

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
NO. W.S. 169

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 169

Witness

James Tomney

Identity

Head Centre I.R.B. 1913-1916, Co. Tyrone.
Organiser of I.V. 1913-16.

Subject

- (a) I.R.B. and I.V. activities, Co. Tyrone, 1913-16.
- (b) Easter Week, 1916. Co. Tyrone.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1137

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by James Tomoney, Coalisland, Co. Tyrone.

In the autumn of 1913 I joined the Irish Volunteers at its organisation in Dungannon District. I cannot give credit to any particular person for organising the Volunteers, as the movement was a spontaneous answer to the plans of Sir E. Carson's Ulster Volunteers. I then lived three miles outside the town at a place named Corr. We had the use of the Hibernian Hall there for drill purposes. The Corr Company numbered about eighty before the split in June 1914.

Shortly after joining the Irish Volunteers I was initiated into the I.R.B., Coalisland Circle.

A few weeks after joining the I.R.B. I organised a Circle in my home locality.

On the 26th December, 1913, a convention was held of the I.R.B. delegates for all County Tyrone in McGorry Hotel, Scotch Street, Dungannon. Dr. McCartan and Denis McCullough were present. An election was held and I was appointed head Centre for County Tyrone. I was also appointed an organiser for all County Tyrone and South Derry.

From early in 1914 I was working full time on I.R.B. work and Irish Volunteer organisation over the same area. My expenses for this work were paid by Denis McCullough. My reports were sent in quarterly to McCullough and Dr. McCartan, and were handed in personally to Dr. McCartan's dispensary at Carrickmore.


All the young men of military age of Nationalist tendencies were members of the Irish Volunteers at the time of the split in June 1914. Donaghmore and Dungannon were



the only Companies in County Tyrone which had serviceable rifles, part of the Howth stuff. Between 30 and 40 of those rifles were located in those Company areas. Corr and Derrytresk Companies were armed with Martin Henry rifles of an older type. There were about fourteen of those rifles in each Company.

At the time of the split all the Companies mentioned above remained loyal to the provisional Committee formed by the Irish Volunteers. When the split occurred there was a Division between Redmond's followers and the Irish Volunteers. The Redmondite crowd had control of old rifles of Italian origin which were obsolete and without ammunition. These rifles were made available to us in 1916 if they were of any use. I got 10-12 carbines from the Redmondite party myself, for use in Easter Week. These guns were serviceable and we had ammunition for them. There were about 20 or 30 revolvers and automatics available for 1916. There were also plenty of serviceable shotguns available. We made round lead balls for use in those shotguns.


Some days previous to Wednesday of Easter Week, Denis McCullough gave me instructions to procure transport for conveying arms from Belfast to Coalisland for the use of the Belfast Brigade during Easter Week in Tyrone. On Spy Wednesday I procured two cars. Hugh Rodgers drove one car and I went with him. Tom McGuiggan drove the other car and Willie John Kelly, Senior, went with McGuiggan. We drove to Clonard Monastery and picked up the stuff. We loaded both cars to the limit with rifles and ammunition, and drove back to Coalisland. We left Belfast at 2 a.m. and arrived in Coalisland at 5 a.m. on Holy Thursday morning. Peter Burns was in charge of the men who handed us the stuff in Belfast.



On Thursday and Friday I was engaged in arranging billets for the Belfast contingent in Coalisland and district. I was also engaged in the mobilisation of the Tyrone Brigade. The first of the Belfast men came off the 3.30 p.m. train on Saturday from Belfast. I met them at the station and took them to billets I had prepared for them at Annaghmore, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles outside Coalisland. The next contingent arrived in Coalisland from the 7 p.m. train. I had them billeted in a hall in Derrytresk, about two miles out from town. The third and last crowd arrived in Dungannon at 12 midnight. This last contingent included the Cumann na mBan under Nora Connolly and Miss Corr. The Belfast officers accompanied the last contingent. These officers included Peter Burns, Seamus Dobbyn, Archie Heron and several others. I had not seen McCullough from early in the week when I visited him for instructions re transfer of arms and was told by him that the Rising in Tyrone was timed for Sunday. I understand that McCullough travelled from Portadown on the same train as the last contingent from Belfast, and he went on through Dungannon to Carrickmore and found Dr. McCartan there. I understand that Miss Owens of Six Mile Cross travelled from Dublin and joined the train at Portadown on which McCullough and the last Belfast contingent were travelling, and that possibly she carried Owen MacNeill's countermanding orders to McCullough.

The third contingent from Belfast was billeted as follows: the Volunteers were provided with billets in Coalisland in an old Hall, now named Liberty Hall. The Cumann na mBan were sent out to two big farmhouses in Derrytrask - Mick O'Neill's and Peter McGrath's.

The mobilisation of the Tyrone Brigade was effected on Sunday morning. A Church parade took place in Coalisland

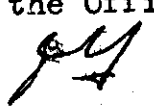


for ten o'clock Mass, and the following Companies: Derrytrask, Pat O'Neill, Captain; Coalisland, Joseph Quinn, Captain; Corr, Charles Tomney, Captain; Edendork, T. Eccles, Captain; Dungannon, Tom Kelly, Captain; Donoughmore, James McElvogue, Captain; Pomeroy, Arthur McElvogue, Captain; Benburb and Moy Companies, J. Shields, Captain; Carrickmore, Sean Corr, Captain; Sion Mills, James Curran, Captain, were mobilised locally. Strabane Company also stood-to to take part in the mobilisation.

The plan of the Rising as I can now remember it was that the Belfast and Tyrone Brigades were to march on Omagh on Sunday and capture the military post there, then proceed to Enniskillen and on the way capture all enemy posts, and attack and capture Enniskillen. After Enniskillen we were to proceed South West and join up with Liam Mellows, thus creating in Connaught an Irish territory. The question of commandeering transport and providing commissariat for this movement was the responsibility of Captain Frank O'Neill, Aghamullen, Coalisland.

After Mass all Companies were standing-to awaiting orders from the leaders who were then in Carrickmore. When 2 o'clock p.m. came and none of the leaders appeared Archie Heron and I hired a motor car and proceeded to Dr. McCartan's home in Carrickmore. We arrived there to find that they had departed for Coalisland by another route.

We returned to Coalisland and found McCartan, McCullough and Herbert Moore Pim in Coalisland. They informed us of receiving O'Neill's official countermanding orders, and that they were cancelling the plans for the Rising. McCullough informed me that he was taking the Belfast contingent to Cookstown to catch the 7.30 p.m. train for Belfast. I then held a council of war with the Officers




of the Tyrone Brigade and we decided that under the circumstances of that Sunday evening we should order the demobilisation of the Tyrone Brigade, that the men return to their homes and await further orders. The Tyrone men were to each retain his arms and hold himself available for mobilisation.

Mr. McCullough, before his departure for Cookstown, told me that he was leaving me in charge of the Belfast rifles and ammunition, and to have them properly secured until such time as he would again require them. I got Captain Joe O'Neill, Derrytrask, to take charge of sufficient men in his own area to carry out McCullough's instructions re safety of the Belfast arms.

Late in the evening I and other Tyrone officers were holding a meeting discussing the situation, and Nora Connolly and Miss Corr of Belfast joined us. Miss Connolly was very much annoyed with the action of the leaders of the Tyrone and Belfast Volunteers in calling off the mobilisation. She stated that she was sure a Rising was taking place in Dublin, and that she wanted to get there as soon as possible. She asked me to get her transport to take her to Dungannon to get a train to Dublin. I got her transport and she left for Dublin that night. She returned on Monday to Dungannon.

On her return from Dublin Miss Connolly had Pearse's orders to us for remobilisation, and those orders were conveyed to me by some person to go ahead and carry out the original instructions. I do not remember now if Miss Connolly came to Coalisland on this Monday. I do not even remember who told me of Pearse's orders, but I know that I received Pearse's orders from a trustworthy source. It may have been Tom Kelly came, if Miss Connolly did not herself come with the orders.



Miss Nora Connolly left for Carrickmore on Monday morning to contact Dr. McCartan.

When I got Pearse's orders to remobilise on Monday, I mobilised about fourteen men of the Coalisland Volunteers, and we proceeded to Derrytresk. We marched on Easter Monday night to a place called The Rock, and from there we proceeded to Greencastle by an unfrequented road and arrived there about 5 a.m. Greencastle was situated about 5-6 miles from Carrickmore and is a mountainous district. On our arrival there we located Patrick McCullough, now dead. He sent a scout to Carrickmore district to try and contact Dr. McCartan. At this time I believed that the Donoughmore and Dungannon Volunteers would have also moved to Carrickmore and we were anxious to make contact with them if they were in the vicinity of Carrickmore. The scout returned to us and reported that he was unable to make contact with McCartan. As it turned out the Donoughmore and Dungannon Volunteers were in the vicinity of Carrickmore, but in an opposite direction from us. Our scout did not make contact with them.

On Patrick McCullough's suggestion I procured a car and went myself to Dr. McCartan's home, in an effort to contact Dr. McCartan. On Monday evening I met Dr. McCartan in his home. A short time previous to my arrival the military had been there, raided the house, and, on leaving, set fire to his motor car. When I met him he seemed to have had a bad time and showed the effects of it.

Dr. McCartan told me that things looked bad. The military were in the area. Omagh was garrisoned by the North Irish Horse, and Carrickmore was only ten miles from Omagh. He said that he was not in favour of doing anything further, that military action under the circumstances in

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County Tyrone would be madness, and that I was to take my men home. I returned, after my interview with McCartan, to Greencastle where my men were waiting with Patrick McCullough. I told Captain P. O'Neill of my conversation with McCartan, and I asked him to take the Coalisland men back to Derrytrask, and that I would make an effort to contact the Carrickmore men to see what their intentions were. I failed to see any of the Carrickmore men and I proceeded to Pomeroy by motor car. We were held up in Pomeroy by military. The car was searched. After questioning we were allowed to pass, and we proceeded to Dungannon and called at Willie J. Kelly's house. We met Willie John and his wife, and heard from Willie John that the Dungannon and Donoughmore men had also been in Carrickmore, and that they had a much similar story to relate as ourselves.

I proceeded from Dungannon to my father's home and found that military had raided the place. I was told at home that the military had a local R.I.C. man with them, and that they were looking for me. The military had arrested my brother, and the R.I.C. man, Lynch, said "That's not the man we are looking for". I proceeded then to Michael O'Neill, Derrytrask, and found the military were engaged in raiding O'Neill's and Peter McGrath's houses. Both of these houses had accommodated the Cumann na mBan from Belfast on Easter Saturday night. I had to go to Fitzgerald's house that night, and I waited there until Captain Patrick O'Neill arrived with the men on their march from Greencastle. The military had left the district when O'Neill and his men arrived. We all stayed at Fitzgeralds on Tuesday night. We dumped all our own

14

arms, and all the Belfast arms. Those arms we placed in a dump we made in a bog, and it was large enough to accommodate all the arms and a few men if necessary. After this I was on the run, and sleeping out or living away from home until Christmas 1916. A few houses in my area were raided regularly for wanted men for months after 1916. No local men were arrested.

Signed James Connolly

Date 21-10-48

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Witnessed John Treacy

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