

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 373

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 373

Witness

Mr. John Hosty,
"Fatima",
Shantalla Road,
Galway.

Identity

Courier from Galway to MacNeill, Dublin,
Holy Saturday, 1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1910-1916;
- (b) Preparations in Co. Galway for
Rising, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT BY JOHN HOSTY,

"FATIMA", SHANTALLA ROAD, GALWAY.

Prior to 1910 to the best of my recollection what we will call the "physical force" movement more or less originated with the issue of the "United Irishman". Anyway, it tended towards keeping a fair number of we young fellows, from becoming followers of what was called the "constitutional movement". I have a distinct recollection - I think it was 1906 - the visit of King Edward VII - to Ireland, and Maud Gonne leading a mass attack on the Dublin Corporation to oppose an address which it was contemplated presenting to him. Timothy Harrington, M.P., a member of the Irish Party, was Lord Mayor, and sympathetic to the address, but fortunately Maud Gonne upset the apple cart and the address was not carried.

It was not so here in Galway, for the Galway Urban Council of the day voted and carried an address to be read to His Britannic Majesty. It was carried by a majority. This town was nicely decorated, and at Williamsgate Street - between McCullagh's Book Shop and the corner shop opposite - a triumphal decorated archway was erected. Some time afterwards we learned it was in the form of the masonic emblem - a kind of square and compass. This may not be of much interest to you,

but it shows the mentality of the powers that be at this period, and I venture to say the same mentality is still in a good many of the succeeding generations even down to the present day. An attempt to saw it down by some of us failed to mature.

At the end of that year local elections took place and we youngsters, clubbed together - collected a few pence here and there - one of the lads, Tom Flood, who later went to Canada, was a bit of a poet and composed an "address" emanating from some of those who voted the English King the address: it was headed - "Address from the Galway Mind the Main Point Urban Council". Along with this there were some poems; one was a parody on Tennyson's 'May Queen' - dedicated to the late Sir James O'Donoghoe, who was knighted - something like this:

Sir James to his mother:

"Arise and wake me early, wake me
early, mother dear;

For I long to see the dawning of
this bright and glad New Year;

For the King he is a-coming, mother,
in all his grand array,

And I'll be Mayor of Galway, mother,
Mayor of Gal-way".

(Note: If Dr. G.A. Hayes-McCoy looks up the files of the "United Irishman" of this period, there should be a lot of valuable information obtained from them).

1912, I think it was, the Gaelic League Oireachtas was held here in Galway. Seán McDermott was active during it in the interests of the I.R.B. Seoirse MacNiocall (George Nicholls) was installed as

Head Centre and at least half a dozen of us were taken in. I myself was sworn by Seán MacDermott. From now on all we could possibly do in the movement against the Irish Party and 'agin the Government' was done. Anti-enlisting literature was distributed on every available occasion - at all hours of the night. If the "blackguards" were only caught, what would not be done to them? However, they were not caught.

The formation of the Ulster Volunteers in 1913, I think, was an event. Here in Galway, the Irish Volunteers were inaugurated at a meeting held in the Town Hall in December, 1913. It was addressed by Eoin MacNeill, Sir Roger Casement and others. There was a huge list of names handed in for membership. (A copy of this list of names, I understand, is still in existence. It was held by Mr. Michael Allen, now of the firm of MacDermott & Allen, Solicitors, Francis Street. Mr. Allen who lived in Shantalla - though I am not sure if he lived here in Shantalla at the time - but anyway he had the list and he told me some years ago that he did leave them in the Shantalla residence in a concealed room when he vacated the place. The house was then occupied by Mr. Michael Stewart, and it is believed the list is now in the possession his son-in-law, Mr. Frank Curran. It might be possible to obtain it from him - though some of the big names of the Fianna Fáil organisation of which he is or was an active member).

Drilling now became fairly brisk and Companies were established in Castlegar and all over the county,

during 1914-1915. Then the unfortunate 'split' took place. There was a meeting called in the Town Hall - it was held in what was known as the Urban Council Chamber - a pretty large room; the late Martin McDonagh, T.D. (the biggest merchant in Galway) presided. His sympathies were Redmondite. Our crowd was rounded up for the occasion and a vote taken which side the Volunteers as a body would go. We had no intention of going any side but the right side, no matter how the vote went. The Redmondite section was also rounded up - they had a full following - Volunteers and non-Volunteers - for voting purposes. The vote was a tie, and Martin McDonagh declared the motion which was "that the Irish Volunteers deserve the support of the meeting" lost. It was inevitable anyway. Every obstacle would be thrown in the way of the Irish Volunteer Movement no matter what happened. From now on it was open war between both sections. The Irish Volunteers had both press and people against them. The finest body of fifth columnists in Ireland were in Galway town. The remainder of the county, especially around Castlegar area, was pretty good and could always be relied on for any help required. They were a deterrent factor against the likelihood of any of us here in town getting a bashing. You could always call on them if necessary and, did the other side know it, not half!

A Pipe Band was founded by George Nicholls. With the exception of three, all were I.R.B. members. The band toured most of the county at intervals - matches, concerts, etc. and did a lot of propaganda.

work. It, I believe, was partly financed by the I. R. B. Headquarters, but Nicholls himself was out of pocket considerably.

(Some time about this period - it may have been earlier - Máirtín Conlon (sometime T. D. and sometime Senator) brought a few suitcases of literature to Galway for circulation. They were lodged in the Old Malt House (Michael Walsh's) in High Street. The literature emanated from Sir Roger Casement. I think, looking back, that it was titled, "The Next War - England, Ireland and Germany". All this stuff was enveloped, stamped and distributed in all the Post Offices and Post Boxes in Galway, collected by the postmen and delivered to the various addresses. This must be early in 1913).

Recruiting meetings for the British Army were now being held throughout the country. One meeting in the Town Hall, Galway, addressed by Stephen Gwynn, M. P., had all the supporters of the regime in attendance. Admission was closely watched. Likely hecklers or probable disturbers were refused admission. Fr. Connolly of St. Joseph's, Garbally, Ballinasloe, was stopped and refused admittance. (Fr. Connolly died a few years ago on the Chinese Mission). However, the refusal to admit did not deter Fr. Connolly from saying what he had to say. He came away. Directly opposite the Town Hall lies the Convent of Mercy Schools with a six-foot wall around it. Fr. Connolly mounted the wall, and addressed the overflow. In case of interference with him he was immediately surrounded by a fairly hefty crowd of young men. He finished what he had to say

without interference and got as good a reception - an enthusiastic one at that - as the gentlemen inside closed doors had from their own supporters. We learned afterwards that Dean Considine was informed officially by complaint of Fr. Connolly's action. No action on the complaint was taken by the Dean. The Dean was not sympathetic towards the recruiting movement.

One big review of Irish Volunteers was held in Athenry and addressed by The O'Rahilly, Eoin McNeill, Larry Ginnell and _____ Judge. The Galway Pipe Band was present at this. It was also present at the O'Donovan Rossa funeral.

In passing, I may mention that a big recruiting meeting was called for the Galway Town Hall sometime in 1915. The meeting was billed for 8 o'clock at night. It was never held. We discussed among ourselves what was best to do to stop it. Stink-bombs were manufactured in U. C. G. Laboratory and distributed amongst a few reliables who got into the hall. George Nicholls occupied a front seat and the remainder were scattered here and there throughout the hall. Poor Frank Hardiman who rented the hall, was peppering in case anything would happen, but he was assured everything would be O.K., that there would be no interference with the progress of the meeting. Three of us, Tom Hynes, Michael Kavanagh and myself, were told off to cut the wires at a certain time. In case of anything like this being thought of, a policeman (R. I. C.) was placed on the roof of the hall to watch. Nevertheless at about 8.30 or maybe a little later the lights began to flicker in the hall and then total darkness. The stink-bombs were then placed on the

floor and crushed. The hall was cleared in the twinkling of an eye - through doors and windows. Only afterwards we thought of how risky it was for those who were present. In the rush out they might have been killed by trampling. Everyone though kept their feet and got through.

(For a report on this meeting see Irish daily papers - some of the reporters present told our side a short time afterwards that he could still smell the stink-bombs). The wires were cut opposite the stained-glass window of the Mercy Convent Chapel at Newtownmyth. They ran under the wall just over the river. There were four live wires. Rubber gloves were used and as each wire was cut it fell into the river - flop - cutting off the supply to the Town Hall, and all around the whole area and up to University Road. We scattered and re-assembled outside the Hall. A force of R.I.C. about 16 to 20, left Eglinton Street Barracks on the double for the Town Hall but the damage was done. The meeting was dispersed. Immediately afterwards the recruiting meeting re-assembled outside the courthouse with motor lamps lit. Now that I remember, the late Willie Redmond, M.P., was present with S. Gwynn, and billed to speak. The meeting proceeded apace with much catcalls, etc. Now a pretty big contingent from Castlegar had come in late - it was just as well. When the meeting ended half a dozen of them hurraied Stephen Gwynn and carried him shoulder high until they reached the Abbey Church when the poor man kicked to be let down. The 'ruffians' had cut his braces and the pants was nearly off. It was a standing joke for years how Mr. Gwynn nearly lost his pants.

The sequel to this attack on the anti-recruiting meeting took place some weeks later. I should have mentioned earlier that the Irish Volunteers had a drill

hall in Williamsgate Street, the property of the late Mr. John O'Donnell, sometime M.P. for Mayo. The hall was situated at the rear - it was portion of the shop now occupied by the Blackrock Tailoring Company. The late Mr. O'Donnell was very sympathetic to the Irish Volunteer organisation and facilitated it in every way. Well, on this particular night, a few dozen of what remained of the Galway Co. Irish Volunteers assembled as usual for drill - wooden guns and one small rifle, with a small quantity of ammunition. Between 8.30 and 9.30 an organised opposition assembled outside McNamara's shop (opposite) ably supported by the R. I. C. in the background. Missiles began flying - crash - crash - crash - goes the glass in the windows over the shop. Members of the Company began to clear out - running the gauntlet so to speak - until about half a dozen were left. The last half dozen were, George Nicholls, Jim Carter (Chief Clerk, Galway County Council), M. J. Allen, _____ McKeigue, Tom Flanagan and the writer. Of these, Nicholls, Carter, McKeigue are dead. To make a long story short they moved out with the wooden guns and the one rifle (McKeigue had the rifle). We got a short way only when the rush came with the R. I. C. in the rear, urging the mob on. We had to turn face towards the attackers and retreat backwards down town (I must say that no stones were thrown) until we came to Lower Mainguard Street, at the point where the street narrowed, that is where Carr & Sons, Decorators, have their business premises; the old Military Barracks stood directly opposite. The width of the road at this point would not be more than twenty feet. The rush came here. McKeigue asked several times if he would fire - he carried the rifle loaded. The order was "no", "swing it by the

barrel". The moment the rifle - the solitary rifle, was reversed, the 'battle' was lost. The rifle was snapped. The remnants of the Galway Company as a unit ceased to function.

Just before we scattered, Jim Carter got one in on an ex-soldier, J. McGowan. For this, some days later he was arrested and charged at Petty Sessions with the Resident Magistrate, Gardiner, in judgment: sentence - six weeks in Galway Gaol. Carter was married - had a small family. An appeal was lodged to the Recorder's Court - Judge Doyle. The procedure in this Court for this type of case was the Judge sat and the Magistrates of the area could sit with him, in judgment. We still have a little influence and pressure was brought to bear on the Magistrates - the late James M. Campbell (a loyalist), the late R.H. French of Rocklawn, Claregalway, and I think there was a third, sat with Judge Doyle. The Crown prosecuted. Mr. J.H. Concannon, Tuam, (a Mason?) was the Solicitor retained for Carter. The sentence of six weeks was revoked by a majority - the majority were the local Magistrates - to a fine of £10, which was a victory for the Irish Volunteers.

We were now back again where we were in 1912. Still we could always rely on the outside areas for help or assistance of any kind if necessary. That night after the break-up, the mob toured the town, visited the areas where active Irish Volunteers lived, stoned the windows of the houses and did considerable damage. The town paid afterwards on malicious injury claims. The writer happened to get a 'black-eye' that night. Four years later the 'gentleman' who presented him with the 'black-eye'

was playing in a hurling match at Cranmore. One of the Castlegar men, Barney Fallon, knew him, so he collected a few kindred souls, went on to the playing pitch and escorted the 'gentleman' off the field with an argument more forcible than polite for the black-eye he gave Hosty the night of the riot. (I must say that this lad who gave the black-eye is now dead). Afterwards he was a good as gold. The same applies also to a big number who were in the attack that night. They knew nothing. After 1916 a good many always regretted their attitude on that occasion. "If we only knew", was the cry, "things would have been different".

The Galway Pipe Band still held sway and a general mobilisation of County Galway Volunteers was fixed for St. Patrick's Day, 1916. Companies from all over the county concentrated on Galway town. I would say from memory that the mobilisation would be in the neighbourhood of 500 to 600 Volunteers. There were pikemen and rifles, and a fair amount of small arms. Everything went off quietly. It was thought that there might be trouble after the dismiss, but no. No molestation of any kind took place.

Now comes the crucial week of Easter, 1916. We were aware during the week that the Rising was fixed for Easter Sunday. The late Larry Lardiner was Commandant for the county, but to my mind then and now, everything emanated from George Nicholls. Nicholls was persona grata, so to speak, with the Supreme Council I.R.B., the organisation within an organisation. Instructions went through him to Lardiner.

Friday of that week a despatch arrived fixing the Rising for 7 (seven) o'clock p.m., Easter Sunday - if my memory serves me the Castlegar Company were to move in on Galway and occupy the R.I.C. Barracks and other places. In the military barracks at Renmore there were only half a dozen military in occupation. The Galway Company consisted of half a dozen members of the Pipers' Band and some old timers, not many. The order for the mobilisation was I.R.B. Exception was taken by many members (I.R.B.) in authority as to whether it should be obeyed or not. A meeting of Commandants, Captains, etc. (all of whom were I.R.B.) was called for Saturday. The meeting was held in University Road in George Nicholl's house. The decision arrived at was that I be asked to take a despatch verbally to Dublin, to see MacNeill, if the order for the Rising was genuine. If it emanated through him, was he cognisant of it? Well and good! George Nicholls called me aside afterwards and instructed me to call on Pádraig Pearse and tell him the position.

I left Galway that night by road. Larry Lardiner on his way home to Athenry, picked me up about 8 o'clock on the Renmore road. When I arrived in Athenry another meeting was in session. I was not interested in the discussion but I still could gather that without MacNeill's 'O.K.' there would be no movement. I left there by the night mail which left Galway at midnight and Athenry at 12.30 and arrived in Dublin shortly after 5 a.m. In case of being pinched I had no written despatch with me, but from George Nicholls I was told to tell Pádraig Pearse that I had called to see him about Mrs. Hawkin's timber. This would be sufficient to identify me if Seán MacDermott was not there. The late Tom Kenny and Stephen Jordan

were up in Dublin for the G.A.A. Congress to be held that day. I was told to call on them at the Exchange Hotel. I did call. Stephen Jordan was sleeping soundly. Tom Kenny was awake, as also were some others in the room. I told Tom Kenny to remain at the Exchange with Jordan until 10 a.m. when I expected to be back. I did not go back, got a sidecar and travelled out to Rathfarnham, called at Pearse's house, knocked it up. Miss B. Pearse came to the sitting-room window and raised it. I gave her my message. She said, "this is terrible". She told me neither Pádraig nor Willie was there at all that night, that I would find them at - I am not sure of the number - but it was 16 or 12 Rutland Street or Rutland Square. I left then and went to MacNeill's. I met Mrs. MacNeill in the trap with the children just leaving the house for Mass. She pulled up, got out, brought me into the house to Mr. MacNeill's bedroom. Another man was there with him. I learned afterwards that it was Seán Fitzgibbon; gave him the message, also told him I had called at Pearse's. He said then that he had already sent out countermanding orders calling the mobilisation off. He asked me how I contemplated getting word to Galway. I told him by telegraph between 10 and 11 from the G.P.O., Dublin. This was already arranged in Galway before I left. He said there was no necessity, the order was already sent the previous evening and should be there.

(Diverting from this, I should have stated previously that the information we had in Galway on Holy Thursday was that Companies were to move south of Galway, contact Clare and if the expected landing of arms matured, and at that stage there was no reason to

doubt - to collect their share and move back again to Galway). I mentioned this to MacNeill. He said then I would have to travel to Limerick by the 9 a.m. train from Kingsbridge. He wrote a despatch, showed me what he had written - "that all operations were off". He told me to get it to Michael Colivet, to contact either Fr. Hennessy, O.S.A. (afterwards Provincial of the Order) R.I.P., or a Fr. Hughes, S.J. Any of these would bring me to where the Volunteers were mobilised if not disbanded. I left Kingsbridge at 9, got into Limerick before 4, saw Fr. Hennessy, gave him MacNeill's letter. He immediately got a side-car and brought me out to where the Limerick men were mobilised. I told Fr. Hennessy the position in Galway as to the orders issued. I shall always remember his remarks in reply - "that he personally did not give a hang who issued the orders if it (the Rising) only came off". I did not see Fr. Hennessy again.

I now gave MacNeill's message to Michael Colivet. There was a big mobilisation. He met me with his staff, Ledden, big Seán Ó Muirthille and others. We walked up the field. I passed the remark to Michael Colivet that I thought I was had when I was directed to travel to Limerick. Michael Colivet already had got countermanding orders the previous evening. The O'Rahilly was in Limerick and had left a short time earlier that Sunday. I remained in Limerick that night, telegraphed Lardiner at Athenry next morning, met him when the train arrived in, gave him all the information I had, and the change out of a £5 note which I got on Saturday evening to pay expenses. The expenses were, the train fare up to Dublin, 10/- for the side-car to Rathfarnham, and the

train fare to Eimerick and on to Athenry. In these days it did not amount to much. On arrival in Galway I met Nicholls who already had received various messages during Sunday that things were off.

On Monday, Langley arrived in Galway from Tuam with Pearse's order to mobilise, that the fight was on. Nicholls moved out towards Spiddal to meet Droighneáin. I did not see him after that. The round-up had begun on Tuesday, I think. Nicholls, Flanagan, Carter, Faller, Steinberger (Professor in U.C.G. - a German), Dr. Tom Walsh, Droighneáin were pinched. The same thing was in operation throughout the county. Rumours were current in town that Castlegar were mobilised at Carnmore Cross. They were. Some cars with police moved out in that direction, ably assisted by some sterling loyalists from the town of Galway - all dead now.

One R. I. C. Constable - Whelan - the most harmless man in the whole Barracks - was shot dead. Castlegar then disbanded, were rounded up during the week, brought to Galway and later deported by train and ship. That's for the town. Mud, stones, etc., etc. were not good enough when the locals were leaving by boat. Word came in from Lime Park through the late Maud Kyne (Mrs. Harry Shiels afterwards) from Mellows that any of us who were not pinched were to keep out of the way for the time being. My house was raided about ten days after the Rising. A bundle of private letters and the flag of the Pipe Band were taken. I never saw them again. I remained on the dodge for nearly three months in the town and got away with it.

The arms in the town of Galway in our possession consisted of half dozen shotguns, two old German rifles and four revolvers which were distributed.

Contact Con Fogarty of Tuam (an employee of Great Southern Railways in 1916). Con was signalman in Crusheen, Co. Clare. At the time I understand he had got instructions to block the railway at that point if the arms expected were landed. When I left Galway that Easter Saturday night - whether I was told before I left, or whether I was directed by either Eoin MacNeill or Seán Fitzgibbon - somebody told me that I was to proceed to Crusheen and tell him (Fogarty) the position.

I suppose this ends the first phase of the fight for Irish independence. The second phase from 1916 on should be as interesting if not more so.

Here in Galway the "big citizens" meeting of Easter Week, the resolutions passed and the special Constables who did their stuff to a man, should prove, and will show what the quislings of the period were prepared to do for king and country.

SIGNED

John Harty

DATE

April 8th 1950

WITNESS

Seán Brennan Comdt.