

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MILITAIRA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 654

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 654.....

**Witness**

Proinnsias O Dubhthaigh (Francis O'Duffy),  
41 Palmerston Road,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Captain 'C' Company, Enniskillen Battalion,  
Irish Volunteers, 1913 - ;  
Chairman Monaghan Dail Court, 1919-1920.

**Subject.**

National activities,  
Co. Monaghan and Co. Fermanagh, 1907-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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No. W.S. 654

STATEMENT OF PHROINNSIAS Ó DUBHTHAIGH  
(FRANCIS O'DUFFY)

41 Palmerston Road, Dublin.

(1) Preliminary Summary:

I am a native of Co. Monaghan, born near Ballybay in 1883. I was a Secondary Teacher in (a) the Christian Brothers School, Carlow, from 1902 to 1906; (b) St. Michael's Intermediate School, Enniskillen, from 1906 to 1918, and (c) St. Macarten's Seminary, Monaghan, from 1918 to 1921. I was interned during the year 1921 (at Ballykinlar), and became a Civil Servant (Dept. of Education) in 1922. My activities in the Independence movement were mainly of a political nature, and my knowledge of military events is rather slight.

(2) Carlow Period:

Like many others, it was through the Gaelic League that I first became interested in national politics. I was Secretary of the Carlow Branch of the League, and of the Co. Carlow Feis. At that time, I became acquainted with Padraig Pearse, who gave a lecture in Carlow, and I had correspondence with him for some years afterwards. At my invitation he addressed a Gáelic League meeting in Enniskillen (in 1907 or 1908) when I was Secretary of the League Branch in that town.

One of my associates in the Carlow Gaelic League was a young journalist from Kilkenny named Fintan Ó Faolain. He was an active and persuasive advocate of advanced nationalism ("physical force", as it was then called); I understood from him that he was a member of the I.R.B., which had existed without interruption in Kilkenny since '67. Due to his influence I became a member of Sinn Fein

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on its first formation, and I represented Co. Carlow for some time on the National Council of the organisation.

(3) Enniskillen Period:

(a) The Ulster Volunteers were very active and well-organised in 1912 in Enniskillen and throughout Fermanagh. This provided the main stimulus to the organisation of the Irish Volunteers in 1913; large numbers joined who had no aim or motive beyond opposition to the Ulster Volunteers. All the leading Redmondite politicians became members, as well as the small number (including myself) who held other views. There were about 300 members in the Enniskillen "Battalion", as it was called: I remember that on a surprise midnight mobilisation, at a place about a mile from the town, 248 men paraded. The Battalion was organised in three Companies, A, B and C, and I was Captain of C Company; the Battalion Adjutant was John P. Wray, a solicitor's apprentice and the son of one of the leading Redmondites.

The Battalion obtained 100 Redmondite rifles and bayonets (but no ammunition). They were kept in a furniture store (owned by Joe Gillen, Co. C., a leading Redmondite), and issued to the first-comers at the weekly drills. (From the markings on the stock of one of these rifles I found that they were old Italian weapons, "repaired" at Turin.) The instructor had a Lee Enfield rifle (his own property), which he used for demonstration and instruction purposes at his weekly class for officers and N.C.O's.

The instructor (B. Keenan) was an experienced ex British Army Sergeant, and was a capable man at his job. The training included, in addition to foot drill and field training, special lectures and instruction for officers

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and N.C.O's.

(b) Owing to local jealousy between leading A.O.H. and U.I.L. persons in Enniskillen, the Volunteer Battalion there remained "neutral" at first, but the European war (1914-1918) put an end to this, and disorganised the Volunteers in Enniskillen and throughout Fermanagh. There was a large number (about 70, as far as I can remember) of members of the British Army reserve in the Enniskillen Battalion of the Volunteers. When these were called up their comrades marched to the station to give them a send-off, and many of these comrades soon followed them. An intense recruiting campaign was carried on, especially among the Volunteers. The Adjutant (John P. Wray) was given a commission, and it was currently reported that he "bought" it with 50 (or 100?) recruits.

A small Company of Irish Volunteers was reorganised in Enniskillen in 1915, of which I had charge, and drills, etc., were held regularly. But when Sinn Fein began to spread as a movement, I devoted most of my time to its organisation, as it was evident that the most urgent need at that time in Fermanagh was sound national propaganda. The only other centre in Fermanagh at which I have personal knowledge that a small Company of Irish Volunteers continued to exist during this period was Derrylinn (near the border of Co. Cavan).

(4) Easter 1916:

No notification of the Rising came to Co. Fermanagh. On Holy Thursday evening Miss R. O'Doherty of Derry, on her way from Dublin to Derry, handed a despatch to Rev. M. MacCarvill (then C.C. in Enniskillen, now P.P. of Truagh, Co. Monaghan) at Enniskillen railway station. Father MacCarvill gave the despatch to me that night, to be sent by hand to Revd. Jas. O'Daly (then C.C. of Clogher,


Co. Tyrone - now P.P. same place). I sent a cyclist with the despatch to Father O'Daly the following morning.

There were no arrests in Enniskillen or Co. Fermanagh during Easter Week, but I was brought to the R.I.C. barracks for interrogation by the Co. Inspector regarding my movements on Easter Monday. I had arranged to go to Dublin that day, mainly to collect a small parcel of arms (five revolvers) for the Derrylinn Volunteer Company, which was waiting to be collected at Gleeson's, Upper O'Connell Street. As my movements were carefully watched by the R.I.C. in Enniskillen, I went to Ballybay first, visited my home there, and started by the evening train to Dublin. I only got as far as Dundalk and had to spend the night there, returning to Enniskillen the following day. The R.I.C. Co. Inspector's enquiry was about my business in Dublin (to which he knew I had booked) and I told him it was to obtain equipment for the school laboratory (which was my nominal business).

(5) The "Sinn Fein" Period (1917):

Sinn Fein was well organised in Co. Fermanagh. There was a Cumann in every parish, and a Comhairle Ceanntair for the County, which met regularly. The number of members in many of the Cumainn was small, and was composed mainly of younger people, including some of the younger priests and teachers. The Revd. T. Caulfield, then C.C. at Belcoo (now dead) was a very active organiser. Public meetings, aeridheachta, etc., were held regularly, and there is scarcely a parish in Co. Fermanagh which Fr. Caulfield and I did not visit more than once in the course of this work.

All communications with Sinn Fein Cumainn were delivered by Volunteer cyclist despatch carriers, and an effective Volunteer postal system was organised for this purpose.



(6) A.O.H. in Fermanagh:

Though the A.O.H. was well organised in Fermanagh, especially in the rural districts, its members did not actively oppose or interfere with the Volunteers or Sinn Fein. The chief reason for this, I believe, was that they regarded these bodies as too unimportant and insignificant to bother with. When I was arguing the issues once with a prominent member of the A.O.H. in Enniskillen (James Gilgunn), he merely said that he would like to believe in Sinn Fein but his commonsense would not let him!

(7) Monaghan Period (1919/20):

(a) The organising of Sinn Fein preceded the Volunteers in County Monaghan. When I came to Monaghan (September, 1918), Sinn Fein Cumainn existed in every parish, and a Comhairle Ceanntair in each of the two constituencies into which the County was then divided.

There were, however, no recognised or affiliated companies of Volunteers - at least in or near Monaghan, which is the only part of the County of which I had personal knowledge. I was informed that Volunteers had been enrolled in Monaghan town during the conscription scare, but they had not been affiliated or recognised and had disbanded when the scare passed. It was mainly from the Sinn Fein Cumainn, and by their leading members, that the Volunteers were organised in the winter of 1918/19. Eoin O'Duffy had been the first Secretary of the N. Monaghan Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Fein; Tom Donnelly and I succeeded him later in that position. There was always close co-operation between the two organisations.

(b) In the winter of 1918/19 a Company of Volunteers was organised in Monaghan, of which Charles Emerson was appointed Captain. A Battalion was also organised in the area, of which Dr. Ward was the first Commandant. When

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Dr. Ward left Monaghan to reside in Dundalk, Mr. Emerson succeeded him as Battalion Commandant, and I became Captain of the Monaghan Company; the two Lieutenants were then James Flynn and Geo. McEneaney. I cannot remember how many Volunteers were in the Monaghan Company at that period, or how many Companies (4 or 5?) were in the Battalion.

Some arms were obtained locally from private owners by individual Volunteers. These were mainly revolvers of various patterns; they included one modern Lee Enfield rifle (which was used in the early days for instruction purposes). As far as I am aware, arms and ammunition were obtained mainly from official sources in Dublin: I remember bringing a small parcel of revolver ammunition for Dan Hogan, then Brigade O/C; I had collected it at Fintan Murphy's office in Dublin.

The only Volunteer activities in which I took part were of a minor nature and are hardly worth mentioning. I was mainly occupied in duties of a political nature; in addition to being Secretary of the North Monaghan Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Fein, I was Chairman of the Monaghan district Dail Court, a member of the Monaghan Co. Council and its representative on the Co. Councils' General Council, and responsible for ensuring that the Co. Council carried out the directions of the Dail Minister for Local Government, regarding safeguarding of funds, etc. Owing to the demands which these duties made on my time (and for another reason mentioned later), I resigned my position as Captain of the Monaghan Coy. - or rather, I did not resume it on my release from prison in May, 1920; I remained an ordinary Volunteer after that date.

(c) I was arrested with a number of other Volunteers (5 or 6, as far as I can remember, including Dan Hogan, Chas. Emerson, John McCabe, George McEneaney) at my home in March,

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National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

**ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8**

**Form to be completed and inserted in the original record**

**in place of each part abstracted**

- (i) Reference number of the separate cover under which the abstracted part has been filed: WS: 654/A
- (ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 2 pp
- (iii) The date of each such document: 3 March 1952

- (iv) The description of each document:

WS 654 Proinsias O' Duibhthaigh (Francis O'Duffy)  
named individuals. p 7 + 8.

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

- (v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:

**(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.**

( These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

J. Moloney  
Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.

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1920. We were brought to Dundalk Jail first, and then to Derry, where we spent Easter of that year. We were removed to Belfast Jail in April. The day after our arrival there, I got a telegram from one of the priests at Ballybay that my father was dying. I showed the telegram to the Prison Chaplain (I do not remember his name), and asked him to apply for 14 days' parole for me. He consented to do so, and the application was granted.

My unexpected arrival in Monaghan saved the life of an R.I.C. Sergeant named Blair. He was particularly active in spying on the movements of Volunteers, and we had found in captured mails reliable reports from him regarding Volunteer activities in a number of districts. The Volunteers had decided to deal with him, and the attack was arranged for the night of the day on which I returned home. In the circumstances, it was necessary to call it off at the last minute.

I returned to Belfast Jail on the expiration of my parole (and after my father's death). Most of the political prisoners had then been released after a hunger-strike. The small number left (including Dr. Stuart of Belturbet, Joe Duffy and a few others from Dundalk whose names I do not remember) were beginning a hunger-strike; I joined them, and we were released to the Mater Hospital after 7 or 8 days - i.e., about the middle of May, 1920. (I have a photograph of the group, and I will hand it in, if it is of any interest).

(d) I took part in one court martial when I was in the Volunteers. The Captain of the Tyholland Company (named ) was accused of being drunk and breaking into the Tyholland Creamery. Tom Donnelly asked me to defend and get him off if possible on account of the disgrace a conviction would involve. The court was held at Threemile

House, and Eoin O'Duffy presided.

was acquitted

on the charge of breaking into the Creamery, but convicted of being drunk, and (as far as I remember) deprived of his rank as Captain.

(e) My home (at Westerra Terrace, Monaghan) was raided and searched on a number of occasions: three times when I was there, and two or three times when I was being sought for arrest. On one occasion the search included the removal of the skirting-boards in the sitting-room, and I was ordered (at revolver point) to sign a document to the effect that no damage had been done. On another occasion I was told by the military officer in charge of the raiding party, after a consultation by him with the R.I.C. man who accompanied the party, that I would be held responsible if there was any attack on the police or military in Monaghan. No arms or incriminating documents were found in any of the raids at my home.

(f) One day in November, 1920, I was told by Revd. J.P. Murphy (then on the staff of St. Macarten's Seminary, Monaghan, now P.P. of Aghabog, Co. Monaghan), that I should not sleep at home that night. I took his advice, and went to a friend's house near at hand. That night the military raided my home to arrest me. I cannot say definitely if Father Murphy's advice came from Volunteer Intelligence sources: I was under the impression that it did.

I spent part of December in the Water Hospital, Belfast (under my mother's name, Daly), where I had to undergo a slight operation. I returned to Monaghan at Christmas, sleeping in various friends' houses, and on New Year's morning I called at my home. Within half-an-hour the house was surrounded by a large military party, and I was arrested.

I was first brought by military lorry to Glasslough R.I.C. barracks, and left there. I never understood why this was done, but I assumed that since this barracks was a small one in a rather isolated village it was expected that it might be attacked, and I was intended as a sort of hostage. However, I was removed from it to Monaghan R.I.C. barracks later that evening. I spent a night in a cell, with two men from the Clones district - named Hand and McPhillips. The following day (Sunday) news reached the Monaghan barracks of the Ballybay ambush, and an R.I.C. Sergeant (McIntyre) warned me not to leave the cell on any account as some of the other men (Black and Tans) were in a nasty mood. I was transferred to military custody at Monaghan Courthouse that (Sunday) evening. The following day I was brought to the Victoria Barracks, Belfast, and from there, after 10 days or so, to Ballykinlar, where I was interned until the general release in December, 1921.

(8) Ballykinlar Period (1921):

I assume that an account of the conditions and happenings in Ballykinlar would be outside the Terms of Reference of the Bureau, but there are a few matters which I would like to put on record, if it is permitted. One of these is the great obligation we were under to the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Dublin for their generous help in improving our conditions. They gave us an excellent library of books; any book we asked for - history, biography or fiction - was supplied at once, if available. They supplied any materials for hobbies that we asked for, and equipped a gymnasium - including sets of boxing-gloves, punch-balls, etc. Another matter is the excellent discipline of the men interned, and the fact that many of the younger men availed of the facilities afforded in the Camp to improve their general education. I would like to

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mention also our money system: a paper currency (backed by our cash held by the British authorities) and the (dry) canteen conducted by us, from whose profits a weekly allowance was made to all men who had no money of their own.

(The reference in the above paragraph is to Camp II, Ballykinlar, of which I was Commandant during the last six months of my period of internment.)

(9) Dail Courts in Monaghan:

During 1919/20 the Dail Courts were well organised and functioning very satisfactorily in Monaghan. I was one of the Judges (the President or Chairman, as far as I remember) and Phil Marron was Registrar. Our Court rapidly became popular, and the British Courts were practically deserted. The cases dealt with were mainly petty disputes; these gave little difficulty and our decisions were seldom challenged. In one instance a prominent member of Sinn Fein refused to accept a decision: it was promptly enforced by the Volunteers, and he was fined (£5, I think) for contempt of Court. Solicitors pleaded before our Court, and occasionally quoted to us Acts and precedents (of which, of course, we knew nothing!). In one case of this kind in which D.X. Keenan, solicitor on behalf of a local house landlord for a decree for possession of a house, I got over all legal difficulties by saying that our Court was a Court of Justice rather than a Court of Law: instead of evicting the tenant we made him take the pledge for a year!

I do not think our Courts were as satisfactory in dealing with criminal charges as in the case of disputes. When a Volunteer officer brought a criminal charge, he was satisfied of the accused's guilt, but he did not sometimes (and perhaps could not) produce evidence to prove the guilt. A conviction was taken for granted in such cases; in one

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case where I refused to convict owing to lack of evidence, there was some protest.

(10) Attitude of Protestants and A.O.H. in Co. Monaghan:

The Protestants of Co. Monaghan, especially in the rural districts, were actively opposed to Sinn Féin and the Volunteers. Most of them considered it their duty as "loyalists" to assist the R.I.C. when they could safely do so. Many of the Protestants had arms (shot-guns, and in some cases rifles), and the number of casualties suffered by the Volunteers on the night when the attempt was made to collect all arms from civilians in the Brigade area, shows how determined the Protestants were to use their arms. In one district (Loughall, I think was its name) where there is a large Protestant population, rifle shots were frequently fired at motor cars passing at night unless they dimmed their lights. In another district (between Tydavnet and Monaghan) a motorist (Mick Kelly of Monaghan) was shot dead in his car one night when he was returning from Tydavnet to Monaghan. No one was ever charged for this crime.

As regards the A.O.H., the only place in Co. Monaghan in which I am personally aware that this organisation gave active opposition, was the parish of Truagh. I was one of the speakers sent to address meetings in that parish one Sunday during the 1918 General Election: the other speakers were John J. Keenan, solicitor, Monaghan, and Peadar O'Donnell. Our first meeting was to be at Ballyceam Catholic Church, but our first speaker was greeted with yells and boos; stones were thrown at us, men advanced with sticks, and though we had a few supporters, they had to run for their lives, and we were lucky to escape without injury.

We then went to another Church in the parish, Carrickroe. One of the priests, Revd. Fr. McCarney, C.C., was to preside at that meeting, but he was refused a hearing by the howling crowd. Their leader was Arthur Treanor (Arthur Atty, he was called): he stood in front of the crowd, interrupted Fr. McCarney, reminded him of the text, "Render unto Caesar", etc.; he appeared to be a rather excitable, rabid type of the extreme party supporter. Our meeting at Carrickroe had to be abandoned, but there was no violence, probably because of Father McCarney's presence.

(11) I.R.B. in Enniskillen and Monaghan:

(a) I was admitted a member of the I.R.B. by Ernest Blythe in Enniskillen in 1914, or early in 1915 (I cannot remember the exact time). There was then another member of the organisation in Enniskillen, a man named Wm. Hegarty from Derry, who was manager of Lipton's shop. We admitted 3 or 4 others to the organisation, but decided that in the circumstances then obtaining, it was better to concentrate on propaganda through open organisations such as Sinn Fein and the Volunteers. Seamus Dobbyn, who was an organiser for I.R.B., called on me a few times in Enniskillen regarding the progress of the organisation. On one occasion he said it was strange that we could make no progress in Enniskillen, while in the small neighbouring town of Irvinstown Sean B. MacManus had 100 men enrolled. I asked him if he had ever seen the 100 men, and suggested that he send a message to Sean B. that he wished to meet them. He agreed, and I sent a cyclist with his despatch to Sean B. When Dobbyn returned to Enniskillen he told me that Sean B. could muster only seven men, and that he (Sean B.) was resigning his position as "centre".

I discussed the question of the I.R.B. and the Volunteers, in July 1915, with Micheal O'Hanrahan (executed

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Easter 1916) who was then on the staff of the Volunteer headquarters office, and whom I had known intimately for many years. He was aware of the fact that many of the higher Volunteer officers were members of the I.R.B., but he had refused to join that organisation, and he was strongly of opinion that its existence in the Volunteers was unnecessary and might lead to confusion. I was impressed by this opinion, and I took no further part in the I.R.B. (I did not formally resign from it, as I was not aware of any procedure for doing so.)

(b) Soon after I came to Monaghan (in 1918) I became aware that some of the Volunteer officers were members of the I.R.B. At a Brigade Conference (attended by all Coy. Captains and Battn. officers) held at Latton (I do not remember the date?) when Eoin O'Duffy announced that all Volunteer officers were to take an oath of allegiance to the Dail, I enquired publicly if officers were to regard this oath as superseding any other undertaking they might already have given, and O'Duffy gave a definite assurance to that effect. I hoped that this would put an end to I.R.B. organising among the Volunteer officers, but I was mistaken. Some time afterwards, while I was still Captain of the Monaghan Company, the two lieutenants of the Company (James Flynn and George McEneaney) came to me one evening and told me that a man named Colwell (or Caldwell) had approached them about joining the I.R.B., saying he had been given their names by Eoin O'Duffy. I told them that they could do as they pleased, and I found they had no desire whatever to join the I.R.B. I suggested that they might bring <sup>Caldwell</sup> Colwell to my house that night, and we could talk the matter over. They did so. Colwell produced an introduction in Eoin O'Duffy's handwriting. I told him that might be forged or stolen, and for all we knew he might

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be a police 'agent-provocateur'; that in such matters I would accept only a personal introduction by a person known to both of us. (I ascertained later from I.R.B. men in Ballykinlar that <sup>Caldwell</sup> ~~Colwell~~ was a genuine I.R.B. organiser). He told us that he had been accepted without question in other parts of Co. Monaghan. I pointed out that since Volunteer officers were bound to obey orders from their "superior" officers in the Volunteers and had sworn allegiance to the Dail, they could not conscientiously take an oath to obey their unknown superiors in another organisation such as the I.R.B. I cannot say whether our objections had any influence on <sup>Caldwell</sup> ~~Colwell~~; but as far as I am aware he got no recruits for the I.R.B. in Monaghan on that occasion.

A former Monaghan Volunteer (Thomas Boyle) stated recently that I had sworn him (and another man, John McCann) into the I.R.B.: I am satisfied that he is making a mistake. Boyle was an ordinary Volunteer, but McCann was Vice Commandant of the Battn. and was highly thought of by Emerson, the Commandant, on account of his military knowledge and experience (he had served in the British army). If Boyle is correct in his statement that he and McCann were admitted to the I.R.B. at the same time, there is a strong probability that they were admitted by Emerson. (This, of course, is only surmise on my part.)

While I have definite knowledge as to the extent of the I.R.B. among the officers of the Co. Monaghan Bde., I believe that many of the officers were members of that organisation. This might be expected from the influence which Eoin O'Duffy exercised in that area.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 654

SIGNED: Phroinnsias O Dubhthaigh  
 DATE: 3 Marta 1952.

(Phroinnsias O Dubhthaigh)

WITNESS: John Mc Boy  
3/3/52

3 Marta 1952.