

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. **W.S. 529**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 529.....

Witness

James McCullough,
Ungola,
Armagh,
Co. Armagh.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. Armagh, 1914 - ;
Representative on Ulster Co. of I.R.B.

Subject.

The I.R.B., Co. Armagh,
1914-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S.1802**.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JAMES McCULLOUGH, UNGOLA,
ARMAGH, CO. ARMAGH.

I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1914. John Shields, Blackwaterstown, organised our Circle - Blackwaterstown - which I joined. In 1915, about a year after I joined the I.R.B., I was appointed Head Centre for Co. Armagh. There were five Circles in the county at this time: - Blackwaterstown, Annahue, Collegeland, Annaghmore, Middletown and Armagh.

John Traynor, now deceased, was Head Centre for Co. Armagh about 50 years ago. This man was county President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians when he joined the I.R.B. organisation. He remained in the A.O.H. whilst being in the I.R.B. and picked out the best material in the Hibernians for initiation into the I.R.B.

At the time I joined the I.R.B. the organisation was at a very low ebb. I got instructions from Mr. Ernest Blythe to get the organisation going and with about fourteen others I set about the work. The following prominent men in the I.R.B. visited Armagh area at various times: - Denis McCullough, Ernest Blythe, Denis Byrne, James Dobbyn, and his father old Harry Dobbyn, Liam Gaynor and Sean Cusack. Michael Collins and Con Collins from Cork also visited us in connection with I.R.B. affairs. William John McKiernan was an old I.R.B. member in Armagh before my time. James Donnelly joined the organisation after 1916.

Denis McCullough, Belfast, was Ulster representative on the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. pre 1916. When McCullough was arrested Liam Gaynor took over his position. The Ulster Council of the I.R.B. met once a month in Belfast and the date of the meetings were never announced at previous meetings. The method of calling each meeting was as follows: Each delegate to the Ulster Council would receive a copy of the Belfast Evening Telegraph by post, and in the Stop Press Column a date would be inserted in ink. The meeting would be held on the day previous to the date marked in ink in the paper. Thus, if the R.I.C. got to know that the date marked on the paper was connected with the Ulster Council Meeting they would be a day late if they decided to raid for our meeting place.

When a member of the Supreme Council came to Belfast to attend an Ulster Council meeting which were always held in the Gaelic League Rooms, College Square North, at the corner of King Street, a representative of the Ulster Council always met him at the Great Northern Station in Belfast. The representative used wear an ivy leaf in his button hole for identification purposes.

From 1914 onwards the R.I.C. got active in investigating the movements of the known members of the I.R.B. Instructions were issued by the Supreme Council that officer personnel were to be changed regularly and that substitutes were to be appointed to replace any officer of the organisation, immediately, an arrest was made.

On Good Friday 1916 the Blackwaterstown Circle of the I.R.B. got orders to assemble an Anagher Hill, Coalisland, on Easter Sunday 1916. When we arrived at the place of mobilisation we found the Antrim (Belfast) men and the

Tyrone men camped on the Hill. These men were all under the command of Denis McCullough and Seán Gaynor. Tom Carr of Liverpool - whose father Neil Carr was a native of Armagh - was at the entrance leading to the place of mobilisation and challenged each contingent arriving. My party consisted of John Garvey, Michael McGlennon, Edward Kelly and myself. Information came to us at Coalisland that the Rising was off and that all Volunteers from the nine Ulster counties were to demobilise and disperse for their homes. The Belfast men then returned to their homes in Belfast.

A big round-up of Irish Volunteers and I.R.B. members in Co. Tyrone took place in the first part of May 1916. Men were arrested and sent across to England for internment. There were no arrests made in Armagh city area. The Armagh police, however, started to take a more particular interest in the movements of all suspected of being linked up with the Rising in any way.

Before 1916 there were practically no effective rifles available to the Volunteers in Blackwaterstown area. We had three rifles which were procured in Belfast and a few revolvers. We were promised arms from Dublin. Those arms were being procured by a British soldier serving in a military barracks in Dublin. This soldier was caught and sentenced with the result that we never got the arms. It was arranged that these arms should arrive to us by motor bike and side car on the 15th August 1915. (The man who had promised us the arms was John J. Scullen O/C of the Hibernian Rifles, a republican military organisation whose Headquarters was in Gt. Frederick St. Dublin. There ^{were} Corps of the Hibernian Rifles in Armagh city, Blackwaterstown, Dundalk and Anahue. John Garvey was Chairman of the Blackwaterstown Corp of the Hibernian Rifles. I was Secretary and a man named Dillon was Treasurer. The man who organised the Hibernian Rifles in our local area was a Mr. Donnellan of Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone. This man was also a member of the I.R.B.

After 1916 when Scullen and some of the other Dublin leaders were arrested the Hibernian Rifle organisation seemed to have petered out.

From the end of 1916 a big push started to get recruits into the I.R.B. About the end of 1917, or early 1918, there were about seven Circles of the I.R.B. in Co. Armagh. I remember a report being made at an Ulster Council meeting in Belfast by the Cavan representative that there were five Circles in Co. Cavan. As far as I can now remember there were no Circles in Co. Monaghan at this time. There were at least four circles in Co. Down - Newry, Castlewellan and in the Belfast districts in Co. Down. I was Head Centre for Co. Armagh. Paddy Rankin was Head Centre for Co. Down. John Southwell was also a Co. Down representative.

In the years 1917 and 1918 the I.R.B. were very active in getting Companies of Volunteers started in all districts. The I.R.B. organisation attempted to take control of the newly formed Companies of Volunteers, and if possible, to retain control. These objects proved a difficult job and the I.R.B. lost control of the Volunteer organisation which became independent of outside influence in most areas. The great achievement of the I.R.B. organisation was that they were mainly responsible for early re-organisation of the Volunteers after 1916. The strict selection of the I.R.B. confined its members to a small handpicked band. The organisation of the Volunteers was on a more liberal basis where all young Irishmen of good national background were made welcome. In Blackwaterstown area, for instance, the I.R.B. Circle contained only 14 members while the Blackwaterstown Company of Volunteers numbered 80 to 90 men. It was only natural that the Volunteers would break away from the control of the small band of I.R.B. who desired to control them.

After the year 1918, or early 1919, the I.R.B. seemed to be slipping back as far as the organisation was concerned. The main interest of all good republicans at this time was to encourage the vigorous growth of the Irish Volunteers. An order came from the I.R.B. Headquarters in Dublin about 1919 that all the elderly men in the I.R.B. organisation should be asked to resign. It was to be pointed out to the men requested to resign that headquarters appreciated their services and the splendid work they had done in the past, but that their advancing years were rendering them unfit for much more active work and that the younger generation should get a free hand to carry on. Amongst the men who were to be dispensed with and whom I knew intimately were the following: Arthur Gribben, Mick Callaghan, Patrick Donnelly, John Devlin, Patrick Moane, Terry Finn, Peter Fegan, Pat Collins, William John McKiernan and some others, thirteen in all. This order created deep dissatisfaction amongst all the members of the organisation. The old fellows would not agree to be dispensed with. They paid their subscriptions and remained on, but they lost all influence in the control of the organisation. After 1919 the urge to spread the I.R.B. organisation seemed to fizzle out. We lost many of our active members through emigration, and the youngsters had a much keener interest in the Volunteers than in the I.R.B.

The I.R.B. after 1916 played a very important part in the procuring of arms for the Volunteers. We had contacts with I.R.B. Circles in Belfast where quantities of arms were procured and transported to Armagh by our members. James Timoney of Coalisland, one of our important leaders in Co. Tyrone, was able to supply arms to Armagh through I.R.B. channels at various times. The I.R.B. were useful in obtaining information through police channels and through Unionist supporters. I do

not claim that anything of special importance was got in this line in Armagh, but our organisation was generally useful all over.

During the Truce, in or about March 1922, a large consignment of arms came to Armagh from Dublin. Two lorry loads came along to Ballymacnab and were distributed to the various Battn. areas in the 3rd Brigade. Members of the I.R.B. took a leading part in handling and distributing this stuff in co-operation with the I.R.A.

I took charge of a large lorry load of arms in the military barracks, Dundalk, which I had then conveyed to two places, one house in South Armagh and the other part of the load was taken to Harry McKenna's house, Ballymacnab.

Signed:

Date:

James Mc Brien
5/6/51

Witness:

John Mc Coy
5/6/51.

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