

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 230

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Mr. John Southwell,
Newry,

Co. Down.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. 1903-21;

" " Irish Volunteers 1914;

" " I.R.A. 1919-21.

Subject

National activities 1903-1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY JOHN SOUTHWELL,
NEWRY, CO. DOWN.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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I joined the I.R.B. in Newry in 1903. An Edward McCann introduced the organisation into the town. I heard that McCann got instructions to start the organisation in Newry from a man named Patrick Dempsey from Belfast. This Pat Dempsey's son - Seamus Dempsey - was later prominent in the I.R.B. organisation in Belfast.

McCann, before he started to organise a circle in Newry, organised a circle at Tanderagee, Co. Armagh, amongst mill workers there. This circle had later to be disbanded as the members had no proper conception of the objects of the organisation.

Amongst the men who joined the I.R.B. in Newry were Joe Cavanagh, Bob Kelly, Patrick Campbell, Hugh Flanagan, Ned Mullen and George Cahill. Shortly after the circle was started Seamus O'Hanlon arrived in town from Dublin and got a pleasant surprise to find Newry linked up. O'Hanlon was, at this time, very prominent in the I.R.B. organisation in Dublin. He was a native of Lislea, Co. Armagh. He was a first class carpenter and worked in Dublin before 1903. He was a member of the Michael Dwyer Branch of the Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin which was a recruiting ground in Dublin for the I.R.B. When he came to work in Newry he devoted a lot of his time to furthering the organisation of the I.R.B. in the Newry district.

The Cumann na nGael was the forerunner of the Sinn Fein organisation and was spread over the whole country and had a central Executive in Dublin. There was a Branch of the Cumann na nGael in Newry in 1903. Some time after 1903 the Newry Branch got disorganised and Bulmer Hobson came to Newry and gave a lecture. A new club was formed to replace the Cumann na nGael Branch. This new club was named The (Young) Ireland Society. It had the same programme and objective as the

Irish S.O.S.
S.O.S.

Dungannon Clubs, then well-known in Belfast and other places in the north of Ireland. Its main activities were the study of the Irish language, classes for Irish dancing and lectures on historical subjects. Seamus O'Hanlon was one of the most active men in the Irish Ireland Society.

Paddy Rankin joined the I.R.B. shortly after the Newry circle was formed. He also joined the ^{Irish S.O.S.} (Young) Ireland Society. He was most active in all spheres of National endeavour, Irish Ireland activities, language, dancing, games, etc. Rankin went to U.S.A. and was closely identified with Joe McGarrity in Philadelphia. He joined an American militia regiment in Philadelphia in order to acquire military knowledge in training which he intended to use against the British forces in Ireland if and when the opportunity arose. He returned to Ireland about the time the 1914-1918 war started. After his return to Ireland he took a prominent part in organising the volunteers and was a very useful man for training. He also assisted in organising and training the Fianna in Newry.

I was appointed Secretary for the I.R.B. in Ulster in 1904. My work in this office was to get in touch with all the county centres of the I.R.B. and keep in touch with them through secret covering addresses. When it was necessary to get into personal touch with the county centres a meeting was generally held in Belfast - very often these meetings were held in Denis McCullough's house - to discuss matters pertaining to the organisation. Those meetings were held about every three months. Bob Kelly, Newry, was the local representative on the Ulster Council of the I.R.B.

Co. Armagh was not organised nor had the county any representation on the Ulster Council of the I.R.B. until close on 1916 when Tom O'Neill, Killeen, Co. Armagh, was appointed County Centre. ^{(Thomas) S.O.S.} ~~John~~ Arthur Hughes of Bessbrook was appointed I.R.B. organiser for North Armagh about this time. Outside Belfast and part of Co. Tyrone the organisation of the I.R.B. in ^{S.O.S.}

Ulster was poor in 1916.

In 1916 the organisations of the I.R.B. in Ulster were, as far as I can now remember, as follows:-

<u>County.</u>	<u>County Centre.</u>
Co. Derry	James Fox, Derry.
Tyrone	Seamus Curran - now Zion Mills, Co. Tyrone.
Donegal	... Linahan
Antrim	Denis McCullough
Down	Robert Kelly, 16 Mary St. Newry.
Cavan	?
Monaghan	?
Fermanagh	No organisation, to my knowledge
Armagh	Thomas O'Neill, Killeen, Co. Armagh

(I would like those names checked by Denis McCullough. He may be able to fill in the gaps and have a better recollection than I have on this matter).

I left Newry for Glasgow in 1906 and remained there for over 12 months. In Glasgow I joined the Eire Og Branch of the Cumann na nGael. This organisation was very strong in Glasgow. While there I was also linked up with the I.R.B. Just before I returned from Glasgow I was appointed a delegate, with John Kelly of Drogheda, by the Cumann na nGael Club in Glasgow to attend a conference of representatives of Cumann na nGael Clubs and Dungannon clubs to be held in Dundalk on 13th April 1907. We attended this conference. Delegates were present from Dublin Cumann na nGael branches. Dungannon Clubs were represented by Sean McDermott, Denis McCullough and Sean Lester Bulmer Hobson was also there. He had then recently returned from U.S.A. and a man named Judge, who accompanied Hobson from U.S.A., also attended at this convention. It was decided that the Cumann na nGael organisation and the Dungannon Clubs should be amalgamated and that the new organisation should be known as the Sinn Fein League. Arthur Griffith did not attend this conference. He was connected with the National Council of

S.O.S.

Sinn Fein and did not approve of the Cumann na nGael or Dungannon Club organisations. The policy of both those organisations was definitely Republican and at this time Griffith was not himself keen on the Republican idea.

An Executive of the Sinn Fein League was formed at the Dundalk conference. A hot discussion took place as to who should be appointed Chairman or President of the Sinn Fein League. I think P.T. Daly was appointed as he was a prominent member of the I.R.B. organisation and, if I don't make a mistake, was then Head Centre of the I.R.B. at this time.

Subsequently there was an Ard Feis of the National Council of Sinn Fein - Griffith's organisation - held in 11 Upper O'Connell St. Dublin. I attended this Ard Feis as a delegate of the Moira Branch, Co. Armagh. At the time the Sinn Fein League was started there was no great distinction made by people joining Sinn Fein League or National Council of Sinn Fein. Many Republicans were members of both organisations as I was.

Before the business of the Ard Feis started Sean McDermott came in and sat down beside me. Subsequently Arthur Griffith came in and by his manner when he saw Sean McDermott present I felt he resented McDermott's attendance. The late John Sweetman, Drumbaner Castle, Co. Meath, was moved to the Chair and presided at the meeting. The first motion on the agenda was a proposal by P.S. O'Hegarty - "The re-establishment of the sovereign independence of Ireland". When this motion was moved I noticed Arthur Griffith whispering to the Chairman. The Chairman stated he could not accept Mr. O'Hegarty's motion. The debate on the Chairman's ruling produced a very heated discussion with the result that after some time a delegate proposed that the Ard Feis adjourn for lunch and then resume the debate. After the resumption a compromise was effected by Mr. O'Hegarty agreeing to change his resolution to read "The

re-establishment of the national independence of Ireland".

After my return from Glasgow I did not leave Ireland again. I was still Secretary for the Ulster Council of the I.R.B.

In the years just previous to 1916 some organisation was done in the I.R.B. in South Armagh. This was mainly carried out by ^{Thomas (S-05)} John Arthur Hughes, High St. Bessbrook, around Camlough and Bessbrook areas. A man named Murphy did some organisation work in Castlewellan, Co. Down. Murphy got help in this work by a man named Johnston who, I think, was a Protestant. Down was poorly organised and only a few centres operated.

The I.R.B. took the principal part in organising the volunteers in Newry. At the start the number in the volunteers was small, about 20 men attended meetings and parades. Those 20 included the members of the I.R.B. circle in Newry and older boys from the Fianna. Training exercises were carried out at the Marshes, a G.A.A. sports field near the town. Countess Markievicz came to town and presented a flag to the Newry Fianna. The parade of the Fianna for the Countess created a great impression and helped in the matter of getting recruits for the volunteers. Liam Mellows also came to town and spent 3 weeks training the Fianna. I think Mellows' visit was some time in 1914.

About 1914 I was acquainted with a John Marron who was correspondence secretary of the Newry Division of the A.O.H. This man showed me an instruction he had from his head office in Dublin to the effect that men of his type should get interested in the volunteer organisation and attempt to obtain key positions in order to control the volunteers. I sent this information on to Sean McDermott. Later I heard from McDermott that my information to him had been confirmed by similar information he received from Co. Longford area.

S. J. J.

A meeting was held in St. Colman's Hall with the object of effecting the fusion of the Irish Volunteers and the National Volunteers. Father Frank O'Hare addressed the meeting. He warned the young men of Newry against what he described as a nefarious organisation known as the Clan na nGael of America. That was controlled by a man named Devoy. Fr. O'Hare, some time previously, had been in America collecting funds for the Newry Cathedral. John Devoy attacked him in the "Gaelic American" as a person who was attempting to spread dissension amongst the Irish Societies in America and that if Fr. O'Hare persisted in this work he should take off his Roman collar. After Fr. O'Hare spoke for some time in this manner he was interrupted and reminded word for word of what John Devoy had written about his, - Father O'Hare's - activities in America. Fr. O'Hare was very hurt that such matters should be brought up. The meeting broke up in disorder and disagreement. There was no attempt made to appoint a more representative corps of officers to take charge of the volunteers in Newry. A subsequent meeting was held in which it was decided that the Redmondite followers should come into the volunteer organisation and that the old existing officers should carry on.

Before those meetings the Redmondites had not joined in any great numbers the volunteer organisation. The original members were the I.R.B. and other non-I.R.B. men who held strong Republican views and were not connected in any way with the Irish Parliamentary party. After those meetings the Redmondite followers came into the volunteers. When the Redmondite followers in Newry started to join the volunteers there was an immediate and great increase in our numbers. On one occasion between 500 and 600 men appeared on parade in the markets. At this time all Nationalists organisations in town were represented in the Volunteers. We got a consignment of Italian rifles (obsolete) and after the arrival of those rifles a parade with rifles was held in the Marshes, Newry, and about 300 men carried rifles.

S. D. S.

The Newry Volunteers were organised in 5 or 6 companies. Each company was in charge of an ex-Serviceman for drill and training purposes. The individual companies were recruited mainly from members of the different clubs, such as the Foresters, The A.O.H. Workmen's Club, Independent Club, etc.

The split in the Volunteers occurred after Mr. Redmond's speech in Woodenbridge. Redmond's followers in Newry started to express their approval of the advice given at Woodenbridge and a sharp difference of opinion between the Republican section and Redmond's followers in the Volunteers became apparent. The Redmondites formed themselves into the National Volunteers and the original Volunteers remained on as the Irish Volunteers.

A number of the National Volunteers were reservists in the British Army and were called for active service. A number of others volunteered their service for the Army. The organisation of the National Volunteers, after this happened, to some extent broke down. There was little enthusiasm amongst the rank and file who remained, as many of them did not feel any great urge to take a personal part in England's war. The St. Joseph's Brass and Reed Band which was at the beck and call of the National Volunteers was used to lead the parades of reservists and volunteers who had joined the British Army on their march to the railway station to join their units for training. The last indication shown of being alive was during Easter Week 1916, when some of them were mobilised under arms to guard the Newry Post Office. The organisation completely disappeared after this.

After the split the Irish Volunteers were reduced to about 20 men. Drilling and training were carried on regularly. The R.I.C. started to keep a close eye on our activities but did not attempt to interfere with any of our movements.

S. J. S.

I was called to a meeting in Dublin by Sean McDermott a short time - probably a month - before Easter Week 1916. I travelled to Dublin for the meeting. On my arrival in Dublin. I called at Bulmer Hobson's office, 2 Dawson St.. Hobson at this time was Secretary to the Volunteers. He told me that he expected the Castle Authorities would take the earliest opportunity to disarm the volunteers. He told me that he would be opposed to a Rising unless there was a substantial landing of arms and ammunition from Germany, and that when the arrival of the arms was notified there were sufficient men available to take up the arms and prevent their seizure by the British authorities.

I then went to the place of the meeting, 12 D'Olier St. Amongst those present when I arrived were Pat McCormick, Scotland George Nicholls and Paddy O'Malley, Galway, and Sean McDermott; Tom Clarke came in after the business of the meeting started. This meeting was convened by the I.R.B. of representatives of the I.R.B. from every part of Ireland and Pat McCormick representing Scotland. A lot of prominent I.R.B. were absent while I was at the meeting. Some of those may have attended before I arrived or after I left the meeting. There were only 5 or 6 present when I was there. Sean McDermott told us that we were living at a time of the highest tension, that serious happenings were likely to take place in the near future, in fact that anything could happen at any moment. He assured us that definite word would be given as soon as it was necessary. The impression I got from Sean McDermott was that military action was imminent. I didn't suspect before this meeting that such action was planned with such urgency.

Later on and close to Easter Week I attended a meeting in Belfast in Berry St. Club. With me from the Newry district were Bob Kelly and Tommy O'Neill. We travelled by car from Newry and the driver was a local Unionist. The Newry R.I.C. got in

S. T. S.

touch with the Belfast R.I.C. concerning our departure from Newry and our driver was approached and questioned as to whom he drove. He told the police he didn't know the men he drove. Cathal O'Shannon was in charge of a party of Volunteers protecting the meeting place, and had a number of scouts posted to prevent a surprise raid on the Hall.

Tom Clarke, who was driven to Belfast by Dr. McCartan, addressed the delegates. He informed us that the Rising was imminent. He stated that the Citizen Army were going into action with the Volunteers. He described discussions he had with James Connolly and that Connolly had refused to subscribe to the I.R.B. oath until he - Connolly - was satisfied that the Irish Volunteers intended action. Mr. Clarke also stressed the importance of the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers being on the alert against surprise action by the British.

On or about Ash Wednesday of Holy Week, 1916, I got a message from Paddy Hughes of Dundalk "Come immediately". On receipt of the message I contacted Paddy Rankin and both of us cycled to Dundalk. When we arrived at Dundalk we saw the Dundalk Volunteers being drilled by a Dublin man named Hannigan in the Boyle O'Reilly Hall. Amongst the men drilling that night was Sean MacEntee from Belfast, then working in Dundalk. Paddy Hughes took us to a corner of the Hall and showed us a dispatch in code. The dispatch said "The butter will arrive on the 24th", signed "P.H. Pearse".

Paddy Hughes gave instructions that we were to return to Newry and collect all the available ammunition (shotgun and other) possible, and have it sent on to Dundalk. Rankin on our return made a survey of all possible sources of ammunition, and arranged for the procurement of it.

S. D. J.

We held a meeting on the Dublin Road on Good Friday night. Only very reliable and trustworthy men were called to the meeting. We informed those present of the nature of the dispatch which Hughes had shown to us, and a discussion took place as to what our activities should be when the 24th April arrived. Pat Lavery proposed that some messenger should be sent to Dublin to get in touch with the leaders.

Peadar McCann was selected to go to Dublin on Holy Saturday morning, and, through a friend, get in touch with the leaders and make sure that the dispatch we saw in Dundalk was genuine. We decided to await a message from McCann, which he was to send to us as soon as he made his contacts in Dublin. We arranged that McCann should send Pat Lavery a wire in a pre-arranged code. McCann travelled on Saturday morning. Lavery got a telegraphic message to the effect that the position was confused, and that no certainty of events could be forecast. McCann returned to Newry on Saturday evening. With the exception of Rankin procuring some ammunition in Newry and taking it, or having it conveyed, to Dundalk, nothing further happened on Saturday. When McCann returned I met him and he told me that the position was as he stated in his wire.

On Sunday a few of us met. We decided to send a few Fianna boys to Dundalk to find out any further developments there. When they returned they informed us that the Dundalk Volunteers had mobilised and marched out of Dundalk. Some time after the Fianna boys returned to Newry we heard of the Countermanding Orders.

On Easter Monday I went to my work in the Newry Mineral Water Company. Pat Lavery, who was Managing Secretary of the Company, told me to take my van out of the Company's premises

S. O. S.

and do my usual rounds. I did so and went on a journey to the country. When I returned to Newry that evening I heard of Pearse's orders to remobilise.

Paddy Rankin came to my house on Monday evening, got my bicycle, cycled to Dublin, and took part in the fighting in the G.P.O. during the remainder of the week.

I was arrested with Bob Kelly after the surrender in Dublin. We were the only two Newry men arrested in Newry. Rankin had surrendered in Dublin. We were conveyed to Richmond Barracks. When we arrived in Dublin the execution of the leaders was taking place. Later on we were transferred to Wakefield Prison in England.

Signed Sean Quinn

Date 12th Oct 1948.

Witnessed John McKay.

Date 12/10/48

