

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 223

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 223.....

**Witness**

Mr. Robert C. (Rory) Haskin,  
12 Glen Crescent,  
Andersonstown, Belfast.

**Identity**

Member of  
Freedom Club;  
Irish Volunteers Belfast;  
I.R.B. Belfast.

Drill Instructor, Irish Volunteers.  
**Subject**

- (a) National activities 1912-1916;
- (b) Preparations for Rising  
Easter Week 1916;
- (c) His arrest and imprisonment.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil

File No. S.1058.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

**ORIGINAL**

STATEMENT FROM RORY HASKINS, 12, GLEN CRESCENT,

ANDERSONSTOWN, BELFAST

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I was born into a Unionist family. In my early days I had no National ideals worth mentioning. I joined the Orange Order in 1912 (about the time the Ulster Volunteers were first organised), I also joined the Ulster Volunteers.

Shortly after I joined the Ulster Volunteers I met a man named Frank Wilson. Wilson was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I did not know this at the time I first made his acquaintance. He brought me into the Freedom Club. I think the premises used by the Freedom Club for lectures and meetings was in Victoria St. In the Freedom Club I met Denis McCullough, Frank Booth, Sean Lester, Ernest Blythe, Bulmer Hobson, Cathal O'Shannon, Joseph Connolly. Sean Kelly also attended and was, I think, then a member of Fianna Eireann.

When I joined the Freedom Club I was received wholeheartedly by the members of the Club. I was looked upon as a valuable convert to the Republican Cause. I had previous military experience in the British Army - about 6 years - and my knowledge of military affairs was looked on as a valuable asset. A few months after joining the Freedom Club, Sean Lester and Ernest Blythe proposed and had me initiated in the I.R.B. I attended meetings of the I.R.B. in McGuinness's buildings, Berry St. Denis McCullough was Centre of my Circle. When I joined the I.R.B. I did not know of any other Circle in Belfast but later on I learned that there was one or perhaps two other Circles operating in Belfast. Frank Booth later became leader of our Circle.

The policy of the I.R.B. in the early days of my membership was mainly an anti-recruiting effort against the British Army, and the effort to get the proper type of recruits for the I.R.B. The activities of the I.R.B. after I joined looked to me as rather futile. It, however, kept the members engaged in

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activities of good national endeavour. The selection of new recruits was a matter of extreme care. The credentials of new recruits was a subject for careful sifting of the character and background of the proposed member. The Freedom Club was used as a recruiting ground for the I.R.B. and a member of the Freedom Club was carefully watched and, if he was considered suitable, he was asked if he was willing to join the I.R.B. and, if so, was proposed and admitted on his subscribing to the I.R.B. oath.

The meetings of the I.R.B. were mainly taken up with discussing ways and means of furthering Republican principles in Belfast and the purchase of arms. I never saw the members of my Circle engaged in military drill.

When the Irish Volunteers were formed in Belfast the I.R.B. took a particular interest in the new organisation. The initiative in forming the Volunteers was taken in Belfast by the members of the Freedom Club. The first I heard of the formation of the Volunteers was at a meeting of the Freedom Club. I remember Sean Cusack, who was a Reserve Sergeant in the Royal Irish Rifles at the time, taking an active part in helping to get the Volunteers going. The Freedom Club premises were used at the start of the Volunteers for drilling and training of the Volunteers. Amongst the men active I remember Denis McCullough, Herbert Moore Pim, Archie Heron, S.... Dempsey, Sam Heron, Sean Dempsey, Seamus Cullen, Harry and Paddy Osborne, Sean O'Sullivan who was looked upon as the father of the Fianna, Cathal O'Shannon, Seamus Dobbyn, Liam Gaynor. There were a number of others whom I cannot at the moment remember. After the formation of the Volunteers there were formed 2 committees, one civil and the other dealing with military matters. I was a member of both Committees. As the military committee of the Volunteers was merely responsible for the training and equipment of the Volunteers, I also acted

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as military instructor. Sean Cusack was looked upon as the principal man in matters of training. When Cusack was mobilised in August 1914 I had to take over Cusack's responsibilities in the training of the men.. At the outbreak of the first World War the Volunteers were small in numbers, I would say 50 or 60 men was all we had in Belfast. In July 1914, after the shooting at Bachelors Walk, Dublin, we had a great rush of recruits. The shooting in Dublin seemed to have a great effect for the good of the Volunteers in Belfast as men here seemed to think, after it, that the position was becoming serious and that the purposes of the Volunteers was not mainly playacting. Making a guess of the numbers in the Volunteers at the time that Joe Devlin got his nominees on the Council of the Volunteers in Belfast I would say that there were about 100 men enrolled. The men at this time in the Volunteers were a good type and they nearly all stuck to us when the split came later on.

When the followers of Devlin came into the Volunteers there was a great increase in recruiting activities. We had to open a regular recruiting office in Davis Street to deal with the influx of recruits. The two committees of the Volunteers met in Davis St. and St. Mary's Hall was used for drilling and training purposes. Tactical manoeuvres were regularly carried out in the country outside Belfast. After the Devlinite followers came in, about 150/160 Italian rifles came to Belfast. Those rifles were of no military use except for drill purposes. We succeeded in purchasing some Austrian Steyr from the Ulster Volunteers and we also succeeded in purchasing some Lee Enfield rifles from British soldiers. There were a good number of revolvers of various makes in the hands of the Volunteers, Smith and Wessons, Colts, etc. Ammunition was scarce for the revolvers.

In addition to our local ex-Servicemen engaged in training of the Volunteers, Captain White attended occasionally to give

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advice on training and other military matters. An Englishman, Capt. Barkley - came to Belfast and seemed interested in helping the Volunteers as a military body. This man's idea was probably the use that could be made of Volunteers to the British side in the war. He returned to England after a short time. J.J. O'Connell called to Belfast occasionally and gave lectures. The Boys' Hall, Falls Road, was used for training as also was the Willowbank Huts and Shawn's Park.

At a parade at Shawn's Park Joe Devlin presented colours to the Belfast Volunteers; I think the colours was a red hand on a blue ground. The parade numbered about 2,000 men. I was on the Colour Guard at this parade. The Colour Guard carried rifles and fixed bayonets. Sergt. Major Tully was i/c. of the Colour Guard. I was a ~~Company~~ <sup>COMPANY</sup> Commander at this time. Mr. Devlin made an impassioned speech at this parade, urged all Irishmen to give their aid to Catholic Belgium. This address of Mr. Devlin's created a great impression on a lot of the assembled Volunteers. It created, however, an unfavourable impression on the Republican elements as it was looked on that Mr. Devlin's speech was purely an effort to gain recruits for the British Army. This speech was the direct cause of the split in the Volunteers. The vital question became - what was the individual Volunteer to do - follow Devlin's lead or remain true to the principles of Republican founders of the Volunteers in Belfast. A meeting was held in each ~~company~~ <sup>COMPANY</sup> to debate the question and 75% of the Vols. on an average in the Companies voted for following Redmond's lead. There was a meeting held in St. Mary's Hall to decide this question. I did not attend this meeting as I was so sick of the effects of the split that I had no interest in attending. Just before the split occurred I was working in the Belfast Corporation Gas Department. I found that I suddenly was treated as an ostracised person by my Orange fellow workers and I was sacked from my employment. I never got back to this job.

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After the split was a period of reorganisation of the remnants that remained loyal to the Irish Volunteers. It was slow, disheartening and heartbreaking work to try and rebuild the fabric which remained. The National Volunteers also reorganised their elements and as far as I can remember did not openly give our efforts at reorganisation any serious opposition. After the reorganisation we used the Willowbank Huts for drills and used roads and country for tactical manoeuvres. Sean Cusack was called away about this time for service in France. Cusack gave very loyal and valuable service whilst he was available to the Volunteers in Belfast. Padraig Pearse came to St. Mary's Hall, Belfast, and gave a fine oration in St. Mary's Hall. Eamon de Valera also came twice to Belfast; one meeting was held in St. Mary's Hall and the other in Davis St. The meeting in Davis St. was broken up by the R.I.C. and many volunteers got injuries from the police attack.

About a year before 1916 I got work in the Belfast Shipyard. I lost this job after a time and travelled to Tyrone. I saw Dr. McCartan at Carrickmore in Tyrone. I stayed a week there. I then went to Donegal for a few days and then returned to Belfast. On my arrival in Belfast I met Sean Cusack at Willowbank Huts and he inquired where I had been. There was feverish activity in Belfast. Cusack told me that word had come that the Rising was imminent. Amongst those at the Hut on my arrival were Archie Heron, Seamus Dempsey, Sean Kelly, Peter Burns and, I think, Denis McCullough. Peter Burns was put i/c. as Military O/C. of the Belfast Volunteers. P.J. Ryan was also there and, I understand, held some important position in the . . . which I don't remember had been defined to me. Cusack took me on one side and told me that I was to go along with him personally as I was to help him to take charge of a Cycling Corps whose duty it was holding a line to the Shannon. At this time the locality of our operations was not explained to me.

*on drums thought I believe, now  
from the Gaiety Street building was in 1917.*

*R. C. H.*

*R. C. H.*

On Saturday Cusack and I took trains in Belfast. I had not even then been informed where our destination lay. There was a number of other Belfast Volunteers with us on train going to Coalisland in Co. Tyrone. When we arrived at Portadown Station at 9 p.m. we got word that the ~~base~~<sup>MOBILIZATION</sup> was countermanded by Eoin MacNeill. Cusack and I discussed the matter of the countermanding orders. We were for a time undecided as to what we should do. I remember only that I then heard that a dispatch rider had arrived from Dublin with the countermanding orders. Cusack finally decided that he and I should go back and await further orders in Belfast. At the time we left the carriage in Portadown to get back to Belfast, the other Belfast contingent travelling to Tyrone were still on the train and they proceeded on their journey.

When we arrived back in Belfast we proceeded to our homes. I don't remember any activities in Belfast on Sunday; everything was very quiet. On Monday we kept in touch with each other. I remember calling on Cusack at his place of residence. On Tuesday or Wednesday Cusack told me to travel to Carrickmore and to call on Dr. McCartan and find out from the doctor his plans; the feeling of the men in Tyrone on the question of participating in the Rising and the possibility of the Belfast men co-ordinating with the Tyrone men in an effort to link up with some of the areas where military activities were taking place. I was also instructed to make particular inquiries as to how much effective arms and material were available in Co. Tyrone. Taking my field equipment which included a revolver and ~~arms~~<sup>ammunition</sup>, I proceeded to Carrickmore and eventually arrived at Barney McCartan's house. Barney was the doctor's brother. There I met Dr. McCartan's mother. I was only about a half hour there when a large raiding party of military and police arrived. They made an exhaustive search of the inside of the house, and the outbuildings including the turf stacked outside the house. I heard later that they got some revolvers in the turf stack. It seemed strange to

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me at the time that when the military arrived I was not questioned or searched by them. Their interest was principally concentrated on the house and outoffices. The military officer i/c. was particularly gruff towards old Mrs. McCartan. I remained on the premises until the raiders had gone away. The raid seemed to have lasted about 2 hours. When the raiders departed Mrs. McCartan, another lady and myself sat in the house and discussed the raid. Some time later Barney McCartan came into the house. We waited the arrival of Dr. McCartan who was expected to turn up after the raiders departed. I was anxiously awaiting his arrival to get my message to him and return as soon as possible to Belfast. It was around 9 p.m. when Dr. McCartan arrived in the house. I gave him my message and in discussing the matter I learned from him that the Tyrone men were so disappointed with the mix up in the plans that they would not be willing to take the field. He also stated that the men were not ~~properly~~ <sup>PROPERLY</sup> armed and equipped. He did not state what arms were available. He gave his opinion that matters should be allowed to remain as they were.

The last train had departed for Belfast when I had finished with Dr. McCartan. I was forced to remain in his mother's house for the night. I went to bed and fell asleep.

As I found out later, about 2 a.m. a party of military and police arrived at the house and proceeded to raid the premises again. I was awakened by them and sat up in bed with a flash light in my face. They asked me who I was and where I came from. One of them produced my jacket and inquired if it was mine. In the jacket he found a gun and ~~ammunition~~ <sup>ammunition</sup>. I was told to get up and dress. They searched the parcels I was carrying to Carrickmore and found my field equipment. I was then placed under arrest and handcuffed to an R.I.C. man. Around 6 a.m. I was put in a motor car with R.I.C. men and conveyed to Omagh Police Station. When I arrived in Omagh I was charged with being found in possession of arms, ammunition and military equipment. I have

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nothing to complain of the treatment I received. I asked for permission to send out for food which was granted. I remained in Omagh Barracks for some hours and was later removed to Derry Prison. I was told by the police in Omagh that on the first raid after I arrived at McCarten's house the police took me for a pedlar and did not think of questioning me.

I was over a week in Derry Prison. There was a lot of raids and arrests in Derry area and I should say that 40 or 50 Volunteer prisoners were taken in whilst I was there. This unfortunate fact helped to relieve the loneliness I first experienced when I arrived in the prison. I didn't know any of the prisoners except 2 boys from Derry City named O'Doherty. I don't remember any of the other's names. I should say that about 2 weeks after my arrest I and the other Volunteer prisoners in Derry were handcuffed in pairs, carried through the streets of Derry by a very large force of military and put on train for Dublin. An English Sergt. Major who was i/c. of our escort on the train gave instructions to his men that if an attempt was made by the prisoners to escape the soldiers were to shoot to kill. On arrival in Dublin we were marched to Richmond Bks. and handed over to the military guard there. We met a lot of Volunteer prisoners in Richmond from all parts of the country. In my room which accommodated about 30 men there were a lot of Co. Cork and Co. Kerry men. During our stay in Richmond Mr. Asquith paid us a visit. The food situation was bad; dirty vessels used for food; potatoes in rotten condition which hunger forced us to eat. After Mr. Asquith's visit, the food situation improved very much. Batches of prisoners were being shifted to England at regular intervals from the time we arrived in Dublin. After about a week we were removed to Wakefield Prison in England. Whilst in Richmond I heard that some of the leaders were being executed.

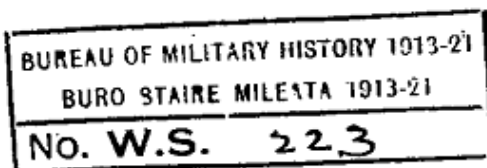
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After a short time - about two weeks - in Wakefield, we were removed to Frongoch Camp in North Wales. The Camp building was an old distillery. There I met the Belfast and Tyrone volunteers who had been arrested following the Rising.

In Frongoch when the Belfast and Tyrone men got together all the events of the days leading up to the Rising and the happenings of Easter Week were discussed. I was introduced to a number of Tyrone men in Frongoch and when I told them that I was informed by Dr. McCartan that they (the Tyrone men) were unwilling to take the field in Easter Week, they forcibly expressed their indignation of Dr. McCartan's version of their attitude and assured me that they were willing to take part in the Rising if there was an officer to lead them. I met in Frongoch a lot of men who were prominent in Easter Week, and others who became prominent later, Mick Collins, Terence McSwiney Austin Stack, Dick Mulcahy, Thomas McCurtain, Hales Brothers from Cork. A lot of our time was taken up in lectures, lessons in Irish, dancing, chemistry, architecture and other scientific subjects.

There was not, to my knowledge, whilst I was in Frongoch any inquiry into the actions of the men or leaders in the areas where the Rising proved abortive. Those matters were the subject of discussion amongst the men but never for the purpose of apportioning blame to individuals or areas where the mix up took place. In fact in areas such as Galway where some action took place, the events there during Easter Week were treated in jocular light even by the Galway men.

After a time in Frongoch release lists were issued and men periodically went home. I was not released until Christmas 1916.



Signed: Robert C. Hashin (Rory)

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> October 1948

Witness John McBoyle  
13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1948