

W.S. 1,343

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUIRO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,343

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,343

Witness

James Cullen,
51 Belfield,
Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Captain Enniscorthy Company Irish Volunteers,
1916;

Comd't. 2nd Battalion North Wexford Brigade,
1918-1920.
Subject.

National and military activities, Enniscorthy,
1907-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.2664

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STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES CULLEN,51, Belfield, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

The I.R.B. was reorganised in Enniscorthy in 1907. In that year I was approached by Larry de Lacy, who told me about the I.R.B. and asked me to become a member. I willingly agreed and he swore me in. In a short time there were four Circles of ten men each. In the early stages when a Circle had ten members it was divided into two and the building up process started again. I became Centre of a Circle and, as such, I had authority to swear in new members. We selected the men very carefully and asked only those who we knew held extreme national views. A few of the older members had been in the I.R.B. long before this. They included Charlie Farrell, Michael Tobin, Tim Moore and Paddy Stokes.

Charlie Farrell was an old '67 Fenian. He constantly gave us good advice but he never attended a meeting. He used to say "Ireland will never be free until Enniscorthy and every other Irish town runs red with blood".

About the year 1912 Major McBride visited Enniscorthy and attended a meeting of the I.R.B. About this time also we had visits from Seán Milroy and P.S. O'Hegarty in connection with the Hibernians (Irish American Alliance). Bulmer Hobson also paid us a visit. Greg. Murphy, who was, I think, attached to the Dublin Centre's Board, visited us four or five times a year.

About 1912 or 1913, with two or three other delegates from Enniscorthy I attended an I.R.B. meeting in a house in Parnell Square, Dublin. I think it was in No. 41.

Delegates from all parts of the country attended. The meeting was addressed by Rev. Fr. Sheehy. Some members had been uneasy about the attitude of the Church in connection with the I.R.B. oath and their membership of an oath bound secret society. The gist of Fr. Sheehy's talk was that the I.R.B. oath was not contrary to the teachings of the Church. When we returned to Enniscorthy we explained the position to the members and they all appeared to be satisfied.

Meetings of the Circles were held monthly. In addition to discussing the suitability or otherwise of men suggested for membership, there was usually a discussion on national affairs and a small subscription asked from the members to pay the expenses of delegates going to Dublin to attend meetings.

When the Volunteers were founded in Enniscorthy early in 1914 after a public meeting addressed by The O'Rahilly, the I.R.B. in Enniscorthy as a separate organisation ceased to function. About one hundred men joined the Volunteers and at the first meeting the following were elected as officers:

Captain - Seamus Rafter.
1st Lt. - James Cullen (myself)
2nd Lt. - Seamus Doyle
Q/M - Patrick Keegan.

Training consisted of foot drill, arms drill, scouting, field exercises, route marches and instruction in the use of the rifle.

The split occurred in the Volunteer movement directly as a result of John Redmond's appeal to the Volunteers to join the British Army. The majority of the

company and all the officers remained loyal to the original executive committee.

A squad was formed to procure arms and explosives by any and every means, while pikes were made by Jem Cleary, blacksmith. Several raids for arms and explosives were carried out. One very successful raid was carried out on the goods' store at Enniscorthy railway station. A large quantity of cartridges in wooden cases consigned to a merchant in the town was seized. Three Volunteers from the Ferns Company arrived with a horse and cart and took away some of the stuff. More of it, believe it or not, was carried a distance of three miles on men's shoulders and hidden in the "haunted house", an unoccupied house situated on the banks of the Slaney.

About November, 1915, Paul Galligan, who was an officer in the Volunteers in Dublin, came to work in Enniscorthy. He immediately attached himself to the Volunteers here and started an officers' class for existing and potential officers.

Padraig Pearse reviewed the Enniscorthy Volunteers on the slopes of Vinegar Hill in the summer of 1915. Standing on a ditch, he addressed the men. He again addressed the Volunteers in the Athenaeum in March, 1916. On this occasion I was in charge of an armed guard of Volunteers in uniform in the hall.

About a week before Easter, 1916, a man named Sullivan, he was not ^{Gearóid} O'Sullivan, came to Seamus Rafter's house. He told us, Seamus Rafter, myself and a few other I.R.B. men, that a general rising throughout the

country had been decided upon and that we were to rise at 6 p.m. on Easter Sunday. We did not give this information to the rank and file. Orders were issued during Holy Week for the Volunteers to parade at the old Fenian Club at the foot of Slaney St., locally known as Antwerp, on Easter Sunday. They were instructed to carry arms and to bring 24 hours' rations.

There was a full mobilisation of Volunteers on Easter Sunday. Meanwhile, Ginger O'Connell (later Colonel J.J. O'Connell) and Dr. Dundon of Borris arrived in Enniscorthy with an order from Professor Eoin McNeill, Chief of Staff, countermanding the orders to Volunteers to parade on Easter Sunday. The parade was dismissed but the men were warned to be ready to mobilise again at short notice.

Late on Easter Monday we heard that the Rising had started in Dublin. On Tuesday and Wednesday rumours of all kinds were circulating. Some said the Volunteers were sweeping the country; others that it was only the Citizen Army that had risen and that the Rising had been suppressed. Meetings of the officers were held, but in the absence of any definite or authentic information it was very difficult to decide what to do. However, Commandant Paul Galligan, who had gone to Dublin on Good Friday, arrived back in Enniscorthy late on Wednesday night. He had cycled all the way from Dublin. A meeting of the officers was held at 'Antwerp' and Commandant Galligan gave full details of the fighting in Dublin and of the positions held by the Volunteers. It was then decided to rise. It was really Comdt. Galligan who was responsible for this decision.

Orders were issued for the Volunteers to mobilise immediately. Early on Thursday morning, 27th April, about one hundred men answered the call. The Athenaeum was taken over as headquarters and the tricolour hoisted over it and volleys fired in salute. Armed outposts were placed at all approaches to the town. I inspected them and had them relieved at regular intervals. Bedding and foodstuffs were commandeered. Members of Cumann na mBan established a food kitchen and cooked for the Volunteers. During the Rising the houses of nearly all the loyalists were visited by parties of Volunteers and motor cars and arms seized. All shops were ordered to close and food tickets were issued to the people to get food. No one was allowed to leave town without a permit. A police force was established to preserve order and to ensure that all instructions were carried out.

About two hundred men came in from the country during the week to take part in the Rising, including about forty from Ferns who took up positions in Ballinahaller Wood situated outside the town. About forty men were mobilised in Ballindaggin to march to Enniscorthy when they got word of the surrender, after which they were disbanded.

When the Rising started, a native of Enniscorthy who was in the English Army was home on leave. He threw off his uniform and joined the Volunteers. He rejoined his regiment when the Rising was over.

On Friday Bob Brennan arranged for a party of about 50 Volunteers to parade through the town so as to impress the people. Comdt. Galligan, who was in charge of field operations, organised a column to proceed to Ferns, where they would attack and capture the R.I.C. barrack and continue on to Dublin. Late on Saturday Comdt. Galligan, with between 40 and 50 men, marched to Ferns. When they arrived there they found that the R.I.C. had evacuated the barrack. The Volunteers took over the barrack and rested for the night, intending to continue their march to Dublin. However, a despatch rider arrived on Sunday with the news that the Volunteers in Dublin had surrendered and that Seán Etchingham and Seamus Doyle had returned from Dublin, where they had an interview with P.H. Pearse, who had ordered them to surrender also. We returned to Enniscorthy in cars, but the car in which Comdt. Galligan was travelling crashed on the way and he was injured and, therefore, unable to continue the journey.

The Volunteers who were assembled in the Athenaeum were addressed by Bob Brennan and Fr. Pat Murphy, Mission House, Enniscorthy, now Canon and Parish Priest of Glynn. The terms of the surrender were announced to the Volunteers; they were, that six of the officers - Seamus Rafter, Seamus Doyle, Seán Etchingham, Bob Brennan, Dick King and Larry de Lacy, would surrender themselves to the British authorities and that the remainder would go free. Fr. Pat advised the men to dump their arms as they would want them again.

Before the decision to surrender, Seamus Rafter, Pat Keegan and some other officers had a discussion

about taking to the mountains and carrying on guerilla warfare, but the majority were against it and so the project was abandoned. However, James Murphy, Pat McGrath, Andy McKeever, myself and a few others decided to go "on the run" for a few days and see what was going to happen. We went to the mountains and, I must say, that when we called to Tom McCarthy's tavern in Killealy, Tom, who knew quite well we had been out in the Rising, brought us into his private apartments and treated us very well. We remained "on the run" for a few days, and when we heard that the Volunteers were being arrested we decided to return home and face the music.

I was arrested and brought to Dublin by rail. I was kept in Richmond barracks for a week or ten days. With a party of other prisoners, I was put on a cattle boat at the North Wall and taken to Holyhead. From there we were brought to Woking Detention Barrack. After a while I was transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp, from which I was released in August, 1916.

Signed:

James Cullen
(James Cullen)

Date:

Jan 25th 1956
Jan. 25th 1956.

Witness:

Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.

(Investigator)

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

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