

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 123

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM MULLINS, 55 MOYDERWELL,
TRALEE, CO. KERRY.

PERIOD: 1911 to MAY, 1916.

UNITS: FIANNA EIREANN, TRALEE SLUAGH,
I.R.B. TRALEE,
IRISH VOLUNTEERS, TRALEE CORPS.

W.S.
123.

I was a member of Fianna Eireann from the time the organisation was started in Tralee about 1911. Those who were responsible for the start included Michael Fleming, Jim Galvin, Michael O'Connor and Vincent O'Connor. Tralee was organised in one Sluagh, having a strength of about 30 boys at the early stages. Chris. Falvey was in charge then. The boys were given lectures in Irish history; on Sundays scouting expeditions and marches were carried out, and week-end camps were held at places convenient to the town. Joe Melinn taught us step dancing and many of the boys competed at Feiseanna.

The organisation remained unchanged until after the start of the Volunteers. Strength had in the meantime increased somewhat; membership numbered between 40 and 50 at the end of 1913. When Volunteer Companies were organised in the town the Fianna was split up so as to allocate a Sluagh to each Company, and that continued to be the position down to Easter, 1916. A Sluagh had been in existence in Listowel before the formation in Tralee.

In 1915 I was transferred from the Fianna to 'A' Company, I.V. 'A' Company had then a strength of about 150 men. This was reduced somewhat by the Split in the Autumn of 1915, but not very much.

After the Split I was taken out of 'A' Company and put in charge of the Cycle Corps, replacing Alfred Cotton who had been O.C. up to then. He went out as an organiser in the County at that time. The Cycle Corps consisted of about 25 men drawn from the three town Companies. The Officers, from the time I took over to Easter, 1916, were:-

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| William Mullins, | Captain. |
| Jack McGaley, | 1st Lieutenant. |
| Maurice Switzer, | 2nd Lieutenant. |

A tribute that should be paid to these 25 men is that every one of them stood fast at the Split; not a single man went over to the Redmondites. It was they who were detailed as a guard on the rifles of the Tralee Corps after the Split. The rifles were stored at the time at the back of Burns' Hotel in Ashe Street (then Nelson Street). Soon after the Split that system was discontinued, the rifles were distributed to individual men who thenceforward kept them at their homes or in other secure places.

The Cycle Corps paraded and trained as a separate unit. Usually it led in all parades of the Tralee Corps as a whole, or when it combined with other Companies for parades. Training of the Cycle Corps was directed mainly to attaining proficiency in protection duties, to advanced scouting and rear guard actions.

The Cycle Corps also operated the despatch service. In the early days before Companies were fully organised in many parts of the County this meant long cycle journeys. I organised lines of communication and an efficient despatch-carrying service to all Companies in the County as they developed. Tests were carried out periodically to determine the time taken for delivery of messages to any Company. The system was pretty good, mainly because the men were very willing and would start out on a long journey at any time of the day or night if necessary. Most of the work was done at night and on Sundays, but a man would get off from work if necessary in an urgent case. When Companies in the County became fully organised we worked from Tralee to the nearest Company only, their despatch riders then becoming responsible for the carrying of the message to the next Company on the route.

One night, shortly after the Split, Austin Stack and I went for a walk. He probed my willingness to become a member of a secret oath-bound society, and I readily agreed. I became a member of the I.R.B. in Stack's circle. There were ten members, all Volunteers, but from different Companies. By the end of 1915 I had myself organised a circle of which I became centre about that time. There were, I think, nine members - we were not allowed to have circles larger than ten - seven of these I had recruited myself, two were detailed or transferred to me. All were Volunteers. One man had to be sworn out of my circle before 1916 because he became too talkative.

I attended one District meeting of centres early in 1916 in Tralee. This was the only meeting of its kind at which I was present. There were eight or nine at the meeting. I do not remember who presided; it may have been Stack. The meeting was engaged on ordinary I.R.B. business. I do not know what the I.R.B. position was in the County outside Tralee.

Seán MacDermott gave a lecture in the Rink at Tralee about November, 1914. Shortly after this, Seán McGaley and I cycled through Castleisland to Brosna where we met Austin Stack by appointment. Stack drove there on a side car, collecting Dan Mahony and Con Brown at Castleisland on the way. A meeting was held at Brosna and a Company of Volunteers formed. McGaley and I put them through some drill. On the following Sunday McGaley and I went out again but no one turned up. We had to continue going out on Sundays until the Company got its own Officers.

Not long before Easter, 1916, Paddy Cahill told me it was the intention to bring a cargo of arms into Fenit Pier on Easter Sunday; that a general mobilisation of the Volunteers was to take place (I took that to mean a general mobilisation of the Kerry Volunteers); that the Volunteers were to march to Fenit, unload the ship and distribute the arms to Cork and Limerick. I had seen two large lamps in the Rink; they were, I think, of the acetylene type, and it was my curiosity about their intended use that made me enquire

from Cahill what they were to be used for, and which resulted in his giving me the information mentioned above. Cahill made no mention of a Rising, or of any other activity in this connection.

About three weeks before Easter, Austin Stack made an appointment with me to cycle to Castlegregory with him one night. We went out after dark and went to Spillane's (now Maurice Fitzgerald's) hotel. Stack left me there, went away alone and came back later in the night. He told me after he returned that he had been looking for a pilot for the ship that was bringing the arms. He said he had made arrangements for a pilot to take the ship into Fenit Pier, but did not tell me the name of the pilot. We stayed in Castlegregory that night and returned to Tralee next day.

Some time in the afternoon of Holy Thursday, Paddy Cahill sent me to Fenit to find out if there was any foundation for the rumour which he said was current in Tralee that there was a strange boat in the bay. I had not heard any such rumour myself. I went to the pier at Fenit and spoke to three or four men who were there. None of them had any information of a strange boat being in the bay. It was before nightfall when I was there. There was a Coast Guard Station at Fenit then, and my recollection is there was a party of Marines also. I came back to Tralee and reported the negative information to Cahill.

About 6.30 p.m. on Good Friday Cahill sent for me and told me that Stack, Collins and Casement had been arrested. A Dominican, Father Ryan, had brought out a message from Casement who was in the R.I.C. Barracks. Cahill instructed me to go to Dublin on the 7 o'clock train, via Limerick, to go to Liberty Hall, but he did not specify any particular person there, and to report verbally that Casement, Collins and Stack were under arrest, and that Casement had sent a message to the effect that "Germany was supplying arms only and no men." I had then no knowledge of an intended Rising, and no message relating to the Rising was given to me or conveyed by me. Cahill told me that he was sending Partridge also to Dublin via Mallow with the same message as I had.

I left Tralee on the 7 o'clock train on Good Friday night. When I reached Limerick Junction I saw Partridge, whom I knew well and who knew me, on the train, but we did not speak and travelled in different compartments. We arrived in Dublin about 4.30 a.m. and both of us walked to Liberty Hall, but not together. We met at the doorway. Partridge knocked, gave the password and we were admitted. There was a uniformed guard of Citizen Army men on the ground floor, armed with rifles and revolvers. We were brought upstairs to a large room on the first floor where there were 60 or 70 men. Cartridges were being filled. Partridge got in touch with some one he knew. The result of his enquiries was that we were told James Connolly was not to be disturbed under any circumstances.

From the time we entered Liberty Hall I followed Partridge's lead. Resulting from some consultations Partridge had with others in the Hall, messengers were sent out calling a meeting for, I think, 10 a.m. Partridge told me nothing could be done until 10 a.m. We got some food and waited. I saw Tom Clarke arrive at the Hall. About 10 a.m. Partridge came to me and I was brought into a room where Connolly, Pearse, Tom Clarke and three or four others that I did not know were seated. Partridge had been in before me but he was not present

when I gave my verbal report. I was told to wait, and came out of the room. Half an hour later Partridge and myself were called in. Pearse said, "There will be no change in the original plans". I left the room then and was down in the hall when I heard my name called. I went back and Pearse was standing at the head of the stairs. He asked me what my own intentions were. I said I did not know. He then said, "You are to get back to Kerry immediately", and asked me what time there was a train. I said there was a train at 3 o'clock and that I would travel on that.

When I arrived in Tralee station on Saturday evening there were R.I.C. men on the platform. About 50 Volunteers came into the station at the double as the train steamed in and escorted me to the Rink. We felt sure I would have been arrested if they had not been present. Cahill was at the Rink, so was Monteith. This was the first time I had seen him. Cahill introduced me to Monteith and to both of them I gave the verbal message from Pearse.

I slept in the Rink that night. There was an armed guard on. I went home on Sunday morning and later paraded with my Company at the Rink about noon. We stayed in the Rink all day on Sunday and on Sunday night. There was then a general expectation that something serious was going to begin. I saw one case of a civilian turning up to take part in whatever was going on. He was given a rifle.

During the day on Sunday parties of Volunteers from the Dingle Peninsula came into the Rink. I had no idea of what action was contemplated. No orders were issued to me. I do not know what plans existed for the distribution of the arms or for dealing with the British Forces in Tralee and Fenit. I have no recollection of how the cancellation order came. The Dingle men went home on Monday. The guard was maintained on the Rink during the week. The Companies mobilised there each night.

On the Saturday of Easter Week Terence MacSwiney was in Tralee in reference to the question of surrender of arms. Next day Cahill and I went to Caherciveen to recommend the surrender there on whatever conditions had been agreed upon. I do not remember what the conditions were. Between Glenbeigh and Killorglin coming back we were held up by armed police. Cahill produced a pass which he had and we were allowed to proceed. In Tralee some old arms were surrendered but serviceable weapons were retained.

In the following week there were several arrests in Tralee. A party of prisoners under military escort were being marched through the town from the police barracks to the Jail. I saw a woman get in front of them, waving a Union Jack. I saw red. I jumped in front of the Officer leading the escort, grabbed the flag from the woman and tore it in shreds.

I was arrested next day and taken to Tralee Jail where the other prisoners were. We were all taken to Richmond Barracks, Dublin, by train, and from there to Wakefield and Frongoch. I had a trip to London to appear before the Commission, but, apart from this, I was in Frongoch until the general release at Christmas, 1916.

An article "Kerry was Prepared and Ready" appears under my name in "Kerry's Fighting Story" (The Kerryman, Ltd., Tralee, 1937). I wish to state that where anything in that article conflicts with the foregoing statement made for the Bureau of Military History, this statement is to be taken as the authoratative document. I have had, since the publication of the article in question, opportunities of checking many points in connection with the matters to which it refers, and I am satisfied that my present statement represents all the facts within my knowledge as fully and accurately as I can recall them.

SIGNED: William Mullins

DATE: May 4th 1948.

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