

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 237

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.237.....

Witness

Mr. Patrick Duffy,
c/o Joseph Duffy,
35 Clanbrassil St., Dundalk, Co.Louth.

Identity

Member of Volunteer Committee Dundalk;
Section Leader Irish Volunteers Dundalk.

Subject

- (a) History of national organisations Dundalk
1907-1921;
- (b) Irish Volunteer activities immediately prior to
and during Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No.S.1313.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT SUPPLIED BY PADRAIC UA DUBETHAIGH,
35 CLANBRASSIL ST., DUNDALK, AT REQUEST OF
MR. JOHN McCOY. (AUGUST 1948).

SINN FEIN - This organisation was established in Dundalk about 1907. The prime mover was Mr. Patrick Hughes of Park St. Dundalk, a rate collector employed by the Louth Co. Council. The membership was small and the organisation had little influence on public affairs. From 1909 until about 1913 local interest was almost monopolised by Parliamentary agitation, due in large measure to the rivalry between Mr. T.M. Healy, member of Parliament for North Louth, and the Irish Party. This militated against progress by local Sinn Fein Club, which was kept alive mainly by the exertions of Mr. Patrick Hughes, who, it was generally believed, was the only contributor to its finances. It organised concerts ("Manchester Martyrs" principally) which were fairly well patronised. Did not ^a effect much interest in language movement. In 1907, a question was asked in British Commons as to whether Mr. Patrick Hughes, a rate collector, had torn down the royal ensign on an excursion steamer from Dundalk to Kingstown (as it then was). In 1910, members of Sinn Fein demonstrated against the proclamation of George V as King at the Market Square, where a large party of military, police and civilians had assembled. The demonstrators, numbering about a dozen ran up an Irish flag in opposition to the Union Jack and sang "God save Ireland" in opposition to "God save the King" by the official and loyalist party. Sinn Fein met in its later years in the hall of the John Boyle O'Reilly Division of the A.O.H. (Irish-American Alliance) in Clanbrassil St.; where it met in its earlier years, I do not know. Meetings were, however, irregular. Short reports were supplied to local Press by Mr. Hughes from time to time (see "Dundalk Democrat" from 1907 onwards). Members in early years included - Joseph Berrill, R. Jameson, ... Kiernan and Miss M. McDermott, from Dublin St. area.

In 1913, Major McBride lectured under the auspices of S.F. in the Town Hall, Mr. Paddy Hughes presiding. Griffith's paper,

Padraic ua Dubhthaigh

"Sinn Fein" had considerable effect on public opinion locally during the early period of the world war, but the local Sinn Fein Cumann was swallowed up by the Volunteer movement and derived no advantage as an organisation from the change of opinion.

THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT.

In January 1914, a circular was issued by Joseph M. Johnson, Patk. Hughes and Joseph Ward inviting local societies to send delegates to a meeting to consider the formation of a Volunteer Corps. Joseph M. Johnson ^{who} was a well-known public man, resided in Clanbrassil St. where he carried on business as a publican. He had been imprisoned in Land League days; had the reputation of being the most resourceful member of local public boards; possessed much ability. Patrick Hughes, second signatory, was rate collector referred to in "Sinn Fein" (above). Joseph Ward resided in Chapel Lane and had charge of Messrs. Williamson's Timber Department. He was prominent in the G.A.A. and a member of the Leinster Council. Secretary to Athletic Grounds Coy.

In February 1914, a meeting of delegates of societies was held in, I think, St. Leonard's Gaelic League Rooms, next Free Library. Representatives were present from A.O.H. (Board of Erin, A.O.H. (J.B. O'Reilly, I.A. Alliance), Young Ireland Society (who had then a hall in Clanbrassil St.), Sinn Fein, Emmet Band (which had been kept alive mainly by the efforts of Mr. Patrick Hughes), Hearts of Oriel (who had rooms in Bridge St. near the Big Bridge), Catholic Young Men's Society, John Dillon G.A. Football Club and National Movements Committee. Gaelic League sent apologies for non-attendance of delegates due to another function. Mr. M. Comerford, Town Clerk, presided. He was a member of a well-known local family, prominent in old-time public movements; a supporter of the Parliamentary Party. The meeting approved of the proposed establishment of a Volunteer Corps and appointed a sub-committee to arrange for a public meeting to be addressed by Mr. P.H. Pearse and Dr. M. Davitt. H.Q. were unable to send those speakers and suggested others.

Patrick Hughes

The Committee decided to wait until their choice would be available and meantime to open recruiting. When a public meeting was held in June, large numbers had been enrolled. The meeting was addressed by Eamon Ceannt, Denis McCullough, Berd. Hamill, J.P., Dundalk, T.F. McGahon, J.P. Dundalk (Editor-Manager "Democrat"), Patrick O'Connell, Earl St. (of the Y.I. Society) and Rev. P. Lyons, Adm., later Bishop of Kilmore, Mr. Lawrence Curtis (Labourers' Society) presided, and Mr. Patk. Hughes acted as hon. secretary.

The members of the Corps drilled in the Athletic Grounds. Wm. McGrory, a former ^{regimental} sergeant-major in the British Army, was in charge. Members were drawn from all local organisations and must have numbered a couple of thousand. Control was exercised by a committee whose members did not necessarily hold rank in the Volunteers. On the other hand, officers were not necessarily members of the Committee. Forget how committee was elected. I was a member of it but not an officer. At Castlebellingham Feis 1914, there was a big volunteer display (pictures published in "Irish Independent" in June or July of that year). Dundalk Corps was inspected by Col. M. Moore and Capt. Whyte same year (1914).

On the outbreak of war in 1914, the local Artillery Garrison were seen off to the front by Volunteer buglers and a large crowd of local people. The Volunteer participation caused internal disagreement. A public parade had to be cancelled owing to a sharp conflict of view regarding the recruiting policy adopted by the Irish Party. A meeting of the local committee was called at which exception was taken to the Redmondite war policy. The majority of the members of the committee approved the Redmondite view and the minority resigned. (A short report of this meeting was published in "Dundalk Examiner" which see). The national Volunteers virtually ceased existence with this meeting. Many of them

Patrick Hughes

joined the British forces in response to the recruiting appeal and there were no further drill meetings or parades. The great bulk of local opinion favoured the Redmondite attitude and the dissentients were an insignificant proportion of the local population.

In October, a meeting was privately convened by Mr. Patk. Hughes for the purpose of establishing a Volunteer Corps under the Provisional Committee, which had broken with the Redmondite section. The meeting was held in the boardroom of the Town Hall. Only a small number of former members attended, due to disappointment over the "split". An attack was made on the meeting by members of the A.O.H. (Board of Erin) who had been associated with the National Volunteers and there was a fierce melee, in the course of which, it was alleged, a revolver was pulled (I was not present and had account at secondhand). It was decided to form a local corps of Irish Volunteers. Drills took place in the hall of the A.O.H. (J.B. O'Reilly Division) in Clanbrassil St. Numbers were small at first but gradually increased. The Sinn Fein papers ("Nationality" and others) had considerable effect on public opinion as time passed. In the first public parade of the new corps, about 100 volunteers took part, but, marching in file, the numbers seemed larger and were exaggerated by the public, to the advantage of the corps. Organisation was on the same lines as those of National Volunteers. Drills were regularly held but there was little instruction in firearms. In fact, there were few firearms. A few revolvers made their appearance early in 1916, but there was a lack of competent instructors and one serious accident took place shortly before Easter 1916, in the hall, when a revolver went off and bullet lodged in the hand of a volunteer (Joseph Duffy) who had his hand at the time in his trousers pocket. The bullet was extracted by Dr. Clarke, Dundalk, and the affair kept quiet but the injured volunteer was incapacitated for a considerable time. So far as I know, there was no rifle instruction (owing to police supervision, it would have been difficult to provide it).

Dr. Clarke, Dundalk

A short time prior to Easter 1916, a Dublin man, Donal Hannigan, came down and gave instruction in the more "businesslike" aspects of volunteering. There was, however, a dearth of arms, A few old rifles and a small number of revolvers would have constituted the equipment of the corps.

EASTER, 1916.

There were no local rumours of a Rising. The majority of volunteers, I think, regarded the movement as in the nature of a threat, after the manner of the volunteers of '82. They would have resisted attack or attempts to conscript them, but did not contemplate aggressive action. The first I heard of contemplated Rising was about 5 or 6 days before Easter, when Paddy Hughes told me on the street. He said the direction was to march to Ashbourne and join forces with some other body there. He produced no document. I was a member of the Committee and had charge of a section, but I don't know if he told all the members of the Committee. The general body was not told the purpose of the Easter Sunday parade and my impression is that Paddy Hughes confined his confidence to a few. I told a couple of friends of the project and three of us decided to go to Dublin for the Sunday activities rather than to Co. Meath. I sent word to Paddy Hughes and went to Dublin by afternoon train on Saturday before Easter Sunday. Stayed at Conarchy's Hotel, Rutland Square (now Parnell Sq.) The late Owen McGeough was to join me on Sunday morning, but he changed his mind meantime and joined local contingent. The third member of the party did not turn up. Went to Volunteer offices in either Dawson St. or Kildare St. area on Easter Sunday morning, but they were closed and no sign of life about them. Met Joe Ward (signatory to circular previously referred to) in O'Connell St. He, evidently, knew nothing of projected Rising and told me he was up in connection with G.A.A. (Congress, I think). Got "Sunday Independent" and saw announcement of cancellation of mobilisation. Visited Terence O'Hanlon and family at 14 Royse Road, Phibsboro (who had heard no rumours either) and returned home by evening train.

Paddy in Dublin

Easter Monday was not then observed as a holiday in Dundalk and a number of the Dundalk contingent of Volunteers who had moved towards Co. Meath on Easter Sunday morning had to return on Sunday night or Monday morning to be in time for work. These were in town on Easter Monday, as well as a few others who, for one reason or another, had not left the previous day. There were rumours on Monday afternoon that operations had opened up in Dublin. These, I think, came from Post Office. I understand that a dispatch was brought by a member of Cumann na mBan from Padraic Pearse or somebody on his behalf for Paddy Hughes, but I did not see it, nor do I know if it was delivered to him subsequently. The first sign of activity here was the arming of the R.A.M.C. stationed in the town. They were given rifles and drawn up outside the police barracks in Ann St. At that time it was reported that the local contingent of volunteers was at Castlebellingham and that the road homewards was blocked by military and police. (The report was not ^{wholly} correct, in fact). A meeting of the Volunteers known to be available in the town was summoned for the "Examiner" Office. A number attended - about eight or ten, so far as I remember. It was thought to be impossible to join the main body, owing to report that road was held by British forces, and I was deputed to get in touch with Carrickmacross with a view to getting local corps to attack police barracks in the vicinity, assuring them that we would join them. This operation was intended to divert the energies of the R.I.C. and lessen their effectiveness. I sent a note with Miss Deirdre Mathews, "Examiner" Office, to a waiter in O'Neill's Hotel, Carrickmacross, who, I knew, was associated with the Volunteers, asking him if he could get the local corps to take the action suggested, in which event our party would join them. I have forgotten the waiter's name, but he was, I think, a Tipperary man. He sent no written reply but turned up that night at "Examiner" Office and told me that there was no hope of action in Carrick, but that he was himself ready to take part in any adventure we arranged. I told him that our numbers and equipment would be too small for independent action. A further meeting was held on Tuesday in some

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place to consider alternative methods of assisting in the conflict. Somebody reported that a man in Hill St., who owned a motor boat, was willing to take our party by sea to Annagasson, whence we could either join Dundalk contingent, if still in the area, or proceed to Dublin. (The information still was that the road was effectively held by opposing forces). Frank Nery^C, who was one of those attending the meetings (he had returned on Monday) was enthusiastic about this project, describing it as the "first naval expedition of the Irish Republic". It was arranged that the party would meet at the Quays at 11 o'clock that night to set out. The details were left to me. I called on the boatman about 9 o'clock to make sure of the arrangements, but he told me that he had changed his mind and was not willing to hazard the voyage. I sent word to those concerned, calling off the meeting at the Quays at 11 o'clock. This was the last effort made by the section of volunteers at home to "join in".

The adventures of the main body of Dundalk Volunteers can best be narrated by some of those present. I have no personal knowledge of them. Reliable accounts could be obtained from Frank Nery^C, Tom Hamill or Dick Dowd.

(I have forgotten the name of the "boatman" above referred to, but it is not a matter of any importance. The name of the Carrickmacross waiter could be easily ascertained there. He was well known and may be there still).

Telegraphic communication between headquarters in Dublin and R.I.C. in town was somehow maintained during part, at least, of Easter Week. Some of the messages for local police, however, never reached them. A clerk in the local P.O., who was associated with Volunteer movement, told me at the time that he had destroyed some of the communications. He did not say what they contained. Name of clerk - Patrick Hughes (no relation of the other Patrick Hughes). His action was never detected and he continued to serve in the P.O.

Patrick Hughes

Cumann na mBan was organised some time around 1915 in Dundalk. The principal organiser was Miss Angela Mathews (Ainglin Ni Mhatha); other members included Miss Gogarty, Miss Mary McHugh, Miss M. Mandeville.

Fianna Eireann was not organised locally prior to 1916. Was approached some years subsequently by Phil Hearty (Carroll & Co.) to teach Irish to a class of Fianna in Gaelic League Hall, which I did for a period. Best authority on founding of Fianna and their activities - Phil Hearty.

Citizen Army was not represented in Dundalk.

I.R.B. - Don't know much of the activities of this organisation. One of the principal members was Thomas Hearty, Bridge St. who kept a dairy and small shop and also a posting establishment. He "swore in" members on his own premises. Don't know where members met but suspect that it was on or about the premises of Mr. Pat Walsh, of Bridge St. and Church St. ^W Walsh did not figure in any of the public movements and, if any approach were made for information, it would require tact. I think that Patrick Hughes and, possibly, Joe Ward were members of this organisation. I have, however, no definite knowledge save as to T. Hearty.

SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS.

Information will be forthcoming from others on the "I.R.A. Period". A few items are jotted down of which I had special opportunities for knowledge.

"Dundalk Examiner" newspaper was suppressed because of publication of Dail Loan Advertisement. I was editor-manager of the paper at the time and, before publishing, I warned the proprietrix, Mrs. Annie Mathews, of the probable consequences. She agreed to take the risk.

There was difficulty in getting suspension removed, although

Patrick in Dub

other papers similarly suspended had resumed publication. Mr. T.M. Healy and other influential people interested themselves without effect. After one of these efforts, the D.I. waited on Mrs. Mathews with a form for signature which provided, amongst other things, that I should not be employed as editor. Mrs. Mathews refused to give the undertaking and the suspension continued. Mr. Joe Dolan, Ardee, who was not associated with Sinn Fein, though an advocate of independence, had been endeavouring to have ban on paper removed. He agreed, with me, to purchase the paper (nominally) and to give the Castle all the guarantees they require. He issued a cheque to Mrs. Mathews for £2,000, which was duly cashed. The cash was then taken to him by hand by Mrs. Mathews' daughter. The next step was to secure an editor. I waited on "Sceilg", T.D. for Louth, to ascertain if he would allow his name to be used. He declined, perhaps because he feared that sentiments would be expressed which he could not approve. I wrote to T. O'Hanlon, 14 Roysse Rd. Phibsboro (whose name was known to I.R.A. people) asking his consent to nominating him as editor. He sent a postcard agreeing. Accordingly, Mr. Dolan sent a letter to the Castle acquainting them with his purchase of the paper and informing them that Mr. O'Hanlon would act as editor. The ban was then removed. I continued to act as editor-manager with a certain amount of secrecy until the Castle was too busily occupied to give attention to these small things.

The smash-up of the plant of the paper in 1921 was, I was told, due to the publicity given to the murder of the Watters brothers and the absence of publicity to somebody on the other side who met his death earlier the same night, of which we had not heard at the time. Sean Gormley had warned me before then that he had information from R.I.C. sources that Peter Hughes (brother of Paddy Hughes), a shopkeeper named ^wDuigan in Bridge St. and I were to be "done in" in the event of any "accident" happening to Black and Tan forces. The information of the British forces as to the men who really counted locally was defective.

Padric Duigan

(Gilooly was, I think, the name)

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A Head Constable^A of the R.I.C. in Dundalk about 1921 told me in Dublin about 1933 that their information as to a projected ambush from Carolan's premises in Earl St., where some ammunition had been lodged, was derived from a woman who used come in casually to clean the barracks and who used talk at random about everything and everybody. If the ambush had come off, he said, they would have used enough explosives to blow up the street. He told me, too, that he often gave a prisoner a "cuff" when putting him into cells to prevent worse befalling him from Auxiliaries and Black and Tans. His reputation was not bad, but a few of his R.I.C. associates were in rivalry with the Auxiliaries up to the end. Others behaved very fairly and still others helpfully. Amongst the latter, was Constable Brennan, Omeath, who was shot in Dundalk. In raids and in barracks, the British military were, as a rule, well-behaved. The "Tommyes" treated prisoners as well as the regulations permitted. In one of their "shoots-up" of Ardee, Auxiliaries from Gormanstown Camp took out a young Irish teacher named Carroll and shot him on the street. As he lay dying and while the Auxiliaries were still firing off their guns, Joe Dolan and his brother (Fr. Dolan) rushed to the aid of Carroll. Father Dolan gave him absolution and Joe ^{made} his position as easy as possible. Neither was associated with Sinn Fein. Joe had supported the Parliamentary movement. My association with him was in the language movement.

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TRUCE PERIOD - I was shown a document^s towards the end of the Truce period which purported to be instructions to local garrisons as to how they were to act in the event of breakdown of negotiations. The document was brought to me by Owen Dullaghan, employed in Dundalk Club (Jocelyn St.) as, I think, a Billiard^s marker. He stated it had been found in the Club and he believed it had been left behind in error by one of the military officers who frequented the Club. The document was typewritten, so far

Padraic Kennedy

as I now recollect; it warned the garrison to be ready to move in event of breakdown of negotiations and the general plan was to round up all men of military age and intern them in camps. The document seemed to be genuine. I advised that it be passed to I.R.A. for transmission to Dublin.

Signed: Padraic W. O'Sullivan

Date: Samhain 18, 48

Witness: John McBoyle
18/11/48

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