

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 90



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ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ATHA CLIATH,
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 90.

Statement by: Con Collins,
1, Redemption Road,
Cork.

Dated: 30th December, 1947.

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CORK STAIRS WILENTA 1913-21

No. W.S. 90

STATEMENT OF MR. CON COLLINS,
1, REDEMPTION ROAD, CORK.

PERIOD: EARLY 1914 TO MAY, 1916.

UNITS: CORK BRIGADE I.V.
"D" COMPANY, CORK CITY I.V.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Cork early in 1914. The Headquarters was then in Fisher Street, and drilling was taking place there. There was then one paid Instructor (Sergt. Major Donovan) and two voluntary Instructors, one named Lane, who had been in the Royal Engineers, and another whose name I don't remember; he worked in Suttons. Sergt. Major Donovan had to relinquish his post after the Redmond Split, otherwise he would have lost his Army pension.

In June, 1914, the strength of the Cork Corps was approximately 400. It had not varied very much from the start, and did not vary much up to the time the Redmond followers came with the Organisation. When they came in the total numbers in the City ran to over 2,000, and in a protest march through the city after the Bachelor Walk Shootings (26th July, 1914) it was estimated that 3,000 men took part. Many of these, however, were not active Volunteers, either before or subsequently.

The City Volunteers were organised into four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D', on a territorial basis. This four Company organisation existed from the start and was continued when the Redmond followers came in. They were absorbed into the existing Companies. After the Split the four Companies were still continued, although very weak numerically. They had, of course, regained considerable strength by Easter, 1916, but for a time after the Split they were only skeleton Companies.

I do not think any Battalion or Brigade organisation existed up to the end of 1914. It was only in 1915 that intensive organisation began, and from July of that year Terence MacSwiney was whole time organiser. I did organising work and drilled Volunteers on Sundays at the end of 1915 and early 1916 in the following places:- Bealnablath, Earnane's, Macroon and Clondrohid. There were small Companies established at these points at that time.

At Easter, 1916, the Officers were:-

Brigade O.C.	Tomás MacCurtain.
" Vice O.C.	Terence MacSwiney.
" Q.M.	Seán Murphy.
" Adjutant.	Seán Nolan.
City Battalion O.C.	Seán O'Sullivan.

I cannot recollect if there were any other Battalion Officers.

whose duties took him into the Military Barracks, used to purchase and bring out small arms and ammunition from the barracks.

I was present at the meeting in the Cornmarket on 30th August, 1914, but I could not say what the total number on parade was. Only a small section of those present decided against following Redmond's leadership. I had no previous knowledge of what was going to happen at that meeting and I do not think other officers or men had any idea either. I was a Section Commander at the time. Many Volunteers who would have voted against Redmond's policy were absent from the parade.

The issue was forced at that particular parade because Captain Talbot Crosbie read a copy of a telegram he had sent to John Redmond offering the services of the Cork Volunteers to the War Office. I imagine he had pre-arranged that with the Redmond representatives on the local Volunteer Committee. The position was, therefore, created at that parade that the Volunteers had either to agree or to repudiate Crosbie. Crosbie spoke on behalf of his supporters and Tomás MacCurtain on behalf of the dissentients. I do not remember that anybody else spoke. Tomás MacCurtain expressed indignation that Crosbie should have taken it upon himself to make such an offer without consultation with the Committee and he repudiated Crosbie's action. The division was taken by a show of hands. I do not know the numbers voting on each side but the majority for Redmond was overwhelming. Captain Talbot Crosbie had been introduced to us as our Commanding Officer at a parade at Minane Bridge some time before the outbreak of the European War (August, 1914).

The strength of 'D' Company went down to 25 after the Split. I don't think we had any rifles at that time; it was later that the Howth guns were distributed.

The National Volunteers continued to use the Cornmarket, and early in 1915 the Irish Volunteers moved from Fisher Street to the Hall in Sheares Street. The Companies were growing stronger again and we had good financial support from a few well-off sympathisers.

At Easter, 1916, there were about 120 men on the roll of 'D' Company. We tried to mobilise everyone for Easter Sunday. The following paraded:-

Christopher O'Gorman,	Captain.
Con Collins,	1st Lieutenant.
Fred Murray,	2nd Lieutenant.
Liam Rabbett,	Adjutant.
Daithi Cotter.	
Harry Lorton.	
Michael Cronin.	
Jerome Mullane.	
Dan Foley.	
Con O'Connell.	
Tom Murphy.	
Cornelius O'Brien.	
Pat Mahony.	
Richard Carroll.	
Jeremiah Hartnett.	
Eugene O'Callaghan.	
Christopher McSweeney.	
Joe O'Shea.	
Jack O'Shea.	
Peter Hogan.	
John Keyes.	
Walter Furlong.	
Paddy O'Sullivan.	
Daithi O'Sullivan.	

John Murphy.
Denis Mahony.
Pa Murray.
Martin Donovan.
Tom Twohig.
Tadg Barry.
Andy Murphy.
Tom Baldwin.
Dominic O'Sullivan.
Dan Healy.
Con O'Callaghan.
Seán Kenny.
Con Twomey.
Michael Bowles.
Liam Murphy.

I did not myself know that this was to be anything more than a week-end parade, similar to others we had had previously. But an indefinite rumour got round on Saturday night that something serious was contemplated and this resulted in many not turning up. No official advice to go to Confession was given but I got a friendly intimation from Fred Murray.

On Easter Sunday we paraded at the Hall in Sheares Street. As we moved off towards the city on the way to Capwell Station, 'D' Company was in rear of the column and I marched behind my Company so that I was the last officer in the column. I was Lieutenant of 'D' Company. When I was about twenty yards from the Hall, after we had moved off, a stranger stepped off the footpath and asked if I was a Volunteer Officer. I said I was. He then said, "I'm from Headquarters - from McNeill. I have an urgent message from MacCurtain. Where is he?" I turned round and saw MacCurtain standing with Fred Murray in front of the cyclists who were drawn up opposite the Hall. He was either speaking to Fred or addressing the cyclists at the time. I pointed MacCurtain out to the messenger and told him MacCurtain would be leaving soon as there was a car waiting for him. The messenger went towards MacCurtain and I went on to overtake the column. I did not see the messenger's car. All the Officers and men had by this time left Sheares Street Hall, with the exception of MacCurtain, MacSwiney, Fred Murray and the cyclists. I did not see MacCurtain or MacSwiney at Capwell Station.

I understood we were to detrain at Crookstown and march to Macroom, picking up on the way the men I had been drilling in that area. When we were forming up after leaving the train at Crookstown, Tomás MacCurtain arrived in a car. I saw him speaking to Seán O'Sullivan, but I did not see Terence MacSwiney. It was stated afterwards, I don't know with what truth, that Tomás and Terry decided to let the parade go on as an ordinary exercise rather than to bring the men back into the Hall.

My half-Company was the rearguard on the march to Macroom. At South Kilmurray R.I.C. watched us pass from the Barrack door and one policeman was detailed to follow us. He followed for a few miles and halted when we halted. My orders were not to allow any uniformed man to pass the rearguard, and one of my Section Commanders wanted to use his bayonet on this policeman. Two Volunteer Cyclists from Courtmacsherry overtook us between Crookstown and Coolcower and joined the column.

Fred Murray and his Cyclist Company overtook us at Coolcower and Fred reported to Seán O'Sullivan, who was O.C. of the whole column. Afterwards Fred came back to me and told me ~~that the exercises had been cancelled~~ that everything had been called off.

W. Colles

There was a meeting of Officers at Macroom, but I was not present. I think only the Company Captains were. After the meeting Sean O'Sullivan spoke to us and told us the exercises had been cancelled. He said it was the intention to go to Carriganinna, where other men were to meet us, but that owing to the downpour of rain no arrangement could be made for the men to camp out that night; it might endanger the health of the men who would be required for more important work later on; consequently, we would go back to Cork by the next train.

On Easter Monday we were ordered to stand to at home. I went to the Hall some time during that day and there was considerable confusion. None of the Senior Officers was there. The message from Dublin had come: "We start here at noon to-day". I think Pat Trahey got it, but no senior officer had been contacted about it. Some Volunteers from Ballinadee came in. There was considerable discussion which went on until late on Monday night. Donal Og O'Callaghan appeared to be heading the group who wanted to take action.

I am not sure if it was on Monday night or on Tuesday that Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney decided they would remain in the Hall and defend it if an attempt was made to arrest them. A guard had been maintained in the Hall at night for some time before Easter Week, each Company furnishing the guard in its turn, but on the Monday or the Tuesday of that week Tomás MacCurtain called for Volunteers for a special guard. I volunteered and so did some members of my Company and some Volunteers who had only recently joined up. They were country lads, working in the city. Tomás asked if there were any more Volunteers and then ordered everyone else to leave the room. He then put me in charge of this special guard on the Hall and said I was to press gang enough men to bring it up to 25. He said that Terence MacSwiney and himself expected that an attempt would be made to arrest them; that they intended to stay in the Hall at night and did not propose to allow themselves be arrested. He told me where they intended to sleep in a small room upstairs, and said we would defend the Hall against any attack. I was to take over duty at 10 o'clock each night and the Hall was to be cleared at that hour. He told me to consult Seán O'Sullivan about the dispositions of the guard, and to see what arms and ammunition were available.

I got 25 men together and maintained this guard every night that week from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. The ordinary Company guard was on duty also, and the special guard was all in one room. The men slept on the floor in their periods off duty. This guard was armed with rifles and shot guns, but we had only a very limited supply of ammunition. A pile of empty lemonade bottles was kept handy for use as missiles. There was no guard in the day time. Volunteers retained their arms at home after their return from Macroom.

I think it was on Monday night of Easter Week that the Bishop intervened, and on the following Monday the meeting was held to consider the question of surrender of arms. There was a large number of men present at the meeting and opinion was divided. Eventually the question was put to a vote and the majority decided in favour of giving the arms into the Lord Mayor's custody. All the arms were not given up and many of the serviceable weapons were retained.

On the Tuesday or the Wednesday of the week after Easter Week I was arrested at my place of employment, Maddens in Bridge Street, by a Sergeant Kennedy and a constable with a drawn revolver. Kennedy, whom I knew well through business, told me ten others were being arrested, that the Kents had put up a fight that morning and shot a Head Constable. I was brought to Cork Jail and handed over to Governor O'Connor. There were eleven arrests: Tomás

MacCurtain, Seán Nolan, Donal Óg O'Callaghan, Fred Murray, Chris. O'Gorman, Cornelius Murphy, Seán MacCurtain, James Murphy, Patrick Trahey, Daithi Cotter and myself. Terence MacSwiney was not amongst the eleven. We were only a short time in the Jail when the Bishop intervened. He told Captain Dickie, the British Army Intelligence Officer, that he had broken his agreement that there would be no arrests in Cork and we were released. I was not arrested in the general roundup that followed.

I had no knowledge before Easter, 1916, of what the plan of action for the Cork Brigade was. After we came back from Macroom I was told that the intention had been to go on through Carriganinna to Millstreet and contact the Kerry men from whom we were to receive the arms for distribution.

MacCurtain and MacSwiney had anticipated that confusion was likely to arise in the sending of orders from Dublin and both of them had gone to Dublin frequently before Easter, 1916. Three months before Easter they had got a decision that no order was to be obeyed except one signed by MacNeill. I do not know on what date either of them made the last visit to Dublin before Easter.

~~It was I who brought Tomás MacCurtain into the Blackpool Branch of the Gaelic League in 1901 or 1902. I had been approached by his brother Seán, and, as a result, introduced Tomás to the Blackpool Branch.~~

It was in the Blackpool branch of the Gaelic League that Tomás MacCurtain had his first connection with the national movement for freedom

SIGNED: *Coimínín & Corleary*

DATE: *30. 12. '47*

WITNESS: *Florence O'Donoghue*

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