

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21

No. W.S. 577

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 577

**Witness**

Archie Heron,  
Mount Prospect,  
Finglas,  
Co. Dublin.

**Identity.**

Company Commander Irish Volunteers, 1916;  
Vice-Commandant Fingal Brigade I.R.A.

**Subject.**

- (a) National activities 1912-1921;
- (b) I.R.B. organisation, 1914;
- (c) Belfast-Tyrone, Easter 1916.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. S.81.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF MR. ARCHIE HERON,

Mount Prospect, Finglas,  
Dublin.

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My first contact with things national was in Co. Armagh through Sean Lester who was then a journalist in Portadown. Shortly after this I went to Belfast, in 1912, where I joined a Fianna Circle of the I.R.B. About the same time the "Freedom Club" was operating in Belfast which was a republican propagandist association controlled by the I.R.B.

I came to Dublin in 1914 for a period and was appointed an organiser for the I.R.B. generally. The first mission I got in that capacity was conducting an anti-exclusion campaign in Belfast. The Irish Party had agreed to the exclusion of Ulster or portion of it and the I.R.B. opposed this move. Ernest Blythe and myself were appointed to conduct the campaign from Belfast and in that connection we held a number of public meetings, press propaganda, etc. A man named Campbell spoke at a number of Sinn Fein meetings. Campbell was President of the Belfast Trades Union body. A group of the younger people in Belfast, prior to that period, 1913, established a republican propagandist organisation called "The Young Republican Party" which arose out of a feeling that the old Freedom Club was not sufficiently active. They ran a series of lectures on various subjects and had speakers amongst whom were <sup>HOBSON</sup> ~~Blanchard~~, Dr. P. McCartan and the late Desmond Fitzgerald.

In 1915, I went to Cavan on I.R.B. organisation work. There is an incident in that connection worth recording: I was staying in McCabe's Hotel in Cavan and it was just before the British Defence of the Realm Act had been passed and it was not possible to make an arrest without a warrant and I had a raid in my hotel bedroom in the early morning when a number of things were found in my possession including a gun and a copy of the I.R.B. Constitution. The raid was carried out by a District Inspector

and a large party of R.I.C. men. They filled the bedroom and the overflow went into the backyard. When they had collected the material they went off, presumably to get a warrant. I came downstairs and discovered there were two R.I.C. men in the hotel yard. I told them that their party had gone and they, apparently misunderstanding their instructions, said they might as well go too. I just got my bicycle over the hotel yard wall, cycled to Ballyhaise railway station and was in Belfast by the time the District Inspector returned with the warrant for the arrest.

I reported to Dublin shortly after this and ultimately went back to Belfast and was linked up with the Volunteers there in preparation for 1916. I had no activity then beyond Volunteer training and so forth until early 1916 when a number of us were informed by James Connolly that preparations were in course of being made for an early insurrection. McCullough, I imagine, had already received that information in Dublin, because he was connected with the I.R.B. headquarters in Dublin at the time, but it was Connolly who told me in Belfast.

I introduced Connolly to Tom Clarke in the latter's shop in Dublin - I cannot state the date, but I'd say it was shortly after the formation of the Volunteers. They had a very friendly conversation. Connolly and Clarke agreed that, while there might be difference of opinion on certain social economic matters, on the national republican issue, they were in entire agreement and could settle all their differences at another time and, apparently, were prepared to co-operate fully on the national republican issue.

The position in Belfast was rather peculiar. There, as to some extent everywhere, the Volunteers were not completely militarised; they had committees and all that thing. Denis McCullough was looked on in a general sense as a leader of the

Volunteers, but he did not perform any precise military function. The arrangement for Easter Week was that the Belfast personnel was divided into three companies who were directed to proceed to Co. Tyrone where orders would be forthcoming from McCullough and McCartan. The command of one company was given to Peter Burns, one to Cathal McDowell and one to myself. Our responsibility was to bring our men to Coalisland, Co. Tyrone, where we would receive further orders. We understood in a somewhat vague way that there was a plan prepared for the northern Volunteers to hold a line of the Shannon and the operation was to have been in charge of de Burca. I did not make any personal contact at any time with him, nor have I any information as to where he was or what became of the original plan. The three companies which entrained from Belfast duly arrived in Coalisland via Dungannon and were billeted there on Easter Saturday night. On Sunday morning we received orders to march to Cookstown railway station. On arrival at Cookstown we were informed that the insurrection plans had miscarried and that we were to return to Belfast and disband the men for the time being. It was on the train journey back to Belfast that I first learned some of the details from McCullough in connection with the MacNeill countermanding order, etc. I got the order on the train from McCullough. I went out to a house outside Belfast - I had McCullough with me - a few days subsequent to this I got a message from Tyrone to the effect that there was still a possibility of doing something there and that the Volunteer company in the Clogher area were 'standing-to' and endeavouring to make contact with neighbouring Volunteer units. This message came from the Connolly sisters who had been in touch with the people at Clogher. I then got back to Cookstown by train and cycled from there to Clogher. The first contact I made in Clogher was with Father O'Daly and Father Eugene Coyle, who put me in touch with P.J. Walsh, son of the local teacher and now General Manager of the National

City Bank in Dublin. He took the message from me to a number of contacts in the county, including Timoney of Coalisland. The idea was to get as many of the county units as we could to mobilize in the Clogher mountains, seize the local police barrack and generally try to create a local diversion in the interests of the people fighting in Dublin. These arrangements were in train when we got news of the surrender. At this stage there was nothing further that could be done. The local police got information of my presence in Father O'Daly's house. His Reverence arranged to have me conveyed to another house in Co. Fermanagh where I remained for some weeks.

After this I went to Omeath where there was an Irish College in session, subsequently reporting to Dublin and was associated with the reorganisation of the Volunteers in association with Richard Mulcahy, Dermot O'Hegarty, Liam Clarke, Cathal Brugha, Seamus O'Doherty and others. The first formal Volunteer Convention was held in Gardiner's Place. Immediately after this, Dermot <sup>H</sup>egarty, who was acting as secretary to the Provisional Volunteer Executive, was transferred to some other function and I took over the secretaryship from him, which office I held at the time of the Jones's Road Convention. It was during this period that I was deputed by Michael Collins to carry out a mission to Derry City to collect a consignment of ammunition which was being transferred from there to the Dublin Brigade. For this purpose I went to Belfast by train with a Dublin man named Griffith as driver. We collected a car on loan from Dr. McNabb of Belfast and proceeded to Derry, took over a consignment of .303 ammunition from Joe Doherty, and brought it by road to the residence of Frank Lawless, Saucerstown, Swords, where the late Dick Cotter and Eamon Price were awaiting our arrival. Shortly after this I was appointed vice-commandant of the Fingal Brigade, acting as second-in-command to Michael Lynch. That carried me from the end of 1916

up to 1918. About 1917 I was appointed to the Fingal Brigade. There was not much in the way of incidents worth recording during this period and early in 1919 I took up a position as organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union which necessitated travelling round the country, and while I maintained contact with the Volunteer headquarters, I had no connection with any particular unit except for a brief period in 1920, when I did some work in the way of instruction in map reading, etc. to officers of the Laoighis Brigade.

About this time I attended a Brigade Council meeting when Rory O'Connor was present representing headquarters in Dublin.

The number of men who went to Tyrone from Belfast would have been approximately 150. When he arrived in Coalisland on the Saturday night I announced to the Company what they were there for and that anyone who wanted to clear out was free to do so. No one left. There were about 35 with me. The 150 would have represented all the men whom it was safe to notify. Ostensibly, we were going on manoeuvres, but everyone regarded as reliable got a mobilisation order. Our instructions came from McCullough through Peter Burns. The rifles were left in someone's charge, but I never heard ultimately where - I imagine it would have been Timoney's.

When my unit was marching to Coalisland from Dungannon we were followed by a couple of Belfast G-men. We halted the company and told them it would be better for them to clear back, which they did. In Tyrone there was no particular notice taken of a Volunteer march. It was fairly late in the evening when we arrived at Dungannon. McCullough told me he had a message for me to proceed to Coalisland. We left by three different trains - three distinct parties.

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Signed: Charlie Heron

Date: 6th Sept. 1951

Witness: J. Kearney