ORIGINAL

ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,016

Witness

Seamus McKenna,
146 Homefarm Road,
Drumcondra,
Dublin.

Identity.

O/C. 1st Battalion Belfast Brigade;

Lieut. Cavan Active Service Unit.

Subject.

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ORIGINAL

W. S. 1,016

STATEMENT OF MR. SEAMUS McKENNA,

146, Home Farm Road, Drumcondra, Dublin.

I joined B. Company, 1st Battalion, Belfast Brigade, or, as it was then, the Belfast, Antrim and East Down Brigade, shortly before my 17th birthday about October, 1917. The Company Captain was Seán Kelly, and the nominal strength of the Company was about fifty. At that time the Belfast Battalion consisted of four companies, the total paper strength of which would not have exceeded 240 men. Battalion meetings were held in a hall once a month, and I doubt if I ever saw more than a hundred men present at such meetings.

The Company strength increased slightly within six months of my joining and, when the anti conscription campaign took place in 1918, the membership increased enormously. In fact, I think it reached 130 - 140 men. When the conscription scare subsided, most of those conscription Volunteers, as we called them, dropped out, but we retained a good few, say twenty or so, men who did become very good Volunteers throughout the years ahead.

Some time during 1918 Seán Kelly, owing to ill health, resigned the captaincy of B. Company and "Wish" Fox was elected in his place. Fox was an excellent company commander and, apart from his other duties, he aimed at making the company a well armed one. He succeeded to such an extent that, when he left Belfast

in September, 1920, B. Company was one of the best armed units in Ireland. Practically every county in Ireland was represented in the company. One very popular lieutenant, Dermot, or Jerry, Hurley, who left Belfast early 1920, became Battalion Commandant in his native Co. Cork and was killed in action near Midleton in 1921 whilst leading a column.

There were no worth-while activities in Belfast until the all-Ireland campaign against income tax records and R.I.C. barracks took place on Easter Saturday, 1920. One of the jobs allocated to our company was the destruction of the income tax records in Belfast Custom House, and I was on that operation. Those taking part, in addition to myself, were "Wish" Fox, Seamus Woods and Bill O'Brien; also a man named O'Dowd who, with myself, was on duty outside whilst the men inside burned the papers. Admission to the Custom House was secured by two of the men - Fox and Woods - presenting themselves at the care-taker's door, dressed in postmen's uniforms and delivering a bogus telegram. Once the door was open, entrance was quickly effected and the men proceeded to where they knew the income tax office was situated. There was a policeman on duty around the outside of the Custom House, and it was necessary for O'Dowd and myself to watch this man until our comrades inside had carried out the burning job. He noticed nothing suspicious. The operation was carried out successfully enough and the party withdrew.

There were other jobs, along the same lines, carried out on other income tax offices in different parts of the city, but I had no particular knowledge of

how they were done and, therefore, I cannot describe them.

The pogrom broke out in Belfast in July, 1920, and at the beginning the Volunteers were ordered not to take any part in what was regarded at that time as fratricidal strife. After a week or two, however, it was obvious that, if the Catholic population were to survive at all, it would be necessary for the Volunteers to protect them in some way, and accordingly the I.R.A. became involved in a struggle against disciplined and undisciplined Orange factions, whilst at the same time having to bear in mind that their main object was to carry out aggressive action against the British forces of occupation. The latter forces were, of course, also involved in the rioting. They generally, however, took the part of the Orange faction. Hundreds of people were killed and wounded in Belfast during the second half of 1920.

In September, 1920, a series of operations were carried out in the Falls Road area against the R.I.C. This consisted in the disarming of armed constables who were on duty at certain points. The operation assigned to B. Company in their own area was the disarming of two or three R.I.C. constables on duty at Broadway, Falls Road. About four or five men in the company, including the company captain and a lieutenant, took part in this operation. I was not selected for this job. The R.I.C. men put up a struggle and shooting took place, as a result of which one of the constables, Leonard, was killed and I think another wounded. Andy O'Hare, lieutenant of the company, was wounded, but our men got away, with the policemen's arms. Curfew was on at the

time, or shortly after the job was carried out. During curfew hours the R.I.C. went to a number of houses in which they knew that sympathisers or members of Sinn Féin organisations were living and, as a reprisal, they shot three men dead. These were Troddyn, McFadden and Gaynor. The latter was the only one who was a Volunteer and he was a member of our company.

As a result of that operation, it became necessary for some of the men involved to go on the run. Thus we lost the services of the company captain at the time, "Wish" Fox, and Lieutenant Andy O'Hare, both of whom, together with a third man, Paddy Wynne, left the city and went to Dublin. We were without leadership in the company and it became necessary to elect a new captain. I approached Joe McKelvey, who was then Battalion O/C, and asked him if he would permit Seamus Woods, who had been transferred from B. Company to A. Company of the same Battalion, as lieutenant, some time previously, to return to B. Company, where I undertook to ensure that he would be elected captain. I made this request because I knew the qualities of the man, and subsequent events showed that I was justified. Woods was a born leader with dauntless courage and great administrative abilities. He had a keen sense of his responsibilities and he would never ask a man to undertake a job or operation which he was not prepared to do himself. On the formation of the 3rd Northern Division, he was appointed Adjutant, and he succeeded McKelvey as O/C of the Division after the split in the Volunteers.

At this time I was section commander of the

company. I urged the company captain to bring before the battalion the necessity for action against the R.I.C. in the way of counter-reprisals for the three men who had been murdered in September. He was of the same opinion as myself in this matter, but he learned that the Brigade Council was opposed to attacks on the police at the time, as they were evidently afraid of reprisals. I made the threat that I would begin operations myself, along with another man or two, by shooting a couple of R.I.C. men more or less indiscriminately, but I was asked to stand firm and wait patiently for a while as there was a change coming in leadership of the battalion and that the new man to be appointed, Roger McCorley, would not look to the brigade for sanction for actions against the enemy. I was convinced then - as I am now - that, if counter reprisals had been carried out against the R.I.C. for the shooting of Gaynor, Troddyn and McFadden, it would have had a salutary effect and would probably have stopped the R.I.C. reprisal policy in Belfast. We did not do this and, as a result, the R.I.C. struck again and again in reprisals, culminating in 1922 in the slaughter of the McMahon family of about seven men. By this failure to carry out immediate counter reprisals, the I.R.A. in Belfast gave the impression that they were more or less cowed, and paved the way for future R.I.C. reprisals following operations against them. The Belfast Brigade staff were too moderate minded and they would never have sanctioned the operations we subsequently carried out in the city if they had been referred to the brigade for prior sanction.

The first operation carried out against the enemy in Belfast for the purpose of killing was in January,

1921, when three R.I.C. men were shot - on the 26th of that month - in Roddy's Hotel. This job was carried out by four men, who did the actual shooting, and four others outside as a covering-off party. The four men who did the shooting were: Roger McCorley, Seamus Woods, Joe Murray and myself. We had no prior warning as to this operation. In fact, at the time of the shooting I did not know who the men were, or what they were shot for, beyond the fact that they were R.I.C. I just happened to be met accidentally on the Falls Road by Seamus Woods and Joe McKelvey, and asked if I would go on a shooting job immediately. They had no doubts as to my reply. We were told that there were three men who had arrived from the Dublin R.I.C. Depot that night and were staying in this place, known as Roddy's Hotel, which was in actual fact a public house with a certain amount of accommodation for boarders. It adjoined Musgrave Street Barracks, the headquarters of the R.I.C. in Belfast.

We went to the public house at about nine o'clock and went into a snug. The man to whom most credit should be given for this operation was Vincent Watters, one of the two barmen on duty at the time, who was a member of C. Company, 1st Battalion. He had given information as to the presence of these R.I.C. men, and he kept us informed as to their movements. When we arrived at the public house, we learned that they had just finished their drinks and gone upstairs. The public house was pretty full at the time, and it was not considered advisable for us to follow them up. Watters suggested that we should wait until the public house closed. We did so. In the meantime, there

were at least two R.I.C. men from the adjoining barracks drinking at the bar, and it was necessary to get rid of them. One of them was friendly to Watters, and Watters suggested to him that he should take his friend, or friends, somewhere else for a drink, as something might happen that night. He took the hint and they departed.

When closing time came, we pretended to leave the pub by a side door. Watters, however, pointed the way up the stairs and said our quarry was there. The four of us went upstairs. We opened the door of the wrong room. It was empty but, by that light, we saw another room. The three R.I.C. men were in bed, two of them in one bed and one man in another, a single bed. They knew our purpose immediately. We threw open the door, switched on the light, and they started screaming. It was a particularly ghastly business, but we had to do it and it was done. We got away without difficulty, although we had less than half an hour before curfew time. I should mention that .45 revolver ammunition was very scarce in Belfast at that time, and we had no cartridges beyond what were in our revolvers. After this job, the ammunition position improved as G.H.Q. sent us a special supply.

During curfew hours that night, the R.I.C. proceeded to a house in the Ardoyne area and shot dead, by way of reprisal, an innocent man who, as far as I know, had no connection with the movement.

We discovered that the R.I.C. men we shot consisted of two men escorting a third man, who was principal witness against a Volunteer, named Gray, who

who was awaiting trial for the shooting of an R.I.C. sergeant at Ballymote fair. The two escorting police were killed and the principal man badly wounded. The trial, to begin the following day, was postponed until the witness recovered. He did after about five months, and Gray was duly sentenced to death. He was the first I.R.A. man to be sentenced to death without reprieve after a courtmartial trial in Belfast. The Truce, coming into operation, saved his life but, if we had not carried out the operation in Roddy's Hotel, Gray would have been hanged within a few weeks.

Following that operation, it was decided to form a small active service unit in Belfast, whose purpose it would be to operate against visiting enemy agents or forces, as it was held that Belfast was being used as a rest camp for members of the British police, auxiliary forces, etc., who were engaged in operations in other parts of the country. I was asked to nominate a couple of trustworthy and reliable men, and I selected Seán Keenan and Seamus Heron. We patrolled the centre of the city regularly at night on the look-out for Black and Tans or Auxiliaries. I only saw one of the latter who, accompanied by a girl, went into a restaurant in the centre of the city. I contacted Seamus Woods and the two of us proceeded to the place where I had seen the Auxiliary, but he had left in the meantime.

I come now to March, 1921. In addition to patrolling the streets ourselves, we had a number of scouts on the look out for the enemy against whom we proposed to operate. On Friday, the 11th March, at about seven o'clock in the evening, four of us - Seamus Woods, Keenan, Heron and myself - were in McDevitt's

tailoring shop in Rosemary Street (the owner, Danny McDevitt, was interned at the time), which we had been using as a meeting place, when we were informed by one of our scouts that three Black and Tans were at that moment located in the Rose and Crown public house in Arthur Square.

We proceeded to the pub without delay and learned from one of the other scouts that our quarry was still on the premises. We were trying to decide as to how we should carry out the job with the least confusion, when the three men walked out of the public house. They were the first Black and Tans I had ever actually seen and they were typical of their class. They walked slowly down Victoria Square in the direction of Musgrave Street barracks where they were evidently staying. They passed the Empire Theatre and had walked a short distance down the Square when they met two girls. We passed the party and sauntered down to the end of the Square and watched. We realised that we could not allow them to proceed much further on their way towards the barracks and that, if we were to do the job at all, we would have to do it then. They were laughing and chatting with the girls; and one of them actually had his arms around one of the two girls. We walked up, four abreast, and, when we got to within a few feet of them, drew our guns and shot them. We had no covering party. The scouts, who had informed us of the Tans' whereabouts, were unarmed and, as anyone conversant with these operations knows, it was highly dangerous to carry out such a job without adequate covering. We got away successfully and, whilst doing

so, we were doubtful as to whether we had killed any, or both, of the girls as well as the Tans. I was the last moving away and, as I looked behind, the three Tans and both girls were sprawled on the footpath.

Next day, however, we learned the result of our action. The three Tans were dead and one of the girls was slightly wounded in the hip, probably from a ricochet bullet. In addition, a civilian named Allen, was also killed. This puzzled me for many years, and I had more or less accepted that this man, Allen, had been somewhere in the vicinity and that one of our bullets, going through a Tan's body, had ricocheted off a wall and killed him. It was not until the 1930's when I was speaking to a man in the Army, a Captain Manahan, who told me that he had been employed in Belfast at that time and was working in Thompson's motor works which was situated on the opposite side of the Square to where we shot the Tans. He told me, without realising the importance of what he was saying, that this man, Allen, who incidentally was an Englishman, many years settled in Belfast, was picked up outside Thompson's premises, dead, and that the police the next morning were searching for bullets in Thompson's premises. He said that there were two bullet holes in the window; and as our backs were to the opposite side of the street when we fired, the bullets were not from our guns. I should have mentioned that one of the Tans did not die immediately, but had struggled to his feet and, according to the newspaper account, had run for several hundred yards to Queen's Bridge before he dropped. After hearing Manahan's story in 1934, I came to the conclusion that this Tan, on getting to his feet, had

probably pulled his gun and fired, either haphazardly or directly, at the man on the opposite side of the street and killed him. The enemy police were, of course, aware of this after they had found the dying Tan with a number of bullets fired from his gun and a dead man on the opposite side of the street from where we shot the Tans. When they were looking for the bullets in Thompson's premises, they knew whose gun they came from, but of course they kept it secret so that the I.R.A. could be blamed for the death of an innocent civilian. It was not until comparatively recently that I was able to piece together this part of the story. If I had known at the time that the civilian had been shot down sixty or eighty feet away and in the opposite direction to our fire, I would have known that there could have been no question of our bullets killing him, as we were firing with our backs towards where he was found. The four of us only fired nine shots altogether.

I consider this operation as one of the neatest shooting jobs done in Belfast and it was practically the only one in which there were no reprisals to follow. The three Tans who were killed were from Gormanston Camp and had come to Belfast with a party of others for the purpose of taking down some transport which had arrived at Belfast docks. They were due to return to Gormanston the next day, and the shooting had a great moral effect.

Previous to this operation, the enemy police in Belfast had considered that the Roddy's Hotel job had been carried out by strange I.R.A. men who had followed their quarry from Dublin, and that the Belfast

I.R.A. men were not involved directly. They thought otherwise after the Victoria Square job, and their activities and searches became intensified. The A.S.U. had more or less to lie low for a few weeks before we began patrolling again. In or about this time I had been elected Lieutenant of my company.

It had been decided to carry out a bombing attack on enemy transport, and on the 4th April, shortly after ten o'clock in the morning, Roger McCorley and myself, armed with Mills grenades and with a covering party of three other men - Keenan, Murray and Heron - took up position in Lower Donegall Street for the purpose of attacking a military lorry, numbers of which used this thoroughfare. We were unsuccessful, however, as no lorries came along. We were about to turn away from the street, when a small party of soldiers approached on foot. We were about to attack the small party when, through the dense traffic, we noticed that they were merely the advance party of a couple of companies of infantry. It was, therefore, unwise to attack. I know of a place where there was a military post which, at the time, was unknown to McCorley. It was situated in Rosemary Street and was the back entrance to a club which was used as sleeping quarters for a number of high ranking staff officers of the British army in Belfast. We went to this place and found that, about eight yards from the gateway on the street, there was a sandbagged barrier, behind which a sentry stood with his rifle resting on the sandbags. The two of us, after sauntering past the gateway, approached again and, with the sentry looking at us without moving, each of us threw our bomb. We got away safely and we heard one explosion as we did

so. No physical damage was done, however. One bomb exploded behind the sandbagged barrier. The other bomb, we learned subsequently, rolled into the guardroom to the feet of the guard sitting around a table, without exploding. This was the first time that bombs had been used in Belfast, and the enemy intelligence attached great importance to this operation.

This club, which was protected at the rere by the party of soldiers whom we attacked, was also guarded at the front by two armed military policemen. I had seen these men going on duty frequently as I lived quite near to the military barracks, and one night I suggested to Seamus Woods that we would disarm them. This was done the next morning, Sunday, the 10th April. As it was in my own immediate neighbourhood, I was not on the job. The two policemen were successfully disarmed. One of the men taking part was Charlie Ryan who was a telegraphist in the G.P.O., Belfast. He was red-haired and was thus easily identified. He was arrested, and the enemy police, concluding that there must be some connection between the disarming of the two military policemen and the attack on the military post, charged Charlie with the double job. The sentry, who had watched us in a dazed manner throwing the bombs, solemnly swore that Ryan was one of the two men, and the courtmartial sentenced Charlie to ten years for the two jobs.

On the 23rd April, which was a Saturday, about three o'clock in the afternoon we located five Auxiliaries in the centre of the city. There were

only five members of the A.S.U. available at the time - McCorley, Woods, Heron, Murray and myself. We followed them around the city in the hope that they would break up and that we would thus have an opportunity of attacking two or three of them. They did not do so, however, but continued close together. In fact, when three of them went into the G.P.O. on business, the other two remained outside at the door. We were undecided as to whether to attack these two, or not, but finally ruled against it. We followed them eventually to where they were staying, the Prince of Wales Hotel in Victoria Street.

We decided to come down-town after tea, with the certainty of getting some of the Auxiliaries. I made the suggestion that an additional unit should be called out which, armed with bombs and revolvers, would hang around the vicinity of the hotel where the Auxiliaries were staying. In the meantime, the main party of the A.S.U. would patrol the streets until they found one, two or three of the Auxiliaries. I said that, when we attacked them and the news got round to the hotel, the remainder of the enemy would dash out, ready for reprisals or anything, and that they should be attacked then by the second I.R.A. party. This did, in fact, happen as regards the enemy, but unfortunately there was a slip-up as regards the I.R.A.

About 8 p.m. we picked up two Auxiliaries in the very centre of the city and followed them through the crowded streets in the hope of getting them in a less congested thoroughfare. They kept to the main streets, however, and in Donegall Place they were shot down.

Roger McCorley and Seamus Woods shot the two of them. The remainder of us were covering off. When getting away, I was thinking of the surprise packet in store for the Auxiliaries who, no doubt, were drinking in the bar of the hotel, as they dashed out, on hearing the news about their comrades, and were met by the bullets and bombs of the I.R.A. party stationed outside the hotel. Unfortunately, however, this bombing party was in charge of a man who afterwards proved, if not a coward, something approaching one. According to his story, they were within a few hundred yards of the hotel when they heard the shooting, and he decided that there was no use proceeding any further. In fact, that was just the time to have gone to the hotel, as he and his party would have been a long time there before the news could have reached the Auxiliaries. There were something like twenty-two of them in the hotel that night. They had come from Sligo for a rest cure in Belfast. When the R.I.C. contacted the hotel and told the Auxiliaries of the shooting, they dashed out and, guided no doubt by R.I.C., raided public houses in the Catholic area nearest the shooting. We missed a wonderful opportunity of wiping out half a dozen or more of these very dangerous enemies.

Reprisal action followed this operation. Auxiliaries and police during curfew hours proceeded to the house of the Duffin brothers and shot two of them dead. One of them, Dan, was our company quartermaster. He was thus the second member of B. Company to fall victim to a reprisal gang of the enemy.

The reprisals carried out against the Duffin's

and against Troddyn, McFadden and Gaynor, were directed from the same barracks in Belfast, namely Springfield Road. About the time of the Duffin murders, a new District Inspector had arrived at the Springfield Road H.Q. His name was Ferris. He had been transferred on promotion from Cork where he had been on duty with D.I. Swanzy at the time Lord Mayor MacCurtain was shot in that city. Orders came from Dublin that he was to be shot and, for a number of weeks, I was engaged along with others in an endeavour to get this man. He seemed to have a charmed life, however, and when he eventually fell, to the bullets of at least three men, apparently riddled, he survived, became a County Inspector, R.U.C., and only died quite recently in London. Before this operation happened, however, I had been taken off that assignment.

Before passing to the next phase of my activities in the struggle, I wish to refer to the two men who were most prominent in the pre Truce operations in Belfast against the British - Roger McCorley and Seamus Woods. At the time McCorley was Battalion O/C, and Woods, O/C of B. Company, and they were the two senior officers on the small active service unit. For coolness, courage and daring, they could not have been surpassed. McCorley was apparently devoid of any feeling of nerves, and would undertake any operation with no sign of disturbance or emotion on his innocent looking face. He was one of the four men who carried out the shooting of D.I. Swanzy in 1920. Woods was a different type, more human in his reactions but quicker at making a decision and carrying it out. To work with them on these street shooting jobs in Belfast city was a pleasant thrill. At least, I found it so. The other members of the

original A.S.U. would, I am sure, have gone anywhere on any operation with either or both of those two men. Woods and McCorley carried out one of the neatest and most daring operations in Belfast about June, 1921, when they shot dead Constable Glover who was one of the notorious R.I.C. reprisal gang. Glover was accompanied on duty by two other constables and it was necessary to put these two men out of action without killing them, whilst at the same time making sure that Glover was killed. I was in gaol when this took place and, when I heard the news an hour or two afterwards, I was thrilled.

Before concluding this chapter, it might be as well to mention that the carrying out of these shooting jobs in the city of Belfast was entirely different from similar operations carried out in Dublin. In the latter city, the majority of the population were sympathetic and those who were not, were afraid to display hostility in any way. The position was different in Belfast where we had three-fourths of the population bitterly hostile (and many of them actively so), worse than one would find in an English city.

Towards the end of April I was approached by Seamus McGoran, who had been a member of B. Company and had been transferred to Co. Cavan as an organiser, and was then O/C of the East Cavan Brigade. He asked me would I be prepared to go on a flying column which was to be formed. The main part of the column was to consist of Belfast men and was to be reinforced by local men on our arrival. I agreed to do so and, in a few days' time, preparations were made for the selection of suitable men from the four companies of the 1st Battalion. We were given a short period of training

by Seán O'Neill, O/C, Belfast Brigade.

The Column, on leaving Belfast, was to consist of thirteen officers and men. They were: O/C, Joe Magee; 1st Lieutenant, myself; 2nd Lieutenant, Seamus Heron; in addition to Heron and myself, there were three other men from B. Company, Paddy McMahon, Seamus Finn and Charlie McKee; A. Company was represented by Joe McGlinchey and Pat Brannigan; from C. Company came Sam McCann and Peter O'Callaghan; and D. Company, in addition to the O/C, was represented by P. Dougan, Seán McCartney and John McDermott.

The thirteen men left Belfast during the first week in May, most of them on the 3rd or 4th of the month and the last man, McCartney, on the 6th. Three others and myself went by train to Redhills, Co. Cavan, and stayed in a house there until nightfall. We were then brought by local Volunteers, by by-roads, to farmhouses around Lappanduff Hill. We picked up our arms from a dump in a barn on our way to our destination. Along with the other members of the column, we slept for two nights in different houses, and occupied a herd's small cottage, which was to be our billet, on Friday, the 6th of May. We spent most of Friday and Saturday sorting out equipment, arms, etc., and putting the billet in order. All the equipment had not yet reached Lappanduff. For example, there was no oil for cleaning rifles which were somewhat corroded after lying so long in dumps which must have been damp. We were to be reinforced by local officers and men to bring the strength of the column to about twenty or twenty-five men.

On Saturday, 7th May, about 5 p.m., the O/C gave

permission to three men to go to a local public house for a drink. I protested at this, but was told that there was no need to worry, as the O/C could trust these men. They were away for at least four hours and came back in a jolly mood - by no means intoxicated, but just boisterous. I did not know where the pub was located but I presumed it was about a mile away. It had been discovered by McCartney on his way up on Friday. Being Saturday evening, there must have been quite a number of local men passing in and out of the pub during the three hours or more that the men spent there. The appearance and speech of the three identified them as city men and, even if there had been no indiscreet talk, the very presence of the men in the pub must have caused surprise, even to friendly disposed people. Two of the men - ex British army men - however, were anything but discreet and I have no doubt but that their tongues wagged. I wonder who heard them that night!

No one else moved away from the billet area that evening. Darkness fell, and sentries were arranged until dawn. I think two men were on sentry duty at a time, for a two-hour period, so that no man was doing more than two hours' during the night. I was detailed as officer in charge of the guard for the whole night. I posted men and arranged for their relief by rousing the two next men on the roster. After midnight local men came up with additional supplies for the column, mostly foodstuffs and clothing. We were also expecting additional personnel, to bring the column up to fighting strength. About 1 a.m. the Brigade O/C, Seamus McGoran, and the Brigade Engineer, Tom Fox, arrived on the scene accompanied by the first of the local reinforcements.

These were two officers, Patrick Smith and Patrick Clarke, who were respectively O/C and Adjutant of their Battalion. I visited the sentry posts from time to time during the night and found everything in order.

About 4 a.m. one of the sentries reported that there was some movement at the foot of the hill. It was still dark, with a slight hint of daylight as dawn was breaking. We could see nothing at first, but eventually I saw a couple of figures moving near the outlines of a house. We assumed that it was the additional local men whom we were expecting. At the time, one of our men, who had just gone off duty, came out with a can to draw water from a spring, about fifty yards from the house. It was getting somewhat brighter and, as this man saw the strangers, he whistled to them and waved his water can. Immediately a shot rang out, followed by another one, and numerous figures were then seen moving around the foot of the hill. I raised the alarm, but most of our party had heard the shots and were awakened.

The O/C of the column ordered me to rouse everyone out of the billet and get them into fighting positions and that he would then take over command. At the same time he ordered two men, McCartney and McDermott, to proceed to the foot of the hill and reconnoitre. If they saw any enemy there, his words were, "to get them". The last I saw of the O/C - he was standing at the door of the billet putting on his Sam Brown belt.

I saw that everyone was out of the house and ordered the men into firing position on the hillside. There was good cover in spots, and then for some distance the cover was poor enough. As a result, the

men drifted about somewhat, and I never realised how much until afterwards. Everyone was on the look-out for the enemy who now showed themselves dodging about to take cover around a farmhouse, and we could distinguish the khaki uniforms. Rifle firing had become quite general on both sides. Every one of our men was intent on getting a shot at the elusive khaki figures.

It became almost full daylight, and I saw the two figures of McCartney and McDermott running across a field at the foot of the hill and about two hundred yards from where we had seen the British. The two men were running towards us up the hill and, as they did so, the intensity of the British firing seemed to increase and one of the two men fell. The other man stopped for a moment to look at his comrade and then continued running towards our position.

The firing had now considerably increased on both sides. McGoran, Heron and Dougan were lying alongside me at the beginning, but the first two moved towards my rere and apparently took up position on higher ground overlooking where I was. I felt that it was time for the O/C of the Column to take control and I began looking for him. I could see no sign of him and I started calling him by his Christian name during lulls in the firing. The echoes of my voice and of the shots were the only answers to my calling. I continued this calling, at intervals, for about an hour, I am sure, and my voice was heard all over the hillside. In fact, the enemy heard it and questioned us afterwards about it. Magee must have heard it before he cleared off - as he apparently did.

Finn, who was quite close to where I was lying, apparently decided to change his position and he began moving along the hillside, a dozen yards or so below me. He suddenly shouted in pain and disappeared from view. He kept moaning. Dougan, who was alongside me, volunteered to go to his aid and I agreed, although it was extremely dangerous to move from where we were as the bullets were whistling all round us. Dougan managed to crawl to where Finn was lying. The moaning continued for some time and then ceased, and I feared that Finn had died and perhaps Dougan as well. I was now on my own, with none of our men in immediate sight. I renewed my calling for the O/C and continued firing whenever I saw a movement of the enemy, or imagined I did so.

About an hour and a half must have passed since the fight began. Up to this stage, there was no reason why we could not have managed to crawl away if we had chosen to do so, or if there was any order for withdrawal, but then the enemy seemed to have got better firing positions and located the pockets where our men were lying, so that it became almost impossible to move without attracting a hail of bullets. I could see no sign of any of our men. McGoran and Heron, who were on higher ground a few yards to my rere, had disappeared from view. I began crawling along the hillside and eventually came to a level spot which was hidden to some extent from the enemy front. If I raised myself to any extent, I drew fire but, in a prone position, I could crawl with safety. I was doing so, keeping more or less parallel with the enemy but moving further from our billet, when a voice hailed

me from behind.

I turned my head and, to my surprise, about eighty yards away, I saw a party of about a dozen British soldiers lining a ditch, with their rifles pointing in my direction. One man in the centre, whom I recognised as an officer, was standing up with a revolver, and he shouted to me: "Are you a policeman?". (At the time I was wearing a blue trenchcoat, hat and bandolier.) I shouted, "Yes", in reply. He then called to me to come across for cover as I was in a dangerous position. I did not reply to this but slowly began edging backwards, hoping to find a depression in the ground where I would be safe. I had only got about six yards away when the officer, who had been closely watching me, realised that I was an enemy. He shouted to me to put my hands up and surrender. I raised my rifle and fired at him. He ducked his head out of sight, as did all the soldiers who lined the ditch. The soldiers' heads then appeared again and they all fired at me, including the officer with his revolver. When I took aim again, they all ducked as before. This must have happened four or five times and, between shots on both side, I was moving backwards. I suddenly found myself out of sight of the enemy on that front, but exposed to where the main part of the British appeared to be.

I was hailed again, but this time by some of our own men who were about fifty yards away, on a little hillock. I crawled over to them and found four men with only one rifle. The men were Charlie McKee, who had the only rifle, McGlinchy and the two newly arrived Cavan men, Smith and Clarke. The position we were in

was one with little cover in front and none behind. The enemy fire seemed to have been concentrated, to a great extent, on this little hillock before my arrival, and it had not slackened any. It was next to impossible to raise one's head and to fire. I discovered, to my surprise, that neither Smith nor Clarke could use a rifle, never having handled one before. The position was desperate and, after firing a few shots, I looked round for a better position to move to. I suddenly discovered an enemy party moving into cover in our rere.

The suggestion was made to me by one of the men that we had better surrender. I refused to consider it at first, but our position had worsened so much that we could merely hug the ground, without being able to fire a shot. If there had been a chance of sending the three unarmed men away, I honestly think that McKee and myself would have fought it out to the bitter end, but I could see the hopelessness and utter futility of five men lying there, with two rifles and perhaps twenty to thirty rounds between us, and unable to use them, just waiting to be picked off, one by one. I eventually agreed to surrender and a white handkerchief was shown, and I instantly regretted the decision, as such a roar and shout of joy went up from the enemy positions, particularly from the R.I.C. and Tans, whom we now saw for the first time as they jumped to their feet from where they had been concealed and danced with joy. It was the most bitter moment of my life - to listen to that cheer of the enemy. We were ordered to march down the hill towards the main enemy position, with our hands up. As we did so, I saw other members of the column coming out from where they had been concealed.

I discovered that the main British military position was facing us, whilst the R.I.C. and Tans had positions on our right flank. In addition, the British military had sent one or two parties to our rere. The enemy, as far as I could see, consisted of about seventy or eighty men. The military ~~was~~ were drawn from the barracks in Cavan which was garrisoned by a company of the King's Royal Rifles, in addition to the usual barrack services. At least half of the company were on this operation, officered by the company captain and 1st lieutenant, together with the company sergeant-major. When we were brought into Cavan barracks, the 2nd lieutenant was the only officer there. The police party consisted of District Inspector Scully, one sergeant and about six regular R.I.C. men. In addition, there were about twelve Black and Tans.

At the beginning of the surrender, we were mostly surrounded by Tans and R.I.C. and they began abusing and striking several of our men, one of whom - O'Callaghan - had his head split open with a blow from a rifle. I approached the officer in charge of the military, whose name I afterwards learned was Captain Dowden, D.S.O., and I protested against the ill-treatment several of our men had got. I pointed to O'Callaghan, with blood streaming down his face. The British captain turned to the Tans and addressed them, saying something like this: "These men have put up a good fight. They have honourably surrendered and, as long as they are in my hands, I will treat them as prisoners should be treated. If any of you men interfere with them, you will answer to me!". He kept his word and in many ways showed he was the type of

Englishman we had often read about but seldom met.

After all these years, I gladly pay a tribute to Captain Dowden, an officer and a gentleman. He was a sportsman also. I asked him if it were he who had been in charge of the party who mistook me for a policeman and then fired at me on learning their mistake. When he replied in the affirmative, I joked him about his bad marksmanship with his revolver. He said that he was only trying to wing me, and that he had won prizes for target-shooting. He then challenged me to a shooting match and offered me his automatic pistol to fire the first three shots at a target. I declined with thanks but, as he had a camera on his belt, I suggested to him to take a snap of the group. He did so, and copies of the picture were produced at our courtmartial as part of the evidence against us. (Original snapshot handed over for scrutiny and returned to witness.)

After the surrender, we were an hour or two at the scene whilst the enemy sent scouting parties around the vicinity, looking for any of our men or arms. They were obviously surprised on finding we were so few, and were convinced that a great number had got away. It was not until they examined our billet that they realised from the clothes and personal belongings how really small our party was. It was a bitter moment for us when the English captain brought forward to me a Sam Brown belt and held it up, saying with sarcasm: "It's a pity your C/O did not wait for the scrap". I asked him where he got the belt, and he told me that one of his men had picked it up about five hundred yards away, over the hill. The holster was attached to the belt, but it did not appear to contain a revolver.

Immediately on our surrender, I had told the enemy that there was one of our men lying either badly wounded or dead, and I brought them to where I had seen the man fall. It was McCartney and he was dead. Finn was wounded in the arm, and one of the enemy soldiers was badly wounded. These appeared to be the only casualties after about three hours' battle. We were told afterwards that at least two others of the enemy had been killed. Local people were supposed to have seen the bodies being taken away, but I do not believe it to be true.

We were taken to Cavan military barracks in lorries. Before leaving, I had asked the British captain not to put any of our men in the police lorries, as I remarked that it was a common practice for the Tans to throw prisoners out of lorries and shoot them for "attempting to escape". The captain agreed that we should all travel in military lorries.

We spent all that day and night in Cavan barracks, and were removed early next morning, handcuffed in pairs, by train to Belfast. We travelled two prisoners and four soldiers in each compartment. En route, I discovered that I could slip my hand free from the handcuffs. I told my companion, Tom Fox, and he suggested that we should attempt a getaway. To do so, we would have to overpower four soldiers, each sitting in a corner of the carriage. It was a possibility but a very thin one, and I decided to wait until we got to Belfast where there might be a chance of jumping from a lorry. When we got to the city, however, the precautions taken by the

enemy ruled out any hope of escape. The men captured were Finn, McKee, McCann, O'Callaghan, Dougan, McDermott, McGlinchy and myself - from the column; in addition, there were Tom Fox, Brigade Engineer, and Smith and Clarke, who had only joined the column.

On arrival in Belfast, we were brought to the military barracks and interrogated by the chief intelligence officer for the area. I was received in a very nice manner by this officer, offered a seat and a cigarette, and asked how I was feeling after the scrap - told we put up quite a good show, etc. - and then he began asking a few questions. When the intelligence officer found that I would give him no information, he turned rather nasty and told me that they would hang us. When that failed to impress me, he called the escort and had me removed.

We were finally lodged in Crumlin Road gaol and ordered for trial by field general courtmartial. As the enemy wished to try us all together and as Finn had not recovered from his wound, the trial was delayed until the 11th July.

Before the trial I was asked by Brigade headquarters if we wished to be represented by counsel. I said, "No", unless there was a case to be made for claiming treatment as prisoners of war. I had thought that there was a possibility of saving the two Cavan men - Smith and Clarke - by stating that they were not of our party but had just walked into the fighting area. Headquarters decided that we were to be legally represented and made arrangements accordingly. The counsel selected were unsympathetic to the Republican

cause, and I found it difficult to convince them that, beyond raising the question of our status as prisoners of war, there was no defence they could make.

When the trial began at 11 a.m. on the 11th July, our counsel, on my instructions, raised the question of the Truce which came into effect at noon and put it to the court that the trial should not proceed. The court adjourned for a few minutes to consider the point. They reassembled and said that they had been in communication with their army headquarters in Dublin, that Dublin had referred the matter to the British Government in London and that a further adjournment was necessary. The court opened again in another hour, and the decision conveyed to us was that the trial must proceed. Great importance was attached by the British to the trial. Percival Clarke, a famous English counsel, was sent from London to appear for the Crown. The main charge was High Treason, by levying war against the forces of the British King in Ireland. After a number of the enemy had given evidence, the court adjourned until the following day.

When we assembled the next morning, before the trial was resumed, our senior counsel, Campbell, told us that all he could do was to appeal to the court for leniency on account of our youth, etc. I told him that, if he did so, I would get up in court and repudiate him. I told him that all he could say was that we had honourably surrendered to much superior forces and that, in accordance with the rules of international warfare, we were entitled to be treated

as prisoners of war. I also said that I had drafted a statement which I proposed to make. The counsel asked to see it. When he had read it, he said he would throw up his brief, as my statement was insulting to the court. To reach a compromise, one of the two solicitors, E.J. Duffy of Virginia - subsequently State Solicitor for Co. Cavan - asked me would I object to a few amendments in my statement. He crossed out a few words and inserted a few others, and I agreed to the amended draft.

At the end of the trial, I stood up and read this statement in which I said that, whilst we asked for no mercy and expected none, we nevertheless claimed the right to be treated as prisoners of war. I finished by saying that Smith and Clarke were not of our party - in a last attempt to save their lives. This, by the way, was entirely my own idea, and neither Smith nor Clarke had suggested it. I wish to emphasise this because, twenty and thirty years afterwards, Smith has had it thrown against him by political opponents that he had deserted his comrades. In this year of 1954 I was present in Dáil Éireann when James Dillon, during a speech in opposition to the Minister for Local Government (P. Smith), said: "There is an old Cavan saying, 'Never leave your comrades in the dock!'". It was apparently an allusion to the court martial in 1921, about which Dillon had heard some garbled account.

To return to the trial, I should mention that McCann had given his name in the Irish form, Mac Conna, and in the pronunciation it became confused with mine

during the evidence, so that I was described as being with O'Callaghan when in fact it was McCann who was with him, of course. We were found guilty and sentenced to death, without any recommendation to mercy.

We were taken back to prison and put into cells in the corridor leading to the scaffold. We were put on the special diet which condemned prisoners get and, a few days after our sentence, we saw that workmen had been testing the trapdoor on the scaffold. The Truce being in operation, we could not be executed, so they held us under the sentence. If the Truce had broken down, I expect that at least six of us would have been hanged. I believe that during the Truce there were about forty-three men under sentence of death in different parts of the country.

After the acceptance of the Treaty by Dáil Éireann, we were taken to Dublin and released from Mountjoy in January, 1922.

While we were in prison before our trial, an attempt was made to rescue us some time in June, I think. The plan was an excellent one and, only for an unforeseen fluke, it would have been successful. A number of the prisoners, who were jailed for possession of documents and known to us as "paper" men, received ameliorative treatment - extra visits, free association with one another for a few hours each evening before bedtime, etc. For this free association in the evening, their cells were opened at about 7 p.m. and they were allowed to form groups in cells. Their O/C was Paddy McLogan - then known as

McLoughlin. On the date fixed, a number of Paddy's men jumped on the two warders on duty, tied them up in a cell and took their keys. They rushed down to the corridor where the selected men were to be released, and opened one of our cells. The remainder of the cells were then opened by one of our own men. We stayed outside on the corridor waiting for the next step.

Outside the prison four men came to the gate, two dressed as British army officers, one as a plain-clothes policeman and the fourth as an R.I.C. sergeant. The latter was Seán O'Neill, Brigade O/C, and the two "officers" were Seamus Woods and, I believe, Tommy Murphy. The Volunteer posing as a plain-clothes policeman was Pat McCarragher. They had a faked order to take out some prisoners. They got inside the outer gate and were speaking to the warder on duty who could not take his eyes off the "R.I.C. sergeant". This warder, named Kennedy, had not been on gate duty for years and had only taken this duty on that particular evening to relieve the regular man. He happened to live in the same street as Seán O'Neill. He recognised Seán, and he started moaning and then appeared to faint. The soldier on sentry duty ~~at~~ inside the inner gate, which was one of iron bars, was preparing himself to salute the "officers" when they came through, and was thus a witness of what was going on. When Kennedy started moaning, the four I.R.A. men tried to get the keys from him. They succeeded in doing so, but the sentry realised that something was wrong and fired a warning shot in the air, alarming the military guard in the guardroom. By moving quickly,

the outer gate was opened and the four men got away.

When we heard the shot, or shots, fired, we knew that something had gone wrong and then we heard whistles blowing and the military running to take up positions around the prison. There was nothing left for us but to go back to our cells and shut our own doors. It was a bitter disappointment.

Reviewing the fight and our capture in Cavan, there are a few observations I wish to make. In the first place, our presence in the neighbourhood was undoubtedly betrayed to the enemy, and I think that the presence of the three men drinking in the local pub, and perhaps bragging amongst themselves, induced some local man, openly or secretly hostile to the cause, to hasten to the nearest enemy position and report the presence in the locality of a number of strangers who were apparently I.R.A. men. The information must not have reached Cavan until late that Saturday night, as I gathered from the soldiers after our capture that they had been roused from their beds after midnight. They were all correctly dressed and equipped, but the R.I.C. and Tans had all the signs of just having tumbled out of beds. The District Inspector, Scully, was in mufti, wearing a collar but without a tie, and some of the Tans complained of being taken out of bed to go with the military on the combined operation.

Whilst in prison, the two Cavan men, Smith and Clarke, told me that they had advised the Brigade O/C, McGoran, against locating a column in the Lappanduff

area, as there was a number of unfriendly people there, apart from the fact that it was well known to the enemy. One of the R.I.C. men remarked to me on this aspect of the matter shortly after our surrender. In a more or less friendly manner, he said: "What brought you fellows to this part? We know every inch of the ground, and I was born and reared not far from here. We took one of your fellows out of that house down there a short time ago". This was a fact, as McGoran's predecessor as organiser, a man named Seán Gallagher, was captured in bed in John Brady's house where some of us spent our first night and on whose land the herd's cottage, in which we were billeted, was situated. John Brady was known to the enemy as an ardent sympathiser and his daughter, Clare, was a very active worker for the cause. We were, therefore, placed in a very dangerous situation without any precautions being taken to warn us of an enemy approach. Even if the situation had been otherwise, the Brigade O/C should have undertaken to have seen that scouts were placed on the roads leading to our position, with the object of warning us of the approach of enemy forces and thus allowing us time to get away. It is with reluctance that I offer this criticism of Seamus McGoran who was, generally speaking, a conscientious Volunteer officer, but he was undoubtedly at fault or remiss in his duties in placing us in a dangerous locality, in the first place, and taking no steps to protect us from enemy surprise. The roads leading to our billet should have been watched by local scouts, whose duty it would have been to apprise us of any enemy movement. This was an elementary military precaution which was the responsibility of the Brigade O/C.

There is also the question of our betrayal. The informer lived in the area and must have gone into Cavan or somewhere else from where the message was sent to Cavan; and yet, with all the resources that the Brigade O/C had at his disposal, no attempt was ever made by McGoran to locate and dispose of the informer. In a conversation I had with McGoran and Paddy Smith about a year ago, I remarked on this question of our betrayal. Smith, who with his fellow-officer, Clarke, had been convinced after our capture that we had been betrayed, was now unwilling to admit it. After thirty years in political life and as deputy for his county, his outlook on this matter had changed, or perhaps I should say, softened. I suppose it is hard for a deputy to admit that there is possibly one of his constituents an informer. He countered my remark by saying that the information might have come from Belfast! McGoran supported him in this by recalling that Hugo McNeill, on a visit to Belfast, heard at an Irish dance that a column was going to Cavan. If he heard it at all, he probably heard it from a Volunteer, as it was by no means widely known, even amongst the Volunteers. Supposing, however, that the enemy in Belfast had heard of such a column, they had no means of knowing what part of Cavan we were going to, as the members of the column did not know themselves. We travelled in two's or three's to different stations, stayed all day under cover and then were brought after dark to our final destination. If there was treachery, as undoubtedly there was, McGoran was only too ready to place it anywhere but in his own brigade area. We were betrayed, and the man who betrayed us is possibly still alive. Whilst we were in prison, local gossip

reached us about a man on horseback having been heard riding along the road that night. I would think, however, that he travelled more quietly on a bicycle.

When we realised that the enemy were in the area, we should have collected our rifles and equipment and cleared off. With the Brigade O/C and his Engineer, Tom Fox, present, we could have been taken to some other hide-out. We should not have fired a single shot and I think that, when Magee was giving his orders to get the men into firing position, and to the two men whom he sent on the reconnaissance expedition, McGoran should have intervened and advised, or ordered Magee to withdraw the column to some safe district. McGoran, however, made no suggestions or intervened in any way except by lifting one of the column rifles and taking up position to fire on the enemy. Magee's order to me to place the men in firing position was carried out by me, seeing the men move along the side of the hill and take whatever cover was available. I waited for Magee all during the fight and, as I stated before, repeatedly called his name. I should, however, as second in command, have assumed that Magee was either dead or vanished and taken control and withdrawn the men. I did not think of doing so, or of getting away. My only thought was shooting whenever I saw a figure of the enemy, whilst waiting for Magee to take charge; the men had changed their position, as I have already remarked, and I was unable to contact them. I should not have allowed them to drift as they did, so that I was unable to reach them. At the outset, it was comparatively easy to move along the hillside but, after half-an-hour, it was very difficult to do so. Nevertheless up to

Appendix 6

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 1016/A

(ii) **How many documents have been abstracted:** 1 p

(iii) **The date of each such document:** 6 October 1954.

(iv) **The description of each document:**

WS 1016 Witness Statement Seamus McKenna. P.37

details of a personal nature and names of individuals

(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.

about an hour after the fight had begun, the most of us, I think, could have got away.

(I should mention . that Magee was the officer in charge of the party of men, armed with bombs and guns, who were instructed to attack the Auxiliaries as they came out of their hotel in Belfast when they heard the news of the shooting of two of their comrades.

The whole engagement at Lappanduff reflects little credit on the officers concerned, including myself. We should not have given battle to the enemy at all, but collected all our arms and equipment and cleared off. The only little credit I allow in our favour is the fact that we held such superior forces of the enemy at bay for about three hours. They were surprised and somewhat disgusted, I think, when they discovered how few men were opposed to them. The main responsibility for the loss of the column must, I think, be shared equally by McGoran and Magee for the reasons I have already given.

Before concluding this account of my activities, I wish to comment on a matter that has possibly been overlooked by other contributors to this record of events. The pogrom in Belfast had a considerable bearing on the Volunteer organisation and it is difficult for people outside Belfast to appreciate the position as it existed between 1920 and 1922.

The pogrom against the Catholic population in Belfast broke out in July, 1920. At the beginning, as I think I have already said, the I.R.A. were ordered to take no part in what was regarded as sectarian strife, but after a few weeks when Orange gangs and mobs, armed and partly armed were attacking isolated Catholic districts in the city and Orange gunmen were deliberately shooting down Catholics on the streets, in their homes, or at their places of employment, it became necessary for the I.R.A. to participate in the struggle, to the extent of defending Catholic areas and institutions which were in danger.

When it was realised that the I.R.A. was the sole protection that the Catholic population could rely upon, a noticeable increase in recruiting began, and continued all during the pre Truce and post Truce periods. In July, 1920, the total Volunteer strength in Belfast would hardly have exceeded three hundred men. When I came out of prison in January, 1922, there were at least a thousand men on the rolls. I would say that about two-thirds of these recruits - possibly three-fourths - joined the I.R.A. for sectarian reasons only, to fight defensively or offensively against the Orange gangs. Few of them had any conception of Irish-

Ireland principles. Some of them undoubtedly became Republican as the result of their association with the old type of Volunteer, but, in my opinion, the majority of these pogrom recruits were lacking in the ideals and principles which inspired the men who joined the movement in Belfast and remained in it between 1916 and 1920.

A considerable number of these post pogrom recruits were ex British servicemen. I had experience of three of the latter type on the Cavan column and, whilst their fighting qualities left nothing to be desired, their conception of discipline was that enforced by punishment as in a regular army. My own company was singularly free from the ex British soldier type of recruit. In fact, we practically barred such recruits. I only knew of two men in that company who had any connection with the British army, and they were far removed from the typical ex British soldier whom one met in Belfast. Other companies, however, were not so free. D. Company, 1st Battalion, from which the three men referred to came and which was captained by Joe Magee, appeared to be very much infiltrated with ex British servicemen.

I was amazed when I came out of prison to discover how these ex British servicemen had gained the confidence of the old senior officers of the battalion and brigade and were holding rank. I will give one example. The two sons of a man, who was killed by Orange terrorists, joined the Volunteers late 1920 or early 1921. Both these sons were ex British servicemen and they had not the slightest

shred of national ideals or principles. They joined the I.R.A. as a means of avenging the death of their father. One of them was with me on the Cavan column. His brother was, within less than a year of joining the movement, O/C of the 1st Battalion, Belfast. When I came out of prison, I was asked to take over the battalion and was told confidentially that this man was being quietly replaced, on account of some missing battalion funds. None of the battalion officers were aware of this, and the culprit was being shielded by the brigade to such an extent that most men in the battalion regarded him as being victimised when I replaced him. When I finally realised the invidious position I was being placed in, I resigned the post within a week of my appointment. The brother of this man, after his discharge from the Army in Dublin, became involved in banditry in Belfast and was eventually arrested and convicted on charges of armed robbery. I am only quoting these two cases as examples of recruits who joined the I.R.A. in Belfast after July, 1920. I admit that they are two particularly bad cases, but I could quote a few others. After the Truce, two of the four Belfast battalions were commanded by ex British servicemen.

I cannot, of course, in this account go into the Civil War period, but historians of that period should consider the weight that was thrown on the Free State side in that struggle by the great number of Belfast men who became incorporated in the Regular Army in Dublin. I was in that Army during the Civil War and saw whole Companies composed entirely of Belfast men. Apart from the rank and file, there were numerous officers who were pogrom recruits in Belfast. Two

senior officers, Colonels, who served in the Army for many years were, in fact, men who joined the Volunteers late 1920 or early 1921. One of them, I know, actually joined in March, 1921. There were many other officers of lower rank in the same category.

The Truce was, in my opinion, responsible for a considerable amount of decay in the Volunteer spirit and also for a lowering of values. I was in prison, of course, during the Truce but I kept myself in touch with events outside. The Belfast Brigade was so keen on building up its strength numerically that little thought was paid to other factors. Undue regard was given to ex British servicemen because of their supposed previous military experience, and some of them, as I have shown, were elevated in rank where they should never have passed beyond section commander.

SIGNED: Seamus McKenna

(Seamus McKenna)

DATE: 30th September 1954.

30th September 1954.

WITNESS: John McCoy.

30/9/54.

(John McCoy) 30.9.54

ADDENDUM

As an addendum to my statement I wish to refer to my connection with the I.R.B. Towards the end of 1919 I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Pat McCormick (Casey). More than half the men in the Circle were fellow members of B. Company, the remainder were attached to other companies in the 1st Battalion. Meetings were held once a month, at which little of importance was discussed. Looking back I cannot recall any useful purpose served by our particular Circle of the I.R.B. As far as I could judge, the members of the Circle were mostly Volunteers with long service; some of them were pre-1916 men. I had no opportunity of assessing the military qualities of my colleagues, except in the case of those who were in my own Volunteer company, and where two of these were concerned they showed a lamentable lack of courage when the occasion for such arose.

I understood at the time that the main function of the I.R.B. was to control both the leadership and the activities of the Volunteer movement from within by ensuring that senior officers were I.R.B. men who would see that the fight for the Republic was relentlessly pursued. I cannot recall that this was effective in Belfast. The Brigade O/C, for most of the pre-Truce period, Seán O'Neill, was not an I.R.B. man. Neither was his successor Roger McCorley. The latter, as I have mentioned in my statement, was one of the most daring and active Volunteer officers in Ireland, but he could not be induced under any circumstances to join the I.R.B. On the other hand, the appointment of Joe McKelvey as O/C of the newly created 3rd Northern Division in 1921

was probably more on account of his I.R.B. membership than on his Volunteer record or capability. Joe was a very good Volunteer officer, but in the opinion of many of his friends at the time he was unsuited to the important position to which he was appointed. He was lacking in initiative, slow at making a decision and very easily swayed by others. Joe, however, paid the penalty that sometimes is the fate of leaders in defeat, when he was executed along with three other leaders on 8th December, 1922, by the Treaty Government as a reprisal. This crime will for ever remain a stain on the pages of Irish history, carried out as it was by a de facto government on men who had been several months in prison, and apparently condoned by the Catholic Church authorities.

When the split in the Volunteer movement took place in March 1922 I was undecided as to whether to support G.H.Q. or secede to the Executive side. Along with a few other members of my I.R.B. Circle, I consulted the man whom we regarded as our Republican father, Pat Casey (or McCormick), who was, I believe, a member of the Supreme Council, and whose connection with the Brotherhood went back to the closing years of the previous century. He advised us to remain with G.H.Q. and he did so himself, although eight or nine months afterwards he renounced the Treaty, and is now, approaching 80 years of age, an uncompromising Republican. He had, however, in my opinion already compromised, and led others along the same path. I am sure that many other I.R.B. men accepted the ill-fated Treaty on the advice of their officers in that organisation.

It can be left to future historians to decide to what extent the I.R.B. contributed to the split in the Volunteer movement. The I.R.B. was a necessary force in the re-organisation of the Volunteers in 1916/17, but from 1918 onwards the organisation, in my opinion now, did not justify its existence.

Seamus McKenna
6th October 1954

(Seamus McKenna)
6th October 1954.

Witness: John McCoy