

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 226

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.226.....

Witness

Mr. William J. Kelly (Senior)
1 Charlemont St.,
Dungannon, Co. Tyrone.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. Dungannon 1880;
" " Clan na nGael New York 1880-1883;
" " Irish Volunteers Dungannon 1914.

Subject

National activities prior to and
during Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. S.1263.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT FROM W.J. KELLY, SENIOR

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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I was born in March 1861 near Dungannon. I went to School in Dungannon and my class fellow there was Tom Clarke, 1916 leader executed after the Rising.

In the year 1880 I was initiated a member of the I.R.B. ^{WJK} Dungannon Circle. At this time there were 23 men enrolled in the I.R.B. in Dungannon and neighbouring districts. Tom Clarke was then Centre of Dungannon Circle of the I.R.B.+ Before 1880, as far as I know, there was no I.R.B. organisation in Dungannon.

Michael Davitt and John Daly, Limerick, had been in prison and released some time about 1879 when the monument to Daniel O'Connell was unveiled in O'Connell St. Dublin.

There was a Dramatic Club in Dungannon with which Tom Clarke and myself were associated and we both travelled with an excursion organised by the Club to Dublin for the unveiling of the monument. When in Dublin Clarke and I were introduced to Michael Davitt and John Daly who were in Dublin at that time but had nothing to do with the activities of the unveiling of the O'Connell monument. I don't now remember the hotel where we met or the name of the person who introduced us. I don't remember what discussion we had with Davitt and Daly in Dublin, but I am certain that the possibility of organising must have been discussed. A short time after the Circle was formed in Dungannon John Daly came to Dungannon and addressed the members of our Circle. Daly's address was concerned with the intensive organisation of the I.R.B. with the object of taking military action against the R.I.C., the drilling, training and arming of the members of our organisation for that objective. It was the intention at this time to get all young Irishmen of good character and trustworthiness into the organisation.

On the 15th August 1880 a parade of Ancient Order of Hibernians took place in Dungannon which led to a clash with the ^{WJK}

hostile Orange section of the population. A riot broke out. The R.I.C. arrived on the scene of the riot about 100 strong, a magistrate read the Riot Act, and the police opened fire on the Hibernians. A man named Hogan was shot dead and several wounded including a brother of mine. On the night of the 16th August 1880, 11 of the R.I.C. were ambushed in Irish Street, Dungannon by some members of the I.R.B. including Tom Clarke and myself - about 5 or 6 in all. We opened fire on the police and they escaped into a publichouse in Anne St. Reinforcements of police arrived on the scene and we had to retreat. There were a lot of men taken before the Courts in connection with the events of 15th and of the night of the 16th Aug. and a number were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of from 4 months to 12 months. There was only one member of the I.R.B. got sentenced as a result of those episodes. I don't remember his name.

About this time Tom Clarke had been an assistant teacher in St. Patrick's National School. The attendance in the school had gone down and Clarke lost his job as a teacher. In Sept. 1880, Clarke and I and a few others decided to emigrate to America. Previous to leaving for America we obtained a transfer from the Dungannon Circle of the I.R.B. to Camp No.1 Clan-na-Gael in New York (No.4 Union St.) We arrived in New York in October and called at Patrick O'Connor's, Chatham St., who was a member of the Clan-na-Gael. Patrick O'Connor introduced us to the members of the Clan na Gael Camp in New York. A man named James Connolly of Cavan was senior guardian of the Camp and Timothy Riordain was financial Secretary of the Camp. Shortly after our admission to the Camp Tom Clarke was appointed recording Secretary of the Camp. We both got employment with Patrick O'Connor in his Boot & Shoe Shop. In the Spring of 1881 we left O'Connor's employment and we went to work at an hotel in Brooklyn, New York, Clarke as a storeman and I as a boilerman. In the summer of 1881 we joined the Napper Tandy Club. Dr. Gallagher was the Club leader. The purpose of this Club was the instruction of its members in the use of

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explosives. I was not long a member of the Club when I had to leave my employment in New York and move to Garden City where my employer had opened another hotel. My connection was broken as far as attendance at meetings of No. 4 Camp and the Napper Tandy Club was concerned. I sent subscriptions regularly to both. After leaving New York I had some correspondence with Tom Clarke in which he informed me of the continuation of his lessons on explosives at the Napper Tandy Club under Dr. Gallagher.

I did not know before Clarke left for England of his journey there. The first intimation I received was the delivery to me by a man named Charles O'Neill - a native of Dungannon - of his trunk for safe keeping. Tom Clarke was arrested in England in 1883.

I returned to Ireland in 1883 and arrived here on the day that James Carey was shot on the boat going to South Africa.

After I arrived home I got in touch with Tom Clarke's sister who lived near Baldoyle, Co. Dublin. I sent her his trunk which I took from America. After I returned I heard that the Clann-na-Gael were taking another sister of Tom Clarke's to America. This sister's name was Maria Jane. I had some correspondence with the Clan as to their purpose in taking her out. I had the feeling that in Tom's absence I should look after his sister. I found that the Clan were getting employment for her in America. I travelled down to Clonakilty to see her. She was working there with a man named Mulcahy as a dressmaker. She later went to America and got employed there by a man named Conway.

When I visited Tom's sister in Clonakilty she did not know her brother was in prison as he had assumed the name Henry Hammond Wilson. At the time of Tom Clarke's arrest very few knew of his identity. The I.R.B. in Ireland did not know anything about it. The photograph of the prisoner was published in two American periodicals (Henry Redpath's Illustrated News and the New York Sun. Newspaper). Some of the people who knew Clarke

in America remarked the likeness of one of the prisoners to Clarke. Charles O'Neill, who sent his trunk to me, knew that Clarke had gone to England and when sending the trunk said in a letter to me that he believed he had gone there. As soon as I heard of the arrest in England and saw the photographs of the prisoners I knew Clarke was one of them. Immediately I arrived in Ireland I made representations for a visit to the prisoner Harry Hammond Wilson. The Home Secretary at the time was Sir Michael Hicks Beech. I was kept waiting over 9 months from my first application for a visit before I got to see him. I posed as his next of kin in Ireland and kept up contact with him through his prison governors.

When I returned from America to Dungannon I found that the I.R.B. organisation was non-existent. There was no effort made to revive it until Tom Clarke was released from prison about 1898. After his return from prison he lived off and on in Dungannon. He organised some circles of the I.R.B. in the locality, one in Dungannon, John McElvogue Centre, and another in Donoughmore where James McElvogue was Centre. Later on another Circle was started in Coalisland - James Tomney was Centre. Another one was organised at Ardboe - James Devlin was Centre of it. A Benburb Centre was organised with John Shields as Centre.

In 1915 Clarke came from Dublin with 37 Howth rifles and 1,000 rds. of ammunition. Those rifles were handed over to James McElvogue and myself with instructions they they should be handed over to the right men. Later I went to Dublin with James McElvogue, Patrick McGuirk and Charles Carbery and we were handed 2,000 rds. of ammunition for the rifles at Kimmage, Dublin.

The Irish Volunteers were organised in Dungannon District in the Spring of 1914. Roger Casement, Captain White and Denis McCullough visited the area and helped in their organisation. Bulmer Hobson and Sean McDermott addressed a meeting of

Volunteers in the Foresters' Hall, Dungannon.

When the Redmondite party joined up in the Volunteers there was a big increase in membership of the Volunteers from supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party, but when the split took place - due to Redmond's attitude when the 1914-18 war started - those men all left the Volunteers and the numbers in the Volunteers after the split were as they were previous to the Redmondites joining. A few of the Redmondites remained with us and some of our original members dropped out. The arms were under the control of the older men and nearly all were available for use when the Rising took place. Some of the arms in Dungannon were under the control of the Redmondite section in St. Patrick's Hall, Dungannon.

About mid Holy Week I and James Tamoney of Coalisland went with 2 motor cars to Belfast to remove a quantity of rifles and ammunition belonging to the Belfast Brigade. We picked up the rifles at the Falls Road. The rifles were given to us by Peter Burns and his men and packed in the two cars. The rifles were mostly Martini Carbines. The cars were loaded as much as it was safe to carry. I was in charge of one car and James Tamoney was in charge of the other. The rifles were handed over ~~to~~ near Coalisland to a man named, I think, Michael O'Neill at Tamoney's father's house, Ballinakelly. I knew by those preparations that a rising was about to take place and that the transfer of the Belfast rifles pointed to an early start.

On Easter Saturday 2 companies of the Belfast Brigade arrived in Dungannon by rail. They were paraded on the square and later marched to Coalisland around 10 p.m. I met Peter Burns who was i/c of the Belfast Volunteers and I escorted him some distance out in the direction of Coalisland. We got an order in Dungannon from James McElvogue of Donaghmore on Holy Saturday night to prepare for mobilisation on Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning we mobilised at Donaghmore where the arms were. On arrival in Donaghmore we took possession of our

arms and remained there until 2 p.m. when Denis McCullough and Herbert Moore Pim arrived by car. McCullough informed us that the Rising was called off by Owen MacNeill. The news which appeared in the morning papers had not then reached us. James McElvogue and William Hughes gave instructions to all Volunteers from Dungannon and Donoghmore to return to their homes. Some of the men took their arms home with them and others dumped the arms at McElvogue's place. James McElvogue, my son Tom and myself got a horse and trap and proceeded to Coalisland per orders given us by Mr. McCullough. When we arrived in Coalisland McCullough had the 2 companies of volunteers from Belfast paraded for a march to Cookstown to contact the 4 p.m. train to Belfast. During our stay in Coalisland a company from Belfast arrived in Coalisland. Those men had come off a train at Cookstown and travelled by a different road to Coalisland and so missed Mr. McCullough and the others marching to Cookstown. Shortly after the Belfast Volunteers from Cookstown had arrived in Coalisland a dispatch rider arrived from, I believe, Dundalk and read a dispatch from MacNeill calling off the Rising and also read cuttings from the morning papers. This dispatch rider also informed us that the Aud was captured. This ^{COMPANY} ~~camp~~ from Belfast made their way into Dungannon and contacted the 7 p.m. train for Belfast.

When in Coalisland Nora Connolly wished to be taken to Carrickmore to see Dr. McCartan and my son Tom volunteered to accompany her in a car to Carrickmore. They proceeded to Carrickmore and I understand Miss Connolly saw Dr. McCartan and had angry words with him over the obeying the countermanding orders. I heard this afterwards. My son Tom can, I am sure, give first hand evidence on this point.

On Easter Sunday night in company with John McElvogue I watched the station at Dungannon for the purpose of obtaining more information than we then had from travellers coming off the train. When the 12 midnight train came in we boarded it

and got off at Donoughmore. There we met James McElvogue and the 3 of us remained up in the Signal Box until daylight on Monday morning. I returned home on Monday morning.

On the following Tuesday we got an order by dispatch carried by Mr. James Dempsey of Belfast to mobilise again, with arms and equipment, proceed to Donoughmore to join up with the other companies and march to Carrickmore, 13 miles distant. This dispatch came from Dublin and must have been Pearse's re-mobilisation orders.

The idea in this movement was to proceed in the direction of the midlands by keeping south of the G.N. railway line via Clones and Ardee. The volunteers taking part in this march were from Dungannon and Donoughmore. William Hughes was 1/c. of the party. When we arrived in Carrickmore we failed to make contact with any of the local volunteers. We remained in Carrickmore to daylight on Wednesday morning. On Wednesday morning we made contact with a man named Grogan - a member of the I.R.B. - who told us that he had been in touch with Dr. McCartan who instructed him to order us home again and to secrete our arms. This order was obeyed. We arrived home early on Wednesday by a cross country route. We dumped our arms on our way home at Galbally. When we arrived in Donoughmore Fr. O'Neill, a curate in Donoughmore parish, asked us to take the arms into Donoughmore Chapel and hide them underneath the altar. His P.F. was Canon McCartan, a strong supporter of John Redmond's party. Fr. O'Neill said the arms would be safe there and he also said "what better relic could Canon McCartan have". As James McElvogue and myself did not trust the priests with the arms we objected and the arms remained in our own dump in Donoughmore. Those arms were handed over later to the I.R.A. for use in the Tan war.

I was arrested on the Friday following Easter Sunday. I was taken to Armagh Prison and then to Richmond Barracks.

Tom Clarke had been executed when I arrived in Dublin so I never saw him again.

In the summer of 1916 I was taken to Wormwood Scrubbs prison to appear before the Advisory Committee. When I was taken before them I asked them if I was standing my trial. They answered 'No', but that they would question me. I told them I would not answer any questions. I was then sent back to Frongoch. I was released from Frongoch at the General Release at Christmas 1916.

From 1917 I was active in the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and I.R.A. I was also active during the Tan War. I was arrested in 1920 and served 9 months between Derry Jail and Ballykinlar Camp.

All my sons were also active members of the I.R.A.

William John Kelly (Sen)
22/11/48

Witness
John Mahony.
22/11/48.

