

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
No. W.S. 172

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 172

Witness

Comdt. Sean Hayes

Identity

I.R.B. and I.V. Drumbaragh, Ceanannus Mor,
Co. Meath 1914-16.

Subject

(a) I.V. Ceanannus Mor, district 1914-1916.

(b) Tara 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT BY COMMANDANT SEAN HAYES, 6 CALDERWOOD
ROAD, DRUMCONDRA, DUBLIN.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in May 1914 at Drumbaragh, Kells, Co. Meath. On joining we took no oath and did not sign any forms or register. I cannot remember anyone who was present when I joined. Our instructor was an ex-British Army Sergeant named Michael Dunphy. We had parades and drill on Sundays. We paid a small subscription weekly, I think it was threepence, towards expenses and the purchase of arms and uniforms. Dunphy was also paid some sum for instructing us. We were known as the Drumbaragh Coy. Our strength was about 35 approx. We had no arms of any sort and did our drills with dummy rifles. I was still a schoolboy at this time. After some time we purchased a .22 Winchester rifle and ammunition. With this weapon we had a good deal of firing practices. Each man paid for the ammunition he used, the charge, as far as I can remember, being a penny for three rounds.

No officers were ever appointed and the instructor took charge and acted in the capacity of Officer Commanding. There was no battalion or other organisation at that time. On one occasion M.J. Judge came down from Dublin and all the local companies of Volunteers paraded in Kells and were inspected and drilled by him. I cannot remember if we were visited by any other officers from headquarters.

At the time of the splitⁱⁿ the Volunteers the Drumbaragh Coy. elected to remain loyal to MacNeill and the Irish Volunteer Executive. This decision was 100%, there being no dissensions. The Carnaross Coy., which was the next Coy. to ours, did the same. Our instructor (Dunphy), however, declined to carry on and I was appointed in his stead. I had no previous experience and had to depend on my study of a British Army Drill Book. We organised a small pipe band of three pipers and two drummers for route marching. The pipers were Frank O'Higgins, Barney Harte & myself.

O'Higgins had his own pipes and the other pipes and drums were presented to us by Mrs. Sweetman of Drumbaragh. This lady also presented to us a collection of books mostly of a historical nature such as Mitchel's Jail Journal, etc. Our meetingplace was in a cottage, owned by Mr. John Sweetman, and rented to us at the nominal sum of one penny per week. Classes for the study of the Irish language were also held at this place and attended by others as well as the Volunteers. The Kells Volunteers had elected to join the Redmondite Volunteers, but a few men from there joined our company of Irish Volunteers and attended at our parades. Amongst this few was William Byrne.

At our parades and route marches we always had one ^{SA} of the R.I.C. men accompanying us. Our Coy. and the Carnaross Company were the only companies in North Meath who remained loyal to the Irish Volunteer Executive as far as I ^{Am SA} ~~was~~ aware. No officers were appointed and we got no arms until my father went to Dublin and brought back a few .38 revolvers. I do not know where or from whom he got them. We had only a few rounds of ammunition for them and could not afford to have any practice in firing. We had no uniforms or other equipment.

A short time prior to Easter 1916 Garry Byrne, who was a brother of Willie Byrne, one of our members, and Barney Mellows and Donal O'Hannigan visited us. The object of their visit was to start a centre of the I.R.B. I was initiated into the I.R.B. by Donal O'Hannigan. Frank O'Higgins was Centre and the only other members I can remember were my father (John Hayes) and Willie Byrne. At this time the strength of our Coy. had dwindled to about 20 who were mostly married men. There were very few young men in the Coy. except at the time when there was a threat of conscription for the British Army. On joining the I.R.B. we took the prescribed oath for that organisation and paid a subscription of 1/- per month towards the procurement of arms. On joining the I.R.B. we were told (I cannot say by whom) that

an insurrection was pending. Nothing abnormal took place until Holy Week. In the early part of that week Hugh Smith, one of our members who owned a motor cycle, proceeded to Dublin in an effort to secure a supply of arms. He returned with a .38. automatic and some ammunition and some other ancient type revolvers - about three or four, all told, I think. Garry Byrne had come down from Dublin to Kells to arrange for the mobilisation of the Drumbaragh and Carnaross Companies. This was about a week prior to the insurrection. He visited Drumbaragh and Carnaross and made arrangements for mobilisation and instructed us about what rations and so forth we were to carry.

We mobilised after lunch time on Easter Sunday and assembled outside the chapel in Kells and proceeded on foot towards Navan. Seven men had reported. We had a .22 rifle and what other small arms were in the Company. We carried three days' rations provided by ourselves. Garry Byrne was in charge. We got cars outside the town and went in them as far as Navan. From there we proceeded on foot to Tara. When near Tara the Carnaross Company passed us on sidecars (horse) and carrying a football to create the impression they were travelling to a football match.

We got to Tara about 7 p.m. just as night was falling. Carnaross Coy. was stronger than ours and they had a dozen .22 revolvers. I don't know if they had any other arms. We were to be joined in Tara by Donal O'Hannigan and a contingent of Vols. from Louth. On arrival in Tara, Byrne put us under cover and instructed us to remain quiet. We got some refreshments from a local shop. We could see moving lights in the Slane direction and thought this was the Dundalk men coming, as we were looking forward very eagerly to their arrival. They did not come however. Some time before midnight Sean Boylan from Dunboyne and a man named Benson arrived in a taxi, and immediately afterwards we were ordered to return to our homes by Byrne and to await orders there. I got into a car which was there and with some others we returned home.

On Easter Monday there was great police activity in our area. They made a particular examination of the railway bridges and railway lines, but made no arrests. On Easter Tuesday I learned from Willie Byrne that his brother Garry had proceeded towards Dublin on a bicycle in an effort to get some information about the situation. Willie also decided that he would go to Dublin and try and get information and instructions as to what we were to do. At this time we knew that fighting was taking place in the city and were anxious to find out what we were expected to do. Nothing further happened until either Thursday or Friday when Sean Dardis, who was another member of our Company, informed me that we were to proceed towards the city via Athboy. I do not know why we were to go via Athboy as this was a roundabout way to the city. I suspect it might have something to do with the proposed release of the internees (German) at Oldcastle which I heard afterwards was part of the original plan.

We mobilised in about an hour at Ball Alley Crossroads near Sylvan Park, but before mobilisation had been completed we were again ordered to return home. There was about a dozen men present at this time. I do not know who issued this instruction as it was passed from one to another and not given out on a parade. We returned home and no further instructions or orders were received. We later learned that the surrender had taken place. We then concealed what arms and ammunition we had. Some of the Carnaross Volunteers were subsequently subjected to a very close examination by the police as to their movements on Easter Sunday.

The seven of the Drumbaragh Coy. who mobilised and proceeded to Tara on Easter Sunday were Garry Byrne in charge, Willie Byrne, Hugh Smith, Frank O'Higgins, Joseph Power, Sean Dardis and myself.

Signed: Sean HayesDate: 11th Jan'y. 1949.Witness: Walter Barry

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