

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILITIA 1913-21

No. W.S. 338

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 338.....

Witness

Mr. Francis McQuillan,  
Castletown Road,  
Dundalk,  
Co. Louth.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. Dundalk, 1908-1916;  
Member of Irish Volunteers, Dundalk,  
1914 -;

Subject

- (a) Training of I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers, Dundalk,  
1913-1916;
- (b) Protest Meeting, Dundalk, on occasion of proclamation  
of Edward VII as King of England;
- (c) Plans for destruction of telephonic communications,  
Dundalk, pre Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1379.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF FRANCIS McQUILLAN,  
Dundalk.

I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1908. Ned Clifford swore me into the organisation. I remember we usually held our meetings in Patrick Walsh's, Bridge Street, Dundalk. Amongst the men in the I.R.B. in Dundalk and neighbouring districts were the following:-

Patrick Hoey (Hackler), Merches, Dundalk.

John Casey, Casey's Row, Dundalk.

Thomas Hearty, Bridge Street, Dundalk.  
(One of the earliest members).

Joe Bennett, Dowdall's Hill, Dundalk.

Frank Sheridan, Castletown Road, Dundalk.

Paddy Baxter and Paddy McCourt, Dowdall's Hill, Dundalk.

Philip McQuillan and George Fitzsimmons,  
Dundalk.

Thomas Treanor, Ballybinaby, Dundalk.

James Reilly, Miltown, Kilkerley.

Mat, James and Mickey Lynch

Patrick Casey, Slieve.

Patrick Carron, Castletown Road.

Mick White, Haggardstown.

Two brothers - Hardy's, Haggardstown.

Thomas and Patrick Mulholland, Kilkerley.

Laurance Tuite, Point Road, Dundalk.

Joseph McQuill, Bridge Street, Dundalk.

Edward Ryan, Louth.

Bernard Clarke, Thomastown.

Peter Hanratty, Sheelagh.

Thomas Luckey, Crossmaglen.

Peter Hearty and John O'Byrne, Dundalk.

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A man from Headquarters, Dublin, generally attended our meetings which were held every few months. Each member paid a subscription of 2d. per week regularly. From the time I joined the organisation, we used the G.A.A. functions as a cover for our meetings. In the early days before I joined the I.R.B. I heard that coursing meetings were used generally as a cover for the meetings of our members. All prominent I.R.B. men were encouraged to take an interest in dogs and usually kept one. Thus coursing meetings and coursing club meetings were used to hide the activities of the I.R.B.

Liam Mellows visited Dundalk for two weeks and stayed in Mr. <sup>McKINDLEY'S</sup> ~~Kilby's~~ of Flurrybridge. Thomas Hunter and Garry Sullivan also visited I.R.B. meetings in Dundalk. When I was a small boy, I know that John Daly of Limerick and another man, named Egan, who was in prison with Daly in England, came to Dundalk after their release, got a great reception and addressed a meeting in the Town Hall.

Amongst the men who came from Dublin to preside at our meetings were Seamus O'Hanlon on a few occasions and Dr. Patrick McCartan; Major John McBride also came on a few occasions; Peadar Cearney also visited us on at least one occasion during one of his visits to Dundalk. Major McBride also visited Adavoyle in Co. Armagh. From 1908 to 1913 most members of the I.R.B. were active in the Sinn Féin organisation.

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At the time of the proclamation of Edward VII as King of England, a demonstration was held opposite the Courthouse in Dundalk. This demonstration was sponsored and organised by the British imperial elements in the town. The military garrison in the town took a leading part in the affair. The proclamation proclaiming Edward VII the King was read. A small number of the I.R.B. and three local sympathisers attended this function, and when the reading of the proclamation was started, Paddy Hughes (who was not himself a member of the I.R.B.) made a public protest. He stated that Edward VII was not King of Ireland and that he and those associated with him would never give allegiance to a foreign king. The military ordered us off, and we refused to move. We were standing around the 1798 Memorial opposite the Dundalk Courthouse; and we felt that, as we were in the shadow of that Memorial, the ground was appropriate and we refused to budge. We hoisted a Green flag and maintained our position. The incident closed with the military moving off and leaving us in our position. This incident caused a sensation in Dundalk at the time and gave the men who took part in it great local prestige with the general public who were not actively with us. Amongst the men who took part in this protest were Patrick Hughes, James Kelly, Bill Darcey, Dick Jamisson, Edmond Ryan, -- McGarvey and myself. I cannot remember the others. In all, about twelve took part. There is a photograph in

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existence of this group, taken on the spot during the protest.

On the night of this incident James Connolly and a man, named Walker, from Belfast held a Labour meeting at the Square, on the spot where the protest was made by Paddy Hughes.

Paddy Hughes was the leading man in Dundalk in those early days. He refused to join the I.R.B. organisation on religious grounds. All the I.R.B. looked on him as a leader, and any time a crisis took place in town, Paddy Hughes took charge. No person thought of questioning him, and he was always found to be right.

We held our meetings in the early days in a room in a Hall in Bachelor's Walk which was known as the Sinn Féin Hall. The start of the Sinn Féin organisation was engineered by the I.R.B., together with men like Paddy Hughes who were republican but not members of the I.R.B. From the start of Sinn Féin the I.R.B. were able to use the Sinn Féin rooms for their meetings. Lectures were delivered in the Sinn Féin Hall. Countess Markievicz came to town and gave a few lectures.

Amongst the districts organised by the I.R.B. was Cooley, and the following were members there:-  
Seamus O'Hanlon and his brother, Michael Ferguson, and Paddy Donnelly.

The members of the I.R.B. were small in numbers

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and were scattered over a wide area surrounding Dundalk. The general body of the people were not friendly to the policy of the I.R.B. The Hibernian organisation linked up a lot of good men who were originally republican, and we lost their support all over the country. All I.R.B. men were oath-bound and were very loyal to each other.

About 1914 the I.R.B. took a prominent part in helping to organise the Volunteers. The I.R.B. organisation got rifles in Dublin for the use of the Volunteers. We were able to purchase a small number of rifles from the military in Dundalk, and arms were purchased from any source possible.

About mid-1914 a split took place in the Volunteers locally, after which there was little doing in the Volunteers. The Hibernian element had a big majority in the Volunteers at the split. After the split the Republican element in the Volunteers was reduced to a small number. For some time after the split it would be difficult to get more than half a dozen to attend a meeting. Great credit is due to Paddy Hughes for the work he did in trying to keep us together and to get others to join us from mid-1914 to mid-1915.

In 1915 a reorganisation meeting was held in the Town Hall, and about twenty of us attended. The Hibernians tried to prevent us attending the meeting. They surrounded the Hall and attacked people trying to

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get in to our meeting. Violent scenes took place in the vicinity of the Hall and many of our supporters could not get in to the Hall. Archie Heron, who came down from Dublin to address this meeting, was attacked by the Hibernians and, as far as I can remember, could not get in to the meeting. The business of the meeting had to be dropped, as it became a riotous affair, with scrapping all over the place. We had to beat a retreat from the back of the Hall into houses in Shambles Lane, and the Hibernians followed us, and threatened to break into the houses and take us out.

This affair created a revulsion in the feelings of the townspeople and, as a result, the Hibernians got a lot of blame for their aggressive attack on our rights to use the Town Hall for our meetings. Tables and chairs got broken during the melée, and the people's money had to replace the damage done.

After this affair, we seemed to get more recruits. The violence in the Town Hall seemed to help us in building up the Louth Volunteers. Every day our numbers increased until in early 1916 we had over 100 active members.

We had no arms when we started to reorganise in 1915, as the Hibernians got control of all our equipment at the split. I remember a meeting of I.R.B. men, held about early 1916, at which Tom Hunter and Sean Tobin attended. Tobin and Hunter asked us

F. Mc

if we were prepared to raid for the arms which were held by the Hibernians. The matter was discussed, and it was decided that the raiding for the arms would only revive the violent feeling of a few months back, would probably cause bloodshed and would not really help us much. We had the opinion that, when the time came to use arms, we could then go for them. Tobin and Hunter were dissatisfied with our point of view, asked for assistance and said they would go for the arms. One man supported them in this. The attempt to get the arms was not carried out, which was a pity as we never got the arms, and the arms were used against us in Easter Week by the military who were handed over the rifles by Mr. Commerford, then Town Clerk in Dundalk.

About ten days, or perhaps more, before Easter Week, 1916, Donal O'Hannigan came to Dundalk to take charge of us and prepare us for the Rising. He drilled us in the fields around Dundalk, and also drilled and lectured us in the Boyle O'Reilly Hall. We had a few rifles, which were purchased by individual Volunteers; and those rifles were used by O'Hannigan for training purposes.

I heard that a rising was to take place at Easter. I heard this about two weeks before Easter Sunday from one of the Committee of the local Volunteers. I cannot remember now who told me. I also heard of it through the I.R.B. organisation about

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the same time. I heard, however, that the rising was to take place in Dundalk.

Padraig Pearse was billed to lecture in Dundalk on Easter Sunday night, and we had to make application for the use of the Town Hall. My brother, Philip, was asked to make application to the Urban Council for the Hall. I told Paddy Hughes that, as my brother was not then well known in town, the Urban Council might throw ridicule on the application and refuse it. Paddy Hughes informed me that he could not himself apply, as he was an Urban Council official (rate collector). My brother's application was made and granted. On Holy Thursday, at a parade outside the town, we heard that the Sunday lecture by Padraig Pearse was called off for the Town Hall.

I can remember that plans had been made, and men detailed for carrying them out, some short time before Easter Week for cutting and destroying communications. Men from Dundalk were detailed to cut the viaduct on the Great Northern railway near Newry, and all telephonic communications in the vicinity of Dundalk were to be destroyed; but on Holy Thursday night we were told that all our former plans were cancelled. The men who told us this were Paddy Hughes, D. O'Hannigan and Seán McEntee. On Thursday night O'Hannigan told us that all the local plans for Easter Week were cancelled and the the Dundalk men would go for a long route march on Easter Sunday.

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During Holy Week my mother was very ill, and it was arranged that only one of us - myself or brother - could mobilise for the march on Sunday. It was decided that Philip should go, as he had made the application for the use of the Hall for Pearse's Sunday meeting and was likely to be arrested for this action in itself.

I did not mobilise on Easter Sunday. After Easter Week I was arrested, with my brother, Philip, by R.I.C. and kept in custody for a few hours. I was then released.

In connection with the I.R.B. organisation in County Louth, before I became linked up with them I knew that there was an organisation in Louth which went back to the Fenian days. One man I knew when a boy was Patrick O'Hare, Merches, Dundalk. This man was Head Centre for the County for a long period. He was a man of extraordinary physique, and held very strong views. He was well known to John Devoy and, although they differed on matters of policy in County Louth, Devoy had a great admiration for O'Hare.

I remember Fred Allen of Dublin calling to Dundalk, in or about 1911, on I.R.B. business when in town. He made calls on several old men all over the County, who were prominent in their younger days in I.R.B. affairs.

I heard from Jimmie Toal that, when the Dundalk

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men were marching up the road towards Ardee on Easter Sunday, Toal saw Seán Tobin coming down the street from the Great Northern Railway station. He knew Tobin, and later mentioned the meeting with Tobin to O'Hannigan. O'Hannigan told him that Tobin should have been in Dublin and that he was surprised that he was then in Dundalk. Tobin stayed in Dundalk until about Wednesday of Easter Week. I heard that a few people who knew Tobin gave him money for his fare out of Dundalk.

SIGNED: Frank M. Quillan

DATE: 12<sup>th</sup> Oct 1949

WITNESS: John Mc Coy.

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