

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,438

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1438.

Witness

Christopher Moran,
Main Street,
Swords,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Volunteer.

Subject.

Activities of Swords Company, 5th Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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No. W.S. 1438

STATEMENT BY MR. CHRISTOPHER MORAN,
Main Street, Swords, Co. Dublin.

I was born on the 27th July 1896, and received my education at the local school in Swords. There existed at this time what one might describe as a small hard core of Republicanism in the Swords area. Some few of the men in this category would have been members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, while they, and others, would be descendants of men who took part in the Fenian Rising or in the Land League troubles. All these people were generally interested in Gaelic football and other Irish activities, and as I was also very interested in football, I grew up with this strata of our society as it existed at the time.

In May of 1914 Thomas McDonagh, who was one of the leaders of the insurrection and was executed after the 1916 Rebellion, came to Swords to enrol and recruit members into the Irish Volunteers which were now well under way in the country. I joined the local company. I was then almost eighteen years old. Drilling took place twice weekly in the schoolhouse yard in Swords. The company had actually been started in Swords on the 6th April 1914, and I had joined them. We had two officers in the company at this time, Richard Coleman (Dick) who later died in Usk prison and who, I believe, was a member of the I.R.B. at this time, and his cousin William Coleman. The latter later joined the British army - the Royal Dublin Fusiliers - and was killed in the first World War.

Our drill and general instructor was a man named Murray, an ex sergeant of the Dublin Fusiliers, who had seen service in the South African war. He was from Dublin and lived at 38 Townsend Street. The company was about one hundred strong. We had no arms, and used wooden guns for drill and parade purposes. Murray also instructed us in arms drill, extended order drill and minor tactics. He also trained Section commanders and section leaders. When the great war broke out, Murray did not turn up any more, and when I went to look for him at his place of residence, there was no account of him. He had probably rejoined the British army, or may have been on the reserve of that force.

Meanwhile, the gun running episode at Howth had taken place - on 26th July 1914. Our company was not engaged in this affair officially, as they were running a local sports meeting that day and were excused parading. A few men of the company did, however, take part in the taking of the arms from the boat, and one of them, at least - Thomas Taylor - did bring back a rifle from it. The result of our non participation was that we got no rifles allotted to our company.

John Redmond, the leader of the Irish National Party in the British House of Commons, made a famous speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, in September 1914, in which he advocated the Volunteers joining the British army. This speech split the Volunteer movement from stem to stern, so to speak, throughout the country. At the first meeting of our company after this and without much speech making or pleading, we divided. About seventy-five members took the Redmond side and followed

William Coleman, while about fifteen stood loyal to the original executive of the Volunteers under the leadership of Dick Coleman. Quite a few faded out altogether. Among those who took the Irish Volunteer side with Dick Coleman were Frank Lawless of Saucerstown and Thomas Taylor. I believe both of these were members of the I.R.B. The Volunteers who took their stand on Redmond's side now became the Irish National Volunteers, while the minority continued to be known as the Irish Volunteers. I was one of the minority in the Swords company.

We - the Swords Irish Volunteers - now secured a hall in Connor's Lane, and we met there openly for drill and other purposes. There was a rifle, with bayonet, left in the hall for drill purposes. I think this was an Italian rifle. It was kept in the hall continually, and neither the R.I.C. or anyone else interfered with it. Dick Coleman now acted as our instructor. He had no previous experience in military matters but, with the aid of British army manuals, he was able to carry on in a limited way. When Coleman was not available, someone else took on to impart the instruction.

A battalion organisation had now come into being in the Fingal area, which was known as the 5th battalion (Fingal), Dublin Brigade. There were small companies of Volunteers in Lusk, Turvey, St. Margarets, Cloghran and Skerries. A battalion committee was set up, and usually met in a house at Turvey which was the property of Michael McAllister. I was not a member of this council or committee, which comprised Dr. ^{Richard}~~Michael~~ Hayes, who was O/C of the battalion, Tom Ashe, who was battalion adjutant, Frank Lawless of Saucerstown, who was battalion quartermaster, Dick Coleman, James Lawless, Michael

McAllister, Peter Moran, Joseph Derham of Skerries, Ned Rooney of Lusk and Charles Weston of Turvey. There may have been one or two others.

Training went on continuously and included night exercises. On one occasion, our battalion successfully defended the Finglas area against the remainder of the Dublin brigade. We also had exercises on the Dublin mountains with the other battalions of the brigade, and also in the Fingal brigade area. The R.I.C. kept a close watch on our activities, but never interfered with us. In the winter of 1914-1915, an officers' class was run at Turvey. It was conducted by a man named Eimhar Duffy, who appeared to have had some previous military training or experience. He was like a man who possibly had been a member of some college officers' training corps. The instruction he gave was based on British army manuals and covered such subjects as entrenching and so forth. It was not very suitable for our Volunteer force who would have to fight a guerilla war. Dick Coleman, Tom Ashe, Michael and John McAllister, and one of the Rooney's from Lusk, and I attended this course, amongst others, from the brigade.

In October 1915, a Volunteer convention was held in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Frank Lawless and I attended as delegates from the Swords area. I remember Michael McAllister was also there. I am a bit hazy now as regards the object of this convention. Eoin McNeill presided, and Bulmer Hobson, who was secretary, read a report on the organisation throughout the country. A committee of high officers, constituting an executive committee, was appointed, which included most of the men

who afterwards signed the 1916 proclamation and were executed. A further committee was also appointed, and I was elected to represent the Swords area on this. I cannot remember now what the object of this committee was but, at any rate, I never heard a word further about it and was never called to any meetings afterwards. Bulmer Hobson seemed to be the all-important person at this meeting.

During the lenten period of 1916, training was intensified, and we had long route marches and exercises in the Garristown-Naul-Swords area. Although Dr. ~~Michael~~ Hayes was in command of our battalion, we all somehow looked upon Tom Ashe as our real leader, and were very surprised to find Ashe in the ranks as an ordinary Volunteer when on exercises in the Garristown-Naul area. Why this was so, I do not know. By now, all our men were armed with a rifle of some sort and some ammunition, or a shotgun. A few had revolvers also. Some of the rifles were the ones that had been landed at Howth. Each Volunteer had to pay for his own rifle or other weapon which he received. He was at liberty to buy arms from any source he could, but the great bulk of ours came from Volunteer headquarters in Dublin. Our men were generally good shots as they had been used to handling and firing sporting weapons, but very few had any practice in firing service weapons. A system of quick mobilisation had been worked out, in which selected Volunteers were responsible for mobilising three others. In this way, every Volunteer was covered.

On Easter Sunday, the battalion was ordered to mobilise at Saucerstown, the residence of Frank Lawless. About two hundred men mobilised, all armed with rifles or shotguns, and carrying rations for two days. The

quartermaster, Frank Lawless, distributed a lot of brand new shotguns to Volunteers there. We were kept hanging around Saucerstown until 12 p.m. that night. Meanwhile, there was great coming and going of our senior officers, and it was quite apparent that something had gone wrong with the plans for the day. The Sunday papers had carried the notice from McNeill, calling off the mobilisation and movement of all Volunteer units for that day, and this left us all in a great state of confusion. At 12 p.m., we were disbanded and told to proceed to our homes, and to hold ourselves in readiness, to mobilise again at a moment's notice.

At 9 a.m. on Easter Monday, Joseph Taylor arrived at my home, driving a pony and trap. He took me with him, and we called on James Marks. Taylor now left me back at my house, with instructions to mobilise at Knocksedan crossroads at twelve noon that day. I arrived at Knocksedan about 11 a.m. There were about eighteen men from the Swords area there. Dick Coleman marshalled us and inspected us. He then detailed Joseph Taylor and me to act as sentinels on the Ballymun road, at the Boot Inn. Other men were sent out on the other roads. We received no specific orders as regards our duties. Taylor and I were at the Boot Inn, which is the better part of a mile from Knocksedan, for about an hour when Thomas Taylor came for us and brought us back to Knocksedan. When we were passing Bewley's house near the bridge, he said to us, "It's on!", and I could see Dr. Hayes removing the number plates from his car, so I had a good idea of what he meant. Dick Coleman now sent the pair of us down to the main Swords-Rolestown road, to cut the telegraph or telephone wires. There was only one wire, ~~so~~ it must have been telegraph. When we got there,

we had no means of getting up the pole or cutting the wire. I got a strong cord to which I attached a stone, and then getting on the bank on the side of the road, threw the stone over the wire. By pulling on the cord, we were able to break the wire and, after removing a lengthy portion of it, we took it away with us.

That night we moved to the Finglas area and went into camp there, or rather into a field, as we had no tents. Trenches were dug here, covering the road from the city. The night turned out wet, and as we had practically no shelter, we got very wet. It was here that Dick Mulcahy and a few others joined us.

On Tuesday morning, twenty or so of our men were sent into the city to reinforce the Volunteers there. Amongst this party was Wilson who was killed in the Mendicity Institute. On Tuesday evening, we moved to Kileek, about half-way between Finglas and Swords. Four of us were sent with a horse and cart to James Lawless' house at Cloghran from which we took a lot of material, including guns and ammunition and other equipment, and brought it to the camp at Kileek. Apparently, the material had been stored there.

Dick Mulcahy seemed to be more or less in charge now. On Wednesday, we moved into the town of Swords where a van load of bread was commandeered, which I think was sent on to Saucerstown and which apparently was to be a supply depot for us. Positions were now taken up for an attack on the R.I.C. barracks in Swords and the post office, which was alongside the barracks. The police in Swords surrendered the barracks without resistance, and the rifles and ammunition were collected from there. The police were

allowed to remain in the barracks and go free, on giving an undertaking that they would take no part in the fighting which we expected was yet to come, or assist the British army, in any way.

We next moved on to Donabate where a demand to surrender was issued to the police there. The sergeant in charge here refused to surrender, and fired a few shots through the loop-holed steel shutters on the windows of the barracks. His fire, however, was quite ineffective. He probably only wanted to make a noise. Our men returned the fire, and one of the police was hit on the finger, and they now surrendered without any further resistance. A few rifles and a little ammunition were also collected here. Bernard McAllister now joined us here, armed with a rifle. He had not been a member of the Irish Volunteers, but was a member of the Irish National Volunteers.

From Donabate we moved on to Garristown, but here we found that the police had already sent on their rifles to their own headquarters, so we drew a blank. Neither here nor in Donabate were the police interfered with, on giving an undertaking to keep clear of events. From Garristown we moved to Borranstown, and went into camp in some old buildings there. Borranstown is near Ballymadeen and also near Ashbourne. I was now very ill, and incapable of proceeding further. So, on Friday morning, Ashe instructed me to go home until I had recovered, and I came back to Swords. Thus, I missed the fight with the R.I.C. at Ashbourne.

On the Monday following the surrender or collapse of the rebellion, I was arrested at my home by a party of

British cavalry. There was a large force of cavalry operating - equivalent to a brigade - and made up of detachments of Lancers, Yeomen and Royal Horse Artillery and so forth. They had a motor truck with them, loaded with forage, and four or five others who had also been arrested and I were put up on this forage and taken along with them. That night the cavalry camped at Duffy's of Ballybin. A horse trap was removed from the coach house, some straw placed on the floor, and we, the prisoners, were put in there. No food was given us. Two soldiers were placed on guard at the door, and the officer gave them orders in our hearing that, if any of us moved, they were to shoot the whole lot of us.

Next morning, we were loaded up again, and proceeded towards Dunboyne in Co. Meath. En route, they arrested Thomas Condron and also Mr. Quigley who was then county surveyor to the Meath county council. Quigley was on the road, apparently attending to his normal duties. He was subsequently tried by court martial for having taken part in the fight at Ashbourne. That evening, we were taken to the gymnasium in the Richmond barracks at Kilmainham, Dublin. There was a large number of prisoners there, including many of the leaders. Detectives and police, and military officers, were busy in and out, trying to pick out and identify the different individuals they required. No attempt was made by anyone to identify Volunteers from the Swords area, and they did not bring the Swords R.I.C. in to do so. They were looking for Dick Mulcahy and trying to saddle Dr. Hayes as a leader. Food and other conditions were deplorable there.

With some hundreds of others, I was now transferred via the North Wall and Holyhead to Wandsworth prison in England, and, later on, from Wandsworth to Frongoch internment camp in Wales. Most of the Fingal men were also there. I was released in August 1916 from Frongoch and returned home. When leaving Frongoch, Seán T. O'Kelly, now President of the Irish Republic, gave me a sealed letter to be delivered to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. I handed this letter, on the morning after my arrival, to the bishop's secretary who opened it and read it, and said he would deal with it. I have no knowledge of its contents.

I now returned to my home in Swords. Although the people seemed very depressed, there were already signs that the country was awakening to a new sense of nationality. I was still a sick man, as well as a man without a job, and it was not until the following year, 1917, that I succeeded in getting work at the construction of the aerodrome at Collinstown which the British War Office was building there. I was not long there when I was sacked for no apparent reason. My comrades on the job wanted to call a strike, but I would not let them do so. Kit O'Malley, whom I knew was alright politically, was employed in my stead. I believe that it was the police reports that were responsible for my dismissal. After a further spell of idleness, I got employed with the Swedish Consul, Mr. Stretch. Here again, I was suddenly dismissed without any warning.

In May 1918 I got employment on the Great Northern Railway. I passed the medical examination which was necessary for the position. I was just in the job for

barely eight days when I was again dismissed. I was given fourteen days' pay in lieu of notice. I believe a Mr. Dixon, who was stationmaster at Malahide, had a hand in my dismissal this time. I knew a man called Carr who worked at Westland Row, which was then the Dublin and South Eastern Railway, and I asked him if he could get me employment. He saw the stationmaster at the Westland Row, a Mr. Rennicks, and told him the complete story of my previous activities. Mr. Rennicks was not a Catholic. I think he was of the Baptist religion. Mr. Rennicks sent for me and started me in work at Westland Row station. I was there when the Irish mail boat, the SS "Leinster" was sunk in the Irish Sea.

In May 1919, a British gun-boat arrived at Dún Laoghaire (Kingstown then) with a load of munitions for the British army in Ireland and berthed at the Admiralty Pier. Twenty-two railway wagons were despatched by the L.S.E. Railway to Kingstown, to be loaded up with this material which was duly done. I was on Sunday morning work, and the then stationmaster at Westland Row, a Mr. Ryan - Mr. Rennicks had left the railway service and taken up a clerical appointment in his church - ordered me to go down to Kingstown with a engine and bring the wagons of munitions to Kingsbridge, and hand them over to the Great Southern railway.

Before doing anything, I went to the chapel to Mass and, on my way to the chapel, I passed two of our railwaymen who were having a talk on the side-walk. They did not know me. As I passed, I heard them say to one another that, if they were instructed or ordered to go, they would not do so. I presumed they were referring to the waggons of munitions at Kingstown. At this time,

the British had landed troops in Russia, to fight the Bolsheviks or Communists there, and the British dockers refused to load munitions for this expeditionary force. I began to think that, if the British dockers refused to handle munitions for their troops to kill Russians, why should I handle munitions for British forces to kill my own countrymen. When I got back to the station, I informed Mr. Ryan that I would not go to Kingstown for the waggons. An ex British army man named Burgess was now detailed to go, but he refused also, as did every other man who was approached.

I now got on my cycle and proceeded to the headquarters of the National Union of Railwaymen to report what had happened. On crossing Mount Street bridge, I met an engine driver who was off duty, named Frank Shields. I told him what had happened, and he agreed also that, if he was detailed, he would refuse to go. I cycled on to Landsdowne Cottages, and there I contacted the secretary of our branch, John Noctor, and told him what had happened, and he said he would back me to the last. I then went to the Locomotive sheds in Grand Canal Street, and there saw the secretary of that particular branch, Charles Hempenstall. He also said he would stand by me.

The munitions never were taken from Kingstown by rail. I understand that they were reloaded on the boat which put to sea again. The traffic manager at Westland Row at this time - George McDonald - interviewed me and asked my reason for refusing to take the train. My reply to him was that, when Englishmen were refusing to handle munitions to kill Russians, I would not handle munitions to kill Irishmen. He said, "This is very serious, and it is hard to see the end of it". I then said, "I am sorry, sir, but I don't think there is any end to it".

That finished the interview. I was not dismissed, or ever asked to handle munitions again.

This was, I believe, the start of the great strike or refusal of railwaymen all over the country to handle trains carrying munitions or British forces. There had been a couple of small instances at the docks previously, but that was confined to a few dock hands.

I was known to a few of the staff at Westland Row as one who was alright, from the Republican point of view, and as a result, I was entrusted with despatches arriving from Wexford, Waterford and South Tipperary. Thomas Gaffney, who was a guard on the Wexford mail train, and William Nolan, who was a ticket collector, regularly carried despatches from and to that area. John O'Connell, who is now a detective officer in Dublin Castle, was also helping in this work. O'Connell often took the despatches for delivery from me, if I could not get off. I delivered the despatches to Dowling's of the North Strand, Dublin, or to a dairy in the Summerhill district. O'Connell delivered the ones he carried to G.H.Q. of the Volunteers directly. He told me that G.H.Q. at this time was in an old disused fire station in Harry Street, near Chatham Street.

Although I carried on this sort of work right up to the Truce, and was trusted, I was not actually a member of the Volunteers after the 1916 Rising, nor was I ever arrested by the British after that.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STATE FILE 1A 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1438
SIGNED:

Christopher Moran

DATE: *Main St Swords*

WITNESS *Arthur Dwyer* *Co Dublin. 19th June 1956*