

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

• BUIO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21.

No. **W.S.** 277

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**.....277.....

Witness

Mr. Alec McCabe,
33 Oakley Road,
Ranelagh,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of Sinn Fein;
Member of Irish Volunteers Sligo 1913;
Chief Organiser and Centre of I.R.B. Connaught
Member of Supreme Council I.R.B.

Subject

- (a) National associations 1913-1916;
- (b) Travelled to Dublin Easter Saturday and returned to West with instructions from I.V. Headquarters for mobilisation, which he carried out on Easter Monday 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. **S.91**.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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RANELAGH, DUBLIN.

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I was in St. Patrick's Training College, Dublin, during the years 1913-14. I knew Gearoid O'Sullivan there. I was a member of the Sinn Fein Movement from an early date and I compiled articles for a Leitrim paper during the election there in 1908. I joined the Irish Volunteers in Sligo in 1913 when they started there, and I was also present at the meeting in the Rotunda, Dublin, for this purpose. I became a member of the Volunteers in Dublin and trained with them at Fairview. This was the 2nd Battn. We were not sworn when joining the Volunteers; we signed a register and contributed a small sum weekly towards expenses and the purchase of arms, equipment and uniforms, etc. I also joined the I.R.B. I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Sean McDermott. Shortly after this I went to Sligo and organised the Volunteers in that area. I was also organising circles of the I.R.B. inside the Volunteer organisation. I succeeded in getting a number of I.R.B. circles going in Sligo. I would say about two-thirds of the parishes in Sligo were covered. Amongst the members I remember are Jim ^{DEVENS OMC} Daverns, Owen Tansey (Gurteen), McHale (Sligo) and Jim Marron (Tobercurry).

When the 1914 war broke out a convention of the Volunteers was held in the Town Hall, Sligo. This was attended by a number of Parish Priests. Larry Kettle from Dublin attended and all Volunteers were summoned to attend. John Jinks was presiding. The object of the meeting was to recruit for the British Army. I protested against this and got a very bad reception but I insisted on having my say. Mr. Jinks said he would not hear any more from me and that he would put me out. I eventually left the Hall and two or three others accompanied me, including Daverns. ^{DEVENS OMC}

At the time of the split in the Volunteers most of the members went on the Redmond side. The Keash Coy. to which I was attached mainly remained loyal, the remainder declared for Redmond and eventually faded out. We had in Keash about 30 members including

some old men. We had very little arms, just a few shotguns.

I attended the convention of the Irish Volunteers after the split. MacNeill presided at this meeting, but the O'Rahilly was the principal man. O'Rahilly was in charge of armament. At this meeting we were told that the Clan-na-Gael in the United States were supporting us financially. I returned to Sligo after this meeting and continued to organise the Volunteers and I.R.B. A meeting of delegates from the I.R.B. circles in Connaught was held in Carrick-on-Shannon to form a provincial Council for Connaught. The meeting was held on the occasion of a big Gaelic Athletic match in order not to arouse suspicion. Diarmuid Lynch came down from I.R.B. Hqrs. There was a representative from each county. Before the meeting Lynch asked me to take centre for Connaught to which I agreed. I was elected Head Centre for Connaught and thus became a member of the Supreme Council. I was organising both for the Volunteers and the I.R.B. for the next seven or eight months and increased our membership considerably.

In May 1915 I attended a meeting of the Supreme Council at the Town Hall, Clontarf. Tom Clarke presided at this meeting and others present were - that I can remember - Sean McDermott as Secretary; Joseph Gleeson representing Scotland; Neil Kerr, Liverpool; Denis McCullough, Ulster. I cannot remember who represented Munster. Diarmuid Lynch represented the U.S.A. Discussions centred on organisation and world contacts. A communication was read from Monteith. He was in South America and was going to Germany. There was also communications from the Clan na Gael in America. At this meeting P.H. Pearse was co-opted a member. A military committee was established at this meeting consisting of Pearse, Ceannt and Plunkett. The purpose of this committee was to look after military organisation. I understood the appointments were to be in the nature of a Military staff. I also attended other meetings of the Supreme Council in Barry's Hotel.

In August 1915 I purchased a quantity of explosive (gelignite) in Gilmore's shop in Sligo. I was arrested at Sligo Station with the

gelignite which I had in a handbag. I was taken to Sligo and from there to Mountjoy. I was tried in Green St. Courthouse. The jury disagreed and I was returned to Mountjoy Jail. I was held in Mountjoy for three months and then released. I think I was the last or second last person to be tried on a charge of this nature by a jury. After I was released I saw McDermott who told me that they had made arrangements for a Rising and also for arms and help from Germany. He instructed me to proceed to the west and to examine the coastline between Ballina and Donegal with a view to the possible landing of the arms there. He said a place had been provisionally fixed in the south, but in case of a cancellation of this, they required alternative areas. He told me that the Rising was fixed for Easter.

I got maps and made a survey of the coast within the areas specified. Local fishermen were a fine source of information. I selected a place called Aughries as suitable. Ballina, I decided was a poor centre as there was no suitable organisation there. Enniscrone, I also decided, as being suitable. I did not know the draft of the vessel or vessels expected, but I gave depths as ascertained locally. I travelled to Mullaghmore. ^{DEVENS RMC} ~~Devens~~ had a Company near here and I also suggested this place as a possible site. Killybegs was a good port, but units of the British Navy were always present there and there was no local organisation either. In the meantime I had taken an appointment as Teacher in Killybegs and McDermott told me to stay there until he sent for me or sent instructions.

On Easter Saturday morning I saw on the paper about Casement's arrest in Kerry. I could see that the R.I.C. were watching me. I cycled out of the town and eventually got the train and travelled to Dublin. On reaching Dublin I sent a message to Tom Clarke asking him to fix a meeting place as I was in the "Hue and Cry" - the Police Gazette at the time. I was told to report to a house, I think it was at the corner of Hardwicke Place. I went there and met McDermott, Joe Plunkett, Pearse, Connolly, Tom Clarke and a few others. Sean McDermott told me about the incidents in Kerry. He

also said that MacNeill had countermanded the "Rising" but that they had decided to go ahead with it. He said that the staff were standing-by. I asked to remain in Dublin, but McDermott insisted that I go back to Sligo. He said that if forced out of the city they would retreat towards the west. He said "mobilise as many men as you can, destroy communications and await our arrival". Pearse and Connolly, who were now leaving, called me to go with them. We went to Liberty Hall. As we went towards Liberty Hall there was a discussion between Pearse and Connolly on the coming events. This covered such subjects as mobilisation; the terrible odds they would be up against and how, when the Rising started in the city, they would be out of touch with areas in the country. I ascertained from their discussion that Pearse was for taking to the country, while Connolly was for fighting in the city from house to house. Eventually Connolly agreed that they might be able to retreat into the country from the city. Pearse told me to do my best and said that as they retreated they would be gathering strength by being joined by the country centres of the I.R.B. and some of the Volunteers. I parted with them outside Liberty Hall. McDermott had advised me to travel back by train to Sligo. He also remarked that it was most likely that most of the Volunteers would obey MacNeill's orders.

I stayed that night in a house in Mountjoy Square. Martin Conlon, Mick Collins, P. Donoghue, J.J. Walsh and some others from England were also there. Next morning I saw MacNeill's countermanding order in the "Sunday Independent". I got a train at Broadstone that morning taking a ticket to Sligo. I got off at Mullingar. I tried to find the Centre of the I.R.B. there, but could not do so. I got a car at Mullingar and travelled to Granard and contacted the Centre there. He was John Cawley. I told him what was to happen. I stayed in Granard that night. The following day I got a car to Carrick-on-Shannon. The car had an accident en route which caused a serious delay. I could not contact anyone in Carrick-on-Shannon. I then travelled on to Boyle and contacted Jim Feely there. He had no arms of any sort and decided that he

would await events. I next travelled on to Ballaghaderreen, getting there late on Monday night. By this time information had reached there that the rebellion had started in Dublin. I contacted Mr. Coleman there, but all they could mobilise was two rifles. There were supposed to be a good many rifles in that area. The driver of our car would not come any further with us now, so Joe Kelly, who accompanied me, and I broke into a garage and took a car and started for Tobercurry. When two or three miles outside the town the car broke down. I stayed with the car and Kelly went to look for petrol. After a long period of waiting I could see lights of cars approaching. I took them to be police cars. I took my coat and gun and made into the bog, incidentally falling into a boghole and getting a good soaking. The approaching car stopped and a number of men got out. I could hear Kelly's voice and questions being asked about a gun. It was dark now. I made off towards Keash and eventually got to a farmhouse where I was received very hospitably. It was now about midnight. They gave me a change of clothes and food. I started early on Tuesday morning for Keash.

I mobilised seven or eight men in the Keash area. They had a Service rifle and some ammunition and some shotguns. Shortly after I had left the farmhouse where I had stayed on Monday night it was surrounded by R.I.C. and searched, but they got nothing. With the men from Keash we travelled across country to Culfadda where we mobilised a few more men. We had about 12 men now. We continued from there to Mullinbreena and collected a few more men, also a few revolvers and shotguns.

We travelled from there into Tobercurry and were reinforced by another 4 or 5 men. The R.I.C. remained in their barracks. We tried to draw them out but they did not come. We went to the railway station which we tried to destroy, but the police still remained in their barracks. We then cut all the telephone and telegraph wires around Tobercurry and broke the railway lines leading to ^{SLIGO and} Meate. A few shots were fired at the Police barracks.

It was then decided that there was nothing further we could do and that the men should disband. A mobilisation place was fixed for

all in case of a further call. The men were to take their arms and equipment with them and to cut all telephone and telegraph wires in their area. We had picked up a further four rifles in Tobercurry.

I returned to a house at Mullinbreena and awaited instructions there from Dublin, but none ever came. Eventually I heard of the surrender in Dublin and I went 'on the run' in the locality and around Sligo. I managed to evade arrest. I kept contact with the I.R.B. and did an amount of propaganda work and kept in contact with the various units.

Signed: *a McLeah*

Date: *14 July 1929*

Witness: *Matthew Barry* Comdt.

