

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 239

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

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Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers Dundalk
1914-1916.

Subject

- (a) Irish Volunteer activities Co. Louth
from 1914;
- (b) Mobilisation and other activities of
Irish Volunteers Dundalk, Easter Week 1916

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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The Genesis of the movement which led to the formation of the Irish National ^{Volunteers} is too well-known to need repetition; following the anti-Home Rule campaign founded by the late Sir E. Carson in the North, and the establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Force ^{early} ~~entry~~ in 1913, news items appeared in the Dublin Dailies in August '13 of the formation by British ex-servicemen at Athlone, of a force to support the Home Rule movement. I am inclined to think the reports, at the beginning, at all events, had no firmer basis than the lively imagination of a local press correspondent. During all that year (1913) Dublin was in a ferment with strikes, and the Citizen Army was founded (Capt. White, ex-British Army - son of Field Marshal Sir Geo. White, of Ladysmith defence fame in the Boer War, was prominent in this) to protect the strikers against police violence. The Athlone example, whether imaginary or not, attracted wide attention and in December, I think, in the Rink, the movement was launched in Dublin (see L.S. Gogan, National Museum). The movement spread rapidly, and the late Professor Eoin MacNeill was prominent. It will be recalled how, at a Cork meeting, he called for cheers for Carson for having blazed the trail for the formation of an Irish Volunteer force. In its inception the Irish National Volunteer movement was founded "to defend the rights and liberties common to all Irishmen".

I cannot say, now, to whom the credit is due of starting the movement in Dundalk. I think Paddy Hughes and Joe Ward (both gone to their reward), Paddy Duffy, St. Mary's Road, were the moving spirits. At all events, in the January of 1914, it started here, not too auspiciously, with a membership of about 80. The Rink in the Athletic Grounds was secured as a drill hall; two ex-militia sergeants - one of them, Carroll, had been actively and successfully obstructive in the Boer War years, when an effort was made to stampede the Louth

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Militia, a Rifle Regiment then stationed in Sheffield (?) into volunteering for service overseas; he told them they were enlisted for home service only - the other, John Finnegan; both have since died.

It may be of interest to note here that the Official British Infantry Training Manual was our textbook; we followed that model in every detail of organisation and drill.

That the movement spread like wildfire is a matter of history. In practically every parish a Volunteer group was formed, some, in fact, went so far as to recruit ^Awomen's Red Cross unit (Kilsarnan). The then Irish Parliamentary Party regarded the whole business with a dubious eye, and with intent to capture it, members of the A.O.H. organisation, the then "Grey Eminence" of the Party, joined in big numbers, resulting, in Dundalk, in the original fistful being brought up to full battalion strength (eight full companies). About that time the British organisation was altered to four double companies. An A.O.H. man (ex-K.O.S.B.) was in charge. We had the unusual arrangement of two B.S.Ms. (^{one} ~~and~~ a newcomer, A.O.H. ex R.I.F.) ^{and} the old instructor, Johnny Finnegan.)

About July we got 40 Lee Enfield l.p. rifles and fired our course on the rifle range. The first rift in the lute came in August 1914, when some British ex-servicemen were called to the colours and were accompanied to the railway station by buglers and some of the Volunteers as a send-off. There was a considerable row over this, but things were patched up.

Later, the Parliamentary Party demanded and were conceded a big share in the Executive of the National Volunteers. When the split came, a vote was taken here and a very small minority supported Pearse and his followers. The dissidents established the Irish Volunteers, meeting in the Boyle O'Reilly Hall; they weren't many; so few, that a skeleton 4 company battalion, based

on the then four wards of the urban area, was all that was possible. Company Commanders were Paddy Duffy, James Toal (dead) Joe Berril (dead) and Sean McEntee. There was a paper strength of something over 200.

On Easter Sunday, about 80 turned out, including 3 from Cooley, who cycled a dozen miles to the rendezvous; Paddy Donnelly (dead), Mick Ferguson, Seamus O'Hanlon. Armament was about 6 Lee Enfield l.p., a single-slot Mannlicher rifle, a Mauser rifle, an R.I.C. carbine, about a dozen shotguns, a few (harmless) .22 automatics and half a dozen revolvers. At Ardee this armament was increased by a further half-dozen Lee Enfields; ammunition for all arms was mighty scarce. A Citizen Army man had been sent down to command the party. This force marched to Slane and about midnight, having learned of the countermanding order, began the march back. McEntee cycled to Dublin. On the way, news of the Rising was received and motors going to Laytown Races were held up to convey what remained together of the force, (many had fallen out footsore,) to Tara, which was never reached. At Castlebellingham, unfortunately, an R.I.C. man was fatally shot, by pure accident.

The senior officer called together all who were available on the Tuesday of Easter Week, and it was arranged to get a motor boat and get as many men to Dublin as possible; petrol was brought, the boat secured and a midnight assignation for Wednesday made; only two turned up and the naval expedition abandoned. Following day British troops patrolled the quay front area.

Within a fortnight, most of the members of the Slane expeditionary force were prisoners, sent to Richmond Barracks first, then to various jails in England; finally, to Frongoch, where eleven were held till the final release on Christmas Eve 1916.

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Frank Nery

22nd Nov. 1948

Witness John Mc Boy
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