

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 183

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 183.....

Witness

Liam Gaynor, 117 Home Farm Road, Glasnevin,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. Belfast 1907-1916 and
I.V. Belfast 1914-1916.

Subject

- (a) I.R.B. Belfast 1907.
- (b) I.V. Belfast 1913.
- (c) The Split 1914.
- (d) Easter 1916 Belfast.

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STATEMENT BY MR. LIAM GAYNOR

117 Home Farm Road, Glasnevin, Dublin

As a young boy in 1902 I was first introduced in school to the study of the Irish Language. My interest in Ireland's history, songs and games grew apace. In the subsequent growth and development of our Volunteer army the language, songs and games of Ireland, particularly the patriotic songs, exercised a tremendous influence.

In 1904 I became associated with the G.A.A., played junior football and hurling for the James Stephens Club. Later this Club was re-organised as the John Mitchel Club for which I played continuously until prevented by I.R.A. activities.

In 1907 I joined the No. 1 Dungannon Club. This was Ireland's first non-secret Republican Club in this century. It occupied two rooms in the top floor above Tom Finnegan's chemist shop, Royal Avenue, Belfast. The members of this Club, as far as I can recollect, were:- Bulmer Hobson, Chairman; Denis McCullough; Sean McGarry (Electrician) of Dublin; Sean McDermott, the 1916 executed leader, who gave this Club credit for teaching him the principles for which he later died; Denis O'Hannigan, East Limerick, who was then a gardener with F.J. Biggar and became o/c of the East Limerick Flying Column during the Black and Tan fighting; Sean O'Sullivan, Kealkil, Bantry; Willie Woods; Frank Wilson, a non-Catholic; Tom Wilson; Dan Branniff; Sean Darby of Liverpool, who was a teacher in the Seamen's Institute; Fred Neill, Shankill Road, of Orange upbringing; Paddy Lagan, who went to U.S.A. and became very influential there in ~~the~~ Irish American political activities; Joe Robinson, who was constantly smuggling arms from Glasgow to Belfast;

Cahal O'Shannon

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and was sentenced in 1915 to 10 years imprisonment; Jimmie Hope, a grandson of Jimmie Hope of 1798 fame, and an Independent Orangeman; James Murphy and his brother Joe, now a Catholic Curate; Jim O'Donnell, a carpenter who delayed his emigration to the U.S.A. to fight in the Four Courts during the Civil War; Robert Lynd, son of a clergyman, now a prominent journalist and literary authority in England; Dan Turley; John O'Boyle, who was at school with me and introduced me to the Club; McNamee, a post office official; P.S. O'Hegarty and Alex. Lynn, B.L.

In 1907 Bulmer Hobson went to America and collected £100, which enabled him, on his return to Belfast, to publish "The Republic". Articles in this paper were contributed by Robert Lynd, P.S. O'Hegarty, and Hobson who was its editor. "The Republic" also contained anti-British cartoons by Morrow. The funds available did not permit this paper to last for more than about six issues.

Sean McDermott was living in Belfast in 1907. In addition to being a prominent member of the Dungannon Club he was also, for a time, a member of the A.O.H. During his membership of the A.O.H. he furnished us with each new Hibernian password which was a source of great amusement. Owing to the erratic nature of his livelihood the members of the Dungannon Club decided to make him an organiser for the Dungannon Club amongst the Hibernians in County Tyrone. Each of the adult members undertook to pay one shilling per week to defray his expenses and Sean managed on the modest sum of fifteen shillings per week. As the Hibernians were ardent supporters of the Irish Party, which advocated the use of constitutional methods to achieve Irish freedom, they did not take kindly to any advocate of physical force in opposition to the Irish Party.

It was expected that Sean would meet with some trouble and, for his protection, was provided with a revolver, which was, in reality, a lead pencil holder. This revolver was humorously presented by Sean McGarry in the Club premises.

The objects of the Dungannon Club were:-

- First The complete independence of the country by physical force methods, which were regarded as the only possible means of attaining Irish Freedom;
- Second The study and spread of the Irish language.
- Third The fostering and support of Irish industries.

Weekly meetings were held in which matters of Irish National importance were discussed and debated during three of the weeks in each month. On the fourth weekly meeting a manuscript journal, consisting of prose and poetic selections from the members, was read for the members by myself, acting as the editor of the manuscript journal. The most prominent contributors to the debates were Bulmer Hopson, D. McCullough, Sean McGarry, Sean McDermott and Alex Lynn.

After a few months in the Club Bulmer Hobson asked me to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but I told him that I felt much too young to join such a body. It was then I realised that The Dungannon Club was controlled by the I.R.B. organisation.

One of the functions of the Dungannon Club was an annual visit to the Bridge of Finea in Co. Cavan to commemorate the deeds of Myles the Slasher. Speeches were delivered there by selected speakers, such as Bulmer Hobson and Denis McCullough. Another activity was the publishing of anti-British recruiting literature. In one of the British Army recruiting drives in the Glens of Antrim it was found that, as a result of our

propaganda, only one recruit was obtained there, and to our amusement we heard that this potential recruit was lame.

During 1907 I was introduced to Sir Roger Casement in Bulmer Hobson's home. He discussed with me the latest book by Lord of Waterford on Irish outrages, alleged to have been perpetrated on the said Lord by the Irish people. Sir Roger informed me that a legal friend of his was of the opinion that these outrages were arranged by the Lordly author himself as anti-Irish propaganda when he had alleged he found bombs in his flower pots. I may add, in reference to Sir Roger Casement, that in 1912 a paper was published called "Irish Freedom" in which Sir Roger Casement - under an assumed name - warned the Irish people of the coming world war, which information was treated, at the time, as far-fetched.

Another activity of the Dungannon Club was the procuring of a horse-drawn lorry for use as a platform for speakers in the Falls Road area, Belfast. The usual speakers were Bulmer Hobson, Denis McCullough and Sean Mc Dermott.

Ladies were also attached to the Club, the most prominent being Miss Bridie O'Farrell, a native of County Kilkenny, two Miss O'Boyles, sisters of John O'Boyle, and Miss Branniff. Miss O'Farrell was always present at outdoor meetings.

On a few occasions speakers from the Dungannon Club debated with supporters of Joe Devlin, M.P. at his H.Q. the policies of physical force versus constitutionalism. Although the Dungannon Club speakers made effective contributions on behalf of the policy of physical force as the only means of acquiring Irish freedom the opposition, far from being persuaded to change their methods, were

violently hostile and personal in their debating methods. The Devlinite opposition in these debates were men of mature years, and, as a result, Bulmer Hobson was strongly of opinion that no converts to the policy of physical force could be made amongst grown-up men and he encouraged us all to concentrate on attracting the youth to our movement.

Jim Larkin arrived in Belfast in 1907 and organised a Labour movement in which, for the first time, Catholic and non-Catholic workers united. This may be described as the first seeds of what was later known as the Irish Transport Workers' Union. So successful was he that even the R.I.C. were induced to go on strike. The authorities became alarmed and endeavoured to break up the solidarity gained by Mr. Larkin by introducing sectarianism into the strike. This was done by deliberately placing large forces of British soldiers in the Catholic Falls Road area to incite the people. The tension created resulted in rioting and three people received fatal wounds from the shots fired by British troops.

Mr. Larkin was eventually invited to address the members of the Dungannon Club. He spoke at some length about the prior necessity of organising Labour and insisted that this was more important at the time than organising for Irish freedom. The meeting was very small and not more than from twelve to eighteen people were present listening to his address. Each member present briefly but effectively replied to Mr. Larkin's arguments, and pointed out that the acquisition of the freedom of Ireland was a much larger and a more important problem to be solved than the organisation of workers for better social conditions. The members of the Dungannon Club earned very modest livelihoods but they were confirmed in the view that the question of freedom was more important than better social conditions. When Mr. Larkin was leaving the premises he was obviously amazed at the ability and

knowledge of Irish affairs displayed by the speakers. His final remark was that it was the most remarkable meeting he had attended in his whole life.

In connection with Dungannon activities units of the Royal Irish Constabulary's plain clothes police were constantly watching the movements of members before and after meetings. On one occasion two of these plain clothes men ventured to the top of the unlighted stairs to listen to the proceedings outside the closed door. They were quickly discovered by Sean McDermott, who threatened to eject them physically if they refused to clear off the premises, which they did.

The Dungannon Club eventually merged into the National Council, which was Mr. Arthur Griffith's organisation. The National Council's programme aimed at getting back to the position obtained by the old Irish Parliament of 1782, i.e. a Parliament of the Irish Lords and Commons giving allegiance to the King of England. The Dungannon Club programme, however, aimed at an Irish Republic with complete freedom from any allegiance to English royalty, but it was felt that those two comparatively small organisations could easily merge their programmes on matters National.

At the start of the Freedom Club movement in Belfast my time was largely devoted, in the evenings, to studying for the teaching profession, and I have no recollection of the various mergers that took place at this time. During 1909 and 1911 I was in the De La Salle Training College, Waterford.

From 1911 to 1913, while teaching in Belfast, I was engaged in G.A.A. and Gaelic League activities, and shortly after the Volunteer movement was formed in 1913 I joined the Belfast Volunteers.

These Battalions of Volunteers were established and about 3,000 men paraded weekly, and were drilled and instructed by ex-British soldiers in the G.A.A. park in Belfast. I was a member of "F" Company, 1st West Battalion. A large number of the Volunteers were supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

The driving force behind the Volunteer movement came from the very small minority of people who believed in physical force methods for achieving Irish freedom. The Constitutionalists, represented by the supporters of the then-known Irish Parliamentary Party, became anxious about the increasing hold that this young physical force body was exercising over the minds of their supporters. To maintain their influence over the Volunteers the Irish Party bought them a consignment of Italian rifles of ancient make for which no ammunition could be obtained. They looked well, however, when used on parade.

Late in 1914 Mr. John Redmond, M.P. leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, made a speech at Woodenbridge, County Wicklow, in which he stated that Irishmen should fight for freedom outside of Ireland. Those who belonged to the physical force movement, dubbed Extremists by the Constitutionalists, were opposed to this new departure in favour of England, then at war. This feeling of antagonism between the Extremists and the Constitutionalists began to grow in the country and the Irish Party decided that they, and they alone, were to control Volunteer activities in Ireland.

Some time in 1915, at the instigation of Mr. Joseph Devlin, M.P., Honorary President, a meeting of the Volunteers was held in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast and it was obvious to some of us that this meeting had been packed by members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Irish Party supporters generally, who were not members of

the Volunteers. Mr. Devlin spoke at this meeting and put a motion requesting that the Irish Volunteers should be controlled by the Irish Party. The Irish Party, he said, represented a majority of the Irish people, both at home and abroad. Devlin's motion was carried and caused an immediate cleavage in the ranks of the Belfast Volunteers.

On the following Saturday when the Devlinite Volunteers paraded to march to the G.A.A. park for drill purposes it was found that the 3,000 had dwindled to 1,600. On the next Saturday the 1,600 had dwindled to 1,200. Eventually this body numbered 400 and ~~soon~~ their public parades were disbanded. Many of these Volunteers were soon recruited by the Irish Party into the British Army and fought in 1914-1918 War.

The physical force body, who were in a very small minority, gathered and held weekly drills in old military huts at Willowbank, Falls Road, Belfast. At these drill parades about forty-five Volunteers attended regularly. Mr. Denis McCullough was the civilian Commander with Peter Burns as the military O.C. Rory Haskins was an assistant to Peter Burns, as well as Cathal McDowell and Sean Kelly. We had now only the nucleus of an average Company of Volunteers, but Section Leaders were appointed. I was made a Section Leader.

Mr. Herbert Pim, a Catholic convert, had interested himself in the Volunteer movement, and, by means of his previous associations with the Junior Conservative Club in London, made use of his membership card to ^{purchase} 42 Martini ^{leaf} Henry rifles for us, with an adequate supply of .303 ammunition, from Braddell's gunshop in Belfast. Although small in numbers we were now fully armed and our indoor drill parades were always shadowed by members of the R.I.C. in plain clothes.

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During the year 1915 we carried out our weekly parades and engaged in a number of manoeuvres, on a small scale, in the adjacent hills. We practised rifle shooting secretly in a quarry on the side of the mountain, using a couple of our Martini Henry rifles and also some old Mauser rifles which had been previously smuggled in at Howth.

About January 1916, Patrick Pearse lectured in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast. He gave a very interesting picture of the organising and planning in Dublin of Emmet during his time. He enthused us by stating that we were fortunate in having as our constant supporter in America that old warrior, who was both hated and feared by the British Government, John Devoy, and he paid a great tribute to the service of John Devoy in the cause of Irish freedom. Feeling between the physical force party and the Constitutional Party in Belfast was running high then and we found it necessary to march back armed to our Headquarters from this meeting, with Patrick Pearse in the ranks.

Imp. Volunteer ^{activity} was now heading towards serious business. Local manoeuvres were being held by Volunteer Units throughout the country which the British military authorities seemed unable to prevent. The Dublin Volunteers became more and more in evidence in the streets and surroundings of Dublin. Soon we were advised of all Ireland Easter manoeuvres being arranged for by Headquarters and told to prepare for such manoeuvres.

Imp. About two months before Easter 1916 we were addressed by James Connolly at our Headquarters at Willowbank. He spoke very strongly about periods in Irish history when the Irish people had opportunities of fighting for freedom and did not avail of them. He said that the first of such opportunities occurred when the Boer War broke out in 1899.

The second occurred when the World War commenced in 1914, and the third, in his opinion, was offering itself in the near future. He felt so strongly about this that he stated, in my hearing, "if the Irish people don't fight, then, by G--- I'll go out and fight myself". He spoke about the coming Easter manoeuvres and he was queried as to what our position in a hostile city like Belfast would be. His advice was to get out of the city any way we could.

On Holy Saturday 1916 the first detachment of the Volunteers, with which I travelled, entrained for Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. A few weeks previously our rifles, had been sent before us to Tyrone and we carried our bandoliers, containing rifle ammunition, small arms with ammunition and haversacks which were covered by our overcoats when travelling. In this first detachment there were about forty to fifty men and Fianna boys. A second and third detachment, ^{equipped} similarly, went later on the same Saturday to Tyrone. In all about 120 Belfast Volunteers went to County Tyrone on Holy Saturday 1916.

The O.C. of my section was Cathal McDowell and from Dungannon we marched to a place called Derrytresk where we were billeted overnight in a small building with a concrete floor. The Fianna boys who accompanied our section gathered straw which they spread on the floor for sleeping purposes. During the night I had to provide armed sentry patrols out of my section as McDowell had left me in charge.

On the following morning, Easter Sunday, we marched, with our full equipment ~~minus~~ the rifles, to the local Church to hear Mass. After Mass I was engaged for about one hour drilling my section on the roadway. Nearby was Mr. Archie Heron drilling another section.

An order then came to us to march to Cookstown. I was not aware of, nor was I present at, any meeting held by officers of the Belfast Battalion in Tyrone in regard to the countermanding order of Eoin McNeill. All that I was told was to march my section, which was increased with local recruits, to Cookstown, a distance of twelve miles, and during the march I got an inkling that we were returning to Belfast. I accepted, without question, this Order of my superior officer.

The march seemed to be a rather severe test of the physical fitness of the men as I distinctly remember a sidecar, during the march, transporting a few men who were unable to keep marching.

Unfortunately during Sunday morning I became aware of one or two Volunteers who still showed the effects of the previous night's drinking. One of these, en route, daringly displayed his small arms to the police, some on bicycles, who were accompanying us. When we were marching past the Cookstown R.I.C. barracks a pre-arranged rush, from inside the barracks, was made by R.I.C. men at this individual and he was dragged from the ranks into the barracks. For a moment it looked dangerous as we all halted, grasped our small arms, which were hidden in our pockets, and prepared for any firing at our exposed position. Fortunately Denis McCullough showed commendable coolness. He called on the Volunteers to remain in their ranks and ordered the advance to the station where we entrained for Belfast. It was fortunate that a shooting encounter was thus avoided as it prevented the British Military Authorities from suspecting that the Volunteers in Dublin would begin to fight on the following day.

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Two companions, Seamus Dobbyn and Manus O'Boyle, a native of Donegal, and myself, got out of the train, with a number of parcels, at Castledawson, where we stayed overnight with friends. We were amused, when leaving the train, at the evident perplexity of the two plain-clothes policemen, Hanrahan and Kelly, who were uncertain whether they should leave the train and shadow us, or continue on in the train. They remained in the train.

The following day when we entrained at Castledawson for Belfast, the stationmaster requested the uniformed R.I.C. man present on the platform to arrest the three of us, but the RIC man seemed to be aware, or suspect, that we were armed, as we were, and avoided us when we were boarding the train. A friendly traveller ^{who} had heard the Stationmaster's ^{remarks. ~~The traveller~~} accepted the custody of our arms while on the train.

We arrived in Belfast at about 11.a.m on Easter Monday, and as we were walking along the centre of the city we saw a large detachment of British soldiers marching towards the Great Northern station for Dublin. We were then informed that a Rebellion had broken out in Dublin. We were in a quandary as to what we should do, and we attempted to get contact with the remainder of the Volunteers on the same day but without success.

On Easter Tuesday morning I was awakened early and told that we were being mobilised, but nothing took place. We met in batches to discuss what was the best thing to do. A number of us gathered in one of the shops where we were in the habit of meeting, but without any official orders we were unable to decide what to do. I heard that Cathal O'Shannon and Dan Branniff, on their own accord, attempted to reach Dublin by train, but I understand that O'Shannon was arrested at Drogheda.

During the week we were waiting from day to day and hoping to get an order from someone in authority, but the order never came and Easter Week 1916 fighting passed without our being able to take part.

Less than a fortnight after the cessation of fighting in Dublin the British authorities made a general round-up of the Volunteers and their supporters. These were brought in batches to Kilmainham jail before being transferred to internment camps in England. A large number of Volunteers were arrested in Belfast, but, to my surprise, I was not.

Shortly afterwards I contacted some of the remnants of the I.R.B., which organisation I had joined in 1915 and was a member of the Circle of which D. McCullough was the Centre.

Owing to the arrest of the prominent I.R.B. and Volunteer officers in the North, I found myself elected as leader of the units of the I.R.B. in Belfast and shortly afterwards in charge of the I.R.B. in Ulster. The I.R.B. had initiated and to a great extent controlled the Volunteer movement. I became responsible, therefore, for the re-organisation of the Volunteers not only in Belfast, but also throughout Ulster.

In Belfast I collaborated with Sean Cusack, an ex-British soldier, and in the autumn of 1916 the Belfast Battalion was re-established with four Companies, "A", "B", "C", and "D". To enable me to devote attention to re-organising Volunteer Companies throughout Ulster through the medium of the I.R.B. organisation I requested Sean Cusack to take command of the Belfast Battalion and I became Captain of "D" Company. Cusack was of the opinion that I should have taken over the command in Belfast, but I held that as he had practical military experience he was more suitable for the post. As an oath-bound member of the I.R.B. he obeyed my command.

At the time I was busily engaged in re-assembling and strengthening the dislocated machinery of the I.R.B. under my control. My election as Ulster Centre of the I.R.B. occurred about June 1916 but owing to the disruption caused by the British wholesale arrests some months elapsed before I was linked up with Dublin. The unceasing and energetic secret activity of the leaders of the I.R.B. had organised the fight in 1916 which dared the might of an Empire ! The epic struggle against hopeless odds had succeeded in shaking the lethargy out of the Irish people.

Nine years of fighting propaganda by this comparatively small organisation was now bearing fruit. So far from feeling that 1916 was a failure all were imbued with the desire to continue the fight against the alien army occupying the country. Our efforts were directed towards reforming and expanding our armed Volunteer forces. The I.R.B. officers were keen advocates of a future Irish Ireland that would be self reliant and free. The motto was *Séin Fein amain* - ourselves alone. Side by side with the development of the military arm they appreciated also the necessity for weakening foreign domination in the social, political and economic spheres, which involved the ardent few in a variety of activities.

The I.R.B. was founded in 1867. During the years of constitutional obsession its physical force policy was unpopular with all but a select few. A new Era was begun in 1907 when that determined Fenian, Tom Clarke, of 1916 fame, was released after 14 years Penal Servitude.

The constitution of the I.R.B. provided for one representative from each of the Four Provinces of Ireland, one from London, one from North England and one from Scotland. The seven representatives co-opted four well-known persons from the rank and file, who were usually resident in Dublin.

The eleven representatives formed the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood which was regarded as the shadow Cabinet of the Irish Republic with its elected leader as President.

At my first meeting of the Supreme Council in the autumn of 1916 Leinster ^{was represented} by Greg Murphy; Munster by Sean Ua Murthuile, who acted as Treasurer; Connaught by Larry Lardner, who was later superseded by Alex McCabe and still later by Andrew Lavin; North England by Neill Kerr and Scotland by Pat McCormack. In 1917 London was represented by Michael Collins who acted as Secretary to the Supreme Council. Sean McGarry was President during my term of office from 1916 to the Summer of 1921. ~~Demot~~ Hegarty, Harry Boland and Gearoid O Sullivan were co-opted members as was also, I think, Sean McGarry.

When questioned at my first meetings about the state of the I.R.B. in Ulster I said it would require overhauling if it were to be effective as a physical force organisation. I was later granted, on my suggestion, the service of Seamus Dobbyn as a whole time organiser for Ulster. The Supreme Council agreed, about 1918, to my proposal to increase the Irish Provincial representation from one to two, thus increasing the Council from eleven to fifteen members. As all the members were earning their livelihood one half a province was as much as one man could properly supervise. I thus became responsible for East Ulster, comprising the Counties of Antrim, Down, Armagh, Monaghan and Cavan, and my organiser was nominated by me as representative for West Ulster.

When I took charge Co. Monaghan had no units of the I.R.B. and Eoin O Duffy was sworn in by my organiser as our first member and requested when organising a Circle to form also a Company of Volunteers. This Company was later increased to a Battalion, then to a Brigade and about 1920 became the fifth Northern Division of the I.R.A

with O Duffy as O.C. Eoin O Duffy was also County Centre of the I.R.B.

The I.R.B. has been the subject of much criticism, perhaps because of its secret nature, but the Volunteer critics were not aware of the thousands of pounds spent by its Supreme Council on the purchase of arms and equipment. Its extraordinary structure of ascending Circles limited the possibility of large disclosures, by a member, of personnel to the enemy - the bane of other Irish organisations since Emmet's time. Only the carefully selected of the Volunteers in each area were invited to membership of the various Circles. A Primary Circle in my area never exceeded twelve members. The Centres of the Primary Circles in an area formed a Secondary Circle and so on to the Supreme Council. For all practical purposes the members of a circle were unknown, as such, to the members of any other Circle of similar or lower standing. There was, however, a limited amount of disclosure during re-election of Centres. This parent organisation within an organisation countered most successfully the efforts of the British Secret Service as the I.R.B. developed a high standard in Intelligence activities to the advantage of the Irish Volunteers. Belfast could inform, say, London at short notice of a British intelligence move.

Scotland Yard men once came to Belfast, ostensibly to learn Irish, and returned after a season's tuition using the names of prominent Belfast Gaelic Leaguers as an entre to the London Gaelic League. They must have been puzzled why they were not received with open arms in London Gaelic League circles. This oblique method of worming their way into the Volunteers was nipped in the bud.

At a meeting of the Volunteer representatives held in Fleming's Hotel, Dublin, December 1916, I was elected as an Ulster member of the Provisional Executive of the Irish Volunteers. Apart from the monthly meetings in Dublin of the I.R.B. I had also to attend monthly meetings in Dublin of the Provisional Executive of the Volunteers. As a number of representatives were members of both bodies we arranged that such monthly meetings of both organisations did not clash.

During the Christmas period of 1916 a large number of Volunteers were released from internment in Frongoch, including a number of prominent officers. On their return it was decided to hold another Volunteer Convention, which took place in Fleming's Hotel, Dublin on Easter Sunday 1917, when a more representative Volunteer Executive was formed. I was elected as an Ulster representative on this Provisional Executive, and held office until October 1917 when the Volunteer Executive was finally established. Mr. Sean MacEntee, T.D., was elected to the position I had held on the Provisional Executive.

In October 1918 the Belfast and East Down Brigade was formed, comprising Belfast and East Down Battalions. Sean Cusack became Brigade Commandant, and I became the Brigade Officer of Communications. This was regarded as a suitable post for me owing to my contacts and my limited success during the conscription scare period in opening a cycle link of communications from Belfast to Clones, Belfast to Derry, and Belfast to Dublin. This link was hoped to be independent of the British controlled postal system if conscription were attempted.

At the time when conscription of our manhood by the British authorities, before the end of the 1914-18 war, loomed closely, I insisted that if we had to fight conscription we would fight it as an organised force in the streets of Belfast.

To do so would, in my opinion; give the lie to the world that Belfast, as far as we were concerned, would be accepted as being entirely in favour of British domination.

My membership of the Brigade Staff continued until Easter Monday, 1920, when I was arrested by the British forces and imprisoned for six weeks in Belfast jail. I was released from jail after being on hunger-strike, and resumed my position as Brigade Officer.

During 1918 a watching brief was held on the Belfast Sinn Fein organisation so as to prevent this body from getting into undesirable hands. Like most of my I.R.B. and Volunteer colleagues I was always, true to my Dungannon Club training, - Doubtful about the sincerity of most platform politicians. It was essential for me to take an active part in the Belfast Sinn Fein Executive meetings with some colleagues, so as to prevent a possible clash with the policy of our armed forces. The Gaelic League was also used as an outer cloak for inner activities.

Owing to the comparative fewness in numbers and the scarcity of speakers to cover North East Ulster during the important Self Determination elections, I reluctantly agreed to Eamonn Donnelly's urgent request to address public meetings in Counties Antrim, Down and Armagh. From this until the Truce was a time of ceaseless activity involving much burning of midnight oil. I found myself attending Sinn Fein executive and electioneering meetings, I.R.B. meetings in Belfast, East Ulster and Dublin, Volunteer executive meetings and Company parades, some raids for arms, transfer of munitions as well as shouldering a certain amount of responsibility for the smuggling of large quantities of rifle ammunition to Dublin and other parts of the country. Up to 1919 I also taught Irish once a week in a Belfast Gaelic League Branch.

When warned that I was exposing myself as a shooting target for the enemy by remaining at my school post I resigned from the teaching profession in the autumn of 1919 and took up a position as a traveller. This work provided me with sufficient outdoor exercise to cope with abnormal indoor activities in dilapidated and badly ventilated premises, which were all we could afford to rent. In regard to indoor drilling, each time we were located by the police we had to find other premises to escape arrest.

On 25th September, 1920 I went to Dublin to undergo a week's intensive engineering course on demolition for the Volunteers, but on the following day I returned to Belfast owing to the death of my brother, who was shot in his home at midnight by British forces. The latter, I was soon informed, thought that they had killed me, and I was forced to go on the run.

This cramped my activities in Belfast, and I was requested to accept a transfer from the Army to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce for the purpose of organising, in my I.R.B. area, a boycott of Belfast business-houses. This boycott was enacted as a law by An Dail, owing to the Belfast pogrom. I agreed to the request, as I felt that my I.R.B. activities throughout East Ulster would facilitate me in keeping closer contact and thereby help to some extent in consolidating and expanding Volunteer activities in that area.

In one very quiet area in County Tyrone I managed to organise two raids on trains. Raids on trains were also made in County Monaghan by General Eoin O Duffy's forces, and Belfast goods confiscated and destroyed. Rich Hill station, in County Armagh, which was an important centre for Belfast goods, was on my orders burned out.

Not satisfied with the effectiveness of the Belfast boycott I completed lists of Belfast business houses which were circulated throughout the country for blacklisting.

The Northern Banks, which financed the Belfast business-houses, were custodians of a large percentage of money owned by our people. Branches of non-Northern British Banks were opened ⁱⁿ some Ulster towns, and many accounts transferred to them. Even in Belfast a number of our business people transferred their banking business from the Northern Banks to the Munster and Leinster Bank. All this helped to weaken the position of the pro-British element in Ireland and strengthen the morale of our fighting forces. To stop leakages of Belfast goods, through the country, which were being sent via English addresses, I went to Britain to organise Intelligence Committees in the North of England, London and Glasgow.

While in Liverpool I sent word through a messenger sailing to New York to Mr. Harry Boland, who was a colleague of mine on the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. and on a visit to the Clan na Gael in New York, to institute a boycott of Belfast linen throughout the United States. This was done, and millions of pounds worth of business were subsequently lost by Belfast linen firms.

On my return from Britain I felt that the pressure on the funds in the Northern Banks could be increased by banning Northern bank-notes throughout the country, and the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Joseph MacDonagh, acting on my suggestion, put this ban into operation on the day the English King opened the Belfast Parliament. Through a certain quarter, contact was also made with South American Companies, resulting in the stoppage of orders for Belfast-built ships.

I regret to state that this effective economic pressure on the anti-Irish faction in Belfast was ended by Michael Collins as a result of an interview he had with Sir James Craig in Dublin shortly after the Truce commenced.

Before the unfortunate Civil War broke out my services were accepted by Joseph McKelvey, a Belfast colleague and one of the leaders of the Republican Forces stationed in the Four Courts, Dublin. I was, however, unsuccessful in my attempts to contact him in the Four Courts when hostilities began.

Through James Mulholland, who was a member of the Republican Intelligence Branch, I acted as Intelligence Officer at the request of Michael Carolan, who was O.C. I continued as such until the Cease Fire Order was given.

Sean Sean MacFionnabaird

SIGNED *Sean Sean Gwynn*

WITNESSED *A.W. Slater*

DATE *21. 10. '48.*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 183