

W.S. 1,025

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1025

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21  
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,025

Witness

John McKenna,  
Market Street,  
Listowel,  
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers,  
Listowel, Co. Kerry, 1914 - .

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Listowel, Co. Kerry,  
1914-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2320

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT OF JOHN MCKENNA,  
Market Street, Listowel, Co. Kerry.

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I was born in the year 1879 in Listowel. In the year 1900 a man named Finon McQuillan started Irish classes here which I joined. In the year 1908, when Arthur Griffith was preaching his Independence movement, it was taken up here in Listowel by a small group which included Mick Griffin, a schoolteacher, Patrick Landers, a blacksmith, James Sugrue, a drapery assistant, and myself.

From among the members of this group developed the Republican movement. It was in the year 1910 that a traveller for Lawlor's of Dublin, named Cathal Brugha, on one of his visits to Listowel swore myself and Mick Griffin into the I.R.B. Mick Griffin, who became the Centre, subsequently took into the I.R.B. a number of local men.

In the latter <sup>end</sup> of 1913 the first Volunteers were formed here. After the landing of arms by Carson at Larne, there was a big increase in the membership of the local Company which, by the year 1914, had increased to about two hundred men.

After the start of World War I, John Redmond in early 1915 pledged the support of the Volunteers to England. This caused a set-back to the Listowel Volunteers, but they never actually ceased to exist.

In 1914 we had weekly subscriptions among ourselves and collected at the church gates for funds for the purchase of rifles. From the proceeds we managed to buy about forty rifles. They had been landed at Howth and were called Martini Henry's. We drilled for a time with

these rifles.

All through the year 1915, there was very little doing in the Company. The rifles had to be kept in the background. They had been distributed among the men of the Company and were not brought out in the open during the year.

In the Spring of 1916 Michael Griffin received word that the insurrection was timed for Easter Week of that year. He, with other leaders of the I.R.B., attended a conference on the evening of Good Friday, 1916, at the Rink, Tralee. The conference was presided over by Austin Stack. Stack, it appears, had earlier that day been trying to locate Roger Casement and had discovered that Casement had been arrested by the R.I.C. from Ardfert. The possibility of rescuing Casement was discussed at the meeting. It appears that the meeting decided not to attempt the rescue of Casement until after the rebellion had started in Dublin.

While the meeting was in progress, Stack received word that a man named Con Collins, who had come down from Dublin to contact Roger Casement and who earlier in the day accompanied Stack in the search for Casement, had been arrested by the R.I.C. The meeting was adjourned, to enable Stack to call and see Collins at the barracks. Collins had sent word to Stack to call and see him. When Stack called to the barracks, he was detained there with Collins.

Late on Good Friday night, Griffin returned to Listowel where he informed me and other members of the I.R.B. of the events in Tralee. He also informed us that Casement, with Monteith and Bailey, had landed at Banna Strand on the South Kerry coast. Outside the I.R.B., few Volunteers were aware of the identity of these men at the time.

On the following morning, we heard of the tragedy of the three Volunteers who were on their way down from Dublin in a motor car to contact the "Aud". It appears that their car went over the pier at Ballykissane, Killorglin when the three men were drowned.

On Easter Sunday morning, we got word from Headquarters that the proposed insurrection had been cancelled by order of McNeill and that The O'Rahilly was on his way down to Kerry, with instructions to that effect.

After landing at Banna Strand, Monteith made his way to Tralee. He was later taken away by the Volunteers through Listowel to Limerick. He stayed on a farm there for three months and later went to the U.S.A.

Here in Listowel, we were waiting for instructions which never came. The Volunteers were mobilised several times during the week of the fighting in Dublin, and each time had to be dismissed for want of some definite orders.

After Easter Week, the Battalion O.C., Paddy Landers, ordered the surrender of all arms to the R.I.C. at the barracks. The Volunteers assembled with all arms and equipment at the Market, Listowel. The rifles were then broken and subsequently collected by the R.I.C.

Things were very quiet up to the Spring of 1917 when the Volunteers were reorganised. Paddy Landers again became one of the officers, as well as a man, named James Sugrue. There were about eighty men in the Company at the time. From the formation of the Volunteers in 1913, they never ceased to exist altogether. It was I and Mick Griffin principally that kept them together as a unit here in Listowel.

In 1918 I was arrested and charged with the possession of arms and ammunition. I was tried by court martial. I was sentenced to one year. I did portion of this year in Cork Jail, but was later transferred to Belfast Jail where I met Austin Stack, Jerry Boland, Fionán Lynch, Kevin O'Higgins and others. I took part in the mutiny there at the time. On Christmas Eve, 1918, I was released with Michael Brennan from Belfast Jail.

After my release, I was over twelve months in hospital. I came home early 1920. This was practically the end of my contact with the I.R.A. as, through my state of health, I was unable to bear the strain any longer.

SIGNED:

John McKenna

DATE:

Oct 12<sup>th</sup> 1954

(John McKenna)

Oct. 12th 1954.

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WITNESS:

John J. Daly

(John J. Daly)