

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 500

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 500

Witness

Sean O Cuill,
442 Collins Avenue,
Drumcondra, Dublin.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers, Cork,
1913-1914.

Subject

Comment on C.D. 23 -

Liam de Roiste's Diary 1913-1914.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 554

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

Copy of C.D. 23.

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No. W.S. 500

ÓGLAIGH NA h-ÉIREANN.

IRISH VOLUNTEERS, CORK CORPS.

Headquarters - FISHER STREET,

Defence, not Defiance.

CORK.

Janemount,
Sunday's Well,
Cork.

24: XI: 1947.

A Chara,

As there is a meeting of Cork Corporation to-morrow night, I regret very much I cannot attend the meeting you have called together. I should like to have been present.

Meantime, I have been extracting some records from my diaries, which may be of interest to you. They are enclosed herewith: but are unfinished as you see. When I get the opportunity, I shall continue extracts. No doubt, others can supply some more detailed information: as, during 1914, '15, '16, I had to be frequently out of Cork.

Mise, do chara,

(Sgd.) Liam de Róiste.

(Note the heading I am writing on: 34 years old).

IRISH VOLUNTEERS : CORK CORPS.

(Abridged records from a diary: Liam de Roiste).

1913.

I. "That it was the Ulster Volunteer Movement which provided the opportunity for the formation of the Irish Volunteers is beyond dispute." Under English law in Ireland such a body as the Volunteers was illegal. To carry arms, except under licence, was a criminal offence.

But, when the British Government permitted the organisation of "Carson's Volunteers", many Nationalists began to think the time was opportune for a Nationalist Volunteer Force. The lesson was again being taught that only by force could Irish freedom from English rule be achieved.

II. In June, 1913, a small paragraph appeared in some of the newspapers that a Volunteer Corps had been started in Athlone and it numbered a thousand! There was no substance in the paragraph, beyond the fact that the idea of such a Corps had been discussed in a "pub." !

III. The beginning was made in Dublin, November 1913, by the holding of a public meeting. A Provisional Committee was formed, of men representative of various shades of political thought. Men who had been upholding separatist ideas - (republicanism, "physical force") - in other years, did not appear prominently on the Provisional Committee.

IV. Dublin had only begun when a few of us were discussing the formation of a Corps in Cork, seriously. It had been talked about previously. We felt, however, the thing was too big to be started by a few. We considered all Irish Nationalists ought combine for the purpose. There were special difficulties in Cork because of the feud between the O'Brienites and the Redmondites. (The latter had two organisations - the United Irish League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians - "Board of Erin".)

V. J.L. Fawsitt, Secretary of the Cork Industrial Development Association and myself discussed the matter a few times. He got talking to J.J. Walsh, Chairman, Cork County Board, G.A.A. In my view, the Gaelic Athletic Association was the appropriate body to take up the formation of a Volunteer Corps. It was not a party Association and its members were the young men who could have been the real recruits for an Irish Army.

The Cork Co. Board, however, did not act. Walsh did.

VI. He wrote to Eoin MacNeill, Chairman of the Dublin Provisional Committee. Eoin promised to come to Cork. Fawsitt, Walsh, Maurice O'Connor, Maurice Conway, with a few others, met and arranged the day, hour and place for a public meeting to launch the Cork Corps - Sunday, 14th December, 1913, City Hall, Cork, 8 p.m.

MacNeill was to be the principal speaker. Walsh, as representative of the Gaelic Athletic Association and Chairman of the Co. Board, was to preside: Fawsitt, to read the Manifesto that had been published by the Dublin Committee: De Roiste, as one connected with the Gaelic League, was to propose a vote of thanks to MacNeill.

VII. There were two choices open to us to emphasise the non-party character of the Volunteers - to have no party speakers, or, to have one from each side - O'Brienite and Redmondite. Ultimately, we decided to ask Eamon O'Neill of Kinsale and John J. Horgan, Solr., to speak; the former, as one identified in the public mind with the O'Brien party, the latter, as one prominently connected with the Redmond party.

VIII. It was decided to call the meeting by ticket only. The names on the cards issued were - J.J. Walsh, J.L. Fawsitt, Maurice O'Connor (then a Law student at University College, Cork) and Liam de Roiste.

Bundles of cards were sent to every G.A.A. Club, every National, political and other society and organisation in Cork City and neighbourhood.

IX. On Friday, prior to the Sunday of the meeting, we learned there was a likelihood of Sir Roger Casement being in Cork and present at our meeting. His purpose was in connection with an endeavour to get German-American Liners to call in to Cork Harbour, as the Cunard Co. had cancelled its calls.

X. Saturday night, I learned that the Ancient Order of Hibernians, (Board of Erin-Redmondites), would have nothing to do with our meeting as a "threepenny ad." had appeared in the "Echo" from the Hibernians of the American-Alliance, asking members of the latter body to attend the meeting! The two bodies were in opposition.

Some letters of a "felon-setting" nature also appeared in the "Echo" that evening.

XI. At the Imperial Hotel, on Sunday, John J. Horgan, Solicitor, met Eoin MacNeill and Casement. He expressed willingness to speak at the public meeting, if MacNeill wishes. In the event, he did not speak.

XII. At 8 o'clock there was a fair attendance in the City Hall. About 8.30, we went out on the platform - MacNeill, Casement, Walsh, Fawsitt, De Roiste; there were also some Fianna boys. It was a surprise. The hall was filled to capacity. Every available space was taken up; those unable to get seats standing in side passages and at the end of the hall.

XIII. Walsh presided and spoke at length; very carefully, so as not to offend the susceptibilities of political partisans. Fawsitt read the Dublin Manifesto. This was received with great enthusiasm.

Then Eoin MacNeill spoke; first in Irish, next in English. There was one interrupter in the gallery. He was quieted by those near him. Everything seemed to be going on splendidly.

MacNeill touched on the Ulster Volunteers. Dangerous

ground with a Cork audience. He continued, however, unconscious of the danger. Then the climax! He called for "cheers for Sir Edward Carson's Volunteers."

A signal was given, as we could see, to Hibernians in the Hall. Applause, long and loud, on the one hand. Hooting, Hissing, shouting, on the other. The order of the meeting hung in the balance for about five minutes: MacNeill standing on the front of the platform, calmly. The whole audience stood up. Near to the platform came angry and excited men: one, in particular, thumping the boards with a big stick. We, on the platform, rose also. The Chairman tried to appeal for order. Then there was a rush on the platform. Excited men jumped up on it, waving sticks and hats in the air. There was a rush at MacNeill and a rush at Walsh. There were loud shouts of "Up Redmond".

- XIV. J.J. Walsh seemed to be the chief object of attack. After a short time, the lights in the hall were turned off. We were all in darkness and no one knew who may, or may not, be struck in the melée.

Walsh had been hit on the head and carried away to the South Infirmary.

- XV. There was a group in one of the side passages off the platform. Among them, MacNeill, Casement and Fawsitt. A friend told me there was still a big crowd in the hall; that the lights had been turned on; that if ^{we} got on the platform again we would be listened to.

- XVI. J.L. Fawsitt got on a chair, or a table. He appealed for a hearing for Casement. He asked the audience to sit down, which they did. Order was restored. The pressmen were gone. Fawsitt was listened to, in quiet: then applauded. Next, Casement spoke. He caught the crowd. He roused enthusiasm. There was long and loud applause when he concluded.

Then, de Róiste spoke. At the conclusion, he quoted the lines, "Awake! Arise!. Be men to-day". This caught the spirit of the audience.

- XVII. Forms of enrolment had been distributed among the people in the hall. At the conclusion of De Roiste's address, an old Fenian who was near the platform jumped up and handed up his form. That was the opening for others. A few hundreds came up, with their names and addresses on the forms.

Many in the audience then went out. A small number remained around the platform. Phil O'Neill, of Kinsale, mounted a chair and sang a Volunteer song he had written for the occasion, to the air of "The Mountains of Pomeroy".

- XVIII. A few of us went to the Imperial Hotel. MacNeill and Casement had gone on before. We had good news. We had won. A Volunteer Corps was formed in Cork, despite the opposition.

That first meeting was the beginning of a series of mistakes on the part of the Redmondites in Cork and the beginning of a series of successes for those who, rightly or wrongly, are called "Sinn Féiners."

The three Cork newspapers, "Examiner", "Free Press", "Constitution" were united in denunciation of the "irresponsible men" who had organised the Volunteers.

- XIX. It had been arranged to submit names to form a Provisional Committee of the Cork Corps at the public meeting. In the circumstances, no names were submitted: only a "general mandate" asked for those who had organised the meeting.
- Among those who came to the hotel was Tomás Mac Curtain. I asked him if he would become Secretary of the Committee. He consented. (I had known him in the Gaelic League and, as far as I knew, he was not a member of any political Society or organisation at the time.)
- XX. The committee we subsequently got together were : Maurice Conway, John Jennings, Diarmuid O'Donovan, Maurice O'Connor, Enright (a student at University College), Denis O'Mahony, Sean Hegarty, Terence MacSwiney, Sean O'Cuill, Liam Owens, Sean O'Sullivan, Patrick Corkery.
- J.J. Walsh was accepted as chairman; J.L. Fawcitt as Vice-Chairman, Tomas MacCurtain as Honorary Secretary, and Liam de Roiste as Honorary Treasurer. "There was no formal election to these Offices: nor could there be, in the circumstances of the time.)
- XXI. In December, (1913), a meeting was held in Dún na nGaedheal, Queen Street: headquarters of the Gaelic League in Cork. To it were invited those who had handed in their names at the public meeting. About 150 men were present. Walsh, Fawcitt, P.S. O'Hegarty, Tomas Curtin and Liam de Roiste spoke. The meeting was very enthusiastic and subscriptions were collected for general purposes. It was decided to rent the Dun for drill for two or three nights a week.
- XXII. The services of a man named Goodwin, an ex-Artillery Sergeant Major, were secured, as drill-instructor. He refused to accept payment for his services. He was, however, unable to attend regularly and another man had to be secured - ex-Sergeant Donovan of the Dublin Fusiliers. He was paid for his work. He was an excellent instructor.
- Drilling continued regularly: in squads and sections. The numbers attending drill were small, but growing gradually.
- XXIII. The Dún rooms being too small for any extended drilling a change became imperative. After much searching and many enquiries, a store in Fisher Street was secured, (January or February, 1914). It was not very suitable, but it was useful. Half year's rent, (£20), had to be paid in advance. We had not that amount. So, four of us "raised a Bill" for £25 at the Munster and Leinster Bank, and became Trustees for Fisher Street Store.
- XXIV. In December (1913), the Government issued a Proclamation prohibiting the importation of arms into Ireland. The "Ulster Volunteers" defied the order.

1914.

- XXV. By St. Patrick's Day, (1914), the Irish Volunteers

were well under way throughout the country. They were actively and passively opposed by the political leaders, and decried by all the newspapers supporting those leaders. Some change came after "the Curragh incident."

XXVI. In Fisher Street, the Cork Corps was divided into Sections, each under a "Section Commander."

On April 3rd, 1914, Cork Cornmarket was obtained for parades, from the Corporation: one A.O.H. Councillor protesting.

On April 5th, we paraded in the Market and went for a route march to Blarney. There were nearly 100 at the parade. It was a fearfully wet day. Photographs of the Corps were taken: one of which appeared in the "Cork Examiner" next day. This was the beginning of a short period of "friendliness" towards the Volunteers on the part of the "Examiner". (The "Curragh incident" was the cause). Picture postcards of the Corps were also printed. A huge crowd awaited us outside the gates of the Cornmarket. Our reception through the city was enthusiasm. For the time being, the Volunteers were popular!

We started a Corps in Blarney. The evening cleared up and we returned to the city by "the rising of the moon".

To be continued.

Liam de Róiste.

24/XI/1947.

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Kigin O'Donnell, 442 Collins Avenue
Glencairn, Drumcondra,
Dublin 5th / 1948

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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NO. C. 9. 45

A copy. I have read with care Mr. Liam de Rosset's account of the beginning of the Irish Volunteers in Cork. I have ticked off with pencil, each paragraph as I read it, indicating that there was nothing with which I could disagree. It appears to me to be a very accurate account of what happened. I could not, myself vouch for the accuracy of some of the events covered, as I became aware of them only at some later date, but I could not imagine them having happened in any other way except as stated. Taking it as a whole, or bit by bit, I think Mr. de Rosset's

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account of the various
happenings may be accepted
as a fully authentic Account.

Yours

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9.0.12

Sean O'Connell