

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 77



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Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 77

Statement by Harry Lorton,
57 Shandon St.,
Cork.

Dated: 5th December, 1947.

On: Formation of I.V., Cork,
1913.

Names of prominent persons.

4 pp. typescript.

File No. S.474.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF HARRY LORTON, 57, SHANDON STREET, CORK.

PERIOD: 1913 to EASTER, 1916. [?] Aug. 1914.UNITS: PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE, I.V., CORK.
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, I.V., CORK.
SUB. COMMITTEE OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

The small Provisional Committee, which organised the first public meeting for the formation of the Volunteers in Cork on 14th December, 1913, was in existence for some weeks before the meeting, and its members were selected mainly by Jerry Fawsitt. Fawsitt held high rank in the A.O.H. American Alliance and was in touch with that organisation in the United States. He aimed to make the Committee sponsoring the public meeting representative of the principal political parties as well as of the Gaelic League, the G.A.A. and of the smaller militant national groups.

The original members of the Provisional Committee, as far as I can recollect, were:-

J.J. Walsh Chairman.
Liam de Roiste.
Diarmuid Fawsitt.
Maurice O'Connor.
Tomás MacCurtain.
Tom Barry.
Harry Lorton.
Seán Jennings.
Diarmuid O'Donovan.
Patrick Bradley.
Daniel Enright.

The four first named above signed the cards of invitation which were issued for the public meeting. J.J. Walsh represented the G.A.A., being Chairman of the Cork County Board at the time. Liam de Roiste and Diarmuid Donovan represented the Gaelic League, Diarmuid Fawsitt represented the A.O.H. and the Irish Industrial Development Association, of which he was then Secretary. Maurice O'Connor and Daniel Enright were students at University College, Cork. Seán Jennings and Patrick Bradley were A.O.H. members. Tomas MacCurtain and Tom Barry would be representative of the I.R.B. and active national groups. No one in the group had any delegated authority from their respective organisations to act on the Committee or promote the meeting, in fact, the County Board afterwards hotly debated J.J. Walsh's action to which some of its members strongly objected; the position was that these men were selected because it was considered that they would be representative.

I was in the gallery in the City Hall on the night of the public meeting. When McNeill made the reference to the Ulster Volunteers, which was the signal for the hostile A.O.H. crowd present to attack the platform, I saw John Horgan get upon a chair and shout, "Come on, boys", waving towards the platform with a blackthorn stick which he carried. I rushed downstairs and up to the platform. I pulled Horgan down and got up on the platform. J.J. Walsh had then received a blow of a chair, and the other speakers had retired to a room off the stage. We cleared the A.O.H. group off the stage. They left the Hall. Some of the more timid of the audience had left also when the row began. The speakers returned to the stage and the meeting continued. Casement made his speech after the incident, but McNeill did not speak again.

After the public meeting all Volunteer activities were carried on in An Dún, Queen Street, for some time. Attendances at drills were small at first, but members gradually increased. Goodwin, an ex-serviceman, was the first drill instructor.

Soon after the public meeting the small Provisional Committee met in An Dun and co-opted a number of additional members. I do not think that Bradley, Enright or O'Connor acted on the Committee after the public meeting; if they did it was only for a very short time afterwards. The reconstructed Provisional Committee consisted, as far as I can remember, of the following:-

J.J. Walsh,	Chairman.
Tomás MacCurtain,	Secretary.
Seán O'Hegarty,	Recording Secretary.
Tom Barry.	
Harry Lorton.	
Seán O'Sullivan.	
Matt. Comerford.	
Jack Fitzgibbon.	
Paddy Corkery.	
Pat Ahern.	
Liam de Roiste.	
Tadg Barry.	
Sean Jennings.	
J.P. Lane.	
Seán Murphy.	
Tom Nash.	
Terence MacSwiney.	
Maurice Conway.	
Seán Ó Cuill.	
Diarmuid O'Donovan.	
Thomas Donovan.	
Denis O'Mahony.	
Jerry Fawsitt.	
Maurice Bulmer.	
Pat Harris.	

It was intended that this Provisional Committee would remain in office only as long as it would be necessary to build up some organisation and arrange for the election of a permanent Committee. I am unable to fix the date, but the election for what was known as the Executive Committee took place within a few months, and certainly before the large influx of Redmond supporters at the end of July, 1914. In this election every Volunteer who was attending parades and who had paid his subscription had a vote, and practically all of them exercised it. The Executive Committee so elected was, as far as I remember, as follows:-

J+J. Walsh,	Chairman.
Denis O'Mahony,	Vice Chairman.
Tomás MacCurtain,	Hon. Secretary.
Seán O'Hegarty,	Recording Secretary.
Liam de Roiste)	
Seán Jennings)	Hon. Treasurers.
Tom Barry)	
Jerry Fawsitt.	
Harry Lorton.	
Seán O'Sullivan.	
Matt. Comerford.	
Jack Fitzgibbon.	
Paddy Corkery.	
Pat Ahern.	
Tadg Barry.	
J.P. Lane.	
Seán Murphy.	
Tom Nash.	
Terence MacSwiney.	

Maurice Conway.
Seán Ó Cuill.
Diarmuid O'Donovan.
Thomas Donovan.
Maurice Bulmer.
Pat Harris.

In the meantime, competitions for Section Commanders had taken place, based mainly on proficiency in drill and control of men. This resulted in a number of changes, for instance, I had been in charge of a Company but was wiped out in the competition. Joe Reynolds took first place in the tests, but was not at all anxious to take the responsibility. Nine Section Commanders were appointed as a result of the tests, and, as the four City Companies gradually evolved, most of these men became the Company Officers. Some members of the Executive Committee held no rank, some were what was known as Associate Members, a few were Section Commanders. Only a small minority of the Company Officers were members of the Executive Committee. There was a Military Committee or Council, but I am not sure if the Company Officers were members of it or not.

After the Bachelor's Walk shootings the Redmondites came into the Volunteers in large numbers. There was a demand for more representation for them on the Executive Committee, and the Executive decided to accede to this demand. The following were then co-opted on the Committee:-

J.F. O'Riordan.
Thomas Byrne.
George Crosbie.
Captain Talbot Crosbie.

In July, 1914, Tom Nash resigned. There was an election by the Committee to fill the vacancy. The candidates were John J. Horgan, a Redmondite, and P.S. O'Hegarty. O'Hegarty was elected.

A number of Sub. Committees were appointed, e.g.

1. Military Council.
2. Equipment.
3. Band.
4. Finance.
5. Collections.

I suggested the formation of the Equipment Sub. Committee and was a member of it. Other members were Tom Barry, Matt. Comerford and Pat Harris. We were mainly concerned with the purchase of belts, bandoliers, caps, puttees and haversacks. I remember placing a contract with a man named Casey in Washington Street for 50 Irish leather belts at 1/2d each. The Committee usually purchased in bulk and were thus able to secure equipment at lower prices for the men. The men paid for their own equipment.

On the 4th August, 1914, the Cork Volunteers were to go to Skibbereen by train. I think a landing of arms was intended there next day. On the previous night I was in Fisher Street Hall when Tom Barker, an "Examiner" reporter, came in looking for the Chairman or Secretary. He had, he said, a very important message to deliver. I took him to J.J. Walsh's house at South Terrace. J.J. was not there. We went on to Tomás MacCurtain's house on the South Douglas Road. Tomás was not there, but Jimmy Walsh, his brother-in-law, came towards town with us to try and find him. Coming into town we met Tomas on the South Douglas Road. The message was given to him by Tom Barker there. It was to the effect that John Redmond had sent a telegram to Captain Talbot Crosbie that the arrangements for Skibbereen next day were cancelled. That meant that the landing of arms was off. We went to the G.P.O. where we saw J.J. Walsh and told

him the news. Both he and Tomás were very much disappointed.

The Volunteers had been mobilised for the Cornmarket next morning. It was at this parade that Captain Talbot Crosbie announced that he had made an offer of the Cork Corps Irish Volunteers to the British War Office in the event of war. I do not think either Tomás MacCurtain or J.J. Walsh were present that morning. There was no discussion of any kind; Crosbie merely made the announcement and we were marched down to Beaumont where Lord Carbery was giving a display with an aeroplane.

Crosbie's action was considered at a Committee meeting during that week. It was decided that it was an indiscretion and that he had no authority to make any such offer. The Committee was overwhelmingly against any policy which would result in the Volunteers becoming a part of the British forces, or joining the British forces individually. They were well aware, however, that a majority of the Volunteers were supporters of Redmond and would be likely to follow whatever line of action he proposed to them. During the month of August, after the declaration of war, the Committee strove hard to avoid a split in the ranks, but, in spite of their efforts, it came on the 30th at a meeting in the Cornmarket. About 60 men remained on the side of the Committee, the remainder followed Redmond's lead. In the Committee itself there were only four supporters of his policy - the four who had been co-opted as representatives of the A.O.H.

The Committee ceased to function as a Committee after the split. Numbers of Volunteers were very small, and the whole organisation had to be rebuilt. Control and direction of the movement from that point onwards were in the hands of the Officers.

SIGNED: Harry Roxton
DATE: 5.12.49

WITNESS: Florence O'Donoghue

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