

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 636

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 636

Witness

Denis McCullough,
12 Oakley Road,
Ranelagh,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. 1901-1916;

Member of Supreme Council I.R.B.
Belfast Centre, I.R.B. 1909.

Subject.

Official attitude of the 3rd Northern Division
to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. S.62

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

W.S. 636

Statement by

MR. DENIS McCULLOUGH,
12, Oakley Road,
Ranelagh, Dublin.

9/1/52
D.M. O'Connell
Seamus Woods

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From Easter 1916 to Christmas 1921 I had spent several periods in various jails. Following the German Plot arrests I was in Gloucester jail for practically a year and in Ballykinlar from early in 1921. I was released from Ballykinlar a few days before Christmas 1921 and returned home to Belfast accompanied by Sean O'Neill, *(Eisicair De ar a anam)* O/C Belfast Brigade at the date of his arrest. We travelled via Loughlinisland where we called on Commandant Hugh Halfpenny who showed us one of the first Thompson sub machine guns got into the country.

The "Treaty" terms had been published early in December and had naturally been under discussion throughout the whole country. I had hardly arrived home when I received a message from the O/C 3rd Northern Division (Joe McKelvey, Trocaire De ar a anam) to say that the Divisional Staff would like an interview with me. As during my several periods of imprisonment I had got somewhat out of touch with activities in Belfast I was glad of this opportunity to meet the leading Officers and to learn what the general situation in Belfast was. I invited them to come to my house. There were present at this interview

Joe McKelvey Divisional O/C, Seamus Woods Divisional Adjutant,

Duce

Frank Crummey Divisional Intelligence Officer and myself who had been O/C of the Volunteers in Belfast until they became the I.R.A. during one of the periods when I was in prison.

As this conference, at which the attitude of the 3rd Northern Division was decided, is of some historic importance I feel compelled to put it on record and have my recollection of what took place at it checked by Seamus Woods, who is the only other survivor of the four who took part in the discussions.

Joe McKelvey opened the proceedings by stating that they wanted my advice and assistance in deciding what attitude the 3rd Northern Division was to take to the Treaty. We discussed the whole position from every angle, the discussion lasting from eight o'clock until midnight. It was decided to adjourn the conference until the following night at the same place so that we might cover any aspect that had been overlooked during our first meeting. On the second night I pointed out that I was not familiar with the then strength or weakness of our military position and consequently was not competent to give a final opinion on this important matter. I, therefore, asked each of the three to state his final views in the light of his knowledge of matters as they stood. Joe McKelvey, who had been attached to the staff of the Director of Organization G.H.Q. early in 1921 and who had some knowledge of the I.R.A. strength etc. in other

J.M.

Truce

Divisional areas, gave it as his firm opinion that "we could not stand up against open and unrestricted war for even two months though he thought that the 3rd Northern was one of the best armed Divisions in Ireland." Seamus Woods pointed out that as rioting and street fighting had not ceased in Belfast since the date of the Truce our forces had, of necessity, been maintained on a war footing and discipline in the whole area was excellent. He *was of opinion,* ~~feared~~, however, from what he had seen in other Divisional areas that six months of Truce had seriously impaired the morale of the I.R.A. and he feared that a return to war conditions would find the men much below pre-Truce standard. Frank Crummey stated that the civilian population had taken the Truce to mean the end of activities and he could not visualize the people again presenting that solidarity of support which had been the secret of our success in the past.

We were all disappointed that the area in which we lived and had served should - even temporarily - be excluded from the provisions which would bring freedom from British Military interference to the great majority of the Irish people but on hearing these opinions from the officers who had been in daily contact with events - and they agreed with those I had gradually formed during our long discussion - I now put to them the question which had been troubling my own mind - can you visualize any

J.M.

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alternative to acceptance of the Treaty? Here we were in complete agreement - we could not suggest an alternative which held out any hope. I thereupon advised that we should make our attitude known to G.H.Q., at the same time requiring certain assurances in regard to the I.R.A. in the six Northern partitioned counties. The three officers thereupon requested me to prepare a memorandum outlining our decision and our requirements. I undertook to do this and it was agreed that we should meet again to approve the final draft of the memorandum. We duly met and the memorandum was unanimously approved. It was suggested that I should proceed to G.H.Q. to present the memorandum personally and to answer any points on which further information might be required. I declined to accept this mission unless accompanied by one of the Divisional Officers. Eventually it was agreed that Joe McKelvey and I should come to Dublin to do what was required.

I propose to ask Seamus Woods to verify my account of what took place at these conferences as I have briefly set them out above, for the purpose of a correct, verified record.

Joe McKelvey and myself travelled to Dublin on St. Stephen's Day. By arrangement, we met Michael Collins in the Gresham Hotel sometime after midnight and reported to him the official attitude of the 3rd Northern Division in ^{regard} accepting the Treaty. I handed him the memorandum I had prepared, setting

J.M.

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out our reservations and the assurances we required. Michael Collins said he considered our requirements fair, and assured us that there would be no question that what we required could be conceded and assured. I regret that I have not a copy of the memorandum, nor an accurate recollection of its terms, so I will not attempt to record them.

*Seamus Woods.
9.1.52.*

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