increase in numbers, it was suggested in a quite friendly way to me, by new members of the Military Committee, that, as Denis McCullough was not a man with military experience, he should be replaced as Officer Commanding by a man with military experience. This suggestion to me had the outward appearance of an effort by sincere men to get the best possible man as our Officer Commanding. Whilst appreciating the sincerity of the men who made this suggestion to me, I sensed in it an effort by others outside the Volunteers to get rid of Mr. McCullough, as a preliminary to taking control out of the hands of the men who originally organised the Volunteers. My reply to those suggestions was that Mr. McCullough was the man who had the driving force to organise the Volunteers at the start, that he was attending his military parades and learning his duties as a soldier, as was any ordinary member of the rank and file, that so doing he was perfecting his military knowledge, and that if he



was deficient when compared with men who had previous military experience, he still had qualities of leadership which should not be overlooked, and that with his background of work for the Volunteers he should not be replaced as Officer Commanding. If this suggestion to replace Mr. McCullough had been pressed at the time and went to the test of a majority vote, it was possible that the move to replace him would succeed. It was not pressed, however, and the matter remained in abeyance up to the time I was mobilized as a Reservist at the outbreak of the War in August, 1914. I know that Mr. McCullough retained his position without serious opposition up to the split in the Volunteers.

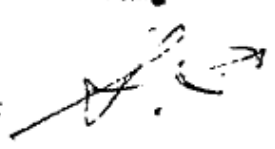
After my mobilisation as a Reservist I was stationed in Hollywood, County Down. As a qualified machine gun instructor I was engaged in intensive training of machine gun teams. As far as I then knew it was the intention of my superior officer to retain me at this work for an indefinite period, as the requirements for trained machine gun teams was a matter of great importance. Owing to the specialised nature of my work at this time I was excused all other routine duties, and this fact, coupled with the close proximity of my station to Belfast enabled me to have constant daily contact with the Volunteer organisation, to continue my contact with the instructional classes and remain a

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member of the Military Committee up to the time I was drafted to France, 23rd November, 1914. The calling up of the Reservists reduced the numbers in the Volunteers, and at this time there was little recruiting taking place.

Following Mr. John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge, a meeting of the Volunteers in Belfast took place in St. Mary's Hall. The object of calling the meeting was to approve or disapprove of the policy of Mr. Redmond towards the future of the Volunteers, as set forth at Woodenbridge. I cannot at the moment place the exact date of this meeting, but it was, approximately, late in October or very early in November, 1914. It was not one of the first meetings held by the Irish Volunteers as a result of Mr. Redmond's speech. I cannot now state who took the initiative in calling the meeting, but I feel that it was the Redmondite Section in the Volunteers who pressed for it.

In order to ensure that the meeting would express the views of the men who had been active in the Volunteer organisation, and not be a rallying ground for political adventurers, I made the suggestion to the Military Committee, called for the purpose of making arrangements for the meeting in St. Mary's Hall, that only men who had membership cards of at least one month and showed reasonable attendance at parades during their membership should be admitted to the Hall. This suggestion was approved of by the Military



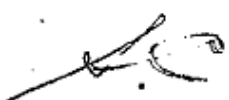
Committee. Before this decision, re admission to the Hall for the meeting, a difficulty arose in connection with the printing of a large number of membership cards owing to the large number of recruits. The local printers, P. Quinn & Sons, could not handle the work, and a large number of members had not got their cards on admission to membership. The decision to have members supplied with cards for admission to St. Mary's Hall meeting made it imperative to have cards printed for all members to whom cards had not been issued, and a submission was made to the Civil Committee asking to have sufficient cards printed. I was assured that steps would be taken to have cards available to all members who required same.

I caused instructions to be issued that the mobilization for the meeting would be carried out in local Company areas, that the Company officers would ensure that only bona fide members would be allowed to parade, and that the local Companies would proceed from their areas to arrive at the Hall at a given time to prevent congestion on their arrival. The first suspicion I had that anything was wrong with the agreed arrangements for the meeting was the appearance of some of the Companies marching in the direction of St. Mary's Hall, which seemed to me to have been considerably in excess of their bona fide membership. I went immediately to the Hall and enquired at the door if the rules laid down for a scrutiny of

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membership cards was being observed. I was informed it was. When I went into the Hall I found that the number of people there was much larger than I anticipated, and that a lot of Volunteers had not yet arrived. I knew definitely then that something serious had gone wrong with the arrangements and when the time of the meeting's opening came the Hall was packed to its fullest extent. This meant that at least half the people in the Hall were not bona fide members. I am of the opinion that there were bogus cards printed and issued and that every person entering the Hall had a membership card.


The two speakers at the meeting were Mr. D. McCullough and Mr. Joseph Devlin. When Mr. Devlin opened the proceedings he referred to the purpose of the meeting, which was to express an opinion for or against the terms of Mr. Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge. Mr. Devlin expressed his approval of the policy advocated by Mr. Redmond. The reasons he gave for supporting Mr. Redmond were that the fate of the Home Rule Bill depended on following Mr. Redmond's suggestions, and that the fate of all small nations depended on the defeat of the Central European powers. His statement was short and concise and not in the nature of a political harangue. When Mr. Devlin had concluded his speech the majority in the Hall broke into long and loud applause. Mr. McCullough then rose to speak. I believe he was of the opinion that addressing the people in the Hall would not have any effect on



on them, that the majority of them there were supporters of the Irish Party policy that the Volunteers should participate in the European War on the side of the Allies. Mr. McCullough's speech was very short, saying he would leave the decision on the matter involved in the hands of the meeting. No method of voting had been decided on beforehand. The meeting decided that a decision would be arrived at by a show of hands. The show of hands disclosed that a big majority of those present favoured Mr. Redmond's proposals. The meeting then broke up.

After the meeting any semblance of unity between the original members of the Irish Volunteers (who were mostly personnel from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Ancient Order of Hibernians - Irish American Alliance - the Hibernian Rifles and the Fianna Eireann) and the men who came in following Devlin's review ceased to exist. A lot of Devlin's supporters at the St. Mary's Hall meeting later joined the 16th Irish Division in the British Army. There was no further contact with Devlin's followers after the meeting.

The minority who did not agree with Devlin's policy started to re-organise the Irish Volunteers and the numbers were reduced to about the same number as immediately before the Devlin review in June, 1914.



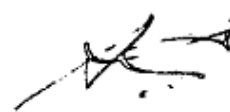
From the formation of the Volunteers men from the Civil Service and from business houses joined the Volunteers from time to time. After Devlin's review there was an increased recruitment of men of different outlook, but the same class, into the Volunteers. These men were put into a special section for the reason that, on account of the hours and nature of their employment, special precautions had to be taken in the matter of their training. When the mobilisation for the meeting on policy in St. Mary's Hall was held, I decided that these men should not be mobilised for it as a body. They were free to attend individually. I cannot say if any of them did attend, but I held a meeting of the section on the Sunday after the meeting in St. Mary's Hall to put the issue of the meeting in St. Mary's Hall to them for their decision. The majority of the section, when the issue involved at St. Mary's Hall was explained to them, expressed the opinion that the matter should not be pressed for a decision then, that they were prepared to go on with their training as if nothing had happened. I explained that a vital matter of principle was involved and that each individual must make a decision. I explained that the majority at the meeting at St. Mary's Hall had decided for the Redmond policy. I allowed them some time for discussion and when the time for a decision came they went approximately 50-50 on the matter.

My connection for the time being with the

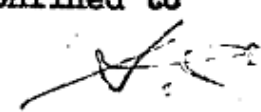


Irish Volunteers in Belfast ceased when I was drafted to France in November 1914. I had information at the time I was sent to France that my attendance at the meeting in St. Mary's Hall a short time previously and the side I took at the meeting decided the British military authorities in sending me to France immediately; otherwise I might have been retained at instructional work in Hollywood for a much longer period. I remained in France up to August 1915. I came home on leave then.

Immediately on arrival in Belfast, and before joining my wife in Downpatrick, I made contact with Denis McCullough, Frank Booth and Harry Osborne and had a discussion with them on Volunteer matters in Belfast. I got an idea from them of what had happened in my absence. I could not meet many of the Volunteers as my leave from France was limited to seven days and I had to spend most of the time with my family. Before leaving for Downpatrick, where my wife resided, I was informed there was a meeting to be held on the following Sunday in Belfast. I was asked to attend and promised to do so. I attended this meeting of the Irish Volunteers in a new and smaller premises that had been procured in Divis Street. The old premises had been vacated during my absence. At this meeting I saw a plan on paper for the Rising. This plan was a battle plan. I don't remember the details of the plan, but I know that it was




set out on that plan that the Belfast Volunteers would, on mobilization for active service, proceed to County Tyrone. My interest in the plan was to some extent affected by my leave being limited to seven days at home. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss this plan. I believe the purpose of my being called to the meeting was to get my opinion on the plan. I expressed the view that not knowing the objectives of the people who drew it up - whether it was intended for offensive or defensive action - and also not knowing the strengths of the Units of the Volunteers outside Belfast in North-East Ulster, I could not give an opinion on the merits of the plan. I had no knowledge of the important factors mentioned above, and I do not know if any person at the meeting had any more knowledge than I had. I did not get the impression at the meeting that an immediate rising was contemplated. However, I got the impression after the meeting, in discussion with some others, that some of the leaders in Dublin were pressing for an early Rising. This impression struck me as a theoretical view more than being based on definite information. My desire at the time was that this theoretical idea of an early Rising would materialize and I took steps to ensure that I would not go back to France at the expiry of my leave. I managed to effect this object on medical grounds. At the time I should have been on my return journey to France I was confined to



bed in my home and a few days afterwards was removed to the Military Hospital in Belfast. About the end of October, 1915, I had a Medical Board and was graded "C" as fit only for home service, and posted to a reserve Battalion at Carrickfergus. Whilst serving in Carrickfergus I found the conditions of service would not permit frequent visits to Belfast. I could not be in Belfast as often as desirable to see my comrades of the Irish Volunteers. I was able to maintain fairly constant touch with them by their visits to me at the Camp at Carrickfergus, and occasional visits, when opportunity presented, to Belfast. About mid-November 1915 I lost two children, with some sort of fever, and my Commanding Officer at the time told me he would recommend my transfer to a Belfast Unit for domestic reasons. I was transferred to Belfast and when there was posted as a Non-Commissioned Officer to a recruiting office, which was under civil control and organised by the Local Authorities in Belfast. This position left me complete freedom in the evenings and I was able to devote considerable time to assisting at the training of the Volunteers. This condition of affairs existed up to Holy Thursday of Easter Week.


I was on duty at the recruiting office when word was brought to me on Holy Thursday, about noon, by a civilian (who I subsequently know - Gribben, a member of a family of strong Republican views) that Mr. McCullough wanted to see me immediately. I asked the messenger was the matter urgent and he



told me it was both urgent and important as "the hour was fixed for the blow." I then arranged to see Mr. McCullough in Linenhall Hotel at 2 p.m. When I called at the Hotel I found that Mr. McCullough had not arrived. I proceeded to Mr. McCullough's business premises. In view of the information in my possession, I approached Mr. McCullough's premises with caution. Archie Heron, who was employed in Mr. McCullough's shop, approached me and warned me that the premises were watched and I was to stay in the vicinity until he got in touch with Mr. McCullough. Immediately afterwards, Heron again joined me and told me that Mr. McCullough was very busy and I could not see him then but later to suit me, which I arranged at 5 p.m.

That evening Heron informed me that he had a written message for me from Mr. McCullough. This message was of such importance that I was only to open it in the privacy of my home, which I did immediately on reaching my home for dinner.

The envelopes Heron gave me contained two notes - one note to Phil McMahon of Ballinagh, Co. Cavan, saying the Bearer has been appointed to

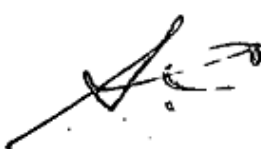


to take command in Cavan and McMahon was to hand out the shot-guns at 7.30 o'clock p.m., on Easter Sunday, but not earlier.

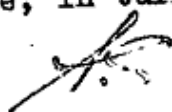
The other note was addressed to myself stating that I was appointed to take charge of the Volunteers mobilizing in County Cavan; that I was to proceed there, arriving not later than Sunday evening, when I would receive further instruction, and I was to act under the orders and in conjunction with a man named de Burca, who was appointed Supreme Commander in Ulster.

Those notes contained no signatures but as they came to me direct from Mr. McCullough, I accepted them as my definite orders from my Superior Officer in Belfast, and, as coming from him, the orders of General Headquarters in Dublin.

I didn't know Mr. McCullough's handwriting and




About 5 p.m. on Holy Thursday I met Mr. McCullough at his business premises. He appeared to be very busy, and told me the time of my calling was inopportune, as he was very much engaged. I then informed him that, if he would make another appointment for a discussion on matters pertaining to my orders for Easter Week, I would be free to meet him. He told me that the orders he got were an upset to him in the manner - the sudden unexpectedness - in which they came. I fully realized the effect this would have on his business connections, and I told him that I only wanted some information about the area to which I was being sent, such as, his knowledge of the local leaders of the Units in Cavan, their equipment and their strength, and the general plan of campaign, in which I would have to take part, particularly in its initial stages. Mr. McCullough told me to put those matters to him in writing, that it would be arranged that Archie Heron would collect same from me, and that he would deal with the matter on receipt. I prepared a note to him, briefly, on the matters referred to above, and handed the note to Mr. Heron. Late that night, Archie Heron came to me with a note from Mr. McCullough; and the note informed me that he had not the information which I required, but that Phil McMahon would be able to give me full information and full co-operation on all matters. I was satisfied then that Phil McMahon, whom I had never met or heard of, to my knowledge, before then, was so reliable and trusted by the leaders that I could treat him with full confidence and he, in turn,



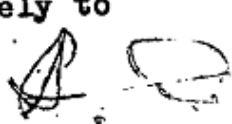
would treat me likewise. I told Heron that, if there was anything else on which I required guidance, I would get in touch with Mr. McCullough on the following day, Good Friday.

On reviewing the problem of my orders and the fact that I was being sent to an area where I was unknown to the men I was asked to command, and their leaders, and those men or leaders had not the benefit of the intensive training that some of the Belfast officers had, I decided to request Mr. McCullough to put at my disposal either Seán Kelly or Rory Haskins to accompany me to Cavan. I passed a note to this effect to Mr. McCullough, through Mr. Heron, and I was told that Rory Haskins would be detailed to go with me. I was also told that I should inform Mr. McCullough of my arrangements for the journey to Cavan and the time of my departure from Belfast. About this time, Mr. Heron told me that Mr. McCullough was preparing to go to Dublin to interview the leaders on the military problems of the day. This day, Friday, was devoted by me in putting everything possible in order for the carrying out of my part in the plans. On Friday night I met Haskins and made arrangements for the journey to Cavan, and that he would procure tickets for the journey and enquire as to times of trains, so that we should arrive in Ballinagh up to time mentioned in my orders. It was arranged that we leave by the mail train on Saturday night, and I had word conveyed to Mr. McCullough to that effect.




We boarded the train as per arrangements, and, when on the train, I found that, accompanying us to Portadown, was the main contingent of the Belfast Unit on their way to Coalisland. In Portadown the men bound for Coalisland crossed the platform and took another train going to Tyrone. I had no association with the other Belfast men on the train to Portadown. I knew where they were going previously, and that their arms had already been forwarded to Coalisland. I also knew that a small advance party left Belfast some time previous to Saturday night. I do not know if the main body of the Belfast men, travelling on the Saturday night train, carried small arms or not, but they did not carry long arms. Both Haskins and I carried small arms on the train.

The train, on which we reached Portadown, was not due for departure immediately, as there was the usual transfer of mails at Portadown, so that there was a big delay there. During this delay, Haskins and I remained in the carriage until Haskins went out on the platform for a walk. He returned shortly afterwards and informed me that there was a man at a certain place in the station who had an important message for me. I went out to the place indicated and met the person whom Haskins had described. I did not know the man. He asked me if I was Seán Cusack, and was I not proceeding to Cavan or Ballinagh. This, naturally, surprised me. He told me that he had orders to tell me that Haskins and I were not to proceed to Cavan, but to return immediately to




Belfast and await further orders, "as all is off". I informed this man that this was a big surprise to me, as I had definite orders on me to report to a certain man in Cavan, and that any countermanding orders should have been sent on to my destination in Cavan. I told him that my intentions were to proceed to Cavan, seeing that I had travel facilities available and all arrangements made, and definite orders to that effect. If I found that matters were as he stated, we could return from Cavan to Belfast, and I would feel better satisfied than returning from Portadown. The messenger then informed me that he gave me the definite instructions he got, and if I refused to carry them out, it was on my own responsibility and peril. I asked him if he knew who called the arrangements off, and he replied that it was done on the orders of the Inspector General (whom I knew to be Eoin MacNeill). I returned to Haskins and told him that I had got orders to return to Belfast. I explained to him what took place in discussion with the messenger whom I had just left, and I told him that I had decided to return to Belfast and I was doing so with reluctance, but that I believed the message I received there was genuine. The time I got the message in Portadown was between 11 p.m. and twelve o'clock, midnight. We both returned by train to Belfast. I might mention that, at the time I got the message at Portadown, I did not know if Mr. McCullough was with the Belfast contingent that changed trains at Portadown, or not, or if the train




for Tyrone, containing the Belfast men, had taken its departure. Soon after I got the message, I enquired and found that the Tyrone train had departed.

EASTER SUNDAY: After returning from Portadown, I went to an early Mass in Belfast, and had a considerable wait until the Dublin papers came in. I was naturally anxious to see if the papers would give any details of movements of men on the previous night. I saw by the papers, when they came in, that Eóin MacNeill had issued countermanding orders to all Units of the Irish Volunteers throughout the country. I knew that there was a number of men who, on account of their business, were excused from travelling to Tyrone on Saturday night, and who were prepared to travel on Sunday or Monday to Coalisland. I made contact with some of those men, including Henry Osborne. I informed them of my reasons for returning from Portadown, and we also discussed the situation created by Mr. MacNeill's countermanding orders in the press. We were all in grave doubt of the position and could not understand what had transpired to prompt Mr. MacNeill's countermanding order. The general opinion was that nothing further should be done, and that on Monday some indication would be given officially as to our future movements. As I was expecting further orders, as a result of the message I got in Portadown, I was prepared to await same.

EASTER MONDAY: I went to Gaelic League premises - Craobh Ruadh - and, on my arrival, I met a number of

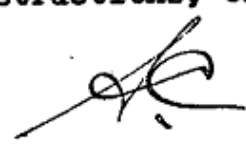


people, including some members of the Cumann na mBan, many of whom were to have travelled to Tyrone on Sunday or Monday. The situation was again discussed and, as no further orders or any definite information about the position was available, nothing could be done, except await events. The position in Belfast on this day was, apparently, normal, with no particular police or military activities noticeable. Later in the day, I learned that some of those who travelled to Tyrone on Saturday night had returned to Belfast, and that they conveyed the information that all the others in Tyrone were returning to Belfast that night. I was aware that an excursion of the Y.M.C.A. had gone from Belfast to Dublin on ~~Sunday~~ ^{Monday} morning. As I knew some of these people intimately, I decided to go to the station at the time the train was due back, and try and get information about the situation in Dublin. I was told that fierce rioting had broken out in Dublin, that the police had been withdrawn off the streets and that the military were on duty. This information was sufficient to show me that, at least, some of the Volunteers in Dublin had started the fight.



On getting this information I made my way again to Craobh Ruadh. I found there a number of Volunteers, principally men associated with the Gaelic League activities, and I conveyed to them the information I had got. I have the impression that some of the men in the Hall had the knowledge that the Rising had started in Dublin, previous to my arrival amongst them. As some of these men had heard from me that I was told that I would receive further orders, when my journey to Cavan was cancelled at Portadown station, I was asked if I had, in fact, received any further orders. The general topic of conversation was the hopeless position of doing anything in Belfast if action was decided on, seeing that all the arms and ammunition were left behind in County Tyrone. There was an attitude of recrimination and regret in connection with the return of the men from Tyrone, and I felt that, owing to this attitude and the late hour of the night, it was better to adjourn any discussion until the following day. I made a suggestion that all the men who were out at the week-end meet again early on Tuesday, and, in view of our knowledge of events in Dublin, decide what we should do.

I personally had the same feeling as had the men who went to Tyrone, that the orders both they and I received were not properly official, and that we should have proceeded on the original orders. I had been turning over plans in my mind from the time I heard that the Rising had started in Dublin, of ~~either Haskins or~~ ^{de} myself proceeding to Ballinagh, Co. Cavan, ~~on Tuesday~~ ^{de} ~~morning~~, as per original instructions, or sending a



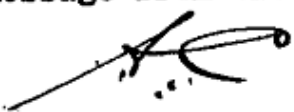
trustworthy courier to Tyrone to see if it was possible to get the Tyrone men to rise, and if so the Belfast unit would attempt to go there and take up their arms and join them.

On Tuesday morning I went, as arranged the night previous, to Craobh Ruadh and informed a small number of Volunteers who were there of my plans. They felt that the better plan was to send some person to Tyrone. I suggested that Haskins should be the man for the journey, and this was agreed to. I told Haskins to proceed on the earliest train to Coalisland and get in touch there with the leaders I had in mind as important at the time in County Tyrone, Dr. McCartan, Father O'Daly, and Denis McCullough if he was there. He was to return immediately to Belfast and report the Tyrone leaders' intentions.

I had at the time the idea in my mind that if the Tyrone men were willing to take action, the Belfast men should join them, and that Haskins and I would proceed to Ballinagh and endeavour to get the Cavan men out. It would be essential for our success in Cavan to be able to assure the Cavan men that Belfast and County Tyrone were out.

Haskins went to County Tyrone and later we heard that he was arrested in Dr. McCartan's house after his arrival there. This knowledge had the effect of convincing us that no further activities were feasible as far as our men were concerned. I believe the knowledge of Haskin's fate in ^{Tyrone} ~~Cavan~~ reached us on Wednesday.

On Tuesday afternoon a message from the British

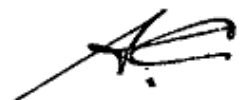


Military authorities was left for me at my home, that I was to report for duty at Wellington Place offices on Wednesday morning. Up to Good Friday I had been on duty at Bridgend offices, and I suspected that the change to Wellington Place resulted from the British authorities having knowledge of my activities over the week-end.

I reported, as ordered, to Wellington Place, and I found that two N.C.O's who had been on duty with me at Bridgend up to Friday were also there. They told me that they did not know why we were changed.

Some time after taking up duty at Wellington Place, the Secretary, Mr. John Ferguson (who acted in a civilian capacity as Secretary to the Recruiting Committee organised by the Lord Mayor of Belfast) arrived in the office. He came into the room where we were on duty, and told us that the office at Bridgend had been closed down temporarily until further notice, and that we were to report at Wellington Place for the time being. We were notified later that on the following Monday morning the Bridgend office would re-open and that we were to take up duty there.

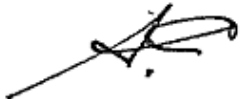
About Thursday morning I was placed under military arrest. I was shown a note I had passed into the Belfast Volunteer Headquarters during Holy Week, stressing the importance of field dressings and first-aid equipment. This note was captured by the military in a raid on the premises a few days later. As my signature was known to the military authorities I was immediately suspected. I was shown the note and asked if the signature was mine. I said it was like mine but that I would not admit it.



I was conveyed to Victoria Barracks, where I was placed in close confinement and remained so until the last week in June. I had no contact with any outside source while in Victoria Barracks. I knew nothing of what was happening, and got no information as to what was contemplated as far as I was concerned.

About the beginning of the last week in June I was visited by the Assistant Provost Marshal, who was known to me as I met him in France - Major or Captain McIlwaine. He told me that there would be action taken in my case at an early date.

On the 28th June I was taken before a Military Court presided over by a Major General, the Assistant Provost Marshal being also present. I was informed by the Major General that the Military authorities had made full enquiries into what he called "the mad week", as well as into my past record in the British Army, and had taken into consideration all the facts of my case. The conclusion arrived at was that I was innocently drawn into my part in the affair, and that my position as a soldier in association with rebels was most serious and could have very serious consequences. However, he told me that if I was prepared to give an undertaking to disassociate myself from all persons whom I knew or suspected were acting subversive to the Crown, a lenient view would be taken of my offences. He asked me if I was prepared to give such an undertaking. I agreed to do so. The Military escort was ordered to withdraw. I was handed a typed document containing the undertaking, which I signed. The Major General and another officer signed it as witnesses. He then produced another



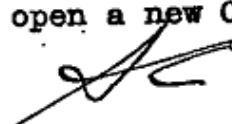
document, and said "This is the decision of the General Officer Commanding in your case". In effect it was that, subject to my signing the undertaking, I was to be released from Military custody and that I was to rejoin my Reserve Unit in Carrickfergus, where I was to resume my ordinary grade duties.

I resumed my military duties in Carrickfergus and served up to October, 1916, when I was discharged as medically unfit for military service.

From July, 1916, until October, 1916, I had association with the remnants of the Volunteers in Belfast. Those associations were during the periods of week-end passes, and occasionally when some of them came to Carrickfergus to see me. I could not associate with them openly, as I had previously, and the necessity for such open association did not arise, as the Units were disorganised and a lot of the Volunteers were arrested and interned.

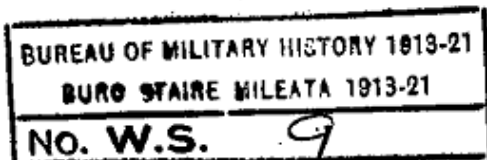
Soon after I got my discharge from the Army I attended a meeting of the Volunteers in the fields outside Falls Road area, for the purpose of ^{organising and} training. At this time the Volunteers were badly broken and disorganised and it became a question of Sections and Squads instead of Company formations. The men who attended those meetings or parades were the remnants of those who went to Tyrone and escaped arrest. In addition, well selected recruits from Fianna Éireann, the Gaelic League, etc., were admitted to membership.

About this time - late 1916 - the I.R.B. was re-organised, and Sean Gaynor was elected Head Centre for Ulster. He requested me to open a new Circle, which I



did.

As it may appear from the foregoing that I was one of the first of the Belfast Volunteers arrested, I would like to point out that the majority of the men had been arrested and interned prior to my being taken into military custody. A number of those who up to then had escaped capture were on the run and a few were arrested later. This closes my story for the 1916 period and its aftermath as far as my memory can serve.



Signature

Seán O'Sullivan

Date

23 Abrán, 1948.

Witnessed

John Meboy.

Date

23 Abrán, 1948.