

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 265

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.265.....

Witness

Mr. George Irvine,
6 Mountpleasant Square,
Ranelagh,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. Dublin 1907;
O/C. B/Coy. 4th Battalion
Dublin Brigade I.V's.
1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1905-1916;
- (b) Occupied hutments South Dublin
Union Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No.S. 913.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF GEORGE IRVINE,
O/C. "B" COY. 4th BATTALION,
IRISH VOLUNTEERS, 1916.

I was a member of the Gaelic League which I joined in the year 1905. I was approached by Seamus O'Connor, in or about the year 1907, to join the I.R.B. I refused at that time to do so. A few months later I was again approached, this time by Seamus Deakin, and I then joined and was attached to the Teeling Circle which met at 41 Parnell Square, Dublin. Later I became Centre of the Clarence Mangan Circle, an offshoot of the Teeling Circle. Sometime before 1913 I was appointed Secretary to the Dublin Centres Board and a member of the Leinster Council of the I.R.B. Bulmer Hobson was at this time Chairman of the Leinster Council and also Chairman of the Dublin Centres' Board. He remained Chairman and I remained Secretary of the Dublin Centres' Board up to the Rising in 1916. I remember the following Dublin Centres - Bulmer Hobson, George Lyons, Tom Hunter, Con Colbert, Frank Gaskin, Sean Murphy, Seamus O'Connor, P.J. Farrell, Peadar Kearney, Sean Tobin, Seamus Deakin, Greg. Murphy, Cathal Kickham, Val Jackson, Martin Conlan, Sean Farrelly and Sean McDermott.

The man who was responsible for the starting of the volunteers was Cathal Kickham. He mentioned it several times at the Dublin Centres' Board of the I.R.B. but the rest of us did not take him seriously, thinking it was some kind of a police force he wanted. At last one night, in reply to a remark someone made about not wanting a police force, he said "I don't mean a police force, I mean an army". That made us think and we began to discuss the matter. I don't remember whether we made the arrangements at that meeting, but it was finally arranged that the Chairman, Bulmer Hobson, and Seamus O'Connor should get in touch with some harmless nationalists like Eoin MacNeill and D.P. Moran on the matter and see if it would be possible to form a committee to set things going. They (Bulmer Hobson and Seamus O'Connor) were not to mention the I.R.B. or use the word republican at all, which at that time was worse than

'communist' at the present day, 1949. Simply to get an armed force to back up Home Rule, as the Unionists of the North had formed a force to oppose it.

The committee was formed - B. Hobson and S. O'Connor acting as our representatives on it to keep us in touch, of course unknown to the others. The result was the meeting in the Rotunda in November, 1913.

For a long time before the I.R.B. men in Dublin had been drilling under Con Colbert and others of the Fianna Eireann, so that the drill instructors who were appointed to the Volunteers saw that we knew something about our work and some of us were told off to look after new recruits. At the same time, when in Summer 1914 it was announced that officers would be elected in the companies, the men of the I.R.B. were ordered not to propose or vote for any other I.R.B. man unless he had the makings of a good officer and was competent to take command.

The first indication I got of an intended rising was early in 1915 when Sean McDermott addressed the Centres' Board and said there would be a rising with or without German aid.. In March, ¹⁹¹⁶ as far as I can remember, we had a very tense week. Seamus Connolly had published some very fiery articles in his paper and threatened, so I was told afterwards, to call out the Citizen Army and the Volunteer would have to turn out then or be disgraced. I was Secretary of the Dublin Centres' Board, I.R.B. and when I left school each day I seemed to have lived on my bicycle carrying messages and summoning meetings of the Centres' Board. Finally, on the Friday, Lt. Harry Nicholls called to me at the school with a message from Comdt. Kent to attend a meeting of officers of the 4th Bn. at his home that night at 9 o'clock. No other meeting I might have was to be allowed to interfere with this order. When Comdt. Kent opened the door to me at 9 p.m. I said "Well, God strafe Seamus Connolly for all the trouble he has given me this week". "Oh" said he "don't say a word about that. The whole thing has been settled now, and I have got all the men here and I don't know what to say to them". He

discussed some formal battalion business and read the words of a song he had composed "Ireland over all" and let us go. Only myself and Con Colbert and one or two others knew what had happened and they were wondering why such an urgent order had been issued about ordinary business. It appeared Pearse had met Connolly and had promised that the Volunteers would turn out definitely on Easter Sunday.

When the Volunteers were started I became attached to B/Coy. 4th Bn. which drilled at Kimmage. When officers were elected I became O/C. of the Coy. Eamon Ceannt became Bn. O/C. when the 4th Bn. was formed. The Redmond split hit B/Coy. very badly. I had well over 100 men, about 130, and the split left me with about 50, so I only had 3 section commanders - Donal O'Hannigan, W.P. Corrigan and Phil Cosgrave. About a week before Easter Donal O'Hannigan told me that Sean McDermott wanted him to go to the country. I reminded him that we had got orders from the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. that all I.R.B. men must obey the orders of their Volunteer Officer only and told him to remain in town. The following Tuesday night, B/Company's drill night, he did not turn up and sent me word he had to go to the country and if I called on Sean McDermott he would explain. Phil Cosgrave had been appointed Deputy Bn. Q.M. and 2nd Lt. W. Cosgrave had been taken as A.D.C. by Comdt. Kent.

Some weeks before Easter the 4th Bn. had manoeuvres. Each Coy. received its orders and that was practically all it knew. B/Coy. was told to hold the back gate of the S.D.U. to hold up an enemy coming from the S.C.Rd. The men were to be deployed along the road on each side of the gate. There was no post mortem on these manoeuvres as we generally had, so I don't know much about the positions of the other companies. This, apparently, was his plan for Easter Monday, but as I had only six men instead of 50, we had to do the best we could.

The first definite news I got of the Rising was at a Dublin Centres' meeting on the previous Thursday at which Hobson presided.

The Bray Centre reported he had been instructed by Patrick Pearse, some time previously, to be ready to cut the telegraphic cable when he would get word and he had got word that the following Easter Sunday was the day. The news came like a bombshell to all present, except, apparently, Tom Hunter and Con Colbert. Hobson said he would see about it. He did not discuss it at the meeting. When the meeting was over I went to Kimmage to sound any Company O/Cs. who might be there. My first Lt., Seamus Kenny, was there and I told him. He was En.Q.M. at the time. When I reached home at 12 midnight, I found Sean Tobin's brother waiting for me. He had been waiting for an hour. I went with him to Sean's house and found I had to write and deliver notices for a meeting of the Centres' Board at 12 noon the following day, Friday. With the help of Sean and his brother I got them written and three of us, Sean's brother, another man and myself, went off to deliver them on our bicycles. I ended up at 6 a.m. the following morning at Con Colbert's who lived a few doors from me. The business of the meeting was not stated, but it was evidently an attempt to stop operations. When we met at 12 noon Bulmer Hobson informed us that there would be no business, but each was to carry out any instructions he received regarding Easter Sunday. I went to see Section Commander Corrigan and told him how things stood. He was the only officer left to me, as I will explain later. I cannot recall where the meeting was held, though I remember it was not a usual place.

In the afternoon I suggested to Lt. Corrigan (as I may call him now) that we should go and see the Chief of Staff, Eoin MacNeill. Outside the Volunteer Office we met Sean Tobin who told us that everything was settled. He also told us that Hobson was going to be placed in arrest and that MacNeill had been taken into the I.R.B. The Rising was to take place on the Sunday and the Germans were to land in two places - Kerry and Galway. He added that Eoin MacNeill had been taken into the I.R.B. the previous day.

On Saturday I saw the Coy. Q.M., Sean O'Shaughnessy, and told him to distribute the emergency rations to the company.

We did nothing more until Sunday morning. The parade was to take place in the afternoon, and, about 11 a.m., an orderly called on me with a letter from the Chief of Staff which I was to read and hand back. The letter was an order to all officers not to turn out as the parade was off. I went to see Comdt. Kent about it and found some other officers there on the same errand. He confirmed the order of the Chief of Staff, told us everything was off, but the men were to stand by until 6 p.m. I carried out this order.

On Monday morning, about 9 o'clock. Martin O'Flaherty brought me an order from Comdt. Kent to turn out at Kimmage at 10 o'clock. I sent Martin with an order to Sec. Comdr. Corrigan to mobilise his section and gave him the names and addresses of the men in the other two sections telling him to use any men he wanted to have them mobilised. Most of them had gone out expecting nothing to happen and only twelve turned up at Kimmage. (I found afterwards that with the exception of two or three, all the men turned out, but linked up with whatever company they met). We marched off from Kimmage about 12 o'clock to the South Dublin Union. At the back gate of the S.D.U. Comdt. Kent said he would take Lt. Cosgrave and six of my men, leaving me with the other six. Three men from other companies came to me later so I had nine men. Comdt. Kent told me to take up a position in the huts inside the gate and barricade the windows. After some time the British soldiers appeared and started to scale the wall around the S.D.U. and our men picked off a few of them. We found the huts mere matchboxes without any cover from fire, being made of thin wood. Later we tried to join Comdt. Kent in the main building, but found we were cut off in that direction and one of the men, Paddy Morrissey was wounded. We had to go back to the huts. We now occupied a back room in the hut we were in, but the British had closed in on us and in the evening were pouring volleys into the hut. One man just beside me, John Traynor, got a bullet through his eye. I saw we could hold out no longer and asked the men would I surrender. They agreed and I did so.

Signed: George Irvine

Date: 20 June 1949

Witness: William Jerry O'Connell

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