

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 260

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.... 260..... ..

Witness

Mr. Hugh Kearney,
66 Dublin St.,
Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Identity

Member of Sinn Fein, Dundalk, from 1910,
Member of Irish Volunteers, Dundalk,
1915-1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities Dundalk 1910-1916;
- (b) March from Dundalk to Co. Dublin
Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT BY HUGH KEARNEY, 66 DUBLIN ST.,
DUNDALK.

Sinn Fein was started in Dundalk before 1910. I joined the organisation under the leadership of Paddy Hughes who was Chairman. From 1910 up to 1914 Sinn Fein had little influence in Dundalk. The overwhelming majority of the people of North Louth had taken sides in Tim Healy's battles with the nominees of the Redmondite Party at several elections for the British Parliament held in North Louth and the efforts of the young Sinn Fein organisation attracted little support.

Paddy Hughes's idea in ordering the policy for Sinn Fein in Dundalk and neighbouring districts was to give the people plenty of lectures, plays and concerts in which the policy of physical force was stressed as a means of obtaining our freedom from English rule. These lectures, concerts and plays attracted a large attendance from those who had no use for Sinn Fein as a serious political weapon and the results in recruits to the policy of Sinn Fein were not as good as the efforts to get them deserved. Although our efforts did not meet with great apparent success we did create an interest amongst the people in a general way that, later, when the National volunteers were organised, helped to swell the ranks.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians were well organised in North Louth and from the start of Sinn Fein were actively hostile to our organisation. There was not a parish in North Louth but had a strong branch of the A.O.H. The A.O.H, in Dundalk and the districts around the town showed their hostility to Sinn Fein. When the National volunteers were organised, the A.O.H. flocked into the Volunteers. Paddy Hughes and the Sinn Fein members in town co-operated with all the other organisations that took part in the starting of the National volunteers. I had such a hatred for the A.O.H. that when saw them apparently dominating the Volunteer organisation I made up my mind to have nothing whatever to do with the organisation. The split in the National Volunteers took place in Dundalk early in Aug 1914 over a rumpus which took place due to the National Volunteer Band turning out to escort the garrison of the military barracks in

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in Dundalk to the railway station on their departure for the war in France. Paddy Hughes took his supporters out of the Volunteers. The numbers that followed Paddy were small and all the rifles the Volunteers had before the split were controlled by the Hibernians and were lost to the followers of Paddy Hughes. Shortly after the split in Dundalk the National Volunteers ceased to be active.

From 1914 to mid 1915 the Sinn Fein Party again concentrated on the spread of their organisation and about mid 1915 Paddy Hughes organised the Irish Volunteers. The efforts to re-organise the Volunteers in Dundalk as Irish Volunteers did not receive much support from the people of Dundalk generally and was met by active opposition from the A.O.H. Our meetings were subjected to physical violence in attempts to back them up and our membership was small for the population of Dundalk and surrounding districts. We started off with about 30 members and immediately before Easter Week 1916 we had at the outside not more than 150 men enrolled.

In January 1916 Paddy Hughes was officer in charge of the Dundalk Volunteers and also had control of the Volunteers in the whole of Co. Louth and the counties of Monaghan, Cavan and Meath. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Irish Volunteers and was directly responsible to Headquarters for the large area over which he had control.

About 2 weeks before Easter Week Donal O'Hannigan was sent from Dublin to Dundalk to take charge of the Dundalk Volunteers and also to take charge in the other areas over which Paddy Hughes had control. O'Hannigan had received considerable military training in Dublin from 1914 onwards and was in 1916 well fitted to control a military force under active service conditions. Paddy Hughes had no military experience or training to fit him to take charge of men under war conditions, but he was a man whom everybody in Dundalk and Co. Louth looked up to as a leader who had given examples of leadership on many occasions to those of us who believed in the policy of physical force. The sending of O'Hannigan to Dundalk to take charge

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locally was not, in our opinion, any reflection on Paddy Hughes's position as officer in charge, but was merely sending him the help of an officer whom headquarters knew had military training.

I met Paddy Hughes on Good Friday 1916 at the Square, Dundalk. He told me there was a mobilisation of the Dundalk Volunteers at the Boyle Hall on Easter Sunday at 10 a.m. and that I should go to confession on Saturday as it was important that I should have confession. I mobilised on Sunday as requested. There were about 22 men in the Hall. Sean McEntee gave us an order to fall in two single files. He inspected us and when he saw me he asked if I had been at confession. I told him I had not. He then said that we were going on very important work for Ireland and if I was willing to go. I said I was there prepared to go. We were handed arms. I got a double barreled shotgun. Arthur O'Neill, who was beside me got a single barreled shotgun. We went out on the street and fell in in military formation and marched up the town to the Workhouse Hill. We were joined by about 80 men who were waiting there for us. We then got orders to march to Ardee. At Ardee we were ordered to fall out and to get some sandwiches. Some of us went in to Brophy's Hotel. When we came out of the Hotel we fell into our ranks again. We were then handed rifles and the shotguns were taken up from me and O'Neill. Phil McMahon and a man named Mathews handed us the rifles. The rifle I got was a B.S.A. small bore and I was handed also 5 rounds of rifle ammunition. I can recollect that about 12 rifles were handed us at Ardee.

We then got orders to resume our march and at the time we were moving off we were joined by some men from Dunleer. We moved off and eventually came to the Hill of Slane close to 7 p.m. and were halted for a rest, as I thought. In Slane I found that the South Louth and Co. Meath men were to join us at Slane. At Slane I also heard that Eoin MacNeill's dispatch calling off the mobilisation had been handed to some of the officers and that they were considering it. I then saw Sean McEntee with a bicycle leaving, on what orders he got I did not know.

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After we arrived in Slane it started to rain and we took up quarters in an old bakery house. The Drogheda and Meath men did not join us in Slane. They saw McNeill's countermanding orders in the Sunday papers and thought all was off. We remained in Slane until about 3 a.m. on Monday morning. Then we got orders to fall in again and marched back in the direction of Collon Village. It was raining torrents. We had 3 R.I.C. men with us the whole time from we started from Dundalk to Slane and back to Collon. Some of our crowd rapped at a house and a woman appeared at a window and after some time she came down and opened up the house; it was a publichouse. Paddy Hughes asked her if she would give the men something to eat. After some time she gave all our men a good feed. After we got the feed a good number of our men went home. Those men went to Dunleer to get a train for Dundalk. Previous to this a number had gone home from Slane in motor cars that came from Dundalk. After our refreshments we moved on again. It was still raining. We were in a sorry plight, wet to the skin. We came along to Kilsarn near Castlebellingham. When approaching Kilsarn we were told to be careful as we might be attacked in Kilsarn. We moved on to Castlebellingham Village. It was still raining when we passed through the village. When we came to about 4 miles from Dundalk a girl from the Dundalk Cumann na mBan - Miss Clarke - met us on a bicycle with a message that if we marched into Dundalk we were in danger of attack by Home Defence forces in the town. Donal O'Hannigan sent the girl home. Paddy Hughes and O'Hannigan were having a chat about Miss Clarke's message when Sean McEntee came from where - I don't know - but in a few minutes I heard Donal O'Hannigan call all the men together. He told us that in Dublin that morning a Republic was proclaimed and that the Dublin men were fighting. He said that he - O'Hannigan - Sean McEntee, Paddy McHugh and some others were going to travel to Dublin. He also said "I am asking any man who likes to do so to come with us". All the men said they would go and only three men went home at this point. This was about 7 p.m. on Monday evening, so we formed up again to march in Dublin direction.

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At this time there were a lot of motor cars on the road travelling from Fairyhouse races. We commandeered the cars and made all the occupants prisoners, also 2 British officers and some soldiers. We put the prisoners into a farm building for shelter and then got orders to get into the cars which we did. As mentioned before, we had 3 R.I.C. men from Dundalk with us and at this point we made them prisoners. When we arrived at Castlebellingham we halted and made prisoners of more policemen and high ranking officers of the British army. A Major Dunville and a soldier who was driving him were made prisoners and lined up against railings in the village. The officers stated they would have us all shot. Major Dunville was particularly cross and he attempted to take a rifle from one of our men and in the melee Major Dunville got shot, but not seriously. A policeman who was in barracks at the time ran out with dispatches, was called on to halt but did not do so, and was mortally wounded. We then proceeded on our way in the cars we had commandeered. We had also a pony and cart and a sidecar driven by Thomas Hearty. We went on towards Co. Meath. When going along a narrow road some of the cars in front of the car I was in went into the ditch and the car I was in when it came up to the car in front could not pass it on the narrow road. The occupants of the cars in front of the car in the ditch did not know what had happened the cars behind them on the road. We had to leave our cars on the road as we could not pass the car in the ditch and could not reverse our cars on a narrow road in the pitch darkness. We proceeded to an old barn and made ourselves comfortable. In the barn we were joined by 14 or 15 men, strangers to me. I soon found out that these strangers were some of the Meath men coming to join us. We spent the best of the night in the barn and before daylight on Tuesday morning we got on the move again. We kept on marching for 2 hours and then got word to halt. We stopped at a big house. Donal O'Hannigan knocked at the gate leading to the house but got no answer. He ordered 2 men to cross the gate and open it. We made this house our headquarters. I heard afterwards that our O/C's. reason for this was that we had left a good quantity of our

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ammunition behind us in Castlebellingham by mistake.

We camped at this house for a good many days and our O/C. posted guards on all sides of the place. An amusing incident took place whilst we were there. I and another comrade were on guard, a hearse came along with two men driving it and a coffin inside. We held it up. One of our men went for our O/C and told him about it. He came along and examined the 2 men, took the coffin out on the road, took the lid off and found it empty. He told the 2 men who we were. The poor fellows thought we were going to shoot them, but after some time we let them go their way.

The first few days we were in this place were terrible on our men. We had no food, only drinks of water. Someone told our O/C. that there were sheep in a field nearby so we took one in, killed it and cooked it the best we could. Then there came some girls from Dunboyne; there was one in particular, Miss Byrne. She is married now to one of the men who were with us, Martin Creane.

I must say the Meath men were the bravest men I met. They were ready to do anything for the cause. Some of those men were in the Redmondite Volunteers before the Rising, but they told me that as it was for Ireland - the fight in Easter Week - they had to be in it.

After some time in this place D. O'Hannigan called us together again and he told us to get ready as we were going to move out as he had orders to do so. I found out that the gardener in the big house got word to move out with his family as there was a battalion of the Lancers with 2 field pieces going to surround us and if we did not surrender to them they had orders to shell the place.

We left and moved back to the old barn we rested at when moving towards Dublin. We had learned that Dublin had surrendered and that the fighting was all over. We also heard that the Lancers turned up at the big house after we evacuated and found us gone.

We dumped our arms at the old barn. At this stage the Dunboyne men went home and the Dundalk men kept together waiting for some

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word as to what was to be done. Mr. O'Hannigan called us together and told us he was going to Dublin and that every man was to fend for himself. Myself, P. Garvey and J. Dunne shook hands with all our other comrades and started for home. We travelled by the main road towards Drogheda. We got in touch with Arthur Green and J. Kelly. When we passed Kilmoon Barracks we lost our way and passed the barrack again and on this occasion we were challenged by two policemen who asked us where we were going. We told them we were in Dublin looking for work. We were let pass. When we came to about one mile from Drogheda we met a man on a mail cart; we asked him if there were any soldiers in Drogheda. He asked us if we were coming back from Dublin and we said we were. He said for us not to go through Drogheda for it was full of soldiers and police. He told us to go back to a place where we would meet a man named Jackson who had a boat and would take us over the river. We did as advised and got across the river. From there we started across fields, passed Kellystown, Ballypousta and on past Monasterboice and to Ardee. Here we separated. P. Garvey went to a house in Ardee. I went to Ardee Station where I had a friend who got me a railway ticket for Dundalk. J. Dunne came on a breadcart to Dundalk.

When I came to Dundalk Station it was guarded by soldiers and police, but I got through them. I got home and rested and after a few days I got word to clear away somewhere as I was to be arrested. At that time every person was watched. Owen Clifford and I got across to Liverpool through some sailor friends of mine and we stopped there for a few months. Then the police in Liverpool started raiding for men evading Army service so we had to clear out. Clifford went back to Dundalk and I went on to the east coast of Scotland. I remained there for 9 months, then I came home to Dublin where I got a job in the Midland Railway and after some time I returned to Dundalk.

BUREAU OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE 1013-21

BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

No. W.S. 260

Signed:

Date:

John McBoyle
31/5/49

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John McBoyle
31/5/49