

J. J. O'CONNELL'S MEMOIR OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS, 1914-17

Presented by

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

No one had a longer high-ranking association with the Irish Volunteers and successor Irish armed forces than Jeremiah Joseph O'Connell, better known as 'J. J.' or 'Ginger' O'Connell on account of his red hair and moustache. Yet, beyond fleeting references, little has been written about him.<sup>2</sup> The best known episode of his thirty-year career was his unlucky kidnapping on 27 June 1922 by the anti-Treaty IRA in retaliation for the arrest of Leo Henderson. Following the assassination on 22 June 1922 of Sir Henry Wilson – the retired British field marshal, Unionist MP for North Down and security adviser to the Northern Ireland government – the provisional government came under intense pressure from the British cabinet to take action against the anti-Treaty garrison which had been in occupation of the Four Courts since mid-April. The capture of Lieutenant-General O'Connell, then GHQ assistant chief of staff and director of training, provided a convenient *casus belli*. And so at midnight on 27 June the Four Courts was surrounded by National army troops under Brigadier Paddy O'Daly, who demanded the release of O'Connell and the evacuation of the complex. This was rebuffed and at 04:15 the bombardment of the Four Courts commenced: the Irish civil war had begun.<sup>3</sup> Both Michael Collins, who gave up the chairmanship of the provisional government to become commander-in-chief of the National (Free State) army, and Richard Mulcahy, minister for defence and chief of staff, believed that it would have been difficult to gain sufficient support within the army for the attack had it not been for the kidnapping of the popular O'Connell.<sup>4</sup> Moved to the centre of the Four Courts for his safety, O'Connell was offered reading material by Ernie O'Malley, who was later appointed assistant chief of staff of the anti-treaty IRA and a member of its army council. The latter had proposed and carried out the abduction as he knew that O'Connell frequently visited his fiancée, Gertrude McGilligan, whom he married in October 1922.<sup>5</sup> She was a sister of Patrick McGilligan, then secretary to Kevin O'Higgins and a future minister for industry and commerce. On 30 June the Four Courts garrison surrendered and O'Connell emerged from the shattered building unscathed. Although never a first rank activist, he held a string of posts at headquarters level in the Irish Volunteers, IRA and National army between 1915 and 1924. This was despite not being a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and notwithstanding his role in conveying Eoin MacNeill's\* countermand at Easter 1916. Three factors explain this. First, O'Connell was one of the only headquarters staff with

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<sup>1</sup> Biographical information on persons marked \* in this introduction is provided in the notes which accompany the document presented below.

<sup>2</sup> He features in passing in many accounts of the Irish revolution and likewise in statements to the Bureau of Military History (hereafter BMH). The most complete albeit short account is Marie Coleman, 'O'Connell, Jeremiah Joseph ('J. J.', 'Ginger')', in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2007) (henceforth *DIB*).

<sup>3</sup> The most detailed account of the civil war remains Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish civil war* (Dublin, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Ernie O'Malley, *The singing flame* (Dublin, 1978), pp 88-90, 99.

regular army training. His chief contribution was in the field of military instruction and thus he occupied a crucial niche. Secondly, he developed a reputation as a keen student of military history and strategy. In the words of Charles Townshend, he was 'the nearest thing to a military expert that the Volunteers possessed, a staunch admirer of German military organization, and a student of Hegel as well as of Clausewitz and Moltke'.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, O'Connell had the facility of befriending key personalities: MacNeill and Bulmer Hobson\* before the Rising, and Collins and Mulcahy after it.

O'Connell was born in Ballina, County Mayo in 1887, the eldest son of Jeremiah Ambrose O'Connell, a primary school inspector. The family lived in Sligo, where the young O'Connell was educated by the Mercy Order; Castledawson, County Derry, where he attended Moyola Park National School; Longford, where he went to St Mel's College; and Belfast. When his mother, Winifred, died he became a boarder in Clongowes Wood College. This was followed by a successful university career in UCD from which he received a BA and a Masters (first class); but he also found time for the Literary and Historical Society and to train the boxing team.<sup>7</sup> At the behest of his father, O'Connell briefly contemplated a legal career and in 1911 his recorded occupation was solicitor's apprentice.<sup>8</sup> But he preferred to become a soldier. According to his sister, Margaret, O'Connell's principles did not permit his enlisting in the British army. Instead he served in the 69th (New York Irish) Regiment from 1912 until 1914.<sup>9</sup> Not much is known of his time in the US and there are no surviving diaries among his papers in the National Library of Ireland.

O'Connell believed that his name was first brought to the attention of Eoin MacNeill, chairman of the provisional committee of the Irish Volunteers, as a suitable instructor by Joseph McGarrity\*, then a member of the national executive of Clan na Gael.<sup>10</sup> His sister believed that he also knew John Devoy, leader of Clan na Gael, but did not become a member as he believed that soldiers should avoid secret societies.<sup>11</sup> Through the Clan, O'Connell came into contact in New York in early 1914 with Bulmer Hobson, the principal founder of the Irish Volunteers and a senior IRB figure, who asked him to help organize the Volunteers.<sup>12</sup> Josephine McNeill (née Ahearne), a member of Cumann na mBan and the object of O'Connell amorous intentions between 1914 and 1917, claimed that he deserted

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Townshend, *Political violence in Ireland: government and resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 1983), p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> Coleman, 'O'Connell', *DIB*.

<sup>8</sup> Census of Ireland, 1911

[[http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Cavan/Cavan\\_Urban/Kinnypottle/339414/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Cavan/Cavan_Urban/Kinnypottle/339414/) accessed 2 Dec. 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Pegeen [Mary Margaret] to Niamh O'Connell [O'Connell's daughter], 23 Nov. 1950 (National Library of Ireland (hereafter NLI), J. J. O'Connell papers, MS 22,158).

<sup>10</sup> Affidavit of J. J. O'Connell for certificate of military service, 3 Aug. 1927 (Irish Military Archives (hereafter IMA), Military Service Pensions, SP12702).

<sup>11</sup> Pegeen [Mary Margaret] to Niamh O'Connell, 23 Nov. 1950 (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,158).

<sup>12</sup> Bulmer Hobson, 'The origin of Óglaigh na hÉireann', *An tÓglach*, 4, no. 2 (June 1931), p. 12.

the US army to return to Ireland.<sup>13</sup> If true, this may explain O'Connell's marked reticence about his military formation. The precise date of his homecoming in 1914 is not known.

O'Connell's association with the Volunteers began in late 1914 after the split in the organization which will be described briefly here. The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) did not welcome the establishment in November 1913 of a nationalist counterweight to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) but refrained from openly condemning it. The Irish Volunteers grew slowly and by March 1914 the RIC reported corps in twenty-five counties numbering an estimated 14,000.<sup>14</sup> By May this figure had almost doubled owing to the increasingly charged political atmosphere created by the Curragh incident, UVF gun-running and humiliating concessions by the IPP on some form of exclusion for Ulster. Following the third reading of the home rule bill on 25 May 1914, the IPP hastily promoted the Volunteers with the result that membership had surged to an estimated 69,000 by the end of that month.<sup>15</sup> This was a precursor to a demand by John Redmond\*, leader of the IPP, in June for a reconstruction of the self-appointed thirty-member provisional committee of the Volunteers. About half were members of the IRB; the remainder (including MacNeill, Roger Casement and Maurice Moore) were moderate but not uncritical followers of the IPP.<sup>16</sup> To safeguard the unity of the organization, a majority of the provisional committee reluctantly assented to an additional twenty-five members nominated by Redmond. The reconstitution of the governing body greatly boosted Volunteer membership. The outrage that followed the Bachelor's Walk shooting in late July stimulated a second influx. A further incentive for new members was the belief that the growing threat of European war presented an opportunity to secure home rule once and for all. Consequently, by September the Volunteers numbered an estimated 182,822 in 1,618 branches.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of the First World War on the Irish Volunteers and on Ireland was far-reaching. Mounting tensions on the provisional committee came to a head over the question of whether the Volunteers should serve Ireland or the British Empire. Redmond held off calling unconditionally for British army recruits until, after a prolonged delay, the home rule bill was placed on the statute book on 18 September 1914. Two days later, at Woodenbridge in County Wicklow, he committed the Volunteers to serve 'wherever the firing line extends', even though the home rule measure was suspended for the duration of the war and was accompanied by an unspecified provision for the special treatment of Ulster. This ruptured the Volunteers. Twenty members of the original pre-Redmondite

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<sup>13</sup> Josephine McNeill (IMA, BMH Witness Statement (hereafter WS) 303, p. 1). In 1918 she became engaged to Pierce McCann who died of influenza in Gloucester Prison in 1919. Four years later she married James McNeill, brother of Eoin MacNeill and Irish high commissioner in London 1923-8: see Michael Kennedy, 'McNeill, Josephine', *DIB*.

<sup>14</sup> RIC Inspector-General's monthly report for Mar. 1914 (The National Archives (hereafter TNA), CO 904/92).

<sup>15</sup> RIC Inspector-General's monthly report for May 1914 (TNA, CO 904/93).

<sup>16</sup> On Moore see Daithí Ó Corráin, "'A most public spirited and unselfish man'": the career and contribution of Colonel Maurice Moore, 1854-1939', *Studia Hibernica*, 40 (2014), pp 71-133.

<sup>17</sup> 'Return setting forth the strength of the Volunteers in September 1914 before the division into two bodies subsequently known as the National Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers', Intelligence Notes, 1914 (TNA, CO 903/18).

provisional committee issued a statement on 24 September repudiating 'the claim of any man to offer up the blood and lives of the sons of Irishmen and Irishwomen to the services of the British Empire while no National Government which could speak and act for the people of Ireland is allowed to exist'.<sup>18</sup> They seceded and retained the name Irish Volunteers; the overwhelming majority supported the position of the IPP and became the Irish National Volunteers.

O'Connell's first involvement with the Irish Volunteers was through the pages of the *Irish Volunteer*, edited by MacNeill and managed by Hobson, to which he contributed articles on military history, strategy and tactics. In November 1914 he was co-opted a member of the central executive and until the Rising was busily engaged in improving the quality and accessibility of military instruction for Volunteers of all ranks. In January 1915, with the rank of captain, O'Connell was one of a quartet of fulltime Volunteer organizers along with Ernest Blythe\*, Liam Mellows\* and Robert Monteith\*. As his memoir reveals, O'Connell focused on developing existing companies (rather than establishing new ones). When the Volunteers headquarters staff,<sup>19</sup> first created in December 1914, was reappointed in November 1915 O'Connell was added as chief of inspection with the rank of commandant.<sup>20</sup>

A deep fault line divided both the Volunteer executive and the headquarters staff. An advanced section favoured a pre-emptive insurrection before the end of the First World War and a secret military committee (later styled council) conspired to this end. By contrast, Hobson, MacNeill and O'Connell favoured a longer term strategy of building up a force of armed Volunteers prepared for resistance in the event of an attempt at their suppression, if conscription was imposed on Ireland, or if the food supply was endangered. Such circumstances would, they held, rally the public and consequently have a reasonable prospect of success. Hobson had articulated this stance as early as 1909 in his pamphlet *Defensive Warfare* and maintained, furthermore, that such an approach was consistent with clause 3 of the IRB constitution (1873).<sup>21</sup> O'Connell was asked by Hobson to prepare a memorandum setting out contingencies 'from the technical military point of view' in the

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<sup>18</sup> Statement by provisional committee on split with Redmond, 24 Sept. 1914 (NLI, Bulmer Hobson papers, MS 13,174/10).

<sup>19</sup> Initially the headquarters staff comprised of Eoin MacNeill as chief of staff, Patrick Pearse as director of military organization, Joseph Plunkett as director of military operations, Thomas MacDonagh as director of training, Bulmer Hobson as quartermaster, and The O'Rahilly as director of arms. In 1915 Éamonn Ceannt became director of communications and Seán Fitzgibbon became director of recruiting but this was technically not a staff post.

<sup>20</sup> *Irish Volunteer*, 10 Nov. 1915.

<sup>21</sup> Bulmer Hobson, *Defensive warfare: a handbook for Irish nationalists* (Belfast, 1909). For a discussion of this see Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: the Irish rebellion* (London, 2006), pp 20-1. Article 3 stated: 'The IRB shall await the decision of the Irish Nation as expressed by a majority of the Irish people as to the fit hour of inaugurating a war against England and shall pending such an emergency, lend its support to every movement calculated to advance the cause of Irish independence, consistently with the preservation of its own integrity': Constitution of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (NLI, Hobson papers, MS 13,163).

event of drastic action by the government.<sup>22</sup> He regarded the Volunteers as a military body not a revolutionary one and was firmly of the view that the Volunteers should not engage in a state of war unless it was forced on them. This is a constant strand in his memoir. But O’Connell was a convert to the potential offered by guerrilla warfare (long favoured by Hobson). He invented the term ‘hedge-fighting’ and expounded on it in the *Irish Volunteer*. O’Connell’s journeys around the country during 1915 strengthened his view that strategically ‘close country on occasion would offer quite extraordinary opportunities for the effective tactical action of small bodies of men’.<sup>23</sup>

From early 1916 a growing number of IRB men and Volunteers were aware that something would occur at Easter, though they had no knowledge of the precise details. The military council went to significant lengths to convince MacNeill that the authorities aimed to suppress the Volunteers by producing the ‘Castle document’ – possibly based on actual contingency plans – the details of which were dramatically revealed on Wednesday 19 April. It also took the extraordinary step of involving O’Connell and Seán Fitzgibbon in its plans, even though neither was in the IRB and both were aligned with Hobson and MacNeill. Fitzgibbon, who had successfully organized the Kilcoole gun-running in August 1914, was asked by Éamonn Ceannt\* to reprise this role by landing German arms in Kerry. O’Connell was ordered to lead the Volunteers in south-east Leinster. This may simply have been designed to ensure his absence from Dublin at Easter. Hobson recalled that on Holy Thursday he received ‘an urgent note’ from O’Connell to see him at headquarters that evening.<sup>24</sup> Satisfied that the general mobilization planned for Easter Sunday was really a cover for insurrection, Hobson and O’Connell went to see MacNeill in Woodtown Park and they went together to St Enda’s to confront Patrick Pearse\*, who admitted for the first time that a rising was planned. That night MacNeill drafted three orders: one cancelling all orders issued by Pearse, a second empowering Hobson to issue orders in MacNeill’s name, and a third giving O’Connell authority over the Volunteers in Munster.<sup>25</sup> O’Connell claimed that he had been sent by MacNeill to meet Casement in Kerry but on reaching Cork discovered that he would be unable to get a connecting train to Tralee.<sup>26</sup> In Dublin MacNeill dithered, having been misled again by the military council. When he finally learned that he had been deceived and that the arms ship sent from Germany had been sunk, he dispatched messengers around the country ordering a general demobilisation and advertised this in the *Sunday Independent*. The confusion generated by the flurry of conflicting orders over the Easter weekend exacted its toll on O’Connell. In Cork he received MacNeill’s countermand from Jim Ryan and met Tomás MacCurtain\* and Terence MacSwiney\*, the Cork Volunteer leaders. O’Connell then travelled to Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford where he proceeded

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 12 below, pp XX.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 5 below, pp XX.

<sup>24</sup> Bulmer Hobson’s account of Easter Week 1916, n.d. (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,613).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp 134-7; Michael Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising* (Stroud, 2004), pp 57-61.

<sup>26</sup> O’Connell’s application for certificate of military service, 24 Feb. 1925 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702).

to call off manoeuvres before receiving contradictory orders which he chose to ignore.<sup>27</sup> Min Ryan, one of the couriers who met O’Connell in Enniscorthy on Easter Sunday, recalled: ‘You would think by O’Connell then that he was very disappointed that the Rising was off. His head was in his hands and he was utterly confused.’<sup>28</sup> Maeve Cavanagh MacDowell, another Cumann na mBan courier, conveyed a message from the Waterford Volunteers to O’Connell in Kilkenny that they were willing to mobilize. She recalled his regret that the leaders of the Rising did not wait until conscription was imposed, his refusal to disobey orders by leading any local insurrectionary action, and that he then ‘broke down and cried, and said, “I deserve that, I’ll be called a traitor”’.<sup>29</sup>

In the event O’Connell’s revolutionary career did not suffer, unlike Hobson who was effectively excluded from Irish nationalist politics after 1916.<sup>30</sup> O’Connell was arrested in Kilkenny city and interned at Wandsworth, Frongoch and Reading until released as part of the Christmas 1916 amnesty. The first batch of Irish prisoners at Frongoch established an elected council but O’Connell and other later arrivals usurped this ‘semi-civil structure with a military one’ befitting the Irish Volunteers and their prisoner-of-war status.<sup>31</sup> This was accomplished despite opposition from ‘political types’ who ‘openly complained about captains, lieutenants and commandants’.<sup>32</sup> Séamus Daly, a member of the 2nd battalion, Dublin Brigade, recalled ‘a very stormy meeting’ at which O’Connell acted ‘like a martinet, the way he choked off some of those poor men, but politicians – it was painful: but he choked them off anyway and told them that this was a military camp and that we were all soldiers’.<sup>33</sup> A military staff was selected with O’Connell as commandant for the control of the south camp (Frongoch comprised north and south camps). The military posts ranged from adjutant to deputy quartermaster with staff officers in charge of individual dormitories. A similar command structure was established in the north camp with M. W. O’Reilly as commandant.<sup>34</sup> O’Connell established classes for officers and NCOs, and ensured that drill parade took place regularly.<sup>35</sup> W. J. Brennan-Whitmore, who was adjutant in the south camp and who delivered lectures on Irish terrain and strategy, claimed that the ‘military staff had raised Frongoch Camp into a Military Academy. What Sandhurst was doing for the British Army, Frongoch Camp was bidding fair to do for the Irish Republican Army’.<sup>36</sup> Hyperbole aside, Frongoch was an important episode in the militarization of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Josephine Mulcahy (née Ryan) (IMA, BMH WS 399, p. 11).

<sup>29</sup> Maeve Cavanagh MacDowell (IMA, BMH WS 258, p. 12); see also Pat McCarthy, *Waterford: the Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (Dublin, 2015), pp 40-1.

<sup>30</sup> Marnie Hay, *Bulmer Hobson and the nationalist movement in twentieth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), pp 199-208.

<sup>31</sup> Will Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921* (Oxford, 2014), pp 68-9; W. J. Brennan-Whitmore, *With the Irish in Frongoch* (Dublin, 1917), pp 24-5.

<sup>32</sup> Séamus Daly (IMA, BMH WS 360, p. 63).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Seán O’Mahony, *Frongoch: university of revolution* (Dublin, 1987), p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Brennan (IMA, BMH WS 1,068, p. 14); O’Mahony, *Frongoch*, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Brennan-Whitmore, *With the Irish in Frongoch*, p. 30.

Volunteers. First, it facilitated training. For many Volunteers, especially those outside Dublin, this was rudimentary before the Rising. Secondly, force of association during internment led many men from all parts of the country who had not previously been Volunteers to join. Thirdly, as O'Connell's suggests in his memoir, the military atmosphere and mentality ensured that when released from Frongoch the former internees were soldiers rather than the enthusiastic nationalists who had turned out during Easter 1916.<sup>37</sup> Michael Staines succeeded O'Connell as camp commandant when the latter and the leadership group were transferred to Reading Jail on 11 July. There, the prisoners were allowed to associate freely during the day. Michael Brennan recalled how O'Connell immediately formed an officers' class which met for instruction in his cell. They worked on Irish Ordnance Survey maps which had been smuggled in and carried out drill under the guise of physical training and exercise.<sup>38</sup> Ernest Blythe recollected that a blackboard was acquired on which O'Connell explained the course of a number of battles and campaigns.<sup>39</sup> During this period of detention O'Connell compiled a prison album of poetry (largely sentimental doggerel) by his fellow inmates called the 'Book of cells' which survives among his papers.<sup>40</sup>

The internees released in December 1916 set about reorganizing the Irish Volunteers and transforming the Sinn Féin party, which at the general election in December 1918 routed the IPP.<sup>41</sup> O'Connell returned home to Sligo, where his father then lived, and at the behest of Alec McCabe, a prominent IRB and Volunteer figure in Sligo, became an unpaid instructor to the Sligo Brigade about April 1917. During the conscription crisis in April 1918 he made a number of visits to neighbouring County Leitrim and at that time was OC Sligo Brigade.<sup>42</sup> Despite a suggestion that O'Connell was one of a number of former internees disappointed at not being selected as a Sinn Féin candidate, there is little evidence to suggest that he wished to stray into politics.<sup>43</sup> His attention seemed focused on military organization. When Éamon de Valera was arrested as part of the so-called 'German Plot' in May 1918 a scheme of army organization was found in his possession of which O'Connell purported to be the author.<sup>44</sup> He too was subjected to arrest and was imprisoned in Gloucester Jail.

After his release from Gloucester in April 1919 O'Connell spent six months in Sligo before being appointed assistant director of training on the general headquarters staff of

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<sup>37</sup> See 'Additional Matter – Reorganisation 1917' below, pp XX.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Brennan (IMA, BMH WS 1,068, p. 15).

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Blythe (IMA, BMH WS 939, p. 69).

<sup>40</sup> 'Book of cells', c. 1916 (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 19,924).

<sup>41</sup> On Sinn Féin see Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> O'Connell's application for certificate of military service, 24 Feb. 1925 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702). On McCabe and Sligo generally, see Michael Farry, *Sligo: the Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (Dublin, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Murphy, *Political imprisonment*, p. 120.

<sup>44</sup> O'Connell's application for certificate of military service, 24 Feb. 1925 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702).



the IRA. He succeeded Dick McKee as director of training when the latter was killed in Dublin Castle on 21 November 1920. In this capacity, he contributed training notes to *An tÓglach*, the IRA's journal and successor to the *Irish Volunteer*, under 'Notes from HQ' that could be used by local units for training and planning.<sup>45</sup> Remarkably, in the midst of the War of Independence O'Connell published an outline of Irish military history, 'divested of all political, social or economic complications', called *The Irish wars: a military history of Ireland from the Norse invasions to 1798*.<sup>46</sup> The memoir reveals O'Connell's disquiet at the absence of objectivity in the writing of Irish military history. This remained an issue of concern to him throughout his life. One reviewer regarded *The Irish wars* as pioneering because it was the 'first time the Irish wars have been studied and described by one who knows what a soldier would look for in them'.<sup>47</sup> Until Christmas 1920 O'Connell was involved in organization work in the midlands after which he served as assistant chief of staff. He retained this position until 1922 under Richard Mulcahy and Eoin O'Duffy respectively. The latter stated that O'Connell spent much time preparing plans of attack and schemes of organization. During the treaty negotiations in London O'Connell chaired a board which prepared data for the defence component of the talks, for which he received an emolument of £50.<sup>48</sup>

The most serious consequence of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 was not the split that occurred in Sinn Féin but the breach within the IRA. O'Connell was one of nine members of the GHQ staff who supported the settlement; four others, including Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows, were opposed. In a submission to the Army mutiny inquiry in 1924 O'Connell revealed his concern at the influence of the IRB from the very formation of the National army in 1922 by referring to 'hidden forces' and 'a mental reserve even among those members of GHQ who were supporting the Government'.<sup>49</sup> As he was not a member, O'Connell felt disenfranchised: 'Gradually one got to feel that one was up against a stone wall, and that [Liam] Lynch and what he stood for were being given a free hand. And as it fell out all the efforts to placate Lynch were unavailing.'<sup>50</sup> O'Connell opposed the level of concession made to the anti-Treaty side during the first half of 1922 as GHQ sought to avert a military split and demonstrated a reluctance to fight. A case in point was the compromise negotiated with Lynch on 10 March, whereby local anti-Treaty units were permitted to occupy strategically important barracks in Limerick. O'Connell and others such as Arthur Griffith believed that the provisional government had failed its first military test.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Townshend, *The Republic: the fight for Irish independence, 1918-1923* (London, 2013), p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Introductory note in J. J. O'Connell, *The Irish wars: a military history of Ireland from the Norse invasions* (Dublin, 1920). O'Connell further explored some of the same themes in 'Ireland in strategical geography', *Studies*, 26, no. 104 (1937) pp 595-608.

<sup>47</sup> Review by J. E. C. of *The Irish wars* by J. J. O'Connell, *Studies*, 10, no. 37 (1921), p. 156.

<sup>48</sup> O'Connell's application for certificate of military service, 24 Feb. 1925 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702).

<sup>49</sup> Commentary by O'Connell on National army in 1922 [c. May 1924] (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,126).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Lynch was chief of staff anti-Treaty IRA.

<sup>51</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, pp 64-5; Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), 97.

O'Connell's specific function at this time was the organization and command of the regular forces. He believed that it was necessary to recruit only in dependable areas such as Dublin and County Longford and did not envisage going outside the ranks of the IRA for officers.<sup>52</sup> This was not adhered to in the rush to build up the National army as civil war became unavoidable. Ironically, O'Duffy complained to Mulcahy that O'Connell had appointed ex-British officers to positions in the Curragh camp without seeking his permission.<sup>53</sup> On behalf of the provisional government, O'Connell took charge of the Curragh from the British on 16 May 1922 and raised the tricolour in a transfer marked by an absence of ceremony.<sup>54</sup> After his release from the Four Courts, he was given charge of the Curragh command, one of five created in July 1922.<sup>55</sup>

Following the reorganization of the National army in 1924, O'Connell was reduced in rank as were many fellow officers. His military pension application reveals the depth of his unhappiness at being downgraded first from lieutenant-general to major-general and then to colonel. He complained that he was the only member of GHQ to suffer such treatment and that 'no charge was ever brought nor any reason assigned for the reduction. Neither has there been any allegation of disloyalty or insubordination either before or since [the] reductions'.<sup>56</sup> His disappointment was made more acute by the nature of the military service certificate awarded to him in May 1927. O'Connell was deemed to have nine years pensionable service with 'the rank of higher than that of major-general' and eligible for a military service pension of £225 per annum. At issue was the fact that his service prior to April 1917 was not recognized. This was partly O'Connell's fault in that he interpreted 'active service' as meaning actual combat in 1916 instead of acting under the orders of GHQ. His case was reopened but the original finding was upheld. Two subsequent appeals directly to the minister for defence in 1927 and 1936 were unsuccessful.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, O'Connell remained in the army. In 1924 he was appointed chief lecturer in the Army School of Instruction, which became the Military College in 1930. He was transferred to army intelligence in 1929 with charge of the Second (no. 2) Bureau (later G2) until 1932. There followed a brief stint as OC Army School of Equitation before a term as quartermaster-general from 1933 until 1935. O'Connell was director of the military archives from 1935 until his death at the age of fifty-six on 19 February 1944. He was an active commentator on military history and strategy during this time. In March 1938 he published an article on Ireland's geographical strategic position in light of advances in military technology and

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<sup>52</sup> Commentary by O'Connell on National army in 1922 [c. May 1924] (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,126).

<sup>53</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 May 1922; Con Costello, *A most delightful station: the British army on the Curragh of Kildare, Ireland, 1855-1922* (Cork, 1999), pp 337-8.

<sup>55</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, pp 61-2, 136.

<sup>56</sup> O'Connell's application for certificate of military service, 24 Feb. 1925 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702).

<sup>57</sup> Appeals made by O'Connell regarding his certificate of military service, various dates May to Aug. 1927 and May to July 1936 (IMA, Military Service Pensions, SP12702).

warned of the country's vulnerability to air attacks.<sup>58</sup> This was followed by a companion piece on whether Ireland could remain neutral in the event of war.<sup>59</sup> Fittingly, on the outbreak of the Second World War he was posted to the Plans and Operations Branch at army headquarters. In an obituary comment the *Irish Times* suggested, not entirely inappropriately, that O'Connell came to be regarded as the Irish Liddell Hart.<sup>60</sup> The rigorous censorship regime imposed during the war may explain the absence of obituary tributes following his death.

O'Connell's unpublished memoir of his Volunteer activities is particularly valuable because it addresses the crucial period from the split in 1914 to the Rising, a timespan not well illuminated in the witness statements collected by the Bureau of Military History (BMH) between 1947 and 1957. It is not clear when O'Connell penned his memoir but there are grounds to indicate that it was between 1934 and 1936. During the 1930s the Department of Defence embarked on a scheme to collect personal testimony before veterans passed away. In April 1934 Colonel E. V. Carroll, acting director Second Bureau, issued a circular to army officers requesting those who participated in the Rising to send him their personal reminiscences to assist in the compilation of an official history by the Department of Education.<sup>61</sup> This forerunner of the Bureau of Military History did not come to fruition. Although O'Connell does not appear to have made a submission, several others did.<sup>62</sup> This may have spurred O'Connell to commit his contribution to paper and as director of the military archives he was ideally placed to do so. In April 1936 James Hogan, professor of history at UCC and editor of *Analecta Hibernica*, was pleased to hear that O'Connell was embarked on a history of events up to 1921.<sup>63</sup> There may have been an overlapping motivation. O'Connell remained aggrieved at the non-recognition of his service prior to 1917; as his sister later intimated, 'he had not been over[ly] well treated after all he had done'.<sup>64</sup> O'Connell made his second military service pension appeal to the minister for defence in 1936. It is an improbable coincidence that the memoir covers the very period not recognized by the military pensions board. O'Connell produced a very accurate document which suggests that he may have had recourse to personal diaries or other memory aids that were not deposited with his papers in the National Library of Ireland.

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<sup>58</sup> J. J. O'Connell, 'The vulnerability of Ireland in war', *Studies*, 27, no. 105 (1938), pp 125-35.

<sup>59</sup> J. J. O'Connell, 'Can Ireland remain neutral in war', *Studies*, 27, no. 108 (1938), pp 647-55.

<sup>60</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Feb. 1944. Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart (1895–1970), British military thinker, historian and pioneer of war studies.

<sup>61</sup> Carroll to O'Connell, 6 Apr. 1934 (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,117(i)).

<sup>62</sup> The Irish Military Archives does not hold any of the personal narratives sought by the Second Bureau in 1934 and there is no record of any submission by O'Connell. However, sixteen accounts are preserved in NLI MS 10,915.

<sup>63</sup> Hogan to O'Connell, 2 Apr. 1936 (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,117(i)). Hogan and O'Connell worked together during the civil war when Hogan was general officer in charge of inspection at National army headquarters and later director of intelligence: see Margaret MacCurtain, 'Hogan, James', *DIB*, and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed.), *James Hogan (1898-1963): revolutionary, historian and political scientist* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Pegeen [Mary Margaret] to Niamh O'Connell, 23 Nov. 1950 (NLI, O'Connell papers, MS 22,158).

The memoir gives a unique insight to the challenges of rebuilding the Volunteers after the split in September 1914. When O’Connell joined the Irish Volunteers survival was the foremost concern. The challenge before them was neatly captured by the *Irish Volunteer*: ‘In 1914 we needed only courage: in 1915 we shall need the rarer and more valuable thing, grit. It was easy to start the Irish Volunteers; it will be difficult to make them a really effective military force.’<sup>65</sup> O’Connell’s memoir reveals his concern at the Volunteers’ lack of popularity in many places; he wrote of them beginning ‘absolutely *de novo* from the split’.<sup>66</sup> While the Irish Volunteers did not have the backing of a major political party, ready access to a national newspaper, significant financial resources or arms, they were better positioned than their rivals to reorganize successfully. First, a majority of the Dublin Volunteers, including practically all the officers, sided with them. Second, a smaller more compact body was, to quote Pearse, ‘infinitely more valuable than the unwieldy loosely held together mixum-gatherum force we had before the split’.<sup>67</sup> This reduced body included a number of committed ideological zealots imbued with a deep sense of mission, none more so than Pearse. Third, despite his subsequent historical marginalization, Hobson was an organizer *par excellence* and played a vital role as honorary secretary in revitalizing the Volunteers. Lastly, as O’Connell’s memoir reveals in considerable detail, by opposing conscription the Irish Volunteers exploited a potent mobilizing asset and one which increased as the war continued.<sup>68</sup>

O’Connell was preoccupied by a desire to mould the Volunteers into a properly disciplined and uniformly trained body with a capacity, should the need arrive, for meaningful military action rather than mob resistance. For many the onset of the First World War quickly extinguished the novelty of playing soldiers. It also created the difficulty of how to sustain proper military training as drill instructors, typically British army reservists or ex-servicemen, were recalled to their regiments at precisely the time when they were needed most. To O’Connell ‘untrained mass enthusiasm’ was dangerous and unreliable.<sup>69</sup> He was dismayed at the widespread practice of appointing local officers on the basis of popularity rather than military ability. For him military efficiency could not be achieved without properly trained officers. O’Connell was principal instructor at four training camps during the summer of 1915 and at an officers’ training school in Cork in early 1916, which he deemed one of the best pieces of practical work done by the Irish Volunteers. O’Connell regarded the officers so trained as a ‘leaven’ that would help improve the efficiency of corps throughout the country; this in turn would stimulate the establishment of new companies.<sup>70</sup> He planned a more extensive programme in 1916 with the aim of securing for every

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Notes from Headquarters’, *Irish Volunteer*, 9 Jan. 1915.

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 1 below, pp XX.

<sup>67</sup> Pearse to Joseph McGarrity, 19 Oct. 1914 (NLI, McGarrity papers, MS 17,477/9).

<sup>68</sup> See in particular Chapters 4 and 7 below.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 1 below, pp XX.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 5 below, pp XX.

Volunteer one week's training in camp, as well as appropriate levels of training for junior and senior officers.

The memoir reveals O'Connell's frustrations with the amateur generals on the headquarters staff. These ranged from poor military management owing to the lack of insistence that reports be submitted, to rambling discussion at meetings, to the frequent absence of MacNeill and Hobson from military parades which suggested that 'they were merely acting the part of politicians'.<sup>71</sup> O'Connell criticized the expenditure of resources on organizing areas judged strategic according to the map, such as County Kildare, but which yielded a meagre return. It would have been wiser (and he had the benefit of hindsight) to focus on more promising areas such as County Clare because having a properly trained body of men at once conferred strategic importance on a place.<sup>72</sup> O'Connell's gravest concern was the lack of military knowledge of some of the revolutionaries who mistakenly believed that 'the art of war could be studied in books without any trouble being taken to fit the book theories to material facts, or to human nature'.<sup>73</sup> This was exposed during field manoeuvres at Stepside in Dublin in September 1915. From O'Connell's perspective the higher command 'consisted of men who could not "slope arms" properly, having never drilled in the ranks, men, who, moreover, thought themselves above sloping arms'.<sup>74</sup> That the Volunteers subsequently accomplished as much as they did was, he maintained, due to the proficiency of the subordinate ranks. Furthermore, O'Connell believed that 'the revolutionary section ... utterly failed to realise' the gulf in military standard between the Dublin Brigade and the rest of the country.<sup>75</sup> Dublin was better officered, better resourced in terms of arms and equipment and exhibited a stronger *esprit de corps*. This state of affairs heightened O'Connell's fears of a pre-emptive Rising. Josephine McNeill recalled how he worried throughout 1915 that any progress in building up the Volunteers might be undone by the impetuosity of the more advanced section which he 'half banteringly and half ruefully' described as the 'Army of Destiny'. O'Connell's was 'not a poetic temperament and to him the mystical idea of patriotism was antipathetic'.<sup>76</sup>

The work of organization initially looked unpromising but, as O'Connell explains, it was aided by a number of factors during 1915. The first was the formation in May of a coalition government which included Edward Carson and Bonar Law but not Redmond, who refused to join. Secondly, conscription was a real concern from autumn 1914 which worked to the advantage of the Irish Volunteers. Rumours of compulsion in October 1914 sparked increased emigration by farmers' sons, particularly from the west of Ireland, to the USA. Such rumours were revived again in the summer of 1915 with the government's registration bill. Intended to establish the numbers employed in each industry, it was seen as a

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<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 12 below, pp XX.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 9 below, pp XX.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 6 below, pp XX.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 6 below, pp XX.

<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 10 below, pp XX.

<sup>76</sup> Josephine MacNeill (IMA, BMH WS 303, pp 2-3).

precursor to conscription. Writing from the Irish Office, A. P. Magill warned the under secretary in Dublin that it would 'frighten a large number of the persons registered into the emigrant ship and would put new life into the Sinn Féiners, who would of course say this is conscription'.<sup>77</sup> So it proved. There was a further panic in November 1915 occasioned by the lord lieutenant's recruitment conference. This was a boon for the Irish Volunteers. According to O'Connell, many National Volunteers who could not get away joined the Irish Volunteers. A third factor was increasing dissatisfaction with the IPP among moderate nationalists. Robbed of home rule, Redmond increasingly bore responsibility for a British war effort that imposed heavy burdens on Ireland without any facility to shape that policy. Fourthly, the authorities displayed a curious reluctance, partly due to legal technicalities, to take decisive action against Volunteer organizers. Four deportation orders were served in July 1915 but O'Connell escaped the attention of the authorities. They became a source of protest and invaluable publicity for the Irish Volunteers, as did the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa\*. Lastly, as the Volunteers gradually consolidated their position their confidence mounted. Writing to Joseph McGarrity in June 1914, Pearse suggested that 'the future of the movement depends upon our remaining at our posts to see to it that the Volunteers are a real army, not a stage army'.<sup>78</sup> That both parts of this assertion were borne out by early 1916 was due, in no small measure, to the underappreciated pragmatism, organizational capacity and military knowledge of J. J. O'Connell.

#### Editorial note

J. J. O'Connell's account of the Irish Volunteers is preserved in his papers accessioned by the National Library of Ireland in 1978 (accession number: 3499). Two versions are extant: MS 22,114 (i) is a holograph; MS 22,114 (ii) is a typescript and is the version presented here. Unfortunately, MS 22,114 does not possess a formal title page and it has been given various library descriptions. The folder containing MS 22,114 (ii) is labelled 'Autobiographical account of events leading to 1916'; the entry in the Sources database is 'Typescript and manuscript autobiographical account by J. J. O'Connell, regarding the events leading to the Easter Rising, in particular the Irish Volunteers'. A further copy of the typescript preserved in the papers of Bulmer Hobson (NLI, Hobson papers, MS 13,168) is labelled 'History of the Irish Volunteers by Col. J. J. O'Connell'. This presentation describes O'Connell's document as a memoir.

MS 22,114 (ii) is set out in chapters, each of which is individually paginated. The chapter sequence is 1-6, 8-11 and 14. It appears that O'Connell inadvertently numbered the seventh chapter as chapter 8. While it is unclear if chapters 12 and 13 were ever written, there is no discernible break in the narrative. MS 22,114 (ii) contains an earlier draft of chapters 1-3 which has not been included here to avoid unnecessary repetition. It also

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<sup>77</sup> Magill to Nathan, 4 June 1915 (Bodleian Library Oxford, Matthew Nathan papers, MS Nathan 457, ff 259-62).

<sup>78</sup> Pearse to McGarrity, 19 June 1914 (NLI, McGarrity papers, MS 17,477/3).

includes a copy of MS 22,117 (ii) – a four-page account of the reorganization of the Volunteers after the Rising. Given its pertinence, it is also included below. In this presentation the chapter numbers have been sequenced 1-11 but notes have been provided to indicate O’Connell’s original numbering. The original pagination for each chapter has also been retained in bold in square brackets.

O’Connell’s memoir has been prepared for publication with minimal editorial intervention. Minor typographical errors, inconsistencies in punctuation, capitalization, and the spelling of personal names and locations have been remedied; for the purpose of clarity abbreviations for military ranks have been spelled out.<sup>79</sup>

MS 22,114 (ii) and MS 22,117 (ii) are produced here by kind permission of the National Library of Ireland. I wish to express my continued gratitude to the staff of its Manuscripts Department.

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<sup>79</sup> For example, ‘Reynold’s Tower’ in Waterford is actually Reginald’s Tower; ‘Dunamore’ in county Cork is Donoughmore.

## Chapter 1

I offer my services to the Volunteers – The *Irish Volunteer* – State of Irish opinion – Fianna cadets – Attitude towards us – Standard of training – Question of arms – Hostile moves by government – Insight gained in preliminary journeys – Changes of opinion

In November 1914 national opinion in Ireland had not found its bearings. The home rule question and incidents, the Volunteer movement, and the European war had all contributed to bring about a very confused and excited state of public opinion in the country. Of those who, a few months previously, had all alike described themselves as nationalists there were now three divisions. A large number, carried away by Mr Redmond's utterances and the press, really believed that it was the duty of Ireland to put all her efforts into the prosecution of war.<sup>80</sup> A smaller body, blinded by hatred of everything English and with recent injustices rankling in their minds, would have had the Germans at any price, purely for revenge. Yet, a third party held that Ireland as a nation should adopt a non-committal attitude and conserve her energies with a view to securing any political advantages that might come along in the course of events: in a word they were opportunists.

It seemed especially curious to me, returning to Ireland after an absence of some years, that the number of these opportunists was so small. Their attitude – assuming that his outlook was patriotic and disinterested – seemed so much the most natural for one calling himself a nationalist that I was at a loss to understand any other. I had never been in contact with any Irish national activity and was subsequently unprepared for the confusion of thought in such matters.

These opportunists seemed to me to have their most coherent expression in the stand and policy of the Irish Volunteers or Sinn Féiners, as for good or evil they have since come to be called.<sup>81</sup> Their policy was at least clearly defined and unmistakable. It was, moreover, apparently a practicable policy and appeared to have adherents all over the country, even though these were not very numerous. These, at all events, were my ideas on the Irish national [p. 2] situation when I presented myself to Eoin MacNeill<sup>82</sup> and The

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<sup>80</sup> John Edward Redmond (1856-1918) leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (1900-18); secured introduction of third home rule bill; pledged support for British war effort in 1914; refused cabinet post 1915: see Michael Laffan, 'Redmond, John Edward', *DIB*.

<sup>81</sup> Following the split in the Irish Volunteers in September 1914, the authorities began to refer to the breakaway group, which retained the name Irish Volunteers, as Sinn Féiners even though the Sinn Féin political organization established in 1907 played no direct part in the Volunteers. 'Sinn Féiner' became shorthand to describe those hostile to the war and the Irish Parliamentary Party. Accordingly, the 1916 Rising was erroneously labelled a Sinn Féin rebellion.

<sup>82</sup> Eoin (John) MacNeill (1867-1945) founder member Irish Volunteers Nov. 1913, chairman of provisional committee and editor of *Irish Volunteer*; chief of staff (1914-16); sided with Bulmer Hobson and O'Connell



O’Rahilly<sup>83</sup> as a possible instructor for the Irish Volunteers in the last week of November. Both those gentlemen gave me grounds for a certain amount of hope for the future of the Volunteers.

Briefly, the situation of the Irish Volunteers at this time was this. At the ‘split’, as it was called, a great number of the Dublin Volunteers stood by the original committee, including practically all the officers.<sup>84</sup> But through the country only handfuls of men here and there stood by them. The remainder followed John Redmond or else went into abeyance entirely. By greater enthusiasm or activity, those who remained Irish Volunteers occupied a bigger place in public view than they were entitled to by virtue of their numbers. It was only later when travelling through the country that I realised that the vastly greater number of corps of Volunteers existed only in name. In short, the organisation of the Volunteers began *de novo* from the split. And at that stage of rebirth or reconstruction, the Dublin Volunteers were already much ahead of the country generally in cohesion and knowledge. This discrepancy of standard between Dublin and the rest of Ireland must never be lost sight of. Instead of diminishing, it accentuated as time went on until finally it proved a very serious factor in the [1916] insurrection in which the Volunteer force perished.

I did not immediately become a Volunteer instructor upon my return to Ireland – not, in fact, until January 1915. But in the interval I spent a considerable amount of time helping the force in an unattached and auxiliary way. About this time, the Volunteers acquired the *Irish Volunteer* newspaper which had been formerly a private enterprise and conducted on national propagandist lines of an extreme stamp, a course which naturally brought it under the ban of the government.<sup>85</sup> The aim of the new journal was to provide a popular, though technical, military paper such as would prove useful for the instruction of untrained men and, more especially, untrained officers. Naturally, I had much scope for activity in simplifying tactical handbooks, furnishing extracts, and making original suggestions. In the purely military aspect of this journal [p. 3], I had a considerable voice and was enabled to further many views on armament etc., rendered doubly advisable by the particular circumstances.

One other duty I took up and continued for a couple of months. This was a series of tactical lectures delivered twice weekly to the Fianna (Irish National Boy Scouts) cadets.<sup>86</sup> These were boys well on in their teens and most intelligent as, indeed, one might expect

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against IRB members who favoured a pre-emptive rising; countermanded orders for a general mobilization on Easter Sunday 1916: see Patrick Maume and Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘MacNeill, Eoin (John)’, *DIB*.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Joseph O’Rahilly (1875-1916); founder member and joint treasurer of Irish Volunteers 1913; director of armaments (1913-16); opposed to a pre-emptive rising; from 1911 styled himself ‘The O’Rahilly’: see Patrick Maume, ‘O’Rahilly, Michael Joseph (‘The O’Rahilly)’, *DIB*.

<sup>84</sup> See introduction above, pp XX.

<sup>85</sup> Between its inception in Feb. 1914 and Nov. 1914, the *Irish Volunteer* was owned and printed by the *Echo Enniscorthy*.

<sup>86</sup> Na Fianna Éireann was established in Aug. 1909 by Bulmer Hobson and Countess Constance Markievicz as a republican boys scouts. Although there was close cooperation between the Fianna and the Volunteers, there was no formal affiliation before the Rising.

considering that they were picked from a large number. It could not be the lot of any instructor to have better material than these boys, all of whom in drill and training, and many of whom in action, definitely proved of what soldierly stuff they were made. Not all of those boys are now alive and those who died have merited the respect of all good soldiers.<sup>87</sup> Yet, it is no slur on their memory to say that among the survivors are others who in no way suffer by comparison. In general, it was my experience everywhere that those boys who had been officers in the Fianna were subsequently among the very best officers of the Volunteers. This, I do not attribute altogether to the training they received, though that went for much. But even more the boys selected boys with the touch of iron essential for leadership, whereas the men commonly selected someone because he was popular or distinguished in some sphere or other. The Fianna, in short, were primarily soldiers; the raw Volunteers were primarily friends and neighbours. Later it will be seen how the difficulty of officering the Volunteers was met and coped with.

It was a rather unpleasant discovery for me that the Irish Volunteers were viewed askance by great numbers of people all over the country. One reason for this was the crying down by job-hunting politicians and others who backed up these last, honestly believing in them. Another reason was the fact that the force was supposed to be a pro-German organisation. Certainly, practically all the pro-German element favoured the Volunteers and this was taken as implying that there were no Volunteers who were not pro-German. The idea of Ireland playing a lone hand did not seem to have occurred to anyone. Be this as it may, the fact remains [p. 4] that the Irish Volunteers had a desperately uphill fight for existence let alone authority in the country.

And there was yet another cause contributing to the difficulties under which the Irish Volunteers suffered at this time – the dearth of instructors. Before the ‘split’ every Volunteer company had its own instructor, for the most part [British] army reservists of varying ranks. Many of these men were called to the colours on the outbreak of the [First World] War, and the remainder were deterred by government interference from continuing their work. As a result, the training began to be neglected or taken up by men who were themselves imperfectly trained. For this reason, some of the Volunteer leaders were in favour of dropping drill in the strict sense and confining the men’s training to shooting and field work as far as country companies were concerned. In these opinions I personally did not concur, despite the quoted analogies of the Boer commanders.

It was my opinion that our differences from the Boers were much more numerous and far-reaching than our resemblances to them. General de Wet’s *Three Years War* was advocated as a textbook, but anyone who has read that book cannot fail to recall how

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<sup>87</sup> Three serving members of Fianna Éireann were killed during the 1916 Rising: John Doyle, Seán Healy and James J. Kelly. At least four others killed or executed had formerly been members: Frederick Ryan of the Irish Citizen Army; and Gerald Keogh, Con Colbert and Seán Heuston of the Irish Volunteers.

frequently the general laments the almost incredible indiscipline of his troops.<sup>88</sup> It was in spite of – not because of – their lack of drill that the Boers achieved so many tactical victories. I favoured a compromise in the matter of drill on the lines that few movements should be prescribed but that in these few precision should be insisted on. With regard to the other matter – attention to marksmanship – the fact that there was no one to drill the men was not allowed to interfere with the instruction. An increased amount of time was given to target practice with the miniature rifle with the result that large numbers of the men became very good shots at short ranges.

At this time it was difficult to procure arms and military rifles were impossible to get for love or money.<sup>89</sup> This all told against the development of the force because the rifle [p. 5] was regarded by many people in Ireland since the Boer War almost with superstition. It will be remembered that at this time the trench warfare in Belgium and France was only beginning and its lessons were not generally realised, as they came to be later. The fire of rifles at medium range was still considered almost a decisive factor in battle. I remember the first time I met The O’Rahilly, speaking to him as to the advisability of getting the companies to arm with single-barrelled shotguns and to load the cartridges with buckshot. The same idea had already occurred independently to him, and, from that time on, neither of us ever lost an opportunity of urging the reform. The powerful effectiveness of the shotgun in Easter Week 1916 vindicated our judgement.

During the latter part of 1914 the government’s hostility to the Irish Volunteers was unmistakably manifested in certain ways. Men were deported from different parts of Ireland, national propagandist organs were suppressed etc. But the government’s policy was to aim at individuals and not at the Volunteer force as such. The idea apparently was that the Volunteers if left to themselves would die of inanition. There was distinct danger of such a thing occurring because the Volunteers were not financially in a position to launch out on a widespread organising campaign. There was no probability of extra funds being sent from America for several months to come and it will readily be understood that things at home were not favourable for raising finances. It was the most we might expect to do to ‘carry on’.

Apart from men engaged as instructors in Dublin, there were only three men employed on organising work by headquarters.<sup>90</sup> Of these, Captain Monteith<sup>91</sup> had been deported from Dublin and was engaged as a permanent instructor with Limerick as his

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<sup>88</sup> Christiaan Rudolph de Wet (1854–1922), army officer and politician in the Orange Free State. Translated from Dutch, his *Three years’ war, October 1899-June 1902* was published in 1902 by Archibald Constable & Co., Westminster.

<sup>89</sup> In Nov. 1914 the Defence of the Realm regulations were modified to ensure that no arms or ammunition of a military nature could be sold without the sanction of the War Office.

<sup>90</sup> After the split, the Irish Volunteers retained its headquarters at 41 Kildare Street but relocated to 2 Dawson Street at the end of Apr. 1915.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Monteith (1879-1956) joined the Volunteers at their inception; dismissed from Ordnance Survey for Volunteer activities; Volunteer organizer in Limerick: see Bridget Hourican, ‘Monteith, Robert’, *DIB*.

headquarters. Captain Mellows<sup>92</sup> was similarly engaged in County Galway and Mr Blythe<sup>93</sup> was employed in County Kerry, but in the capacity of an organiser rather than that of an instructor. The work of an organiser, which was the name used by headquarters, was varied and not at all easy. It comprised getting together a group of men to form the nucleus of [p. 6] a corps, bringing this group into contact with headquarters, giving preliminary instruction, getting particulars of armament, and generally doing a hundred and one odd jobs – and, incidentally, giving the local RIC [Royal Irish Constabulary] something to do besides read the newspapers and repair bicycle punctures.

When I was added to the number of organisers, which was in January 1915, I did not pay so much attention to the forming of new companies or reviving of defunct ones as to the training of existing ones. I took up the position that unless the local men were sufficiently interested to come together to be drilled, I should be only wasting my time talking to them. It was my contention that any decent corps should organise its own neighbourhood. This system tended to bring about local cohesion and local headquarters to develop the initiating of local officers and to leave me free for more special or higher instruction.

When I was appointed an organiser my earlier journeys through the country were short, for a week or even less. These trips to different parts of the country brought me in touch with our principal men in widely separated districts and were very useful in giving me a good general idea of how things stood with us throughout Ireland. I confess the outlook was far from reassuring: we were literally ‘voices crying in the wilderness’.

The first of these journeys which I undertook was a brief run around the extreme south-west, which was at all times one of our best areas. On that occasion I visited Cork, Tralee, and Limerick, besides interviewing the men in charge of the country companies at Castleconnell and Killonan, a few miles outside Limerick city. My second journey was in the south-east to Enniscorthy, Wexford, New Ross and Waterford. A little later, I made my third journey to Edenderry, Tullamore and Athlone, from which last place I also visited a couple of outlying points. Outside Dublin these were the only districts we could really describe as in any way favourable to us. An exception, of course, was Galway, where organising was already well in hand.

[p. 7] It is rather unfortunate, perhaps, that ‘circumstances over which I had no control’, or very little control, have since compelled me to burn the little diary in which I entered my expenses. As a matter of fact, the book contained little besides the dates on which I purchased railway tickets and the tickets I purchased. But it was better to be sure

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<sup>92</sup> William Joseph (‘Liam’) Mellows (1892-1922) joined IRB 1912; secretary provisional committee Irish Volunteers; sent to Galway to reorganize Volunteers (1914-15); arrested 1915; deported to England 1916 but returned to Ireland disguised as a priest to lead Galway Volunteers during Easter 1916: see Marie Coleman & William Murphy, ‘Mellows, William Joseph (‘Liam’), *DIB*.

<sup>93</sup> Ernest Blythe (Earnán de Blaghd) (1889-1975) Volunteer organizer; deported 1916: see Patrick Buckley, ‘Blythe, Ernest (de Blaghd, Earnán)’, *DIB*.

than sorry. I remember, though, that my first official visit to Cork was on a Friday evening in January.<sup>94</sup> It was a damnably wet night and I had to make a long search for Commandant Curtin,<sup>95</sup> who was the man I was notified by headquarters to call upon. It was always my practice to ask as few questions as possible when wishing to get any place and where I could I always tried to get someone who'd 'been there' to furnish me with a rough sketch-map enabling me to carry on with no questions at all. Eventually, I found the commandant and introduced myself, but not before I had alarmed Mrs Curtin<sup>96</sup> who took me for a detective! He invited me to tea the next evening when he was to introduce me to his second-in-command, Commandant O'Sullivan<sup>97</sup> and to Captain (then Lieutenant) MacSwiney<sup>98</sup> who subsequently became an organiser himself. That first meeting with these three officers gave me a good impression of the Cork Volunteers, an impression that heightened later. It was hard to define it precisely, but somehow they gave a comfortable feeling of efficiency. They gave me a good idea of their strength or rather relative weakness, especially of their grounds for believing that things were coming their way in Cork and of the standard of training of their men. They complained that they were at a standstill in the matter of training and wished some preliminary instruction in field work. I said I hoped that at another time I would be able to pay a second and longer visit and carry on the training of the corps for a bit, so as to enable them to get going in this way. I was fortunate enough to be able to do so a couple of months later.

On the occasion of this my first visit to Cork, it was a Red Cross Saturday for the British Red Cross.<sup>99</sup> I purchased and wore a comparatively obvious badge: this might seem in the eyes of very extreme nationalists a renunciation of principle, but it might, on the other hand, prove fairly useful as a disguise. In any event, I [p. 8] have always found the Cork ladies so charming that with the most inflexible nationalism in the world I could not be so hard-hearted as to resist one of them. I remember that evening when I met Captain MacSwiney in Commandant Curtin's his saying as we shook hands: 'What's this? Another atrocity?' And he explained, in answer to my puzzled look, that it appeared to be a clever case of 'abuse of the Red Cross'.

On the Saturday I left Cork for Tralee.<sup>100</sup> It was my first, and up to the present my only, visit to the kingdom of Kerry. In Tralee I was viewed at first with a half-suspicion; I

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<sup>94</sup> This visit was not detected by the RIC.

<sup>95</sup> Tomás MacCurtain (Thomas Curtin) (1884-1920) founder member and secretary of Cork Irish Volunteers (1913-14); worked closely with Terence MacSwiney to reorganize the Volunteers in Cork after the split; commanded Cork Brigade during Easter Rising and in 1917 was subjected to IRB and Volunteer inquiries into the surrender of Volunteer arms: see Patrick Maume, 'MacCurtain, Tomás', *DIB*.

<sup>96</sup> MacCurtain married Elizabeth (Eilís) Walsh in 1908 and they had five children.

<sup>97</sup> On 17 Feb. 1915 Volunteer headquarters confirmed the appointment of the captains of the four Cork city companies: Seán O'Sullivan (A Company), Seán Murphy (B Company), Patrick Cotter (C Company) and David Cotter (D Company). In July 1915 O'Sullivan was promoted to vice-commandant 1st (Cork city) Battalion.

<sup>98</sup> Terence James MacSwiney (1879-1920) fulltime Volunteer organizer 1915; with Tomás MacCurtain criticized for failing to lead a rising in Cork at Easter 1916: see Patrick Maume, 'MacSwiney, Terence James', *DIB*.

<sup>99</sup> A Red Cross Flag Week collection was held between 23 and 30 Jan. 1915 in Cork city and county.

<sup>100</sup> This visit was not recorded by the RIC.

seemed destined on this first trip of mine to be eyed askance. I was two nights in Tralee, on the second of which I witnessed a company of the local Volunteers at drill. The standard of training was good enough, but there struck me as being a lack of business method in the administration of the corps. It proved afterwards that such was the case. Favourable prospects were held out for organising the district and it was hoped that, after a little time, Captain Monteith could come from Limerick to take up duty in Tralee.

From Tralee I went on the Tuesday afternoon to Limerick. There, I was no longer viewed with suspicion as I was fairly well known in the city. In Limerick I stayed three or four days and obtained a fair idea of the state of the district. Captain Monteith's work in Limerick was showing results, and the city companies were in a gratifying state of efficiency. In close cooperation with them were the companies near the city, and steps were being taken to work up the Galtee district and thus provide a connecting link between the counties of Limerick and Cork. In this district, Captain Monteith used subsequently have an officers' training class once or twice a week. As far as I recollect, this class was the first of its kind. Later on, as the Volunteers spread and we acquired sounder methods of working, these officers' classes formed one of the principal features of our system.

The country officers were one weak point with us. By the system of simply forming a company and drilling it, no serious degree of military knowledge was imparted to the local officer. It was [p. 9] found that the organisers could work more profitably by taking the officers in hand, even if that course entailed their not instructing the rank and file at all. It was very difficult to get these raw officers at first to realise the difference between officer and man. Accordingly, one of the first desiderata was to impart to the prospective officer a manner of command and a confident bearing. Although many earlier officers were unsatisfactory, still once the officers' training classes were systematically taken up the country companies with very few exceptions selected a very good stamp of man to attend them – men of good natural intelligence and with the real officer stuff in their make-up.

Personally, I attached the very highest importance to the training of officers. I placed no reliance whatever on untrained mass enthusiasm; one has only to read history to see whither that leads. I realised further that the complete training of the country was hardly a feasible task. But I was convinced that a sufficient number of picked men could be given sufficient training to undertake the knocking into shape of raw men. For this policy there was no need for any wave of enthusiasm, nor any danger to be feared from the fall of any enthusiasm or the passing away of any set of circumstances. Men who were sufficiently keen to go to the trouble of specially acquiring a fair degree of military training would not drop away. Especially, they would be likely to remain on if appointed officers locally; such a proceeding would appeal to their personal vanity in a harmless form. As a result, these men would remain a permanent nucleus and even if the rank and file were floating or apathetic even, these last would have an elementary training at least.

Just about the time when I first started work as an organiser, the government authorities had serious fears of a German invasion or raid on the south or west coasts of

Ireland. As a result, the local police had given elaborate instructions to the country people living near the coast to burn their hay and everything of that nature, drive their flocks and herds before them, and migrate inland. Apropos of this measure, one old lady near Limerick when told to 'proceed to [p. 10] Bruff'<sup>101</sup> – the point indicated for that district – very pertinently asked the policeman: 'And what is there for me in Bruff when I go there?' Naturally, there was no satisfactory answer and the old lady assured him she would die where she had lived, and trust to her grey hairs to save her from the invaders. In point of fact, this order about the flocks and herds had a considerable effect in alienating the sympathies of the country people from the government. From their point of view they argued, 'If they can't protect us from the Germans why should we ruin ourselves? It's much better to sell to the invaders if they give us fair value'. They looked at it as a business proposition and internationally from a standpoint of strict neutrality.

Upon the whole, this first journey of mine held forth no extravagant hopes for the future of the Volunteers. In every place I visited, we and our sympathisers were at that time only a small minority. It was fortunately a minority of a determined and capable type for the most part and there was no locality in which we were 'going back[wards]'. Everywhere we were at least at a standstill; in places, even, we might be described as 'marking time'. There was hope if we got breathing space and a chance to steady ourselves.

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## Chapter 2

Country officers – Collection of returns – Arming country companies – Sacrifices made by Volunteers – Tentative moves to suppress the *Irish Volunteer* – Visit to the south-east – The midlands – Value of these visits to me – Arms raid incident – My idea of 'organising'

The collection of returns of the country companies was one of the chief duties of the organisers. These returns were made on large typewritten forms and furnished the names and addresses of officers, strength of companies, the supply of arms and ammunition at the disposal of the companies, and all other particulars of similar importance. These were all handed over to headquarters and were supposed to be available for reference and inspection. As a matter of fact, though, as far as I recollect, they were never once produced at a staff meeting. These returns should, on the contrary, have been used as a basis for working on. They showed with reasonable exactness where and to what extent we were weak or strong and what measures might be calculated to give the best results in any particular district. Instead of this, districts seemed to be organised on a preconceived idea without any accurate regard for local facts.

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<sup>101</sup> A village in east county Limerick.

The question of arming country companies presented peculiar difficulties. All the arms and ammunition were concentrated in Dublin, and naturally enough the authorities kept a vigorous watch for any transport of arms to country districts. Indeed, from time to time, the Volunteers lost small consignments of arms in passage from Dublin. The most effective way of carrying arms from place to place was by motor, and the motors at our disposal were few and far between and closely watched. The best solution would have been the establishment of branch depots of arms and ammunition at important country centres. Local companies could easily communicate and transact business in Limerick or Cork who could never afford the time or money to go to Dublin. For it must be remembered that a visit to Dublin for the purchase of arms needed always some days. In Dublin arms might be concealed in one place, ammunition in another [p. 2] and so on. The cost of arms was, in any event, very great and the addition of hotel expenses made it absolutely prohibitive. Besides, there were the practical difficulties.

The wonderful sacrifices made by some of the Volunteers to procure arms and equipment deserve to be recorded. Especially were the efforts of many Dublin Volunteers in this matter beyond all praise. These boys – in their teens or early twenties – working hard for small salaries, denied themselves everything: they gave up smoking, which was no loss, music halls, cinema shows; they never took a tram when it was possible to walk. Every sixpence they could get was scrupulously hoarded up to buy first a rifle, then a supply of cartridges, then a bayonet, and then bandoliers, belts, haversacks etc. – the articles being purchased in direct proportion to their importance in combat. Many pounds of the men's savings went to purchase his equipment. And these were the men who were accused of being bribed by 'German gold'! Amongst all the meaningless lies told about the history of Ireland, this one was the most meaningless and the most unworthy. It is questionable if even those who spread it believed it.

About this time – February 1915 – the government authorities made tentative efforts against us. The underlying idea in these attempts seemed to be to bring about a state of affairs in which we would die of inanition. Their activities were calculated to throw discredit on us and put us in the status of social outcasts. For example, the premises where the official organ was printed in Dublin was raided by the police, articles seized, and type carried off.<sup>102</sup> As a result the printing and publication in Dublin had to cease. Simultaneously, newsagents all over the country were warned against selling the journal [*Irish Volunteer*]. Thus the local RIC sergeant would enter the local shop with an air of authority and hint darkly at terrible consequences to follow the continued sale. The local

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<sup>102</sup> On 2 Dec. 1914 warnings were issued to the printers of organs deemed seditious: *Irish Freedom, Ireland, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, The Leader, Irish Volunteer* and the *Irish Worker*. At this time, the *Irish Volunteer* did not contravene the regulations but *Sinn Féin, Ireland* and *Fianna Fáil* ceased and were replaced by *Scissors & Paste* which was published by Patrick Mahon at 3 Yarnhall Street who also printed the *Irish Volunteer*. On 2 Mar. 1915 the military authorities seized all copies of *Scissors & Paste* and removed Mahon's type and some of his machinery. The *Irish Volunteer* was then printed in Belfast by Davidson & McCormack, Northgate Press until Oct. when it reverted to Mahon.



newsagent – frequently a widow with dependents, and such were the likeliest prey – sometimes ceased to sell for a time. But upon the whole they disregarded the unwarranted interference of the police. After all, the paper had a sale [p. 3] and a slowly increasing sale, and that was the business way to regard it. After publication in Dublin ceased the paper was removed to Belfast and continued there for a time until our improved position generally enabled it to be brought back to Dublin, which was on all counts a preferable centre. In Belfast the commandant of the city again interfered.<sup>103</sup> This time, though, by way of warning only. As a matter of fact, the weekly review of the [First World] War which appeared in the paper was what they sought to have stopped.<sup>104</sup> Just then things were going very badly for the Allies, and the review never minced matters in commenting on the operations. We were letting too many cats out of the bag. This weekly review made for the sale of the paper even amongst non-Volunteers, but it had to be stopped or the paper would have been suppressed. After ceasing the review, there was no further interference with the journal.

After my return to Dublin from the south-west my next expedition was to the opposite angle of the country – the south-east. On that occasion, I visited three Volunteer centres in Wexford county: Enniscorthy, Wexford and New Ross, as well as Waterford city.<sup>105</sup> In Wexford town Commandant Sinnott was absent and I heard nothing except that the public feeling was very adverse, as indeed it always continued to be.<sup>106</sup> In New Ross I met the officers of the local corps and expected favourable results from the material I was informed was available. In Waterford there was a small, isolated band of men of an exceptional stamp blessed with an excellent officer in Captain Woods who nursed them along and moulded them gradually into a very efficient company.<sup>107</sup> They were, as were New Ross also, poorly armed at this time. It was unfortunate that later events have left me no longer on as friendly footing as before with some of the Waterford Volunteers. In Enniscorthy alone did I, on this occasion, meet with a really important body of Volunteers. At this time there were three companies in the town, but the organisation and command of those companies was in a most unsatisfactory state. It will appear later that these three companies were weeded down to one very good company with a good level of command, but it took a year to do this; the material in Enniscorthy was good and the men [p. 4] turned out well on special occasions, but no local man had sufficient authority with them to keep them regularly to their work. On the occasion of this visit to Enniscorthy, I arranged for a night manoeuvre wherein the town companies were to attack Scarawalsh Bridge, 3½ miles

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<sup>103</sup> It is not clear to whom O’Connell referred in this instance. In 1915 the commissioner of police in Belfast was Thomas J. Smith and the military commander of Victoria Barracks was Col. C. R. Donns.

<sup>104</sup> The *Irish Volunteer* contained a section entitled: ‘The War’ between 9 Jan. and 13 Mar. 1915.

<sup>105</sup> According to the police, O’Connell was in New Ross from 16 to 18 Feb. 1915: ‘Precis of information received in the Crime Special Branch during March 1915’ (TNA, CO 904/96).

<sup>106</sup> Seán (John) Sinnott was appointed acting commandant of Wexford in Jan. 1915: *Irish Volunteer*, 30 Jan. 1915.

<sup>107</sup> Peadar Woods was a coachbuilder by profession and a member of the Gaelic League, IRB and the John Mitchel hurling club in Waterford city which served as a cover for the IRB.

away, that point to be defended by the Ferns company, who had to march in about the same distance. On this occasion, it was thought necessary by the local officers to parade the men for a route march merely and over 100 men fell in. Once launched on the night march, the men carried on right enough. There was disorder, naturally, but it was apparent that a certain amount of training had been done, even though a few had to be forestalled in an attempt to take up a strong position in Aidan Redmond's public house near the western end of the bridge.

I have mentioned that the question of officering the Irish Volunteers presented great difficulties. The root of the trouble was the popular elective method of appointing officers. Many different types of officers were elected, and they had nothing in common except the accidental fact of having been prominent nationalists in their districts. For example, some of them had been prominent in GAA circles – perhaps as captain of a hurling club or the like. In the main, these men were of the right stamp for usually the captain of an athletic club has qualities of leadership. But unfortunately the athletic activities of such men conflicted with their military duties, and when a match conflicted with a parade or a field day too often the parade or field day was put into the background. And, naturally, it would be asking too much of man to do both on the same day: a few hours' serious field work is severe either before or after a tiring match, no matter how good a man's training, and then he had to be ready for work the next day. It was a fact that the Volunteers did not receive from the GAA the help they expected – nay, to which later on they might fairly be considered entitled.

Again, men were made officers because they were energetic organisers of national affairs or even good public speakers. These are not positive disqualifications for military officership, but [p. 5] they nonetheless are signs of abilities in other than military directions. The obliging man who does everything is not the man to order others to do things, nor is the man of well-thought out words the man for prompt grasp of a situation and instant consequent action. Some good officers had been Gaelic League organisers or teachers but their training obviously was such as to impart a certain facility of instruction and also a certain degree of control. Their position was thus fundamentally different from that of the others.

It was on the occasion of this my first to Wexford that I first met Captain Whitmore who was one of the best officers we had in the entire country.<sup>108</sup> Ferns was his personal command and later he was appointed to the command of North Wexford when the companies of that district were organised into a battalion. This was a couple of months later.

My third country visit was to the Midlands area – the Counties of Westmeath and King's.<sup>109</sup> On this occasion, too, I remember the weather was very wet and bad. I left Dublin

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<sup>108</sup> William James Brennan-Whitmore (1886-1977) commanded Ferns company Irish Volunteers; adjutant North Wexford Brigade 1914; appointed staff officer April 1916; ordered by James Connolly to establish a post on North Earl Street during 1916 Rising: see Patrick Long, 'Whitmore, William James Brennan', *DIB*.

<sup>109</sup> Now county Offaly.

for Edenderry on a Saturday evening and that evening later and next morning I met most of the men in the local corps. I never heard anything further about the Edenderry Volunteers after this occasion and they may have ceased to exist. Yet, obviously, Edenderry would be an important link in any system of communication from Dublin towards the west of Ireland.

Edenderry is a railway cul-de-sac – to call it a terminal would be too much. It has no Sunday train service that would suit to bring me to either Athlone or Tullamore, both of which I wished to visit. Neither on this occasion had I any bicycle. Unless, therefore, I was prepared to waste two days, there was no option but to walk toward Tullamore twenty miles away. With ordinary luck I should be easily able to catch the evening mail car from Philipstown rather more than halfway from Edenderry. On this occasion, however, the road was in poor condition, there was a steady drizzle, and a strong head wind. For a man encumbered by a frieze overcoat and a [p. 6] handbag there was a possibility of missing the car. But happily I had no such ill-fortune and did reach Tullamore that evening, though in soaked and fatigued condition. I stayed all next day in Tullamore leaving for Athlone in the morning.

I found the Tullamore Volunteers distinctly hopeful of being able to improve their circumstances in the district generally, provided they could secure a competent instructor. For this purpose, chiefly, they wished to get refunded a sum of, I think, £15 paid to The O’Rahilly for arms and which The O’Rahilly was reluctant to part with. Upon going into all the circumstances, I was inclined to favour the Tullamore men’s application. It appeared that there was really work for an instructor in the district and there did not appear any immediate necessity for extra arms.

The difficulty of arms was of a manifold kind and caused us trouble in numberless different directions. Money coming from America, from private subscriptions, or from the defence of Ireland fund<sup>110</sup> was devoted to the purchase of arms in bulk. These arms were then retailed in varying quantities to corps of Volunteers or to individual Volunteers. In many cases it was customary to hand over the arms on payment of a sum down, the balance to be paid by instalments. Usually the instalments were in arrears – often badly in arrears – and the capital money continuously available for the purchase of new stocks of arms gradually became depleted. Consequently, The O’Rahilly never parted with ready cash once he got it. I believe the present case was the only one in which such a thing ever happened. And it must be remembered that we were not in a position to hold out inexorably until payment was made before the arms were delivered. The addition of arms to a company caused a favourable effect in a locality: it heartened our own men and improved the neighbour’s opinion of us, thus stimulating recruiting. Again our storage facilities in Dublin were limited and liable to be raided for all we knew. It was much safer to have the arms distributed through the country than accumulating in Dublin.

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<sup>110</sup> This was a national collection to arm and equip the Irish Volunteers.

[p. 7] From Tullamore I went to Athlone and cycled out from there to Tang to interview Fr O'Reilly, the curate there, who had kept a small corps together.<sup>111</sup> To do this, the good man had found it necessary to resort to a harmless subterfuge. He himself stood in with one force to the extent of communicating with headquarters and with the neighbouring corps. But to keep his men from disbanding automatically he did not call them Irish Volunteers, for then they would certainly be branded as Sinn Féiners by the local politicians – 'give a dog a bad name and hang him'! But this incident will very well serve to show how very varied and ill-defined were the opinions of people who favoured the Volunteer force in the country at large, and how vastly they differed from the extreme revolutionary principles held by some of our friends in Dublin. At all events, Fr O'Reilly was prepared to stand in in a small way to help pay the expenses of an instructor for this Midlands area. In Athlone also, they favoured the project and were prepared to stand in. Athlone, naturally, a strong military town, was dead against us, but there was a small local corps there which served as a connecting link with Galway at a later date when the force as a whole was getting on its feet again. To make a long story short, I reported favourably upon the sending of an instructor to this Midlands district to spend half his time in Athlone and half in Tullamore as being the most suitable railroad centres, and to cover as much of the neighbouring country as he could.

One district where we obtained very good results for a time was Tyrrellspass, where an excellent corps was formed and remained in being until Rev Fr \_\_\_\_\_<sup>112</sup> was removed from the district for his influence had been paramount and he gave the Volunteers every assistance in his power. We had reason to believe that the removal of this priest was partly due to government representations.

Owing to the distinct promise of a return from this district, The O'Rahilly refunded the money at headquarters.

My principal object on this journey was to 'place' Instructor Maguire who was unemployed at the time. He was one of the very [p. 8] few professional instructors still available. He was a naval pensioner who was over the age to be called up at first for war service, and though a naval man was an excellent military instructor. Just then the Dublin companies were coming to a stage at which their own officers were able to 'carry on' fairly well and his services were no longer required there. This will indicate from another point the gulf between the Dublin and country Volunteers as a military force. At all events, it was arranged that Instructor Maguire should take up his duties in the Midlands at once and for some months he carried on very useful work in that district. Presently, however, the

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<sup>111</sup> P. O'Reilly was curate of Tang, county Westmeath in the diocese of Meath: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 433. The authorities recorded that he was strongly opposed to enlistment in the British army and that he left the country for China in mid-Oct. 1915.

<sup>112</sup> P. Smith was curate in Tyrrellspass at this time: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 143.

increasing demands of the war caused the calling up of another 'ban' for old sailors and Maguire was ordered to report at Queenstown.<sup>113</sup>

So far my journey through the country may not have seemed to be of very much use – mere flying visits covering much ground in a week. But to me personally they were of the greatest use because I met Volunteers from all parts and got first-hand knowledge of local conditions. If subsequently that knowledge was not made the fullest use of, I was not to blame. But these visits had an excellent effect on the country companies in this way: they removed the sense of isolation which some of them felt. The country Volunteers were brought into immediate contact with headquarters and realised that they were part of one organised force. Of course on different points I was often in a position to give advice and suggestions even though not enabled to be very long in any place.

My time in Dublin at this period was varied by occasional mildly exciting incidents of which the following will serve as an example. One day Volunteer headquarters were somewhat flurried by the news that the house of Mrs Humphreys<sup>114</sup> and Miss O'Rahilly,<sup>115</sup> The O'Rahilly's sisters, in Morehampton Road<sup>116</sup> had been raided by the police for arms and some twenty revolvers had been seized. The problem was how to remove some eighty other revolvers and several thousand rounds of ammunition which had been overlooked! There was reason to believe that a watch was being kept on the house all [p. 9] the time. It was decided that the ladies of the house should have a musical at home – and a private gun-running in, or rather out of, the next room. Three or four double sashes of strong folded calico were prepared and put on strongly with safety-pins on the men selected: \_\_\_\_ facetiously regretted that he had not enough calico to complete the brigand effect by the addition of bows! Each of these contained nearly a score of revolvers. For my part, I was detailed to get a bag from a golfing friend. As a matter of fact, I was unable to do so and got a violin case instead – not too out of place, however, for a musical evening. The clearance was successfully carried out without any loss whatever. In the violin case I succeeded in bringing 1,500 cartridges and one revolver to a university residence for young ladies in Stephen's Green, the presence of whose guardian nuns might fairly be considered a safeguard in anything approaching ordinary circumstances.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Patrick E. Maguire drilled Volunteers in Athlone and Tullamore from Apr. 1915 until called up on 26 July 1915. His work as a Volunteer instructor brought him to the attention of the special branch which concluded that 'he was merely earning his living by acting as a paid drill instructor': see 'Precis of information received in the Crime Special Branch during July 1915' (TNA, CO 904/97).

<sup>114</sup> O'Rahilly's sister Nell (Mary Ellen) was married to David Humphreys, a medical doctor, and the couple had two sons and a daughter, Sighle, who became a well-known republican activist.

<sup>115</sup> Anna (Áine) O'Rahilly, a founding member of Cumann na mBan.

<sup>116</sup> The house was in fact 54 Northumberland Road. This incident is recalled by Áine O'Rahilly in IMA, BMH WS 333, pp 2-3.

<sup>117</sup> This residence was Dominican Hall. In her statement to the BMH, Maureen McGavock, then attending UCD and a member of Cumann na mBan, recalled storing two violin cases containing revolvers and ammunition for O'Connell: Mrs Seán Beaumont (née Maureen McGavock) (IMA, BMH WS 385, p. 1).

All through my journeys over the country I always paid much more attention to the training of existing companies than to the forming of new ones. It seemed to me that the preliminary organising work should be carried out by the local men. They were best circumstanced for getting together the half-dozen or so men in a locality most likely to take a prominent part. These in their turn would arrange to have all the likely men assemble at a suitable time and place. Then the best course was to fall them in at once for squad drill without any speech-making at all. Appeals to the past glories of our race – which always appeared largely imaginary to me – didn't seem to lead very far and seemed to have been largely over done in former times. For my part, I never made such.

I well remember the only occasion on which I made a public speech of very short duration: it was at Freshford, County Kilkenny in the autumn of 1915. The occasion was just after a small field exercise between the local corps and a contingent from Kilkenny city.<sup>118</sup> I made a few remarks criticising the day's work and then emphasised the fact that our movement was open and above board and that its characteristic was that we 'didn't give a damn'. What impresses the incident on my memory was the twist given to it by the local [p. 10] RIC sergeant at my subsequent examination at Richmond Barracks, Dublin.<sup>119</sup> That worthy peace officer described me as urging the Volunteers 'to trust in their own right arms', or some such *ráméis*<sup>120</sup> but I punctured his story by asking him if he had taken a note of my words. True to his kind he had not, but also true to his kind he was 'quite positive'. I was 'quite positive' of the contrary and am still, though I, naturally, have not the faintest intention of raising the point ever again.

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### Chapter 3

Weekly courses of training – Cork – South-east – A field day of raw corps – Command of Wexford Brigade – County boards – Improvement in our status – Project of organising Tyrone – Police surveillance – New factors favouring us – Progress in Tyrone

It seemed worthwhile to follow up my flying visits by a series of courses of training in different places, each lasting for a week. This would in some sort palliate the great dearth of permanent instructors which was a continual difficulty through the country. Even a week would give the men some sort of idea of discipline and some idea of how to carry on by themselves. The first suggestion of this system of training came from Cork city who applied for me to go there and take up the duties of instructor for a week or a fortnight, which I did

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<sup>118</sup> According to the police, O'Connell was in Kilkenny between 25 Sept. and 10 Oct. 1915: County Inspector Kilkenny report for Oct. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/98).

<sup>119</sup> This is a reference to O'Connell's arrest after the 1916 Rising. Like many others, he was detained for a period in Richmond Barracks in Inchicore, Dublin prior to internment.

<sup>120</sup> Translation: 'Nonsense'.

early in March. The Cork companies were well enough instructed in close order and parade drill and merely required a grounding in field work. I was able to fit into the week two Sunday field days, with pretty large numbers; two afternoon cycle rides, lectures, and a little night marching every night. The results were very gratifying, although, naturally, less well-trained companies would not be so capable of profiting by the extra instruction. I was further able to furnish the Cork officers with a list of suitable text books and hints for continuing training. The night before I left, the corps presented me with a splendid silver-mounted blackthorn.

My second effort in the direction of these courses of a week's training was in the south-east, where I spent the latter part of April and the early part of May: four weeks in all. In that period, I visited Kilkenny, Waterford, New Ross and Wexford. At the time, the Irish Volunteers as a whole had weathered the severe trials of their early days and were beginning to walk more surely. The improvement in their position was, so far, only in the direction of increased self-confidence: there was, as yet, no addition in the shape of favourable public opinion. Unquestionably, the fact of a week's steady extra drill at such a time was well calculated to improve their morale and confirm their confidence. Besides, I made [p. 2] it my business on this occasion to lay the first foundation of a system of inter-communication and cooperation between the companies in this district generally.

The area was large and quite isolated from any other district where we had any considerable following. Also, this area possessed certain well-defined lines of communication within itself which were possible of development. As yet, the centres were rather wide apart, though all the distances were cyclabale (sic). But I hoped that it would be possible in course of time to establish small intermediate corps as connecting links between the already existing centres. I shall have occasion later to enter in much detail into those points in reference to which I differed materially from the headquarters view about this area as a whole. On the occasion of this first considerable visit, I had an entirely open mind. It was only subsequently when I saw the lines on which matters were actually developing that I formulated a definite opinion.

I think that in all my experience of the Volunteers I never met any other company that improved so much as the Kilkenny city company did on its first showing. When I went there first, it was not a military corps at all. Its numbers had dwindled to little more than a score of men, who were too shame-faced to appear in public in a formed body precisely by reason of their smallness.<sup>121</sup> They had a drill-hall where they met and had a smoke and a chat around the fire. Only one single military activity did they continue: the shot. And it *was* shooting.<sup>122</sup> The Kilkenny Volunteers practised on a short indoor range with a high quality air rifle and they were also fortunate enough to possess an outdoor range on which they

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<sup>121</sup> According to Thomas Treacy 28 men sided with the Irish Volunteers at the time of the split and 23 Volunteers mustered when O'Connell first visited Kilkenny: Thomas Treacy (IMA, BMH WS 590, pp 4-6).

<sup>122</sup> O'Connell's emphasis.

could fire up to 150 yards.<sup>123</sup> At all events, the company, having a nucleus of first rate men, set to work and took in hand the work of reconstruction. Before I left they were in a condition to arrange for a field day with New Ross which entailed the contingents cycling beyond Inistioge – a distance of over twenty miles. When I left Kilkenny for Waterford, the corps was ready to climb.

Waterford I found much as it has been in February – without [p. 3] any increase in respect of numbers, but pegging away steadily. A drawback under which the Waterford men laboured was isolation. They were fifteen miles from New Ross, the nearest corps, and there were not in the Waterford company more than half a dozen cyclists so that cooperation was practically impossible with any regularity.

New Ross had made a slight move forward having acquired a small extra contingent from the Mile Bush district, a few miles from the town, in the County Kilkenny, however. The progress of the New Ross corps, unfortunately, did not continue after this. The numbers were now at a maximum and later there were cases of men ceasing to drill owing to pressure being brought against them in their civil occupations. But later there was what might be called an *intensive* improvement, for those men in this corps who were able to continue their training reached a very creditable standard of instruction.

The joint manoeuvres I had arranged with Kilkenny amply justified the trouble entailed. It is true that as a military exercise this field day – the first in which either had taken part – was useful chiefly as an example of how *not* to do it, but it was very important from the point of view of linking-up. Especially was this the case because Kilkenny despatch-riders – motor cyclists – were able to meet the Ross officers personally and learned their way about the neighbourhood. In the tactical work of the day Kilkenny had secured most of the Ross men as prisoners in detail only to find that the survivors had come on their stacked bicycles by accident and thus cut them off! I shall not easily forget the amazement on the faces of the local RIC when men appeared in dozens on bicycles coming from no one knew where.

A few days later, in company with a Ross despatch-rider, I cycled to Waterford, and, although there is no other town in Ireland so easy to watch the approaches to, and, although there were half a dozen plain-clothed police, got away again without being seen. We had, naturally, no object whatever for secrecy – other than to satisfy ourselves that it could be done if we wished. Our plain-clothes [p. 4] people never dreamt of a cyclist entering the city across the ferry near Reginald's Tower!<sup>124</sup>

From Ross I proceeded to Wexford – my second visit there. I found the Wexford corps small and unpopular, but well-trained and efficient. Indeed, it was a fine example of what a few good men could do by way of carrying on under the gravest difficulties. On the

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<sup>123</sup> The air rifle range was in the Volunteer hall on St Kieran's Street, Kilkenny; the outdoor range was located in a field owned by Richard Maher on Lower Dunmore Road, Kilkenny. Individual Volunteers covered the cost of any ammunition fired during shooting practice: see Thomas Treacy (IMA, BMH WS 590, p. 4).

<sup>124</sup> O'Connell mistakenly referred to this as 'Reynold's Tower'.



last evening of my stay in Wexford we marched through the streets, having rather more than the average muster. It was the first time the Wexford corps had appeared in a formed body in the town for six months. And it was not without its effect as an indication of returning confidence. An expedition I essayed to Rathangan and Taghmon on this occasion in the hope of getting corps started in one or other of those centres proved abortive on this occasion, although later companies were formed in both those localities.

On the occasion of this visit to Wexford I paid a visit to Enniscorthy to attend a meeting of the Wexford County Board, the chief executive body of the Volunteers in the county. On this occasion Captain Whitmore of Ferns was appointed to the command of a battalion formed of all the companies in the northern portion of the county. It was hoped that this unification would have a good effect in improving the energy and training of the men in this district. This expectation was not realised for Captain Whitmore lived several miles from Enniscorthy, and Enniscorthy was the only possible headquarters for a North Wexford Battalion. Slackness of subordinates vitiated all attempts to command through the instrumentality of written orders and so the efficiency of these units did not improve, but at best remained stationary.

Indeed the Wexford Volunteers were very unfortunately circumstanced in the matter of command. I have explained the difficulties in the Enniscorthy district; but to a still greater extent the same affairs obtained through the county as a whole. Commandant [Seán] Sinnott of Wexford had command of all the Volunteers in the county, but his own corps in Wexford town was small and amid a hostile population. Geographically, Enniscorthy – and not Wexford – is the [p. 5] centre of the county and Enniscorthy is fifteen miles from Wexford. Consequently, to command the whole force from Wexford was an almost impossible task. Subsequently, the difficulty was somewhat palliated by brigading the Wexford Volunteers and promoting Lieutenant Seamus Doyle of Enniscorthy, a very good and energetic administrative officer, to be brigade adjutant.<sup>125</sup> But this was a good bit later.

I have mentioned the Wexford County Board. These county boards were committees of representatives of the different corps in a county and they administered the working of the Volunteers in the different counties. At first they consisted of influential local men, but these were found to be fonder of talking than of working and to have no real idea of military business. Gradually, these boards became militarised and the commanding officer of each corps became *ipso facto* its representative. Eventually, the name ‘county board’ was dropped and replaced by ‘brigade’ or ‘battalion’ council as the case might be. In every case the change was found to make for the more efficient working of the Volunteer force as a whole.

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<sup>125</sup> Seamus Doyle joined the Gaelic League 1900; joined IRB 1907 and Irish Volunteers in Enniscorthy 1913; secretary of county board 1914; adjutant Enniscorthy Battalion Irish Volunteers after the split; adjutant Wexford Brigade 1916; participated in mobilization at Enniscorthy at Easter 1916; sentenced to death but commuted to penal servitude for five years; imprisoned in Dartmoor and Lewes (1916-17); member of second Dáil.

By the time I returned to Dublin after this month's tour, it was evident that our position in the country generally had undergone a substantial improvement. From day to day, or even from week to week, it was not possible to observe this as a process. But comparing the state of affairs then, in the middle of May, with what they had been at the beginning of the year, it was easy to notice the change. There was no longer an immediate prospect of our speedy extinction: moribund companies were reviving, and new men were coming in from time to time. We were getting to have some sort of an idea as to how we stood and had distinct hopes for the future. We began to think seriously of breaking new ground for there was no longer any fear of our men dying away in any district where we had organised corps.

In accordance with this new proposal, it was decided that I should go to Tyrone for a couple of months. Tyrone was selected largely, I believe, as a compliment to Mr Joseph McGarrity of [p. 6] Philadelphia, a Tyrone man by birth and president of the American Volunteers Aid Association.<sup>126</sup> He had expressed a wish that something should be done in the way of organising that district. It was not at all an easy matter because we had only a nominal following in Tyrone and no following at all in any neighbouring county. In addition, the Irish Parliamentary Party resented this effort on our part to extend our 'sphere of influence' and set themselves to prevent our development. My appearance in Tyrone was the signal for an attempt to re-organise the National [Redmondite] Volunteers. Captain Eckersley, who before the split had been an instructor at Donaghmore [county Tyrone], was sent northward on this duty.<sup>127</sup> Captain Eckersley was by birth an Englishman and, although quite sincere in his efforts to re-organise the National Volunteers as against the Carsonites, was not able to effect anything. As a matter of fact, his employers did not care whether he effected anything or not provided he rendered my efforts useless.

Tyrone was the only place where I personally found the local police took an exhaustive interest in my doings. Practically, I was never without them, except when going from one place to another on my motorcycle. I am inclined to think that this was due to a hope that such a course of action would cow the young men and prevent them joining the Volunteers: it was easier to do this than to detach them if once they should have joined. Clearly, it was sound policy to try and prevent my getting any results in a district where I was struggling under difficulties to break new ground. Doubtless, the line of reasoning wished to be inculcated was such as this: this man is under strict police surveillance and so he must be a 'bad character', a 'dangerous man' and the like. Young men were warned to 'have nothing to do with me', and certainly these efforts met with some limited success.

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<sup>126</sup> Joseph McGarrity (1874-1940) joined Clan na Gael 1893, elected to national executive 1912; raised \$20,000 for Irish Volunteers for arms 1914; opened discussions with German ambassador von Bernstorff about German assistance to Ireland during First World War: see Francis M. Carroll, 'McGarrity, Joseph', *DIB*.

<sup>127</sup> John A. Eckersley was a captain on the staff of the National Volunteers. Throughout 1915 he was deployed in various parts of the country as a National Volunteer organizer.

This surveillance began at Newtownstewart, where it had the desired effect. I was nearly a week in Newtownstewart and the only incidents I remember were three occasions on which I derived a little harmless amusement from the activities of the guardians of law and order. Whenever I went out for a walk I was followed by a [p. 7] uniformed policeman at a distance of twenty or thirty yards. The first evening I went out the distance was about fifty yards, but on that occasion I hopped over the fence at a turn and running round the base of a hillock I climbed it and lay among the heather on top watching the policeman lengthening his step as far as the next turn in desperate anxiety at losing me. I turned back thereupon and presently up comes my friend on a borrowed bicycle and dismounts close to me, leaving the machine to be found by its owner, who apparently had arranged to follow it. Next morning I walked to Strabane from Newtown[stewart] – 10 miles – at a fast clip. I wished to go to Strabane and had plenty of time. My unfortunate attendant was scarcely as fit as I was for at Sion Mills – ‘three miles to go’ – I could hear his feet beginning to drag, striking obliquely to the surface. By the time I reached Strabane, he was like a dog with his tongue hanging out for the day was rather warm and, doubtless, he was not sorry to hand me over to his brothers-in-arms. The next day I was enabled to get another of them half drenched by making him walk in heavy rain from Newtown[stewart] to Gortin – seven miles. He wore only the short regulation cape and, naturally, his legs were soaking, I being safe in an oilskin poncho and leggings the while. I am firmly convinced that the Newtownstewart ‘force’ was relieved to see the last of me!

Only on one occasion was I ever solemnly catechised by an RIC man: this was in Strabane. I answered a few questions to begin and then asked him why he was questioning me. Thereupon, he told me the Defence of the Realm Act<sup>128</sup> gave him great powers and was somewhat taken aback when I said that if I didn’t know he had those powers at the moment I would not answer him at all. Nor would I have – beyond telling him to go to the devil, a personal devil for choice. We conversed amicably and he showed me the house of a man I was looking for, who, however, was out.

In the work of organising Tyrone I received considerable assistance from the younger clergy. As a rule the parish priests were opposed to us, taking it for granted that we were pro-Germans and sought to overthrow the influence of the [Irish] Parliamentary Party in [p. 8] whom they still believed. The curates, on the other hand, believed the Party to be the sham it was increasingly proving itself to be and were correspondingly ready to forward the work of the Irish Volunteers. They were hampered by the fact that the powerful AOH<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Introduced in Aug. 1914, this wide-ranging emergency legislation gave the government power to prosecute anyone whose actions were deemed to ‘jeopardise the success of the operations of His Majesty’s forces or to assist the enemy’. It was extended several times during the war.

<sup>129</sup> The Ancient Order of Hibernians was a Catholic association which emerged in Ulster in the nineteenth century in opposition to the Orange Order. Under the presidency of Joseph Devlin MP, it expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century. This was helped by the removal of a clerical ban in 1909 and its designation as a friendly society. By 1912 it was the most powerful nationalist body in county Tyrone.

organisation was working vigorously against us at first and practically all the young men were Hibernians.

One factor that contributed powerfully to recruiting for us after a time was the formation of the coalition government<sup>130</sup> with Sir Edward Carson in the cabinet.<sup>131</sup> This greatly strengthened our position all over the country, but the effect in Tyrone was, naturally, very big indeed. It was calculated to bring things home to them in a personal way in the North that Carson, the originator and recognised head of the Ulster Volunteer Force and all that it stood for, should be amongst the highest in authority. It signified, at all events, that whatever happened the Ulster Volunteers would not be likely to be heavy sufferers. I believe that had the appointment of Sir Edward Carson not taken place, my efforts towards the re-organisation of the Volunteers in mid-Ulster would have met with no success. Naturally, the local men who were seeking to prepare the way for me used the lever this afforded to the utmost extent of their power.

An effort was made to turn my flank at a meeting convened to establish non-party Volunteers to be called Tyrone Volunteers – to such a pass had parochialism in Irish nationalism gone. At this meeting attended representatives of formerly existing corps. The project broke down upon its being ascertained that these Tyrone Volunteers would be only nominally neutral for when the question was asked – where would instructors come from – the answer was: ‘Mr John Redmond’. The subterfuge was too transparent. Indeed, about this time, too, a local ordinance went forth to the purport that every AOH division should have a corps of National Volunteers attached to it and that these corps should have the Hibernian halls for the purposes of instruction and drill. Most of these halls would not give space for a dozen files to fall in so the utter worthlessness of the idea was obvious. But the incident serves to show the type [p. 9] of military training that was contemplated by some Irish patriots.

But all through the summer [there was] an increasing spirit of discontent with the leadership and principles of the Irish Parliamentary Party, having its rise in the establishment of the coalition government. A number of moderate nationalists of considerable local prominence in various districts began to make protests upon various heads: letters were written to the papers, and public bodies passed resolutions condemning or at least criticising the powers that were. As yet there was no very sweeping indication of the country’s change of feeling, but the handwriting was on the wall for all that. Naturally, this state of public feeling caused us to be regarded with more favour than before.

My first actual organising work in Tyrone was in the Clogher district, where there had been three half companies before the split. There was a considerable amount of nursing

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<sup>130</sup> This was formed by H. H. Asquith as prime minister on 25 May 1915 and included several members of the opposition.

<sup>131</sup> Edward Carson (1854-1935) MP for Dublin University (1890-1918) and Belfast Duncairn (1918-21); leader of Irish Unionist Party 1910; attorney general (May-Nov. 1915); First Lord of Admiralty (1916-17); minister without portfolio (1917-18): see Alvin Jackson, ‘Carson, Edward Henry’, *DIB*.

necessary owing to the local feeling I have described, but when I left the North the more steadfast men in the neighbourhood were fairly safely banded into a company, and they were fortunate enough to have an excellent local man – formerly in the militia – for instructor and commanding officer. From Clogher I went to Carrickmore where the material had a better spirit, or rather where Hibernian influences were not so strong. Here I was able to get good work accomplished, and a considerable area was included in this case. The great majority of the corps were cyclists and, for this reason, they were particularly useful. The distances between the various companies in Tyrone were considerable and the training of this rather centrally-placed corps as cyclists was of great assistance as will appear later. Adjoining to the Carrickmore corps was Sixmilecross, where another small corps was formed and, on the other side, I laid the foundations of a corps at Pomeroy on the main road to Dungannon, while at Donaghmore, two miles from Dungannon, there was already a small well-trained corps.

It will be observed that all the localities mentioned are in the southern part of County Tyrone. In the northern part of the county I visited only Glenelly in the very broken mountainous [p. 10] district on the borders of County Derry. Here also a small corps was formed in my time and later on other units joined up in this northern area.

On the eve of my departure from Tyrone there were existing in the southern area Volunteer companies at Sixmilecross, Carrickmore, Galbally, Donaghmore and Clogher. There were prospects of several other small detached sections and of even companies in the Coalisland district. For the purposes of consolidating the Volunteers as a body, I suggested to headquarters – and urged very strongly – the forming all these companies into a South Tyrone Battalion. It is true the area of this battalion from end to end would be nearly forty miles, but the very unusually large number of cyclists made this much less of a drawback than it would ordinarily have proved to be. Headquarters sanctioned this and also the appointment of Captain McRory (Sixmilecross) to be commandant of the battalion.<sup>132</sup> For this last appointment I had to fight hard at headquarters because proved nationalism was there frequently considered an ample qualification for command, and in Captain McRory's case the only proven qualification was military efficiency. Later on, however, his nationalism proved to be good enough. Subsequently, Captain McRory was appointed organiser and instructor for the whole county and was paid by the county companies, while, of course, making reports to and being at the orders of headquarters.

It was only really when I was leaving Tyrone, towards the end of July [1915], that it was possible to note the beginnings of real progress. The great contributing causes were the conscription scare, MacNeill's meeting at Cappagh, the deportations, and the first training camp. These I shall now describe in order mentioned, leaving the last to the special chapter where properly it belongs.

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<sup>132</sup> Hugh McRory had served as an officer in the American army. He was captain Sixmilecross and Dunmoyle company: see Seán Corr (IMA, BMH WS 145, p. 4).

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## Chapter 4

First conscription scare – Our measures to meet it – Standing order – Organising public opinion – My journey to Cavan – Police attempt to terrorise at Cappagh – The four deportation orders – The O’Donovan Rossa funeral

I was hurriedly summoned to Dublin to attend a general council<sup>133</sup> meeting on Sunday June \_\_\_\_.<sup>134</sup> The telegram summoning me I received on a Friday evening, but I missed the evening train from Omagh that evening and had to go by the night mail instead. I got into Amiens Street station between 5 and 6 am. My departure from Omagh had been telegraphed – an RIC sergeant and constable were there to give me a send-off, and a G-man was ‘on the job’ to welcome me.<sup>135</sup>

This was on the occasion of the first registration bill, which, of course, everyone recognised to be thin edge of the conscription wedge in England.<sup>136</sup> The question was would the bill be made to apply to Ireland? If it did our course was clear: we were pledged to resist it, and we meant to resist it. Moreover, the undertaking was by no means of a hopeless nature. To begin with we could count on practically the undivided support of the whole population of the country. The most moderate nationalists, even, considered themselves under no obligation to give their lives for the British Empire, and they were like ourselves quite of the opinion that they ‘might as well die in Ireland as die in France’. All they wanted was an example and this we could supply. We were never doubtful upon questions in which we could depend on the support of all Ireland. It was only when hoeing our own row that we felt at all weak. The object of this general council meeting was to formulate a definite policy and to spread it through the country with the least possible delay.

Briefly the line of action decided on was this: (a) as registration would, naturally, precede conscription the men were to refuse to register; (b) in case of an attempt being made to seize a man he was to evade it if possible; (c) if escape was impossible [p. 2] he was to resist; (d) he was to be assisted by friends and neighbours to the best of their power. It will be seen that these ordinances were elastic enough to serve for the guidance of every

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<sup>133</sup> This met monthly and was part of the governing structure of the Volunteers. It consisted of the executive committee and one delegate from each county in Ireland and one from each of the nine cities of Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Derry, Waterford, Galway, Sligo and Kilkenny.

<sup>134</sup> The meeting was on Sunday 4 July 1915.

<sup>135</sup> G division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police had responsibility for monitoring political crime. Its headquarters was at 1-8 Great Brunswick (now Pearse) Street. O’Connell featured on police lists of dangerous suspects.

<sup>136</sup> The National Registration Act was passed on 15 July 1915 to ascertain the number between the ages of 15 and 65 engaged in each trade.

man in Ireland – and this was precisely our object. In view of our position, as an example to the country, it was necessary to have a scheme of action within the competence of the whole country. A comprehensive military scheme for our own trained men would not be applicable for totally untrained men with no chance of technical leadership. But clearly, as is evident from (d) above, we by no means forewent the advantages accruing to us from our training.

Besides to secure the defeat of a conscription, it is by no means necessary to achieve the military defeat of the enemy – far from it. The object is entirely attained *if no recruits are forthcoming*. Now a recruit, volunteer or conscript, is worthless unless sound in wind or limb but any man who resists to a finish will certainly not be this, even if alive at all which is not likely. And at best he thus fails to replace any men he may himself have killed in the chase. In short, the English would lose a trained soldier for the untrained man they eventually would fail to secure. Clearly, then, the experiment could not succeed if resisted. And resisted it certainly would have been.

But if it were possible to forestall the business by bringing about a public opinion in the face of which the bill would not be applied to Ireland, clearly that was a preferable course as things were; and the reason it was decided to start a rush organisation of the country so as to round up the greatest possible number of expressions against conscription in the shortest possible time. The method recommended was that such public bodies as district councils, town councils, town tenants leagues etc., letters to the daily press, the local press through the country, and the clergy should voice opinions against it. If a member of parliament or any local leader of unusual importance could be got to make a special statement, so much the better. It is to be observed that in this movement – or rather ‘move’ – the Irish Volunteers were not to appear active: the more moderate the men were who were to make [p. 3] the statements the better. We did not strive after the impossible; we did not seek to get every Irishman to state that he personally would resist conscription to the death. We would be quite satisfied if men who were not in the least danger of conscription themselves would say that every Irishman who was would resist to the death. Every man who attended this meeting of the general council was directed to spread this propaganda as judiciously and as quickly and as widely as possible in his own district. Our efforts on this occasion were crowned with success.

My own orders in this case were clear and admitted of very little delay. I was to go from Tyrone through Monaghan to Cavan and visit all the local Volunteer officials on route, besides as many representative men as I could get into touch with in addition. Fortunately, the route Aughnacloy – Emyvale – Monaghan – Cootehill was not difficult to find and thereafter I knew County Cavan, having lived there at one time.<sup>137</sup> But I remember very well the extraordinarily nice nursing I had to manipulate to make my petrol bring me into Cavan. It was a Sunday evening and there was considerable danger of my getting stuck on the road.

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<sup>137</sup> At the time of the 1911 census the O’Connell family, including J. J., lived in Cavan.

Happily my machine – a Rudge-Multi – was suitable for driving accurately on the gear and I saved myself from being benighted.<sup>138</sup> In Cavan I put up at the Farnham Arms, the proprietor of which was of German extraction and which was largely deserted in consequence.<sup>139</sup> There was quite a possibility of my being recognised in Cavan and although my former friends might not know or care very much what was my business there, the RIC would certainly care and be very anxious to know.

In Cavan I explained my mission to the Rev. Dr Comey, a very great personal friend of my own, and he promised me every help in his power and, in addition, assisted my memory of the roads to different parts of the neighbourhood which I wished to visit.<sup>140</sup>

In Cootehill I called on a namesake of my own the Right Rev. Monsignor O’Connell, who was the parish priest there.<sup>141</sup> He also promised me to give any help he could in the matter of conscription, although he emphasised the fact that he was not a Sinn Féiner in any other sense.

[p. 4] At Cootehill I had rather an unusual experience on the Monday evening at tea. Lieutenant (as he then was) T. M. Kettle<sup>142</sup> MP, another officer and Mr Maxwell Green<sup>143</sup> were at the table. They were on one of those recruiting campaigns that secured so few recruits, and a recruiting meeting took place that evening.<sup>144</sup> I remember nothing about it except that it furnished me with an excellent red herring so to speak. The local RIC were so bent upon keeping ‘order’ that if they had any ‘orders’ about me they forgot all about them.

In Rockcorry, County Monaghan I met the Rev. Lorcan Ó Ciaráin, parish priest – the ‘poorest parish priest in Ireland’ as he described himself.<sup>145</sup> But it was in money only that the reverend gentleman was poor, for in national spirit and energy as well as the qualities of a priest he was rich enough and to spare. Fr Ó Ciaráin had organised and kept going and got armed a Volunteer corps, and had besides trained every male parishioner – and some of the females – to be crack shots; he was a fine marksman himself. I left Rockcorry with the

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<sup>138</sup> The Rudge Multigear series of motorcycles was produced by the British Rudge-Whitworth company between 1911 and 1923.

<sup>139</sup> According to the 1911 census the proprietor was Paul Pershaw, a member of the Church of Ireland, who was born in Germany.

<sup>140</sup> Martin Comey held a doctor of divinity and was curate of Urney, Cavan in the diocese of Kilmore: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 362.

<sup>141</sup> Patrick O’Connell, parish priest of Cootehill and vicar-general: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 425.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas Michael (‘Tom’) Kettle (1880-1916) joined Irish Volunteers 1914; lieutenant in British army with responsibilities for recruitment in Ireland and England 1914; killed on 9 Sept. 1916 at Ginchy: see Donal Lowry, ‘Kettle, Thomas Michael (‘Tom’)', *DIB*.

<sup>143</sup> Joseph Maxwell Green was a deputy lieutenant county Cavan and a former high sheriff. He lived in Tullyvin House, Cootehill, county Cavan.

<sup>144</sup> During the week beginning 7 June 1915 the Central Recruiting Council for Ireland held a series of recruiting meetings in counties Monaghan and Cavan. A meeting in Cootehill on 7 June was addressed by Lieutenant Kettle, Captain Cheevers of The Connaught Rangers and Captain Johnston, Maxwell Green presided: *Irish Independent*, 8 June 1915, *Irish Times*, 10 June 1915.

<sup>145</sup> Laurence O’Kieran was parish priest of Rockcorry, county Monaghan: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 431. Variations of the Irish form of his name – Lorcán Ó Ciaráin – were frequently used.



assured conviction that Rockcorry parish would not be a good place to go looking for conscripts in.

It is now history how the government, viewing the rising tide of opinion in Ireland and finding that it was driving even the [Irish] Parliamentary Party to express opinions against conscription, did not apply the registration measure to the country. There was no doubt but that the Irish Volunteers were a powerful contributory factor towards preventing the application of the bill. They were not on this occasion, I think, the sole factor as they certainly were on the occasion of the far more serious danger the following autumn, when they constituted a military threat. But even now they were a guarantee that the resolute lead would be forthcoming, which alone was needed to keep the country in general quite firm on the question.

The second cause I have mentioned as tending to promote greatly the spread of the Irish Volunteers in Tyrone was the attempt of the police to terrorise the public meeting addressed by [p. 5] Eoin MacNeill and A. Newman (Herbert Pim)<sup>146</sup> at Cappagh village.<sup>147</sup> As far as the terrorising went, I can truthfully say that no Volunteer was terrorised. About the emotions of the police I am not in a position to dogmatise.

It was certainly the strangest ‘monster meeting’ – for so it was advertised – at which I was ever present. It was got up in order to popularise if possible the Irish Volunteer idea in the district. About forty police, armed with carbines and bayonets, were present and about twice that number of Volunteers. The latter were mainly from Donaghmore [and were] reinforced by a cyclist detachment from Carrickmore. All these were pretty well-trained men and nearly all of them were armed with pistols. The Rev. James O’Daly C.C. of Clogher<sup>148</sup> presided at this meeting, at which our objects were set forth in a clear and manly fashion, and emphasis was laid on the different treatment accorded to us and to the Carsonites.<sup>149</sup> Apart from the Volunteers, the police and a few bystanders, there was absolutely no one present. Heavy rain that evening doubtless had something to do with this, but in any case the district is not sufficiently densely populated to furnish anything like a ‘monster’ gathering.

That morning I had got a very bad fall off a bicycle and my face was completely bandaged up and I had to motor to the place of [the] meeting. I arrived at Cappagh in good time to take command of the Carrickmore cyclist detachment, which dismounted and closed up at the foot of the steep hill, which is the village street of Cappagh, and then marched up wheeling their machines. I was very proud of the smart manner in which the detachment ‘at the halt, facing left, formed company’: every man was on his mettle to show the public and

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<sup>146</sup> Herbert Moore Pim (1883-1950) joined Irish Volunteers 1914; wrote regularly for the *Irish Volunteer* under the pseudonym of ‘A. Newman’ and published a pamphlet series, *Tracts for the times*; imprisoned July-Sept. 1915 for Volunteer activities: see Patrick Maume, ‘Pim, Herbert Moore’, *DIB*.

<sup>147</sup> The meeting took place on 29 June 1915.

<sup>148</sup> O’Daly was a member of the IRB and prominently involved in the Irish Volunteers: see James O’Daly (IMA, BMH WS 235).

<sup>149</sup> The Ulster Volunteer Force.

the police that there was least *one* body of trained men in Cappagh that evening. Happily, my bandages did not prevent me giving the words of command, although indeed at a slight inconvenience. The Donaghmore company marched in and Captain Hughes formed them up by themselves.

Presently, the two speakers drove up having come by road [p. 6] from Pomeroy station, half-a-dozen miles away, and the meeting started without much delay. The platform was merely a high bank by the roadside, close to the higher or eastern end of the village, and in front of this the Volunteers formed up in [a] two-deep line, except for a few who were on the platform. Half the police stood about anyhow at the end of the bank and the other half formed up in single rank behind the Volunteers covering the left half of the line; we were between two fires on paper. In front of the Volunteers and opposite the platform stood the district inspector (DI) in command of the police; the head constable, his second in command, and a shorthand note-taker. Captain Hughes was at the head constable's right elbow and I was at the DI's left, both of us slightly in rear of them. If the police became objectionable our front rank would account for all in front, while our rear rank would turn about and lap round the party in rear: the DI, the head [constable] and a sergeant, carrying extra ammunition in a handbag, had special provision made for them.

Subsequently, we had a discussion with the principal local men in the Hibernian hall – a significant occurrence in itself. After that the Volunteers fell in to march home, the cyclist detachment falling in with two of its three lamps at the head of the column and the third at the rear. Apparently, the usual vigilance of the RIC in the matter of bicycle lamps was in abeyance on this occasion. Once clear of the village, I believe the Volunteers fired one or two shots into the air – the only incident of indiscipline I observed the whole time.

Now, looking casually at this event, it might be thought perhaps that the meeting was a failure. And if the mistake of thinking it was a political meeting is made, then certainly from that point of view it must seem a failure and its significance is lost. But its real significance was that our strength had in a manner been challenged and had stood the test. The action of the police was a bluff; we called their bluff and they failed to make it good. The result was far more beneficial to us than if they had elected to ignore us completely. Every man who was present at [p. 7] the meeting acquired increased confidence from the fact and you may be sure we did not omit to give the incident the fullest publicity in our power.

The third factor in the improvement of our position at this period was the serving of four expatriation orders about the middle of July.<sup>150</sup> The men on whom these orders were served were Captains Mellows and McCullough and Messrs Blythe and Pim. They were ordered to leave Ireland within a definite number of days, to report where they resided and to fill certain other requirements. Upon having the orders served on them, they all went to

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<sup>150</sup> Orders to leave Ireland were served on Liam Mellows at Athenry on 11 July 1915; on Ernest Blythe at Ennistymon on 12 July; on H. M. Pim near Dungannon on 13 July; and on Denis McCullough in Belfast on 13 July.

Dublin immediately to obtain directions as to what course was to be taken. The decision was to ignore the orders and this, accordingly, was done. Subsequently, all four were arrested separately and sentenced to some months of imprisonment. Before their arrest, Blythe, McCullough and Pim addressed a meeting of protest in Belfast which received a large amount of publicity.<sup>151</sup> It should be observed that all these three were Ulstermen, so that it would seem the government have had some definite idea in mind in selecting them for this procedure.

From the point of view of the authorities, this particularly drastic measure of deportation was ill-judged. Former deportations had been out of certain counties or other circumscribed areas and did not excite much comment or sympathy. But to order an Irishman out of Ireland seemed to be quite different, and not having sufficient warrant in anything the men had ever done. Very many people who were far from being Sinn Féiners sympathised strongly with them and said they had a perfect right to refuse to leave their own country. Even in prison, the four men experienced this feeling: the prison officials were as lenient towards them as was possible in the circumstances. It was quite clear that the government thought they had made a false move in this matter because upon the expiry of the sentences of imprisonment, they made no effort to enforce the orders but dismissed them with a caution, so to speak. They, for their part, simply went on with the Volunteer duties as before.

[p. 8] I personally expected an order at this time, and I believe the fact that I didn't was due to my holding my tongue and confining myself strictly to the work of training. All the same, it was thought well that I should be as mobile as possible – to quote MacNeill's phrase – until things blew over. It seemed to be the way of the authorities to get busy in an area in which the Volunteers showed marked improvement in their position. Accordingly, I stayed no longer in Ulster than was necessary to fix up the matter of unifying the Tyrone companies into a battalion as has been described.

By the merest coincidence Pim was served with his deportation order at the camp just immediately after a motor-load of rifles was run up and distributed to the Tremoge (Tromagh) Volunteers who were paraded with the camp detachment. DI Barrington and his half dozen police got the surprise of their lives when they were halted at the entrance to the camp.<sup>152</sup> Two squads receiving bayonet instructions were simply turned about so as to be held facing the police, while I manoeuvred a cyclist squad on the road so as to cover the car, wherein there still remained the ammunition. In sum, the police served the order in the spirit of men having a painful duty to perform which is, of course, the proper frame of mind

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<sup>151</sup> This meeting took place on 16 July 1915.

<sup>152</sup> Richard Barrington was born in county Wexford in 1865. He was promoted to district inspector third class in 1909 and in 1915 was second class. He was pensioned in 1922 and four years later emigrated to British Columbia, Canada where he died in 1949: see Jim Herlihy, *Royal Irish Constabulary officers: a biographical dictionary and genealogical guide, 1816-1922* (Dublin, 2005), p. 57.

in such cases. Formerly, though, in Ireland such occasions were always regarded as so many manifestations of power.

One public event which centred attention very much on us was the O'Donovan Rossa funeral on the first Sunday in August.<sup>153</sup> From this point of view, it was of the greatest value to have the Volunteers supply all the guards and escorts in connection with the lying-in-state and the funeral. It kept us continually before the public for some days and, incidentally, served to a certain extent to familiarise the officers and men of the Dublin Brigade with guard duties. Especially useful did the actual funeral prove. The number of Volunteers was very large for the Dublin Volunteers were strongly supplemented by contingents from different parts of the country which had come up for the occasion. Besides, the numerous excursions from all parts of the country run for the occasion brought into Dublin many thousands of people who otherwise [p. 9] would never have heard of the Irish Volunteers, much less realise what a considerable and fairly well armed body they were. As far as I recollect, this was the first occasion on which shotguns were carried by the Volunteers. I heard that some of the police expressed ridicule at [the] sight of shotguns; later they acquired sounder ideas both on manners in public and on firearms.

I marched in from Ticknock<sup>154</sup> with the contingent from the second training camp through Dundrum and Milltown. The day was very hot and close, following on terrific rain the night before, and when we halted for Mass in Stephen's Green the rest was very welcome. After this we went to headquarters in Dawson Street and were there instructed where to report to fall into the column. Our contingent remained with the rest of the Volunteers until the funeral was over and then marched back to headquarters where I dismissed the men. I had arranged with Captain O'Duffy that he would take command that night and I did not go to Ticknock myself until the next day.<sup>155</sup> I took the opportunity of meeting some of the Cork officers and some others who were in town for the occasion.

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## Chapter 5

Summer training camps – A drawback they had – Advantages derived from them – Another disadvantage – Counter advantages – Nature of the training – Status of officers – Changes designed in 1916 camps – Social side to the camps – Effect on recruiting – Police incidents – Camp equipment

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<sup>153</sup> Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831–1915), Fenian, died in New York. He wished to be buried in his native Rosscarbery, but his body was brought back to Ireland for burial at Glasnevin cemetery, Dublin on 1 Aug. 1915. The funeral was orchestrated from America by John Devoy: see Patrick Maume, 'O'Donovan Rossa, Jeremiah', *DIB*.

<sup>154</sup> Located in the Dublin Mountains.

<sup>155</sup> Eimar (Ultan) O'Duffy (1893-1935) adjutant 2nd Dublin Battalion, Irish Volunteers; chief contributor on military affairs to *Irish Volunteer*; Dublin brigade chief of transport, supply and communications, 1915; sent to Belfast to prevent rising at Easter 1916: see James H. Murphy, 'O'Duffy, Eimar (Ultan)', *DIB*.

The summer training camps were one of the biggest factors operating in the rapid development of the Volunteers during the summer of 1915. They began in the middle of July and continued until the middle of September; and they were thus spread over a period of two months during which they kept the Volunteers, to a certain extent, continuously before the public. An interval of a week intervened between every two successive camps, which was necessary to allow of fresh arrangements being made. In all, there were four camps and we endeavoured to secure the maximum result by allocating one to each province.<sup>156</sup> This [was] with the two-fold object of strengthening our position in different localities and giving a sense of national unity and solidarity to the men attending the camps.

Of course, it may be freely admitted that from the standpoint of training these camps were not ideal – and I had decided on several radical changes for future training camps. To begin with, the standard of the men attending the camp varied greatly and to squeeze into a week or a fortnight of training a course of instruction that would benefit everyone – and benefit all equally – was practically impossible. For example, one man in camp might be a Dublin company commander who was accustomed to fairly large bodies of fairly well-trained men, but being a city man had no great skill in field operations. Another might be one of the rank and file of a small isolated country corps, who knew country like an often-hunted fox but had no idea whatever of drill or training of any kind. And in between these there were all sorts and conditions of knowledge and ignorance. There were some even who came for a holiday with [a] little military instruction in their spare time, but these were quickly undeceived and, to be fair to them, they never objected in the least [when] they found that physical exertion [p. 2] was entailed, which, perhaps, was just as well. Again, the numbers in camp were a bit on the small side for elaborate training: in round numbers there were 20 in the first, 30 in the second, 40 in the third, and 20 in the fourth.

In view of such varied conditions it is evident that homogeneity of training was very difficult to impart. A camp was primarily for training in field work, but was field work of much use to men totally ignorant of drill, as some were? And, if I began by systematic drilling, how find opportunity for any other instruction in the limited time? Again should I let a good officer go away at the end of his training with very little extra knowledge? Or should I give such a one higher tactical training and carry on over the heads of the rest? It will be seen that I had by no means an easy task in so managing the routine of the camp that everyone should derive some amount of profit from it. And as every man paid his own expenses, it was desirable that no one should be disappointed. As a matter of fact, it was only after the last camp that I myself was able to form a fair idea of the best course in such circumstances, and I think it is true to say that in the matter of utility as a military training each camp was a little better than the one which preceded it.

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<sup>156</sup> The first summer training camp was held in Tyrone from Saturday 10 to Sunday 18 July, the second in Wicklow from 31 July to 14 August, the third in Limerick from 21-30 August (referred to as the Galtee camp as it took place in the Galtee Battalion area) and the fourth in Athlone from 4 to 18 September.

Indeed, I think it is no exaggeration to say that I personally derived more benefit from the camps than anyone else, and that by a long way. Until these camps, I had no idea as to the best methods of leading in hedge-intersected country, like the most of Ireland, although I had often pondered the subject. In the camps I set myself to study the matter systematically, using the men experimentally and making copious notes of any points that seemed to indicate the need for any new departure or modification of accepted tactical ideas. The smallness of the numbers was in this rather an advantage than otherwise because more complete observation of results was possible. And I formed the opinion that close country on occasion would offer quite extraordinary opportunities for the effective tactical action of small bodies of men – provided the latter had specialised training in such country.

**[p. 3]** Of course, in other respects, I personally derived great benefit from these camps. To begin with, I added considerably to my knowledge of the country for all except the first were in districts with which I was unfamiliar up to that time. And, secondly, I got to know a very large number of Volunteers all over the country, for many attended the camps who were from districts which were practically unknown to me. I was thus able to add considerably to my knowledge of our general position in the country, where we were strong and where weak, who were likely to be suitable for officers in different localities, and who of the existing officers were unsuitable etc. etc.

Another disadvantage of these camps, from the point of view of training, was that they were mere moving camps; and, short as was the time at our disposal in the first instance, this fact left us still shorter of time for instruction. Practically every day's march meant the loss of a day for any other purpose and there might be two or three marches in a week. One might say that this was useful training and, doubtless, it is for the individuals. But a hundred odd men was a small proportion of our total strength and if they were to be regarded as a leaven, then, clearly, they might have learned much more useful things than how to swing their legs along a road. As a matter of fact, the main reason for the marching was a recruiting one for propagandist purposes. For the most part, the camps were in hopeful Volunteer districts; the Wicklow camp was an exception and was from reasons of proximity to Dublin. Such being the case, the more generally the camp contingent showed itself the better: two or three days spent in a place made all the difference imaginable and was often the means of establishing a flourishing corps in the locality. And, of course, there was without doubt impressed on the men the details connected with a change of camp – selection of a new site beforehand, making arrangements for supply, timing the departures and arrivals to harmonise with meals, arrangements for long or short halts – all what might be called the 'staff work' of a small column besides the other details of striking and pitching tents, cleaning camp sites, digging fireplaces, latrines etc., and getting used to their baggage. For, obviously, men with **[p. 4]** unsuitable baggage had to suffer for their ignorance.

It will be seen then that automatically there was enforced on the men an amount of military training entirely new to them, and of a sort the existence of which many of them had never previously guessed. And, of course, it was easy to treat such matters as protection on the march under a fair approach to actual conditions. In the matter of drill, I quickly made up my mind to reduce it to a minimum, but in that minimum to insist on the utmost rigidity. That was all there was time for. The duties of sentries and orderlies were taken by all in turn, and neatness in person and property was insisted on. Thus by merely being in camp, a certain amount of knowledge was acquired. The value of this was enhanced by the fact that the men were all intelligent and all anxious to learn.

The rest of the training was in minor tactics: outposts, advance and rear-guard actions on a small scale, and the like. In these, I always sought to apportion the training to the man's capacity to profit by it. Thus, when two bodies were told off the command was given to the seniors or the most promising men on each side, and these were changed about so that each man was given a chance to command, or to prove himself unfit for command. I myself usually acted as umpire or exercised a general control and only exercised actual command on a couple of occasions. Indeed, once when I should have taken command I shamefully abandoned my post: it was in the Glen of Aherlow.<sup>157</sup> In palliation, I must plead that it was at the invitation of no fewer than seven ladies, any one of whom would constitute an extenuating circumstance before the average court martial!

Where operations on a larger scale were carried out, the cooperation of local Volunteer corps was always requisitioned. In the case of Wicklow this was not possible, but the local men were requisitioned at all the other camps. Frequently, of course, cooperation with local corps had to take the form of night operations because the local men were, for the most part, not available by day. On such occasions, it was always very interesting to observe the sense of unity and *esprit de corps* existing among the men in camp and [p. 5] their desire to defeat the local men at all costs. With this *esprit de corps* there developed also a certain sense of professional soldiership: the men in camp were for the time being whole-time soldiers and thus, in a manner, superior to the others. And the longer a camp lasted, the more marked this professional feeling became. Occasionally, when we had tent room available such of the local Volunteers as wished were allowed to sleep in camp, as well as taking part in manoeuvres.

Volunteer headquarters found tents, cooking utensils, and officers: the fifteen shillings per week, required of men attending camp, was devoted to the purchase of food, fuel, and hiring of transport. Occasionally, it was found necessary to hire a field, but, on the other hand, we sometimes received gifts of food and fuel, and even free transport. I believe the camps about paid their way, which was truly gratifying for an experimental departure.

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<sup>157</sup> In county Tipperary.

Besides myself, the only other officer permanently attached to the camps was the quartermaster, Lieutenant J. J. Burke<sup>158</sup>; Sergeant S. Cooling<sup>159</sup> was quartermaster of the first camp in Tyrone. Captain [Eimar] O’Duffy was second-in-command in the Wicklow camp, but was unable to take up duty in any of the others. We were very successful in all the camps in preserving a correct mutual attitude between officers and men; quite good discipline was maintained without any objectionable assertiveness of rank. The officers had their tents pitched for them always in the same relative positions and, no matter what crowding might take place, they never shared their tents with anyone else. Such small observances as this caused the distinction of rank to be realised semi-consciously and tacitly accepted. The whole question of officering the Volunteers, which was of the very first importance, I shall have occasion to deal with much more fully later on.

It is perhaps not wholly out of place to describe the changes I mediated for the training camps of 1916, if they had materialised. In the first place, they were to be more numerous. It was the object to have one in every locality where the Volunteers were sufficiently [p. 6] numerous – the command being taken by a local officer, if one of the necessary knowledge and capacity could be found, and otherwise by some officer sent from headquarters. For myself, my design was to visit all these standing camps, spending some days or perhaps a week in each so as to co-ordinate the training – which last would be based on an outline programme prepared beforehand. Each camp was to last a month, or two fortnight camps might be found more suitable: the month of June being selected for farming districts, the months of August and September for urban corps. We had in view half a dozen or more areas: Tyrone, Galway, Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Kilkenny and Wexford, and looked for excellent results. The camps would allow much more time for training. Shifting ground each week would mean that four centres were touched in each area, and this would mean that practically every centre of any importance was included. The aim was, if possible, to secure for every Volunteer a week’s training in camp, or at least a week’s steady cooperation and intercourse with a disciplined force in camp. As a result, we could safely count on having the cadres of a quite passably-trained militia force which would prove a very important asset to the country, and the strength and efficiency of which would progressively increase. These projects of mine were fated to remain unrealised.

There was a very agreeable social side to these camps. Practically everywhere we went, we contrived to get into the good graces of the people. On no occasion were we without someone who could sing and almost everyone could dance, and there never was a dearth of partners. The good discipline and conduct of the men, on such occasions, was not without its good effect on the districts generally. One rather good story of the Galway camp deserves to be remembered.<sup>160</sup> The very pretty grand-daughter of an ex-head constable of the RIC attended a dance at the camp and was questioned later by a cautious elderly

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<sup>158</sup> James J. Burke joined the Irish Volunteers at the inaugural meeting and was a member of A Company, 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade. He joined the IRB in 1914. His statement to the BMH is WS 1,758.

<sup>159</sup> This may refer to Seamus Cooling who worked in Volunteer headquarters in Dublin at this time.

<sup>160</sup> The Athlone camp in Sept. 1915 spent some time in county Galway.



neighbour, who didn't quite approve of Sinn Féiners: 'What did your grandfather say about it?' 'What would he say, but what any old peeler might say' was the crushing reply of the wayward one.

The effect of these camps upon recruiting for our ranks was [p. 7] very remarkable. They constituted centres of activity for local Volunteers and sympathisers: if the local corps were good they increased and improved, if they were languid they got new life. On a couple of occasions, we even caused new corps to come into being. You see, it was an unheard of thing to have men coming to a locality from all parts of the country for the purpose of Volunteer training. The isolation or semi-isolation in which the local men had formerly found themselves was broken down and they realised that others all over the county were of their way of thinking. In fact, the resultant tendency would be rather to exaggerate than to under-estimate our strength. And the improvement in collective morale thus arising would naturally be a powerful factor in our further development.

Incidents occurred from time to time which stiffened the morale of the men in camp, and, at the same time, propagated a spirit of independence in the several localities. It will be readily understood that the RIC manifested an exceptional amount of interest in the activities of the camps; and as they are not really a very discerning body of men, it will be understood that sometimes their professional zeal exceeded their wisdom. In short, they sometimes so far forgot themselves as to come into the field in which the camp was pitched. On every such occasion the senior present in camp explained that a regrettable incident would certainly occur unless they left. There is nothing the RIC like less than regrettable incidents or, to be more accurate, the loser's end of the same. As a result, they invariably left. Anyone who knows rural life in Ireland knows the extraordinary awe in which the RIC are held in so many parts of the country. The spectacle of them being sent about their business – and going very quietly too – was an earth-stirring event in a neighbourhood. How were the mighty fallen!

I remember in the Wicklow camp I included Newcastle [Co. Wicklow] in the itinerary for the purpose of showing the men the blockhouse guarding the cable terminal near the railway station. This was a cottage loop-holed and strengthened with sandbags and surrounded with barbed [p. 8] wire and a trench, the object being to repel a landing by a small raiding party. The garrison consisted of RIC, but in other respects the little fort was a good model for such a work. One morning I marched the camp contingent down to the shore and up to the blockhouse; the garrison must have thought we were going to attack because two went inside and a third came up and asked what we were doing. I explained [that] I had brought the men to the place as an example of such a position. He said I should find a better example, but I expressed myself satisfied. Then he said no one was permitted to halt in front of the blockhouse and I moved the men off. This man was not aggressive, and by this time the men had taken full stock of the place. This time, however, the police had the laugh on us because they worked so on the fears of the man in whose field we were encamped that he refused to let us stay another night. This was the greeting the

quartermaster had for me when we got back to camp for tea after a warm and unusually vigorous day's work. Even starting on the night march for Kilmalin most of us were tired and the rate of marching was unusually slow even for a night march.<sup>161</sup> We had a rather unpleasant bivouac in the Glen of the Downs and were very much the worse for the wear when we reached Kilmalin. There we found that the quartermaster's duties had been usurped, not less efficiently than charmingly, by Mrs Desmond FitzGerald.<sup>162</sup> The RIC had ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest!

A few words as to our camp equipment may be of interest. The Irish Volunteers regulation tent was 7 feet square on the base with a 7-foot pole rising in the centre of the front base-line. Only one guy-rope was needed besides the pegs for the base. A waterproof ground-sheet was laced to the four corners inside at night and in the morning was pulled out and the men's kits piled on the rear half of it, the front half being turned over in case of rain. If necessary, each tent slept four men. Tent-pitching intervals were taken from the directing flank by the men grasping the tent-pole at the ends and easing off to arm's length, the heels of each man marked the foot of the pole of his tent. This gave a sufficiently roomy passage between the tents. Each rear tent covered at such a distance as to have the guy-ropes clear the rear of the tent in front. The tents [p. 9] could be pitched and struck very quickly; frequent tent-pitching competitions brought the men to a high pitch of smartness. To save transport expenses and round off the camp equipment, a trek-cart was designed for 1916 to be attached to the camps. The camp contingent by manhandling the tenting equipment would thus become altogether self-contained in the matter of transport.

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## Chapter 6

The field day at Stepside – Criticisms – Orders – Contact – Cyclists – Staffs – Indiscipline – The high command – Shortcomings – Second visit to Kilkenny – Local organising – Affiliations – Mine and the official view of Kilkenny-Wexford area – Communications – November in south-east – Manchester martyr celebrations – Irish attitude towards public meetings etc. – Articles in *Workers' Republic* – 'Carry on'

The Galway camp, which was the last of the year, was not due to break up until Sunday, but I left Athlone on Friday as I had been asked to act as umpire on the occasion of a field day of the Dublin Brigade arranged for Stepside on the Sunday.<sup>163</sup> It happened that I was able to secure Captains MacSwiney and Mulcahy and Sergeant Cremin, who had been in camp, to assist on this occasion and Captain O'Duffy had also been asked to umpire. We had thus an umpire staff of five, all mounted on bicycles in a district very fairly supplied with roads. One would imagine that such a staff was ample to survey any possible manoeuvres in which one

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<sup>161</sup> Kilmalin is a townland in Enniskerry, county Wicklow.

<sup>162</sup> Mabel Washington McConnell married Desmond FitzGerald in 1911. They lived in France and then west Kerry before moving to Bray, county Wicklow in Jan. 1915 when FitzGerald was banned from Kerry under the Defence of the Realm Act.

<sup>163</sup> 19 Sept. 1915.

weak brigade found the sum total of both forces. But, in point of fact, it was only with the greatest difficulty that we were able to keep in touch with the operations.

This was my first experience of the Dublin Brigade as a whole, or even of any definite units of it. Hitherto, I had only met some of the officers and men individually in the camps. I had found those I did meet in possession of a good standard of efficiency and I had formed the expectation that the entire brigade was of that stamp, and that a good standard of leadership might be expected. I confess I was sadly disappointed. This field day at Stepside showed me quite clearly that the best Volunteer companies – for such they were – were still far from being an efficient military force. All down the hierarchy of command and in the training of the rank and file, grave shortcomings could be observed. Stepside was useful – in the main if not solely – because it showed the Dublin Brigade how little they knew. Every member of the umpire staff agreed with me in this.

[p. 2] Captain [Eimar] O’Duffy and myself criticised the operations in an outspoken fashion in the next number of the *Irish Volunteer*. Captain O’Duffy discussed the subordinate handling of the men and the training shown by the latter; I criticised the scheme and general conduct of the operations. I was studiously careful in my official umpire’s report to offend the susceptibilities of no one, but the operations were so faulty that it was practically impossible to praise anything in them. If I had stigmatised as glaring faults things which were unquestionably such, it might have been better. But it might have seemed invidious and drawn opprobrium on the interloping iconoclast who was known to so few of them, and presumably was merely seeking to advance his own status. In my desire not to hurt susceptibilities, I was disappointed. For all the good my careful phrasing of criticisms did, I might as well have said what I thought in the way I thought it. The effect of my review of the manoeuvre may be guessed from the fact that never from that time on, 19 September 1915, did either Pearse<sup>164</sup> or MacDonagh<sup>165</sup> – the commanders of the opposing forces on that day – take command of a side at manoeuvres.

The fact is both Pearse and MacDonagh (Plunkett<sup>166</sup> also) believed that the art of war could be studied in books without any trouble being taken to fit the book theories to material facts, or to human nature. And yet, the operation orders for the Stepside field day showed clearly enough that Pearse and had not a practical grip of such matters. These orders ran over four closely typed pages of foolscap and prescribed the most minute details for the conduct of the attack, including the formations of attacking units at definite

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<sup>164</sup> Patrick Henry Pearse (1879-1916) member of provisional committee Irish Volunteers; joined IRB 1913; director of military organization (1914-16); delivered oration at O’Donovan Rossa funeral 1915; member of military council 1915: see J. J. Lee, ‘Pearse, Patrick Henry’, *DIB*.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916) member of provisional committee Irish Volunteers; director of training (1914-16); joined IRB 1915; commandant 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, 1915-16; key role in organizing O’Donovan Rossa funeral; co-opted to IRB military council 1916: see Lawrence William White, ‘MacDonagh, Thomas’, *DIB*.

<sup>166</sup> Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887-1916) member of provisional committee Irish Volunteers; director of military operations (1914-16); joined IRB 1914; member of military council: see Lawrence William White, ‘Plunkett, Joseph Mary’, *DIB*.

geographical points and the precise hour at which the assault was to be delivered, neither of which, I need not say, were even approximated to.<sup>167</sup> Where Pearse got the model for this order I do not know, unless it were that other order cited by the unfortunate Austrian general Mack which covered so many pages and took so long to write out and compare and ‘did not contain a superfluous word’.<sup>168</sup> At all events, I determined then and there that when I was detailed to the Dublin Brigade my first care would be to give the officers the most thorough grounding I could in the writing – and intelligent interpretations – of orders.

[p. 3] The front of the attackers at Stepside extended in a straggling way over several miles – a force of three weak battalions! I was solemnly assured that touch was kept from flank to flank. It is true that cyclist orderlies carried despatches from flank to flank, but what sort of touch was that? Everyone knows that a battalion will not cover four miles in less than two hours if any fighting is involved; and everyone knows, also, that a hard-pressed battalion may easily be wiped out in less than one hour. From flank to flank there was no touch on this occasion – for touch, *unless it means capability of reinforcement at will*, is not touch at all. It is better to have lost all ‘touch’ definitely for then at least you know the worst.

And again the attackers’ cyclists were sent by the mountain road on a circuitous route along half of which they were compelled to wheel their machines instead of being on the opposite flank on the roads towards Stillorgan, ideal for the operation of such troops. As a matter of fact, the Dublin Brigade never fully appreciated the possibilities of cyclist troops. I only recollect one noteworthy example of their use at manoeuvres – a daring night enterprise by Lieutenant Malone C Company, 3rd Battalion, who subsequently died very gloriously in action in Northumberland Road.<sup>169</sup>

Another remarkable feature of the Stepside manoeuvres was the enormous staff supposed to be essential to the conduct of operations. Enough men were retained on staff duty to perform the task of directing an army corps, whereas one or two officers and half-a-dozen orderlies would have been ample for all that was needed. Consonant with this was the custom of the O.C.-in-chief to remain a considerable distance in rear and direct everything through messages. It was this point of view which Captain O’Duffy criticised so mercilessly as ‘thinking in army groups’. That was really what it was. The higher command of the Volunteers consisted of men who could not ‘slope arms’ properly, having never drilled in

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<sup>167</sup> Pearse’s orders were in fact no more than two pages but MacDonagh’s amounted to five foolscap pages.

<sup>168</sup> Karl Mack von Leiberich (1752-1828) was commander of the Austrian forces that capitulated to Napoleon at the Battle of Ulm in 1805.

<sup>169</sup> During the 1916 Rising Irish Volunteers occupied four positions in the vicinity of Mount Street Bridge: Clanwilliam House, on the city side of the Grand Canal, which dominated Mount Street Bridge and Northumberland Road; St Stephen’s Hall on Northumberland Road, the school opposite, and 25 Northumberland Road, the corner house on Haddington Road. This last was occupied by Michael Malone and Jim (Séamus) Grace. The fighting at Mount Street Bridge occasioned the greatest number of military casualties of the Rising. Twenty-eight members of the 2/7th and 2/8th Sherwood Foresters were killed or subsequently died of wounds, while another 135 were wounded. Four Irish Volunteers were killed, including Malone who was shot dead on the stairs of No. 25 on 26 Apr.; Grace escaped.

the ranks, men, who, moreover, thought themselves above sloping arms. They had read about the campaigns of Ulm and Austerlitz and Jena, and overlooked that they had not the numbers, nor the quality of the soldiers of Ulm and [p. 4] Jena.<sup>170</sup> I personally had read about the campaigns of Ulm and Jena but I took good care not to mention the fact. It seemed to me more important to make our officers take their hands out of their pockets when giving commands. In short, the Volunteer higher command had put the cart before the horse when they set out to learn their business.

It is only the higher command, however, that was really deficient in technical grip; the subordinate officers knew a fair amount, even at this time, and were really anxious to learn more and not in the least ignorant of their own limitations. Systematic training made them much more efficient, and as their own general efficiency increased so did their capacity to see the limitations of their superiors. This caused a certain discontent and desire to have things adjusted which was beginning to be noticeable shortly before the [1916] insurrection.

Another matter that impressed me very unfavourably at Stepside was that the fall out was given for, I think, half an hour in the village of Stepside. This was after the final assault by converging columns, when attacking and defending forces were mixed up in the direst confusion and the little village was literally crammed with men. The scene of disorder ensuing was, naturally, far from being calculated to reflect credit on the Volunteer force as a whole. Men straggling into shops and houses and strolling about aimlessly would be likely to impress unfavourably the people passing by – a large number on fine Sundays. What would have been easier than to march the men off or back half a mile clear of the village, and fall them out along the road to rest and eat their rations – detailing a few pickets to make sure none of them wandered any distance from the column. But no: the other arrangement had been made on paper and the bank holiday picnic farce had to be played to a finish.

More serious still was the fact that Stepside dealt cyclist training in the Dublin Brigade a blow from which it never recovered. The cyclists, already much fatigued by wheeling their machines up [p. 5] mountain roads, were compelled to march back several miles wheeling their machines in front of the infantry at the close of the day. This was to impress the people with the large numbers, but would they not have been equally impressed with the sight of a well-ordered cyclist column riding in alone. And, in this event, the cyclists would at least have got some sort of palliation for the irksomeness of the day. As it was, they individually made up their minds never to be 'had' similarly again, and always after this it was a very difficult task to get a considerable number of cyclists out together at all.

This day at Stepside opened my eyes to many things. From top to bottom there were grave shortcomings. The higher command was quite obviously up in the clouds and

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<sup>170</sup> These were famous engagements during the Napoleonic wars. At Ulm (16–19 Oct. 1805) Napoleon I's army trapped the Austrian army under Mack; at Austerlitz (2 Dec. 1805) the armies of Russia and Austria were defeated and at Jena (14 Oct. 1806) the Prussian army was decisively defeated.

unlikely to be induced to come down. The subordinate command was better, but even here there were glaring mistakes: companies were marched in fours up to the enemy's positions without anything even remotely resembling combat reconnaissance, and other companies were disposed on the defensive in positions that commanded nothing. Even the rank and file showed gross ignorance of the use of ground; men exposed themselves in the most glaring way, and others played hide-and-seek (apparently) when there was no danger whatever of their coming under fire. The prevailing impression was one of unreality. This was not so very surprising for both officers and men were almost entirely without any practice in field work. All their knowledge of such was derived from occasional lectures supplemented by a certain amount of desultory reading of the text books.

But here and there were more hopeful signs: one officer had at once proceeded to reassemble his company from amid the confusion of the final assault in Stepside; one or two NCOs [non-commissioned officers] in command of pickets or patrols handled them with alertness and intelligence. Even the men of those units which had made the arduous march across Three Rock Mountain were cheery and willing after all their exertions.<sup>171</sup> These were all things that pointed in the right direction. Evidently there was plenty of the right material for both officers and men available – only it had to be knocked into shape.

**[p. 6]** Our uncompromising exposure of the mistakes at Stepside certainly had the effect of making the Dublin officers see about overhauling things. From this time on, they began to pay attention to the study of minor – indeed almost, one might say, petty tactics. But the higher command did not change their methods of procedure; instead of a vigorous effort to set the house in order they waited until the improved training of the subordinate officers and men would raise the standard before they again ventured to command.

The next big event as far as the Volunteers were concerned was the annual [Volunteer] convention which took place at the beginning of November in Dublin.<sup>172</sup> Previously to this, though, I had one other duty assigned to me: a fortnight's period of training and organising in Kilkenny and the neighbourhood.<sup>173</sup> I have already mentioned that this corps improved very steadily once it started on the upgrade. It was six months since I had been there before and – even allowing for the improvement all over the country – the advance made by the Kilkenny company was a revelation. There had been a considerable influx of recruits of an excellent stamp, and night after night while I was there they turned up regularly for instruction. There was also a thorough sense of discipline and a professional way of doing things. This last was to be put down to the fact that six members of the company had attended the Galtee training camp, and the discipline they had acquired proved sufficient to leaven up the remainder, or, at all events, went a long way towards

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<sup>171</sup> Part of the group of hills in the Dublin Mountains which comprises Two Rock, Three Rock, Kilmashogue and Tibbradden.

<sup>172</sup> The convention took place in the Abbey Theatre on 31 Oct. 1915.

<sup>173</sup> See above note 118 p. X.

doing so.<sup>174</sup> Naturally, the men had omitted no branch of training which they were in a position to carry out. Indeed, I learned that they had held a second joint field day with New Ross during the summer and had a profitable day in spite of villainous weather.

But where they were particularly exemplary was in the work of local organisation. They were indefatigable in looking up men likely to be interested in the formation of Volunteer corps all over the county and went far and wide, by cycle and motor, whether in their spare time or by fitting in with business arrangements. Messrs Comerford,<sup>175</sup> the secretary, and Barry,<sup>176</sup> [but] especially the former, spent much time in this way and got in touch with numerous men all over the [p. 7] district. The first Sunday I was in Kilkenny on this visit a meeting of delegates from many parts of the county was held and a systematic programme of organisation was then and there taken in hand. The first fruits of this were the corps of Claragh, Inistioge, Clomantagh and Bagenalstown – the last fitting in naturally with Kilkenny as a headquarters, although really in County Carlow. Briefly, the method adopted was as follows: a method evidently suitable to the most unfavourable cases.

Any man who thought it possible to form a corps in his district got into communication with headquarters in Kilkenny, or sometimes they sought out a man mentioned as likely to be interested. The pros and cons were carefully gone into, and if the outlook was promising enough a recruiting field day was arranged for the first convenient Sunday. On that day, it was arranged that the prospective new corps should occupy some minor tactical point like a crossroads or a bridge and hold it against the strongest contingent that could be sent out from Kilkenny. It is, of course, superfluous to point out the great value of cyclists in such cases. Two or three of the best Kilkenny Volunteers were sent ahead to dispose the raw levies in position and take command of them. Naturally, these little manoeuvres were planned with one eye on the crowd of spectators likely to assemble and be suitably impressed. The method outlined gave fine results.

It is not out of place to point out how valuable these little exercises were to the subordinate officers entrusted with the command of the recruits. Naturally, they were encouraged to do their very best on such occasions: to get a decision over their commanding officer with only raw recruits would of course be a feather in their caps. And the commanding officer, for his part, naturally, was put on his mettle not to be beaten by one of his sergeants in such circumstances. When the new local corps was got together in this way it was affiliated with headquarters and the affiliation fee paid, and any

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<sup>174</sup> The members of A (Kilkenny city) company who attended were Pierce Brett, Edward Comerford, Laurence de Loughry, Timothy Hennessy, James Lalor and Martin Kealy: see Timothy Hennessy (IMA, BMH WS 1,614, p. 4).

<sup>175</sup> After the split Edward ('Ned') Comerford of Wellington Square, Kilkenny and fellow IRB members – Pat Corcoran, Peter de Loughry and James Nowlan – controlled the Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny city. In 1916 Comerford was quartermaster A Company (Kilkenny city) Irish Volunteers. He was interned after the 1916 Rising and was subsequently first Kilkenny battalion and later Kilkenny Brigade quartermaster.

<sup>176</sup> This is probably Denis Barry, a member of the Kilkenny city Volunteers, who appears to have been a draper's assistant in The Monster House, High Street, Kilkenny. He was interned after the Rising.

arrangements possible were made with reference to securing a man to attend and instruct from the nearest centre of trained men.

[p. 8] Mention of affiliations recalls to my mind that we frequently had much trouble on the head of these. Every corps was required – it was put in a general order, indeed – to pay an affiliation fee of one penny per man per month to headquarters. The sum derived from this source was devoted to the current expenses of the upkeep of the Volunteers. If all affiliations were paid strictly up to date, the sum so accruing would have been almost, but not quite, sufficient to meet running expenses. But as a matter of fact the affiliations were always badly in arrears and running expenses had continually to be found out of moneys primarily contributed for the purchase of arms, which, strictly, should have been devoted to that purpose alone, so long as arms were at all possible to obtain. At times, the funds at our disposal sank so low that we were threatened with insolvency a couple of months off. If there had been any ‘German gold’ in existence this would hardly have been the case.

This intolerable slackness in respect of payment of affiliations must be put down mainly to the slipshod business methods and inability to take a broad national view, which obtain so largely in Ireland. Pure carelessness alone prevented the affiliations coming in because where a capable and energetic secretary was in office no difficulties like this ever arose. As time went on, we had to make very stringent regulations about this matter and to impose a general levy of sixpence per man to secure some of the arrears. The failure to grasp the fact that the entire force was in danger of collapsing owing to lack of these paltry subscriptions is symptomatic of the amateurish and heedless way in which many national activities are carried on. These fees, I repeat, would have almost sufficed; supplemented by occasional donations, by the subscriptions of the Auxiliary,<sup>177</sup> and by collections they would have quite sufficed. The arms money would then have reached a formidable sum against any emergency.

I have already said that I differed materially from the official headquarters’ view of the lines on which the development of the Volunteer force should proceed. It was on this occasion that I first formed definite opinions with regard to this, and every [p. 9] subsequent visit tended to confirm me in those opinions. In brief, the official view was that Wexford was the proper headquarters for the district; mine was that Kilkenny was the proper one. What first inclined me to this opinion was the fact that, at this period, Kilkenny offered much better prospects in the way of forming new corps than Wexford. In the former county, one or two new corps were being formed every week; in the latter, it was a case of marking time at the moment. And, personally, I always maintained that corps should be developed where they could be – not where any individual would like them to be. And, of course, geographically, Kilkenny was much more suitable by reason of its far greater facility of intercommunication both with Dublin and with the south-west – our two most important

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<sup>177</sup> The Irish Volunteers Auxiliary was established in Aug. 1915 to cater for those wishing to associate with the Volunteers but unable to become active members due to work circumstances or the absence of a corps in the locality. The annual subscription was ten shillings. See chapter 7 below, pp XX.



existing centres. For the county of Wexford is isolated from the rest of Ireland by a long system of mountains and a great river. Moreover, local circumstances in Kilkenny were favourable for transmission of communications, e.g. number of suitable despatch-carriers available, of skilled labour etc. And then too, for example, Kilkenny would have been a very suitable situation for establishing one of those sub-depots of arms, which I have already mentioned as being desirable for our local needs.

I was very keen on establishing the closest possible connection between these two counties, but the projecting southern tongue of County Carlow in between caused certain difficulties. This last county by reason of the presence of a numerous landed gentry, continually resident, has been always greatly lacking in national spirit. I have already described how the Bagenalstown corps placed itself directly under Kilkenny as a headquarters. At the other end of the county, on the confines of Wicklow – at Rathvilly – a small and fairly good corps was formed about this time, but it remained wholly isolated. These were the only corps in Carlow and both of them lay rather off the direct routes between Kilkenny and Wexford.

I have already mentioned my efforts at establishing a line of communication from Kilkenny via Thomastown and Inistioge to New Ross. On this route, the Thomastown district was not as yet favourable to [p. 10] our development, and it would have been very desirable to establish a link in the chain there. Lieutenant Mullally of the Kilkenny city company was at one time working there continuously for several weeks and had formed and was training the nucleus of a corps, which, doubtless, would have developed in course of time.<sup>178</sup> His efforts were greatly handicapped by RIC terrorisation of the parents of the dozen or so young fellows who had rallied to him. It was decided to overcome this hectoring by concentrating forces from Kilkenny, Bagenalstown, [New] Ross and Waterford by train for a Sunday manoeuvre exercise at Thomastown.

The other and more direct line of communication would be via Gore's Bridge, Borris, and Scullogue Gap to Enniscorthy. From Borris, there are alternative routes on the two banks of the [River] Barrow to New Ross. I hoped – in spite of the august presence of that minor nabob Mr Walter MacMorrough Kavanagh – to form a small corps at Borris which was exactly half-way between Kilkenny and Enniscorthy.<sup>179</sup> My hopes were based on Dr Dundon, a great personal friend of mine dating from our student days in Dublin, who was the captain of the defunct local National Volunteers.<sup>180</sup> If only the doctor could persuade his fellows to re-commence drilling, I expected to be able to secure them because all active Volunteer bodies tended to gravitate to us. They were not wanted elsewhere. Another unit I hoped to

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<sup>178</sup> Anthony Mullally of Parnell Street, Kilkenny was 2nd lieutenant A (Kilkenny city) company, Irish Volunteers.

<sup>179</sup> MacMorrough Kavanagh (1856-1922) landlord and politician; deputy lieutenant for Carlow and a justice of the peace for counties Carlow and Kilkenny; IPP MP for Carlow (1908-10); privy councillor for Ireland 1916: see Patrick Maume, 'Kavanagh, Walter MacMorrough', *DIB*.

<sup>180</sup> Dr Edward ('Ned') Dundon was a medical doctor in Borris; member of the IRB and active in the Irish Volunteers; arrested in May 1916 and imprisoned in Reading but released in Aug.; first OC 4th Battalion Carlow Brigade in 1917 but quickly succeeded by Pierce Murphy; died 1941.

secure by 'peaceful penetration' was the Callan company – a well-armed force which the Rev Fr Delahunty kept from straying too far from the 'Party' fold – although the reverend gentleman had long ago lost faith in the 'Party'.<sup>181</sup> If once Borris were established as a centre, it was pretty certain that in the mountain district of Rathanna, Ballymurphy and Kiltaly the more independent men of the district – mountaineers and good fowlers – would rally to us strongly. In that event, the contact between the two counties would be securely established. But such developments as this require time: all I could do was to put the desirable objects before the local men and trust to them to work towards them. And the work was none too easy.

In November I again spent three weeks in the south-east; and it will be better to treat of that subsequent visit here as it was [p. 11] mainly in development of the preceding. It is true that the November visit was after the [Volunteer] convention, and, consequently, when my personal status was different from what it was earlier. It was, nonetheless, at the instance of other members of headquarters for at that time I had not yet made the determination to dictate my own movements. Many of the headquarters staff were anxious that I should spend as little time as possible in Dublin, and correspondingly anxious that as much employment as possible should be found for me outside of Dublin. On this particular occasion, the second conscription scare was on and a good deal of my work had a more or less direct bearing on that: this part I shall detail later. Right here, I intend to touch upon a few incidents of interest in other directions. I may say that the development of Kilkenny county was proceeding satisfactorily. As far as the city company was concerned, I merely gave a short course of somewhat special instruction to the officers and NCOs.

This time I managed to get a little further with the work of linking up the corps by the formation of a corps in the Ballywilliam-Rathgarogue district about four miles from New Ross. The ordinary meeting place of the men of this corps was at the forge at Ballywilliam, appropriately enough. The area embraced by this corps lay around the junction of the [New] Ross-Borris and [New] Ross-Enniscorthy routes of road and railway, and was not too far distant from either Borris or Enniscorthy. An NCO from New Ross – Joseph McCarthy – was detailed to come out regularly for some time and act as instructor to the Rathgarogue men.<sup>182</sup> Another communication link I sought to establish was at Glenmore, about half-way between New Ross and Waterford in County Kilkenny. Here, we were not able to quite get going but later on a little corps of about a score of good men was formed in the neighbourhood.

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<sup>181</sup> Patrick Delahunty, curate of Callan in the Catholic diocese of Ossory: *Irish Catholic Directory 1915*, p. 368. The Kilkenny county inspector recorded that the priest made a 'rather violent speech' against recruiting and conscription on 23 Nov. 1915: CI Kilkenny, Nov. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/98). Thomas Treacy recalled that the Callan National Volunteers joined the Irish Volunteers as a body about April 1918 and brought with them twenty-four service rifles: Thomas Treacy (IMA, BMH WS 1,093, p. 8).

<sup>182</sup> McCarthy was 1st lieutenant New Ross Company: see Joseph McCarthy (IMA, BMH WS 1,497, p. 15).

It chanced that I was able to be present at the Manchester Martyrs'<sup>183</sup> celebrations in both Kilkenny and Waterford on successive evenings.<sup>184</sup> These took the form of meetings addressed in the former city by Seán MacDermott<sup>185</sup> and in the latter by Herbert Pim. The Kilkenny meeting was addressed only to Volunteers and sympathisers, and [p. 12] at the end of it I was asked to say a few words. I said very few. The purport of my remarks was that while others might require them to die for Ireland, my business was to teach them to kill for Ireland; that I saw many faces I have never seen before, and which, unless they were prepared to enrol and drill, I had no desire to see them again; that, finally, / [O'Connell's emphasis] was the man who wanted the 50,000 Irishmen at that time advertised as being wanted on the motorcars of every man practically who could afford to pay an able-bodied chauffeur. That night the city company received fifteen recruits. Previous to the meeting, we had made a march around the town which had a considerable effect. A number of the Claragh men were in the ranks and the column was of a creditable size. Moreover, about fifteen men carried Lee-Enfield rifles and bayonets, and the people were duly impressed by the sight of such serviceable weapons. The company had considerably more rifles than this, but these were the ones easily got at and were considered sufficient for the moral effect required.

The following evening there was an open-air meeting in Waterford in front of the Imperial Hotel. This was following on a meeting in the city hall the night before. It was significant of the change coming over the feeling of the country that an Irish Volunteer meeting could be held in public in Waterford – John Redmond's own constituency.<sup>186</sup> And it was a complete success, too. On this occasion, I took command of the Volunteers separating the sheep – or the compact, well-trained, Volunteers – from the goats, or the more numerous body of recruits that had flocked in in the enthusiasm of the moment.

Public meetings and demonstrations always seemed to me to be over-done in Ireland. Doubtless, they are sometimes very useful for purposes of propaganda, but they have never, as far as I can see, been looked upon as a *means* – they have been made an end in themselves. They are so easy to go to, and there is such a feeling that they need not be followed up. After these meetings one hears people say: 'That was a fine meeting', 'Fine spirit shown tonight' etc. etc. The plain fact, of course, being that the crowd went there to be [p. 13] amused or rather entertained, or possibly to get a little extra knowledge on national matters. And, as crowds will, it caught the atmosphere of the occasion and became enthusiastic. But crowds will also get enthusiastic in a theatre and the effect will be just as

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<sup>183</sup> William Philip Allen, Michael Larkin and Michael O'Brien were active Fenians born in Ireland but living in Manchester. They were convicted of the killing of police sergeant Charles Brett on 18 September 1867 during the successful rescue of two Fenian prisoners. The 'Manchester martyrs' were hanged publicly at New Bailey Prison, Salford on 23 November 1867. Their deaths created a consensus of support for Fenianism.

<sup>184</sup> The Kilkenny meeting took place on 23 Nov. 1915 in the Gaelic League rooms on Parliament Street. Patrick Pearse and O'Connell addressed the Waterford meeting the following evening.

<sup>185</sup> Seán Mac Diarmada (MacDermott) (1884-1916) member of the provisional committee of Irish Volunteers and IRB military council in 1915: see Lawrence William White, 'Mac Diarmada (MacDermott), Seán', *DIB*.

<sup>186</sup> On this, see Pat McCarthy, *Waterford: the Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (Dublin, 2015).

permanent. We always found that meetings of this kind brought in recruits, but it was also our experience that many of the recruits so obtained were likely to drop off again. But while they stayed 'with the colours', so to speak, there was, of course, the chance of imparting some military training to them, and the further chance that they might get keen on the work and stay on permanently. For these reasons, I frequently attended such functions, although I detested them. On such occasions, I fell in any recruits that showed up as being the surest way to secure them. It was one of the marks of the Volunteer movement that it was working into the national character a certain manliness that had very little use for such idle demonstrations, which appeared to lead nowhere and to merely satisfy people that something had been done when in point of fact nothing definite had even been projected.

The only other incident of importance, which I have to chronicle, about this time in the south-east was a conversation I had with Captain Whitmore, whom I cycled out from Enniscorthy to see. Our talk turned on to some articles appearing about that time in the *Workers' Republic* of a rather advanced revolutionary character.<sup>187</sup> I saw danger ahead on those lines and said so; Captain Whitmore entirely agreed with me and said he would use his personal authority, as far as possible, to limit and confine the damage likely to be done by spreading such ideas. He shared with me, and with many others as will appear later, a fear that the Irish Volunteers might become a revolutionary and not a military body. Just now is not a suitable moment to consider any general question of policy; all I wish to convey is that even at this time we found it desirable to inculcate the need for continued training and careful study of military matters. Our object was a steady all-round advance in efficiency, and, certainly, there was room enough as yet for work on these lines without worrying much about anything else.

[p. 14] I remember Mac Dermott [Seán Mac Diarmada] in Kilkenny on one occasion dropping some remark as to 'wondering when the Germans would attack in the West', and his surprise when I gave it as my opinion that they would never again attack in the West. There did not seem to be any reason why they should: it seemed more important for the French to drive them out, than it was for them to get further in. And, besides, I was of the opinion that to attack French troops in formidable positions was not a task in which success could be counted on with absolute certainty. It seemed to me that nothing short of absolute certainty would justify such a course. The event of the battles for Verdun has proved the correctness of this opinion.<sup>188</sup> I merely mention this incident as indicating how with many of our supporters, and those very influential ones in their way, the wish was father to the thought. Hatred of England blinded them to facts. England was the enemy, therefore the side on which England is found is foredoomed to failure.

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<sup>187</sup> Edited by James Connolly, the *Workers' Republic* succeeded the *Irish Worker* when it was suppressed in May 1915.

<sup>188</sup> The Battle of Verdun fought between the German and French armies from 21 February to 18 December 1916 was the longest battle of the First World War.

The English military informal caution, 'carry on', has always seemed to me to convey a most valuable lesson in practicality. It sums up a sort of rule-of-thumb arrangement in which each individual has his own definite work to do, and does it without worrying about general principles. Of course, if one has a definite thought-out scheme, as the French and Germans, that is much better. But if one hasn't that the 'carry on' spirit is eminently practical. It works in big things too. When Colonel Goethals was digging the Panama Canal his second-in-command was greatly nonplussed by the first big landslide in the Culebra Cut.<sup>189</sup> He asked the colonel, when the latter appeared on the scene, what on earth he was to do. 'Hell!', said the colonel, 'dig it out again'. Now if the spirit of 'carry on' had properly permeated all our ranks from the beginning it would have been much better for all concerned.

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## Chapter 7<sup>190</sup>

Second conscription scare – Difference from the first – Handbills – Recruiting – The Auxiliary – Reserve of officers – Method of working of the staff – Slackness about reports – Gaelic League lectures – The general council

Practically the first big matter the new government of the Volunteers was called on to tackle was the second conscription scare.<sup>191</sup> I have already described our course of action with regard to the first one about six months earlier. To a certain extent, we adopted the same means: the local press, public bodies, public men etc. But now we were very much stronger in numbers, and [had] several units in training also. A more military stamp of opposition was now possible. Consequently, we, so to speak, counter-attacked by starting a recruiting and organising campaign on our own. We kept as much as possible in the public eye, thus letting it be seen clearly enough that there were a certain number of trained and armed men in the country to give the lead in resistance, which alone was necessary to defeat any such scheme. I have described my visits to the south-east about this period on which occasions I always used the conscription cry as a recruiting asset. I shall now describe in more detail some more of our methods on this occasion.

One of these was the circulation of handbills and leaflets. I remember distinctly the general run of two of these. One was a letter written to the press by the bishop of Limerick denouncing the maltreatment of intending Irish emigrants by crowds in Liverpool.<sup>192</sup> It was

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<sup>189</sup> Major-General George Washington Goethals (1858-1928), US army officer and civil engineer, supervised the construction and the opening of the Panama Canal.

<sup>190</sup> This is incorrectly numbered VIII in O'Connell's original typescript.

<sup>191</sup> From Oct. 1915 onwards.

<sup>192</sup> Edward Thomas O'Dwyer (1842-1917) was bishop of Limerick from 1886 until his death. The letter, published in the *Munster News* on 10 Nov. 1915, attacked Redmond for not defending the Irish emigrants. The

of a convenient length and written in the bishop's customary manly and vigorous fashion and had a terrific demand. Another handbill was a quotation from a speech by Mr John Dillon, whose name figured prominently as the author in great black type.<sup>193</sup> This clever manipulation of John Dillon, which would catch many people to whom MacNeill or anyone like that would be merely a crank, was an idea of poor MacDonagh's: and I can well recall the burst of laughter with which his suggestion was adopted.<sup>194</sup>

These leaflets were distributed by the thousands through the country to the secretaries of our different corps, every Volunteer coming to Dublin from country districts having a bundle bestowed on him. The ladies of Cumann na mBan<sup>195</sup> distributed them at hurling and [p. 2] football matches – inside the enclosures, naturally, where there was no danger of police interference on grounds of anti-recruiting activity. For although there was no illegality, conscription not being enacted in Ireland, it was quite possible that the incidents might be twisted into the form of a charge. These leaflets were paid for as recruiting literature out of moneys allotted to Fitzgibbon as director of recruiting which, by the way, was not a staff post.<sup>196</sup>

Of course, it is to be understood that all this [occurred] while the training of the Volunteers was speeded up considerably. It was important for us to make the maximum impression on public opinion and, besides, for all we knew, we might soon be called upon to put our training into effect.

It will easily be understood that the recruits who joined us to avoid conscription were not extreme revolutionaries. The incident alluded to above about the emigrants in Liverpool will throw some light upon their point of view. These intending emigrants were prevented from going to America – in fact, emigration to America was stopped to all intents and purposes. Large numbers of our new recruits were men who would have preferred to run away to America, if that were possible, and joined us because they were unable to get away. They were not men who were spoiling for a fight – quite the contrary. Were they on this account to be disdained as soldiers? By no means. The fact that they joined us proved that they had the military instinct, for it proved that they recognised the value of training and organisation and discipline generally. When a fight was put up to them, they realised that it was best to offer military resistance – not mob resistance. I personally had no objection to these kinds of men; they were good enough material and gradually got into the way of their work, and held on and proved themselves good dependable Volunteers long after the conscription scare was over. But, I repeat, they were men who weren't going out

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prelate claimed the emigrants' 'crime is they are not ready to die for England': see Thomas J. Morrissey, 'O'Dwyer, Edward Thomas', *DIB*.

<sup>193</sup> John Dillon (1851-1927) deputy leader of reunited Irish Parliamentary Party (1900-1918) and leader after death of Redmond in 1918: see Frank Callanan, 'Dillon, John', *DIB*.

<sup>194</sup> The IPP frequently labelled their opponents as 'cranks'.

<sup>195</sup> The republican organization for women established in 1914.

<sup>196</sup> Seán Fitzgibbon was a Dublin Corporation official; chair of the central branch of Sinn Féin; member of provisional committee Irish Volunteers; refused to join IRB; involved at landing of arms at Kilcoole, Aug. 1914; director of recruiting 1915; sent to Kerry to supervise an arms landing in the days before the Rising.

of their way to look for [a] fight, and any estimate of them which assumed that they were was quite erroneous.

Somewhere about this time, too, there was formed the Irish Volunteers Auxiliary, of which the name gives a rough idea of the object. It was a body of men – and women also were allowed to [p. 3] become members – who for one reason or another were unable to become active Volunteers. Such persons could help by subscribing: the subscription being ten shillings per annum. The members of the Auxiliary were directed to keep in touch with the nearest existing corps of Volunteers and to acquire any military training they could, or at least some capacity to use a rifle. They were thus in a manner a sort of reserve, besides contributing to the upkeep of the force. Financially, it proved very useful, especially towards the end of our career, when the numbers joining it were beginning to increase very appreciably. Amongst its members were, as well as elderly sympathisers, very large numbers of the clergy. Those members of the Auxiliary who were of military age and could thus justifiably be regarded as a possible reserve force consisted of two classes: men who could not be active Volunteers simply because they did not live near enough to any existing corps to get regular instruction; and men who for business reasons could not afford to identify themselves openly with us. Of these two classes, the former might conceivably be looked to as possible men to rely on for forming new corps when their local circumstances should improve.

Arising in a sense out of the Auxiliary, I formed the idea of establishing a reserve of officers and I got my views on this point accepted, and even made some beginnings at putting the scheme into operation, although I was unable to devote as much time to it as I would have wished, and, indeed, as was necessary. The idea at the back of my mind was this: if we are forced to take military action against the enforcement of conscription, we shall inevitably find ourselves swamped by a sudden rush of absolutely untrained men. How are we to handle this rush? Only a small proportion of these new men can be absorbed into existing units because vast numbers will come forward in districts where no Volunteers exist at present. And even where Volunteers do exist, we cannot utilise more of the recruits directly than are required to bring the existing units up to full strength. In any event, there will be a big untrained residue which it will be a hard job to officer. We could, of course, draw on the existing officers to a limited extent: from a company with three good officers we could take one for a new command, but this could not safely be done with [p. 4] a company having fewer than three good officers. Similarly, some of the best NCOs could be taken and promoted to the officer's grade. But even allowing for both these sources, it will readily be seen that the number available would be very inadequate. Because it would be thoroughly mischievous to deprive the trained units of their officers for the benefit of the recruits; by such a course the trained units might suffer irretrievably and, anyhow – officers or no officers – the raw units would at first be only a mob, whatever way you took it. The only feasible course was to gain time by the employment of the trained men for the raw men to get trained somewhat, in the meantime maintaining the trained units by drafts and

calling upon the most progressive of the new units as they gradually acquired some sort of military character. Of course, the entire scheme was looking a long way ahead, but its development was bound to be slow at best, and it seemed to me to high time to begin.

My proposal was that a list should be prepared of suitable men to form a reserve of officers who would supplement the men detailed from existing units. These men might consist of men who had formerly been officers but were unable now to play any active part for business reasons, others might offer themselves and be required to pass a qualifying examination – as some did later. Still others might be selected from the Auxiliary etc. and detailed to acquire what military knowledge they could. It was the intention to have special lectures privately for these men whenever suitable opportunities offered. Naturally, a careful estimate of the men on this list would be required: we were not after men to fill an honorary position. Men of fair education and a serious stamp of character were needed – not everyone can become an officer on the spur of the moment.

It may be interesting to describe the staff's method of doing business or rather of leaving it undone. Theoretically, MacNeill as chief of staff was the supreme authority and his function was to coordinate the work of the different departments. Pearse as director of organisation drew up a scheme of company, battalion and brigade organisation supposed to be suitable to our conditions, but which was never approximated to, even in the Dublin [p. 5] Brigade. MacDonagh as director of training prepared a syllabus of training of a most exhaustive kind, the more vital branches of which were fairly well carried out. My own duty was supposed to be to see that the programmes of organisation and training were carried out. For two reasons I did not do this: in the first place, the programmes were quite impossible to carry out in their entirety and, in the second place, I had so much other work to do that I had no time. The duties of Plunkett, Hobson<sup>197</sup> and The O'Rahilly were more apart. The last mentioned their business at staff meetings. Plunkett, whose duty it was supposed to be to form plans, never once outlined a plan at any staff meeting at which I was present nor I believe at any other. In short, the staff did not even attempt to do what purported to be the sole object of its existence – the military management of the Volunteers. There was nothing done at a staff meeting that could not have been done quite as suitably by the executive directly, and yet this latter body frequently referred different matters to the staff. In fact, when one got tired at a meeting of the executive anything that could reasonably be described as of a military nature was promptly 'referred to the staff'.

As the staff never voted on any question, the feeling got abroad among the members that it was of secondary importance and frequently members of both attended only the meeting of [one] in a week. The executive met on Tuesday evenings, the staff on

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<sup>197</sup> (John) Bulmer Hobson (1883-1969) founding member of Irish Volunteers 1913; secretary Volunteer executive Dec. 1914-1916; persuaded MacNeill and majority of executive to accept Redmond's nominees in June 1914; favoured a defensive strategy and guerrilla warfare; took no part in fighting during Easter 1916 and thereafter was excluded from mainstream Irish nationalist politics: see Patrick Maume, 'Hobson, (John) Bulmer', *DIB*.



Wednesdays as a rule. It was rather trying to be called upon to attend two routine meetings on successive evenings at an hour – from 6 p.m. onward – which precluded the doing of anything else on those evenings. More than once the hour of meeting was changed in hopes of quickly getting a full attendance and of getting the business over in a reasonable time. But in this respect we never came to a satisfactory arrangement and the meetings took an unconscionable length. Someone's dinner or someone else's tea clashed with it. I remember one occasion on which Hobson sent to Pearse and MacDonagh the following message: 'MacNeill is lecturing in the Mansion House, I am going to listen to the lecture, O'Rahilly is dining out, and O'Connell is going to a dance – there will be no meeting of the staff tonight'!

[p. 6] Organisers and instructors were supposed to send in weekly reports but, for the most part, they omitted to do so. Personally, I always sent in such reports until I became myself a member of the executive and of the staff. Even after that I always sent in a report to MacNeill of any matter which seemed to me to require special attention. And, in addition, I always sent in reports of field days at which I acted as umpire and, in short, wherever it seemed to me that a report was called for or might do good. I fully admit the undesirability of sending detailed information through the post, but for this there was no need whatever. All that was required was that a brief general statement should be sent in to keep us in touch with the district concerned. The only complete set of reports I remember seeing at headquarters were those of Captain [Hugh] McRory on his work in Tyrone.<sup>198</sup> It will readily be understood that the toleration of such slackness as this handicapped us very seriously.

I admit that the difficulties we had to contend against were very great: but there certainly were many things that might have been done without any trouble, but which taken together would have greatly contributed to the smoother and more efficient working of our machinery. I have mentioned the question of reports of organisers and instructors. But this matter of reports from country districts might have been considerably extended with very much improved results. It should have been a matter of duty – made so by a standing order – for *every* country Volunteer to report to headquarters *every time* he happened to come to Dublin. This should not have taken the form of strolling in for a chat but of coming to present a proper written report of the state of the Volunteers in his own district. This would have been a good lesson in discipline for these men themselves and would also have served to keep us fairly well in touch with affairs throughout the country. Too often, men thus coming up [to Dublin] had their eyes upon individuals not on headquarters as such.

I think I have said enough to show that the methods of the staff were not such as to inspire confidence or respect. It was entirely owing to the good general level of efficiency in the subordinate ranks that we accomplished as much as we did. One factor [p. 7] that militated against our getting things done was the tendency to rambling discussion at our meetings. This was owing to too easy-going chairmanship at the meetings. By far the most

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<sup>198</sup> See above p. X.

business-like chairman we had was Kent<sup>199</sup> and in his case there was the extra advantage of his being one of the revolutionaries; and, consequently, there was no danger of the firmness of his rulings being put down to partisanship and giving offense in consequence. But with some of the others the meetings simply became a desultory chat. Kent always prepared a list of things he wanted discussed, but no one else did so regularly. Personally, I never suggested anything unless it was something important and quite definite.

There was another matter which it may not be out of place to mention, although it was not directly connected with my Volunteers work. The Gaelic League inaugurated a series of sixteen lectures on various incidents or periods of Irish history, which were delivered in the League rooms in Parnell Square. I was invited by the League to give four of these lectures to be of a half-popular, half-technical kind dealing with the military history of Ireland. I selected the Battles of Kinsale,<sup>200</sup> Benburb,<sup>201</sup> Aughrim<sup>202</sup> and the campaign of Humbert,<sup>203</sup> which last, by the way, was delivered in the internment camp at Frongoch.<sup>204</sup> It seemed to me that these lectures afforded the opportunity for imparting a more correct view of these incidents in Irish history. Irish history, as far as I have read it, is, in the main, written in an uncritical and sentimental way: thus O'Neill lost at Kinsale through the treachery of his guides, and St Ruth at Aughrim because he kept Sarsfield in the background! We are in the habit of eagerly clinging to such sops to our vanity. Of course, if such a method is adopted in the history of war the result is not only worthless, but positively harmful. I eagerly took the opportunity of, to a little extent, popularising critical military history in Ireland.<sup>205</sup>

I have not laboured this point from motives of personal vanity, but simply because my delivering these lectures tended to make me, in some sort, a public figure in national circles in Dublin, I mean considered altogether outside of the Volunteers. Now one of the disadvantages under which I laboured in the struggle to impress my personal point of view on the policy of the Volunteers was [p. 8] the lack of the sort of general prestige, which I was placed in the way of acquiring by being invited to deliver these lectures. If once I came to be regarded as even approximately as much entitled to speak on national questions as the others, then manifestly I was quite entitled on all counts to fight my own points against them everywhere, in season and out of season. But for this a single series of lectures was

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<sup>199</sup> Éamonn Ceannt (Edward Thomas Kent) (1881-1916) founder member Irish Volunteers; director of communications (1915-16); member of military council; commandant of 4th Battalion Dublin Brigade at South Dublin Union during Easter 1916: see James Quinn, 'Ceannt, Éamonn', *DIB*.

<sup>200</sup> The battle or siege of Kinsale was fought between 2 Oct. 1601 and 3 Jan. 1602.

<sup>201</sup> This took place on 5 June 1646 during the Irish Confederate Wars.

<sup>202</sup> Fought between Jacobites and the forces of William III on 12 July 1691, it was the decisive battle of the Williamite War.

<sup>203</sup> General Jean Joseph Humbert landed a small French force in Mayo to assist the United Irishmen in 1798 which was successful at the Battle of Castlebar on 27 Aug. 1798 but was defeated at Battle of Ballinamuck on 8 Sept. 1798.

<sup>204</sup> O'Connell was in Frongoch from May until 11 July 1916.

<sup>205</sup> To this end, O'Connell published *The Irish wars: a military history of Ireland from the Norse invasions* (Dublin, 1920); see introduction, p. X.

not sufficient. I could not more than claim to have inserted the thin edge of the wedge – if indeed so much.

It will perhaps be useful to describe the character of the meetings of the general council. This consisted of the members of the central executive and representatives from each county board, and the meetings at headquarters took place once a month at noon on a Sunday. The meetings lasted three or four hours. Upon the whole, these council meetings were considerably more business-like than those of the executive and the staff. One could hardly insist on the attendance of a man from Limerick, say, and then waste *all* his time when he attended, and, of course, an agenda was always prepared. MacNeill was always in the chair at these meetings and, although perhaps not quite strict enough, was upon the whole a very good chairman. Then, too, the men chosen to represent the county boards were, with a couple of exceptions, men of sound common sense, and their contributions to the discussion were always valuable. I always considered it a pity that on these occasions the country representatives did not take upon themselves a larger say in the business. If they had, it would have served as a useful and very necessary corrective to the one-sided view held by the Dublin people. The country men could have with advantage shown in what and to what extent they fell short of the Dublin standard, and their *advice* should have been asked instead of their *assent*, as was too often the case.

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## Chapter 8<sup>206</sup>

Training of Dublin Brigade – NCOs – My views on outpost and night training – Training of officers – Mobilisation arrangements – Failure to organise district – Auxiliary instructors – Improvement in brigade – Field ‘half-days’

My first experience with the Dublin Brigade suggested to me several lines on which reforms might usefully be pushed. Among these was the training of the officers and NCOs. Many of the latter were quite ignorant of their business, even of the mere drill movements – although they were for the most part men of an excellent stamp. I determined that their systematic training should be taken up. It happened that Captain O’Duffy was unemployed at the moment and I urged that he was precisely the man for the task of training the NCOs. I was somewhat surprised to find on the part of some members of the staff a very marked animus against Captain [Eimar] O’Duffy. His extreme youth – he was only twenty at the time – was urged against him.<sup>207</sup> I maintained that if his efficiency was admitted, his age didn’t matter. Another objection was his manner – ‘the manner of the OTC’ as it was described.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Numbered IX in O’Connell’s original typescript.

<sup>207</sup> At this time O’Duffy was 22; he was born on 29 Sept. 1893.

<sup>208</sup> The Officer Training Corps (OTC) operated a junior division in public schools and a senior division in the universities. It was established as part of the Haldane reforms of the reserve forces to meet the shortage of

This was said to be objectionable to the feelings of the men. To this I answered that it does not do for an NCO to be thin-skinned. If he is sensitive about what is said to himself, he will be too careful about what he says to his subordinates and will inevitably be a dismal failure in consequence. As a matter of fact, I believe that Captain O’Duffy’s abruptness had an excellent effect in sharpening the subordinate command of the brigade.

I finally succeeded in getting Captain O’Duffy appointed and he prepared a system of training. This consisted of two hours – (4-6 pm) on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons – as being those extra days on which men could most easily spare time from their civilian pursuits. These classes consisted of drill at Camden Row (the 3rd battalion headquarters) for an hour or as long as light served, followed by a lecture at headquarters<sup>209</sup> (about 10 minutes march) for the rest of the time. Aspirants for NCO rank could get permission from their company commanders to attend this instruction and some of the junior officers also attended voluntarily. Commonly, 60 or 70 [p. 2] attended the Saturday drills and about 20 the Wednesday ones, the attendance upon the whole being most satisfactory.

In the drills Captain O’Duffy at first gave a thorough grounding in squad, section and company and extended-order drill. Absolute precision was insisted on and the NCOs, after a time, drilled as a very soldierly company indeed. Later on the individual men were given command in turn so as to accustom them to handling larger bodies than their own commands in case such a need should ever arise. It was most gratifying to notice how the men gradually acquired a sharp firm manner of command and a readiness of judgment. The lectures were arranged consecutively and the men were required to take copious notes. They were encouraged to ask questions – naturally, only questions immediately arising out of the lecture, and any difficulties were thus cleared up. If any point of special interest or importance was raised, Captain O’Duffy postponed its treatment to the next lecture and then treated it in a more complete fashion. The NCOs derived a considerable amount of military knowledge from these lectures, sufficient to be a good supplement to the practical soldiery they acquired at the drills.

It is not out of place to emphasise here the degree of keenness displayed by those who attended this NCOs instruction, for it might have been possible for some to be excused, if they sought it, and besides there were the privates who volunteered. *Some of these men had four drills or instructions per week*: they had the two afternoon instructions for NCOs, their own company drill on some other night, and either shooting or a field day on Sunday. Practically all the time they were not working was given to military training. To the sacrifices they made to procure their equipment must be added this sacrifice of all time available for recreation. Later on some of them were called upon – and all of them were ready – to make a still bigger sacrifice.

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officers and was incorporated into the new Territorial Force created in 1907. Eimar O’Duffy had been a member of the OTC at Stonyhurst.

<sup>209</sup> 2 Dawson Street.

In November and December I spent an entire month with the Dublin Brigade, dating from about the time at which the training of NCOs began. During this time I took one company each evening [p. 3] and marched it out to a suitable piece of ground, where I put it through the work of finding sentry groups and pickets for a section of a line of outposts. This duty seemed to me to present better facilities for general tactical training than an equal amount of any other instruction [as] so many things enter into its proper performance. In the first place, it gave a good practical example of minor tactics in general; in the second place, it taught the individual Volunteer the need and manner of concealment, silence, self-control, and alertness at night; finally, it taught the men the more or less routine duties of visiting patrols, challenging, countersign etc. I further always regarded the proper performance of outpost duty as not only the best, but the *only sound* training for night operations and I was strongly of the opinion that our men should pay particular attention to night operations.

My reasons for this opinion were manifold. The circumstances of our training – almost always in the evenings – lent itself very favourably to practising night operations. Hence, it was quite feasible to give our men a thorough grounding in this particular branch of war. But besides being thus easily possible, it was in the last degree eminently desirable that we should have this training because our small bands would have the intimate local knowledge that would enable us to turn it to the fullest account. Moreover, those same small parties would be able to inflict more damage and achieve better results at night than in the daytime. Finally, ‘in the night all cats are grey’ and our inferiority in equipment and arms would matter not at all. It was imperative for us to husband our ammunition, and any tactical method conducing to this end should be promptly availed of. I was an unqualified subscriber to General Dragomirov’s dictum that ‘criminal’ was the only word to apply to firing in a night attack.<sup>210</sup>

In the case of the Dublin Brigade we were fortunate in that there was within easy marching of each battalion headquarters a locality suitable for this outpost training. The 1st battalion had Phoenix Park and the Royal Canal, the 2nd battalion Fr Matthew Park, the 3rd battalion the Grand Canal, the 4th suitable country near Kimmage. Needless to say, suitable localities could always be found within [p. 4] easy reach of any country centre.

Another simple exercise which I always found very useful was to practise the men in keeping contact on the march at night. I used to string out the whole force into connecting files and direct a man here and there to slip out of the column when he thought he saw a chance. It was surprising how this smartened up the men generally, although at first they usually failed to notice. But after a few times, even on the darkest roads, they missed nothing and the sequence – ‘Halt!’ ‘What’s wrong?’ ‘File missing’ – occurred regularly every time.

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<sup>210</sup> General Mikhail Dragomirov (1830-1905) was a Russian military theoretician.

At the same time, I took up a somewhat more advanced course of training with the officers through the medium of lectures and staff rides. For the lectures, I selected the subject of orders. First of all I explained the general forms of orders, and then we assumed a tactical situation and followed its development step by step. Starting from certain meagre information, we drafted a set of orders to suit the circumstances, thrashing out each paragraph in detail on the map, supplemented by extra local knowledge where we possessed it. This series continued from one Saturday evening until the next and at the beginning of each lecture I postulated such extra as might be procured by good average scouting from day to day. In this way, we contrived to combine the study of orders, tactics, protection, outposts, map-reading and topography, and in this way a very fair measure of profit was derived from the lectures. All the officers of the brigade took part in these lectures and discussions which were held in the large room at headquarters.

The staff rides were conducted on bicycles on Saturday afternoons or Sunday mornings. On each ride came the officers of one battalion. The rides took us only a few miles out of Dublin and consisted of the detailed examination of a locality. For example, we might consider the best means of defence for a village from a given direction, or the precise location of an outpost line – always having reference to the disposable force. To save time on these occasions, I always went out personally earlier in the week and [p. 5] selected the locality and decided on the general outline of the problem. These little exercises were, I think, very useful and to myself, at any rate, they were invariably pleasant. Very often – indeed whenever possible – we arranged for a manoeuvre exercise on the ground reviewed on each staff ride; sometimes these exercises were carried out by the entire brigade, sometimes by one battalion against another, sometimes by two or three companies of a battalion against two or three of the same battalion. In this way, the officers had a subsequent opportunity of testing their views formed on the ground by a close approach to the conditions of actual combat, which tended to the formation of sound ideas. It was noteworthy how this method of instruction improved us all in the capacity to size up the tactical possibilities of a place.

It will be observed that all my training of the Dublin officers was carried out in the country neighbouring to Dublin. In the course of this series of staff rides and manoeuvre exercises, we gradually acquired a good knowledge of the country around Dublin and, in course of time, even those officers who were city-bred men gradually came to have a good eye for country. I will have later many chances of praising the Dublin officers, I am glad to say; I would have hoped in course of time to have got the Dublin officers to prefer the prospect of fighting outside the city rather than in the streets, although, I may say, I had at this period no knowledge as to what were the individual opinions of the officers on the subject. At all events, if it could be managed that general opinion became strongly against street-fighting as a natural process of growth that was a way of accomplishing the object far preferable to any violent denunciation of it which would have only caused mistrust between my colleagues and myself.

There was one circumstance about the Dublin Brigade, as it stood, which I regarded as requiring to be overhauled, namely the organisation of the Dublin Brigade with a view to rapidity of mobilisation. In theory, the city was divided into four battalion areas: the first and second on the north side, the third and fourth on the south side. In general, the areas corresponded moderately closely to the personnel of the battalions but, all the same, there [p. 6] were numerous instances of men belonging to one battalion who lived in the area of another battalion. Nay, there were even men of the first two battalions who lived south of the river and men of the other two who lived north of it. Mobilisation was carried out through the NCOs, each sergeant being responsible for his own section. It will, therefore, be easy to see that in a hurried mobilisation men might either be overlooked or compelled to mobilise with a strange unit. I was strongly of the opinion that all mobilisation and organisation arrangements should be established on a strictly territorial basis and I recommended that a list should be prepared of men living outside their proper battalion areas as a preliminary step. What made me rather insistent on this point was the fact that in 1798 the occupation of all the Liffey bridges by the government forces had effectively separated the United Irishmen in the two halves of the city. The disadvantage of a similar isolation would, naturally, be reduced to a minimum by ensuring that at least each isolated fraction would be self-contained and homogenous and have nothing to fear from intermingling of units. Of course, there were difficulties in the way, but these were merely personal with individuals who could be brought to see the desirability on military grounds of the new distribution. As a matter of fact, I believe the list was prepared and the transfers were begun; at least the enlistment of men outside their own areas was stopped in the battalions. Unfortunately, for this, as for others of our reforms, we had not time to bring it to fruition.

In one respect Dublin was disappointing: the influence it had on the surrounding country. It fell short, both absolutely and still more relatively, of the standard of Cork, Limerick and Kilkenny in the matter of organising the surrounding country. In a great degree, I attribute this to the fact that Dublin was thoroughly *urban*: the social and economic and nationalist life was all inside and concerned with the city itself, and scarcely anyone knew the country intimately. Such of the Dublin Volunteers as were country-bred were from all over Ireland and, naturally, did not know the special conditions of the country around Dublin. And those who were city-born were, if possible, more unfamiliar still with those conditions. [p. 7] In the provincial cities, on the other hand, with their smaller population, people were much more in touch with the country districts, and compared to Dublin the outlook was far more *rural*. It was easy enough to find a Cork city Volunteer who was familiar with a nearby country district and would undertake pioneer duty therein. In Dublin such a man was by no means so easily found.

Still if this difference in conditions was properly realised and allowed for, there was a probability that the problem of organising the districts near Dublin could have been tackled. It would have meant diligent searching until the man was found who could do the needful

pioneer work in a given locality, sending him out to get hold of local men and arrange for a manoeuvre exercise of some importance in the locality.

There was another problem affecting the country generally that to my mind could have been quite effectively solved by using the Dublin Brigade – at least in the later stages. It would have meant a certain amount of expense, but it would probably have given results that would have justified the same. Amongst the Dublin junior officers and NCOs there were plenty of men good enough and to spare to act as instructors to country corps, and they could have been sent Sunday after Sunday over a very extended area of the country. It was easier to get from Dublin to Dundalk than from Cork to Macroom, yet the latter was often done and the former never. And yet it would be difficult to imagine any scheme better calculated to promote an intimate connexion between Dublin and the country.

I noticed – indeed everybody noticed – a marked improvement in the efficiency of the Dublin Brigade as time went on. The measures I have indicated for the improved instruction of the officers and the NCOs had their natural effect in a corresponding improvement in the instruction of the rank and file. There were certain unexpected, and even ludicrous, obstacles in the way, but we gradually contrived to overcome many of them. At first, there was, in a fashion, a lack of reality about the Sunday manoeuvre exercises arising from the following cause. At first the exercise began about midday or in the early afternoon when the majority of [p. 8] the men had been at Mass. As a natural consequence, the men were in their ‘Sunday best’ in which condition they felt little inclined for whole-hearted skirmishing among the thick hedges and deep drains of north county Dublin; an orderly march along the roads was much more to their taste. This difficulty was surmounted by a regulation of the brigade council that every man on manoeuvres should wear either uniform or an old suit. This had the desired effect.

As the percentage of men on the rolls who were present at manoeuvres was ordinarily small and I had heard a number of complaints that field days were very long and that they had no free time at all, I suggested that a good method would be to assemble the men quite early in the morning so that they could dismiss before noon after a couple of hours work. This enabled the men to be back for dinner and gave them the entire afternoon free. The system was adopted and proved excellent for battalion manoeuvres, for which it allowed ample time. At this stage, too, battalion manoeuvres were much the most important from the point of training of officers and NCOs. Of course, for the brigade manoeuvres the entire day was still allotted but at this time the several battalions had improved to such an extent that brigade manoeuvres were likely to be more profitable than formerly.

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## Chapter 9<sup>211</sup>

Ideas for development in 1916 – Higher training for field officers – Cork O[fficer].T[raining].  
School – Its effects

While at home for Christmas 1915, I spent some of the time working at a scheme of development for 1916 which seemed to me to be that best suited to the country in existing conditions. The first point to be concentrated on was, in my opinion, the work of the organisers: in this I was of the opinion that the best guide was the feeling in different parts of the country. Applications and letters to headquarters came in from all parts, and from these some indication could be got as to the state of opinion in different districts. In my view, the most promising of these should be properly investigated and if it seemed a good investment, the working up of the district in question should be systematically taken in hand. In short, the districts most easily worked at the moment should be those tackled and those districts be required to pay for the expense of organising them, or as large a proportion of that expense as possible. Of course, I quite realised that the most easily organisable districts might be remote from anywhere – ‘of no strategic importance’ – in fact. But by the mere fact of having their men trained and armed, they should at once become ‘of strategic importance’. It so happened that the pre-conceived idea of an insurrection had committed some of my colleagues to the express task of organising districts of greater importance indeed, judged by the map, but where the response was so feeble as not to justify the money expended. For example, there is no doubt but that for the money spent in Kildare we would have contrived in Clare to train men amounting to a formidable numerical strength. My idea would have given only slow returns it is true, but it would have given big ones. I blame no one for disagreeing with me – our objects were not the same.

I have already touched on most of the other aspects of this scheme: the reserve of officers, the decentralisation of the arms supply, the point of organising from local centres, the question of a comprehensive scheme of camps for training junior officers and NCOs in minor tactics and service conditions, the accumulation [p. 2] of local information of military value (a service of intelligence in fact). All these matters admitted of gradual improvement – allowed of no other than a gradual improvement, in fact. And the improvement in one would contribute to an advance in the others.

Another matter that the time appeared ripe for was a certain amount of higher training for our senior officers. This would comprise, for the most part, more advanced theoretical work relative to the handling of larger bodies of different arms – at least, infantry, cyclists and train which were the branches we possessed. My idea was that selected officers should have a fortnight’s course in Dublin where they would sleep in barracks and have a comprehensive syllabus of work laid out: lectures, staff rides etc. The

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<sup>211</sup> Numbered X in O’Connell’s original typescript.

Dublin Brigade would be at their disposal for experiments and some field days could be arranged on which they would have an opportunity of putting the theoretical studies into practice in accordance with a carefully prepared scheme. A step in this direction was made in Dublin in January.

On this occasion a week was set aside for this kind of training and a few country officers were detailed to attend the course. Also some of the Dublin officers were detailed for the same purpose. But the time was unsuitable, the training had not been sufficiently made known, and there was other work in abundance just then with the result that but little profit was derived from the undertaking – except by way of suggesting improvements for the next move in a similar line.

A different and particularly successful training school for officers was started in Cork immediately after that last mentioned. For some time past, the Cork Brigade had been making preparations for a systematic training of officers preparatory to a thorough organising campaign to include all the county. I went to Cork towards the end of January 1916 to take charge of this school which was to continue for a fortnight. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the second week I got a bad attack of influenza and, besides, was summoned to Dublin so I was not able personally to take any part in the second week's training. Happily, however, everything worked very successfully and smoothly just the same. Where there's a will [p. 3] there's a way, and the will was in Cork and no mistake.

The officers who attended this course of training were sent at the expense of their corps, except a few who were able to pay their own expenses and did so. It was possible to have them attend at this time of the year as there was nothing doing just at the moment in the agricultural line. All the same, the sacrifice made by them and the sacrifice made by their corps deserves to be recorded. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the whole thing was the extremely accurate judgment shown by the country companies in the selection they made. It looked to me as if each corps had deliberated in cold blood: 'would I trust my neck to so-and-so in preference to any other man here?' The kind of men who were there were the kind would come if that question was answered in the affirmative. Their men evidently decided that these men were the stuff, and that it was they who should have the training also. For me, I can only say they justified the confidence of their companies – and that although they knew very little about military matters on their arrival. But everything that could be learnt in a fortnight that much they did learn. About thirty officers attended this school, all from County Cork except three who were from County Limerick. Some of the Cork Volunteers, of different ranks, who had a little spare time on their hands [spent] it with the school, thus taking as much of the training as they could get.

I was particularly fortunate in having Vice-Commandant [Seán] O'Sullivan<sup>212</sup> and Captain O'Gorman<sup>213</sup> of Cork city able to help me with the training and Lieutenant Barry<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> See above note 97 p. X.

<sup>213</sup> Christopher O'Gorman was captain D Company, Cork city Battalion.

for quartermaster. In fact, without them I should have been practically helpless. This was inevitably the case on account of the method of instruction as far as the forenoon was concerned. The forenoon was spent indoors [for] two to three hours. During this period I split up the command into three squads: Vice-Commandant O’Sullivan, Captain O’Gorman, and myself taking one each for training as a squad and for individual training. Thus one squad might be at squad drill, a second at bayonet exercise, a third at the manual of arms. Each man was given command of the squad in turn and then sent into another room to fall in there, a change between the squads going on continually. Thus every man was kept [p. 4] constantly on the move for the whole forenoon and, moreover, in such a manner that his work was varied all the time. In turn of a morning, he would both obey and command in as many as three branches of military instruction. A gruelling morning, you say? At all events, a training that would not dispose him to spare his own command when he had a chance of getting his own back off them.

All the officers attending the course messed in headquarters and all except a few who, for one reason or another, got special exemption slept there. They had thus experience of life in barracks and the corresponding routine. Indeed, in a local paper there appeared a paragraph headed: ‘Sinn Féin barracks! What next?’<sup>215</sup> In this barrack life there was observable the same changes as I had noticed in the training camps – the growth of professional military spirit. And this militarisation of the mind was, naturally, the best preparation for the training to be imparted to them. In addition, of course this system of messing and billeting the officers attending the course was financially much more economical for them.

In the early morning before breakfast the officer aspirants were given half an hour’s training in extended order drill. For this purpose, the Mardyke Walk was utilised and the command divided into two sections, every man in each section taking charge in turn. The constant practice at this made them very handy and flexible, quick to perceive mistakes and inaccuracies and to correct them. On the way from and to headquarters they were marched strictly to attention, sometimes doubling and constantly changed from fours to file and vice versa. Great strictness was insisted on and any man carrying himself badly was called upon by number to correct himself. After a little time, the corps presented a very soldierly appearance indeed.

In the afternoons the corps went out for a small field exercise. In spite of the time of year, we managed to get these exercises while light served; we aimed to be back at headquarters for tea at six, which would mean starting on our return about five or so and thus we had sufficient time from the [p. 5] ordinary after-dinner start. The field exercises carried out varied. At one time the corps would be handled on the road as the advance guard of a larger column; at another the exercise would take the form of inspecting a

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<sup>214</sup> William Barry was 1st lieutenant C Company, Cork city Battalion.

<sup>215</sup> This probably refers to a minor headline in the *Skibbereen Eagle*, 29 Jan. 1916: ‘SINN FÉIN BARRACKS STARTED. What will be the next?’

suitable defensive position for a small force and investigating in detail the best method of occupying it. It was in this field work that the natural intelligence and 'eye for ground' of these men were visible. All of them were country-bred and their aptitude for the work was corresponding.

In the evenings after tea the officer aspirants were 'turned loose' on the [Cork] city Volunteers. The city battalion comprised four companies and by putting on the screw a little it was easy enough to secure the attendance of a sufficient number of men every night. The City Volunteers present were divided up into squads and a batch of the country officers detailed to each squad. Each candidate took over the city men in turn and was required to put them through the exercise, giving the full detail of the instruction and correcting any faults. This did away, once and for all, both with any diffidence or shyness on the part of the countrymen, and with any unjustified assumption of superiority by the townsmen. There was little fear that any man who had put the comparatively well-trained city men through their facings would be afraid to give his own raw little company a thorough grueling if need be.

Every Sunday while the school lasted the entire city battalion was paraded for a field exercise so that the raw officers had a certain amount of opportunity to participate in operations on a somewhat more extensive scale. Besides, on every Saturday or other half-holiday as many city Volunteers as could be paraded were requisitioned and on these occasions somewhat larger forces were at our disposal. Occasionally, to vary the continual work indoors in the forenoon, or when the weather in the afternoon did not permit of training outside, the programme was varied by fairly short theoretical lectures on the blackboard – the instruction being always kept within pretty close distance of the actual conditions these men might reasonably expect to experience when handling their own small commands. Matters of organisation, equipment, armament and the like were thus touched on, besides a general idea of map-reading and [p. 6] field sketching. In short, the aim was to make these theoretical lectures as *practical* as possible.

The aim of this school – it cannot be too clearly stated – was to train raw men to officer other men no rawer than themselves. Obviously, the first requisite for this purpose was to give them a 'manner of command'. If the training did not give them this, it might make *soldiers* of them it is true, but it would not make *officers*. I aimed at this first of all and determined to give the first week to this, exclusively if need be. The first thing they were taught was how to hold themselves: it is impossible for an officer to impress his men unless he has a smart carriage himself. More, unless he has this he ought to be ashamed to describe 'the position of the soldier' to his men. Part of this matter of carriage was how to keep the hands when giving instruction without arms. I observed that much the most unusual method was for the instructor to stand before the centre of his squad with his hands hanging limply down by his sides, as if he were a recruit himself and a particularly raw one at that. A few more self-confident [men] put their arms akimbo which was, if anything, worse, though in the opposite direction. I insisted that all alike should clasp the hands

behind the back which is, to my mind, the only proper carriage if the officer is without arms. At all events, we got them all able to stand before a squad and 'look the business'. No small step in advance!

Next was the word of command: the main thing about this was that they had to be able to realise that the important point is not that the utterance of the officer should resemble what's printed in the drill book, but that it *should sound like a command* and like a command that's to be obeyed quick too. First, we taught them the proper accent and intonation, and then we made them shout. This last was done on the indoor range, the officer aspirant being put at one end and his squad at the other. He was compelled to give the detail of instruction so as to be heard quite distinctly at that distance. Then the instructor ordered the squad to mark time and directed the aspirant to 'carry on'. Thus he had to give a command that would be heard above the noise of a squad marking time on boards. [p. 7] But all these men had sound lungs and there was no manner of hesitation or weakness about their words of command after a week.

When we had got them this far it was plain sailing enough: all that remained was to correct any little individual peculiarities an individual might have. One might be too easy-going on details, another might handle the men unnecessarily to correct them; but the lion's share of the work was over. We had the officer's manner; it only remained to add extra confidence and knowledge and our method gave those as well as we were able with our facilities. As time went on, the results were gratifying indeed. One of the class – Captain Manning<sup>216</sup> of Donoughmore – was constantly rallied by his comrades on the grounds that he would inevitably be taken as a deserter from the Irish Guards and, in point of fact, two other members of the school were questioned in the street by police on suspicion of being British army deserters who had contrived to procure civilian clothes. I gave to each man who attended the school a certificate that he was entitled to officer's grade upon the conclusion of the course.

It is not to be supposed that it was 'all work and no play' for our training period. On the contrary, the Cumann na mBan ladies gave us two particularly enjoyable evenings at their rooms, and the general efficiency nowise suffered in consequence.

The Cork officers' training school was one of the best pieces of practical work done by the Irish Volunteers. In sum, the result was that some thirty country companies – which could not in any other way have got an instructor at all – were provided with a man who could train them and lead them, who could be very helpful in instructing his subaltern officers and NCOs, who would be always on the spot, and who would, in addition, be thoroughly au fait in the Cork headquarters. More far-reaching results were gained than could conceivably have been obtained on any other system. The venture was an experiment and it had turned out an unqualified success. I personally had acquired many valuable hints

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<sup>216</sup> This was John Manning who recalled attending the course in his statement to the BMH: see IMA, BMH WS 1,720, p. 1.

as to the conduct of such schools, and I was strongly in favour of them wherever and whenever they could be managed. I was convinced at the time and am still that no other method would do so much to spread the Volunteers in a fashion at one and the same time extensive, sound, and lasting.

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## Chapter 10<sup>217</sup>

Examination of Dublin officers – Different standard of Dublin and country companies –  
Manufacture of equipment – Development of communications

After my return from Cork to Dublin I was detailed to carry out the officers' examinations of the Dublin Brigade. I calculated that this would take about a month, allowing a week for each battalion and roughly a night for each company. The examination consisted of two portions: (a) each officer was required to drill or instruct a company or section in three or four branches. This was with a view to testing their knowledge of their work and manner of command; (b) a tactical problem was set on the ground for written solution. This was meant to test the possibility of the officers proving fit for higher command. My contention was that every officer to be considered eligible must pass the (a) test satisfactorily. Otherwise, he could not be considered fit to retain his rank. Failure to pass (b) test would not, naturally, cause him to be reduced. In addition to the officers, any NCOs who wished could get permission to present themselves for examination. Several did so and were very satisfactory. This gave us a considerable number of men qualified for officer grade in case of necessity. The examination included no one above the grade of captain. I had originally intended it to include all, but headquarters altered this. In any event, the four battalion commandants would have had not the least difficulty in passing the tests.

It was my object to ratify as many of the existing grades as possible and to reduce no officer who could be retained. I furnished a report to each battalion commandant on the officers of his own command immediately I had finished with them as far as test (a) was concerned. Test (b) which was not so important I never was able to finish. Indeed, I believe there were quite one-third of the solutions that I never got time to touch. Even so there were many excellent solutions. As a matter of fact, the standard of command taken all round was a pleasant surprise to me. There were a few officers I had to report rather unfavourably upon but very few indeed.

**[p. 2]** This is possibly as suitable a place as any other to contrast the military standard of our men in Dublin with that of our men through the country. The difference in standard was a thing that the revolutionary section of the staff utterly failed to realise and

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<sup>217</sup> Numbered XI in O'Connell's original typescript.

this failure to realise it was a main cause of their mistakes. This matter is so important that I shall not apologise for treating it in considerable detail.

I have just said that from a technical military point of view the Dublin Brigade was well officered – quite as well officered as a force with our opportunities for training could reasonably expect to be. There were very few really poor officers and the NCO ranks were capable of filling the gaps; more, there were some exceptionally good officers. In the country generally, the opposite was the case. The vast majority of the small detached corps could not strictly be said to be officered at all in any real sense. The large bodies were in some cases pretty well officered, but even in these there was far from being the same homogeneous level that obtained in Dublin. And the whole question of providing officers for our force was only beginning to be systematically grappled with. So much should be clear from what I have already described. Much would have been done in another summer of systematic training in camps to provide for our deficiencies in this respect.

And again in respect of aggregate numbers available Dublin was far and away ahead of the country as a whole. The average attendance at drills in Dublin totalled up to 1,200 or so – representing about 66 per cent of the men on the company rolls. The outside nominal total was thus about 1,800. This, after all when everything is taken into account, is a considerable number of men. Such a body as this is bound to powerfully influence public opinion in any place; on the other hand, a few score of men cannot exert any such influence, they can just maintain their position.

In respect of training the difference was even more marked. The Dublin Volunteers were very fairly drilled and disciplined and exercised; they had a certain pretty well-defined military atmosphere about them. Their cadres had a couple of years standing and the later arrivals in the ranks could be assimilated without too much [p. 3] difficulty. I do not say that the Dublin Volunteers were ideal troops, for they had many quite obvious shortcomings, but they were improving very steadily. But they were far from the ‘tin soldiers’ they were mocked as being and plenty of battles have been won by worse. But this standard was only equalled by a few of the very best country corps – I speak only of the rank and file – it was not attained anywhere else in respect of the officers. To strike an average of country corps was practically impossible: the range of efficiency was so wide. But taking a wide swathe in the middle of the range, it is correct to say that the men could shoot a little, could do a little squad drill, and had a little theoretical knowledge – this last of the vaguest and most rudimentary [nature]. They were just emerging from the mob stage and, of course, the newer corps never had time to be other than a mob.

In armament it was the same story. I have described how circumstances largely compelled us to keep practically all our reserve stores of arms in or near Dublin. Thus the Dublin Volunteer was always able to get a weapon and ammunition at a few days’ notice. He might not, it is true, be able right off to secure the kind of firearm he would prefer but he could get some firearm that would be good enough. Besides, the inducements to get armed were greater in Dublin – all his comrades were armed and it was up to him to emulate them.

If he neglected this he was written off as only a make belief Volunteer. But, indeed, most of the Dublin men were not in need of such incentives. For the most part, they were entirely anxious to procure arms.

What I have said about arms applies with equal force to equipment. Numbers of the better Dublin Volunteers were literally 'ready to the last gaiter button': they had their spare shirt, socks, towel and soap *always* in their haversacks; they had suitable footwear and all odds and ends. Those who had not everything ready had something ready and were gradually providing themselves with the rest. The countrymen, except a few who had attended a camp or a few exceptional men, had no equipment at all. And, apart from firearms they had always had, they were not as quick to buy up existing supplies of arms as were the Dublin men. Nor, indeed, had they [p. 4] equal facilities.

Also the morale of the Dublin men was higher as will to some extent be gathered from what I have said. This better morale was not of the nature of greater courage but of greater self-confidence. It was an outcome of their superiority in the other respects I have described. If the country corps had reached the Dublin standard in those other points, a corresponding improvement in their morale would have resulted. I repeat that in respect of actual courage the country contingents were quite as good as the Dublin ones: perhaps, indeed, *esprit de corps* would convey my meaning more exactly than morale. At all events, taking one thing with another, the clear course seemed to me to be to work up the country corps to the standard of the Dublin Brigade [and] not to assume an equality that did not exist.

Among the many activities carried on at headquarters was the manufacture of haversacks which was provided for and superintended by Hobson. We decided that for our men the most economical equipment was a big roomy waterproof haversack which would hold everything handily and would not be expensive. We sold large quantities of these at 2/6 apiece and they were entirely satisfactory. In no other way could our men secure cheap and satisfactory equipment so easily. I regarded it as an excellent sign of the times that representatives of country corps coming to Dublin were often authorised to purchase quantities of these haversacks.

Another article of equipment which we designed and got made was belts. These had shoulder straps crossed at the back and coming down straight in front, taking the weight of the ammunition pouches right where it fell. The pouches held 75 rounds each, one on each side, the strapping of these was defective but that was the only flaw in the equipment. There was a bayonet frog which would also take an officer's sword if necessary. The equipment thus suited all ranks.

A matter in which we had been making very noteworthy progress was the branch of communications. This departure was in the hands of Kent [Ceannt] and he was making a huge success of it. Kent possessed a great insight into detail and a habit of industrious accuracy and a [p. 5] patience far too rare among our countrymen. He divided his work into



two distinct branches: the first concerned Dublin and was directly superintended by himself and elaborated to a remarkable degree. It is necessary to remember that this branch was entirely distinct from the ordinary battalion machinery of mobilisation – it was *communications* in the strict sense. The second branch of the scheme concerned the country at large and over it Kent could only exercise a general and indirect supervision. The aim of it was in brief that our own men should carry all our own messages. This naturally meant that great speed could not be expected at first, nor was it desired by us. Our object was to establish a *dependable* way of sending messages without possibility of external interference. Thus orders not requiring immediate performances, report etc. were sent by this method according as our lines ran *through*. In places the postal authorities held up letters indefinitely and even extracted money. Our lines were built up bit by bit, each link being tested before the next one was added on. Sometimes it would be necessary to make three or four attempts before we could arrive at the best line. Sometimes the two end sections of the chain might be fairly long and complete, and communication in the centre section unreliable or intermittent. Clearly, the work of local organisation properly pushed would in course of time remedy these defects. As it was, the scheme as far as it went was a fine and useful achievement.

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## Chapter 11<sup>218</sup>

MacNeill's policy – My memorandum – What the country thought – Conflicting views among the authorities – MacNeill's move to assert himself – Development of Wexford – RIC provocation – Tullamore – Our recruiting countermove – Incidents of that Sunday

'Did MacNeill', it may be asked, 'ever definitely propound any policy as against the clearly revolutionary party'? He certainly did – a very clear policy to which he consistently adhered and to which by the country in general he took every possible step to secure. Moreover, on some occasions he formulated this policy in clear and quite unmistakable terms, and that apart from his public writings and statements. On one occasion he set out his views in great detail in a letter to Pearse. This letter Pearse read at a meeting of the executive. On this occasion, MacNeill was not able to be present and we all took it that the letter in question was, so to speak, MacNeill's contribution to the discussion. There was no discussion. The excuse put forth being that this was a carefully prepared document and that the rest of us, not having had a like opportunity of systematising our ideas and putting them on paper, would be at a disadvantage in considering the subject. There was a majority of this opinion and so the matter ended with promises of full investigation later. To me, at

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<sup>218</sup> Numbered XIV in O'Connell's original typescript

least, it was quite plain that discussion was the last thing desired by some of the executive and that no stone would be left unturned to postpone and prevent it.

In this letter, which was written somewhat subsequent to the frustration of the insurrectionary attempt in January<sup>219</sup>, MacNeill joined issue with some personal views of Pearse emphasising the fact that no man should allow his personal feelings to overthrow the judgment of the executive as a body. He maintained that the Volunteers, being in some sort a national safeguard, should be employed with the greatest care. They were too valuable a national possession to be lightly regarded.

Very soon after this meeting Hobson asked me to prepare a memorandum from the technical military point of view on the Volunteers, setting out the contingencies that would from that standpoint justify us in taking extreme military action or, in other words, waging war. [p. 2] Hobson, as secretary of the Volunteers and being all his time at headquarters, naturally had the greatest number of opportunities of meeting men from different parts of the country. He wished to have this expression of opinion for the guidance of men through the country who might not be in a position to take a comprehensive view of our situation as a whole. He was of the opinion that some such memorandum as this might be of service in dispelling illusions and checking any exaggerated views of our capacity for action. I, accordingly, prepared a memorandum, a copy of which I gave to MacNeill at a subsequent date. In brief, my main position was that we should not enter into a state of war unless it was forced on us. I went in detail into the various courses it was possible for the government to take which would leave us no alternative but war, such as attempts to enforce conscription, to disarm us – which would be merely a prelude to the first – or to seize the food supply of the country.

It was possible for the country at large to form an estimate of the policy of the Volunteers. That estimate in the rough had been formed and I believe that, in the main, it coincided with what MacNeill's own policy was. Some of our colleagues were of the opinion that we would not be allowed to follow this policy to its logical conclusion. I believed – and believe still – that we could have done so. I think the general trend of the evidence before the Revolt Commission will bear me out.<sup>220</sup> I will draw attention only to these points.

There were two totally distinct government policies with regard to us: the military and the civil. The policy of the military authorities was, in a word, to suppress us. This, of course, was always possible; the only question was, was it expedient? So long as we made no really provocative move, any measures of suppression would enable us to rally the public opinion of the country to us, and then it might prove to be a miscalculation and not worth

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<sup>219</sup> In Jan. 1916 members of the IRB military council convinced socialist revolutionary James Connolly to postpone a mooted insurrection by the Irish Citizen Army. He was then co-opted to the military council and cooperated with its plans for Easter 1916.

<sup>220</sup> The Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland was chaired by Charles Hardinge, first baron of Penshurst. It was charged with enquiring 'into the causes of the recent outbreak of rebellion in Ireland, and into the conduct and degree of responsibility of the civil and military executive in Ireland in connection therewith': see *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland: report of commission* (June 1916), Cd. 8279.

the trouble. Still, as a feat of arms it was perfectly feasible – although I am inclined to think that the British army authorities considerably underrated our fighting power, especially that of our better trained units. But the practicability could not be doubted and to a soldier it would seem the obvious course of action.

The opposite view was that of the civil executive: Mr Birrell<sup>221</sup> [p. 3] and Sir Matthew Nathan.<sup>222</sup> Now it is easy to be wise after the event and it was easy to say in May 1916 that those gentlemen had failed lamentably in their duty.<sup>223</sup> But it is not at all so easy to prove that any other course of action would have been any better from their point of view. These two officials desired to keep the country at peace, which was obviously desirable in many ways from the Imperial point of view. It did not seem to either of them a likely way of achieving this – nor was it – to come down on us, unless we were plainly putting ourselves in the wrong. It seemed to me that if we had only played our cards fairly we had the government in a cleft stick. Either they would have to make the first move and suppress us by force – this raising the country about their ears and being compelled to scrap their ‘small nationality’ postulate – or they would be compelled to look on at our rapidly increasing strength until we would be in a very fair position to demand practically what we wished and be absolutely certain of making a hell of a fight for it if denied.

One incident is worth narrating as an example of how MacNeill sought to secure control in such a way as to cause no ill-feeling or unpleasantness between himself and his colleagues. [St] Patrick’s Day 1916 was set apart as a general parade day for the Volunteers all over the country, having as a special feature a review in Dublin in College Green. MacNeill and Hobson both appeared at this review. This was the first time either had appeared at a purely military function. This habit of being absent from such had a bad effect; it tended to spread the feeling that they did not take the military side of the Volunteers in earnest and that they were merely acting the part of politicians. The new departure was welcomed by many, who thought that MacNeill was not taking his due place at the head of affairs, the regrettable thing was that such a policy had not been adopted by him long before.

I myself was not in Dublin at this time but as a matter of fact I was differently circumstanced. There was no danger that I would not be sufficiently before the rank and file because my business kept me necessarily before them at all times. This [St] Patrick’s Day I was in Enniscorthy where we had a field exercise. I went on the next day to Wexford where I found that some small corps were being organised in the neighbourhood of the town.<sup>224</sup> I

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<sup>221</sup> Augustine Birrell (1850–1933) was chief secretary for Ireland (1907–16): see Pat Jalland, ‘Birrell, Augustine’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>222</sup> Sir Matthew Nathan (1862–1939) was under-secretary for Ireland (July 1914–May 1916): see Colin Newbury, ‘Nathan, Sir Matthew’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>223</sup> The report of the Royal Commission placed primary responsibility on Birrell as the administrative head of the government in Ireland.

<sup>224</sup> The Wexford county inspector reported that O’Connell spent five days in Enniscorthy and one in Wexford: CI Wexford, Mar. 1916 (TNA, CO 904/99).

carried out an instructive piece of night [p. 4] work on this occasion between Wexford and Kingsford, one of the new corps, on which occasion the newly formed company made quite a creditable showing. It was particularly gratifying to find that the district of Wexford was beginning to stir. There were no better material in Ireland and I was convinced that a big showing of country corps in Wexford town would inevitably have the effect of strengthening greatly our position in the town, where, by this time, the hostility was marked.

The government at this time – towards the end of March 1916 – began to make a sort of half-and-half move against us: the object being to make such a provocative use of the RIC as would make our men retaliate in such a way that local feeling would be with the RIC. This, then, would give the desired excuse for proceeding to the formal suppression of the force. A few days after [St] Patrick's Day it seemed that such an incident had occurred in Tullamore. The details of that incident are well known.<sup>225</sup> The stage management was very crude – nothing surprising to those who knew the RIC best – the Volunteers displayed a more determined front than was expected and one policeman was dangerously wounded. Local feeling turned over entirely to the Volunteers and the RIC had the mortification of knowing that they had put their rather large feet in it rather badly.

Three incidents connected with the Tullamore affray are not so well known. The first was the instruction by the military authorities in Dublin that if any considerable body of Sinn Féiners boarded the morning train at Kingsbridge the engine should be uncoupled at Inchicore and the 'relief column' immobilised in that fashion. The second incident was that a battalion of infantry and a special train were held all night at the Curragh siding ready to proceed to Tullamore in case of necessity. The third incident was on our side and consisted of a night mobilisation and standing to arms of the Athlone Volunteers in case any move should be made against them.

That the Tullamore affair was no accident was made plain enough by the simultaneous arrests of Captain Mellows and Lieutenant Blythe at the same time and the measures taken to enforce against them the deportation orders of the previous summer. There was a meeting of the general [p. 5] council on the following Sunday<sup>226</sup> and this new government move against us was the main subject of discussion. On this occasion there was practically no divergence of opinion; even the more cautious men were quite clear that this policy of the government could not go on or a rot might set in. And the more extreme section was cautious for the nonce because they now knew the appointed day for insurrection. It was on this occasion that MacNeill drafted the 'hands off' manifesto for the daily press. The only paper with sufficient courage to publish it was the unionist *Evening*

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<sup>225</sup> On the night of 20 Mar. 1916 shots were fired in the Sinn Féin rooms in Tullamore at CI Crane, DI Fitzgerald, Head Constable Stewart and Sergeant Ahern when they went to investigate reports of shooting. Ahern was seriously wounded. In his report Crane described the incident as 'a murderous attack'. Thirteen people were subsequently arrested and charged with shooting with intent to kill: see CI King's report for Mar. 1916 (TNA, CO 904/99); *Irish Times*, 28 Mar. 1916.

<sup>226</sup> 26 Mar. 1916.

*Mail*.<sup>227</sup> I have usually found Irish unionists to be at least men. But the fact that the *Mail* was unionist was not so much of a disadvantage because it is by far the most widely read of the evening papers in Dublin and also finds its way into the country to some extent. This publication was only a beginning; we determined to come in on the rising tide and see whether it would not be possible for us to turn this hostile move to account.

It was decided to start a broad cast recruiting campaign. The government had given us a good opportunity with the deportation orders: the very idea of these was so repugnant to the ordinary Irishman that he backed us up at once – in spirit only, of course, for the present. A quantity of recruiting literature was prepared and distributed and a series of big recruiting meetings was arranged for Dublin. Members of the executive and staff addressed these meetings which were held in different parts of the city on somewhat similar lines to those held by the British army authorities. I took part in none of these meetings myself, although I made up my mind to have all the say that I found any opportunity for in the training of the recruits as they should enlist. The results of the recruiting campaign exceeded all my expectations: we secured about four hundred recruits in Dublin in our recruiting week!

On Sunday 9 April it was decided to hold a big recruit parade to exhibit to the public the result of our recruiting week. The Volunteers, recruits and all, fell in at the battalion headquarters and the brigade concentrated at Parnell Square. There the recruits, to the number of 400, were sorted out and formed into companies by themselves. I used this opportunity to pick out some of the best NCOs [p. 6] from their own units and give them command of the recruits. The recruit battalion (under Vice-Commandant Beasley<sup>228</sup>) marched in rear of the trained column without arms, Captain George Plunkett's<sup>229</sup> 'Empire' company from Kimmage covering it as an armed rearguard. I personally superintended the column of recruits, being particularly anxious that no slackness should be permitted on this occasion. The O'Rahilly also took part in this review. We were determined from this on to take as prominent part as possible in all reviews, parades, field days etc. so as if possible to keep things from slipping through our grasp. At the head of the recruit battalion was borne a banner inscribed: 'Irish Volunteer Recruits: Dublin Answer to Deportation of Irishmen'. The

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<sup>227</sup> On 27 Mar. 1916 the *Evening Mail* published the following extract from a statement issued by the general council of the Irish Volunteers the previous day: 'The government is well aware that the possession of arms is essential to the Volunteer organisation, and the Volunteers cannot submit to being disarmed either in numbers or detail without surrendering and abandoning the position they have held at all times since their first formation. The Volunteer organisation also cannot maintain its efficiency without organisers. The raiding for arms and attempted disarming of men, therefore, in the natural course of things can only be met with resistance and bloodshed. None of the Irish Volunteers recognise or will recognise the right of the Government to disarm them or to imprison their officers and men in any fashion.' The statement was printed in the *Irish Volunteer*, 1 Apr. 1916 and in the same issue MacNeill wrote 'we shall defend our arms with our lives'.

<sup>228</sup> Piaras Béaslaí (1881-1965) founder member Irish Volunteers and member of executive; deputy commanding officer 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade under Edward Daly during Easter 1916: see Patrick Maume, 'Béaslaí, Piaras', *DIB*.

<sup>229</sup> Brother of Joseph Plunkett; commanded the 'Kimmage garrison', formed from men who returned to Ireland from Britain to escape wartime conscription: see Lawrence William White, 'Plunkett, George Oliver Michael', *DIB*.

recruits on this occasion numbered over one-fourth of the total force paraded and, marching as we did over a very large part of the city, the effect was very remarkable. On the whole, the deportation orders had been a big asset to us.

The recruits were dismissed at Camden Row, the 3rd battalion headquarters. It was imperative that we should strike while the iron was hot and before the parade was dismissed it was arranged that each battalion should have two weekly drills for recruits: one on Sunday morning and one on some week night not otherwise occupied. Then and there, I detailed some of the more truculent NCOs to parade the recruit companies for dismiss. It was well for their first military experience to be harsh to make them realise it was not a procession or demonstration they were engaged on.

A feature which had no small effect in imparting a professional tone to the Dublin Volunteer officers was the social side in winter. There were a great number of céilidhe<sup>230</sup>, private dances, concerts and the like at which the officers all appeared in uniform. It is true that at first some people made this custom the occasion of disparaging remarks about ‘tin soldiers’ etc. I notice, however, that very frequently it was the best officers who were most prominent on these occasions, and later on in action the same men proved their value there too.

The evening of the Sunday on which the big recruit parade was held there occurred two incidents connected with a seizure of arms [in Dublin] which were intended for Ferns, County Wexford. These arms had been stupidly [p. 7] applied for through the post in spite of the regulation against such a proceeding. As a result, the motor car sent for them to Dublin was shepherded all the way along. The first incident – of which I have not particulars – was in the afternoon at Croydon Park.<sup>231</sup> I understand it took the form of an ‘incident’ in which the police had somewhat the worse of the argument. The second incident later in the evening was the seizure of the car and arms in question at the corner of Grafton Street and College Green.<sup>232</sup> It was not necessary to come that way for the return journey. The car crossed O’Connell Bridge the most easily watched in the city and the difficult curve and narrow streets past Trinity College were hopeless to a chauffeur not thoroughly familiar with Dublin as far as concerning putting on a burst of speed.

It happened that I heard of these incidents at a friend’s house, where I was spending the evening, by a despatch from Kimmage to Captain Plunkett who was there also. He went to Kimmage and had the garrison stand to arms. I went to the Ancient Concert Rooms<sup>233</sup> where there was a meeting at which MacNeill was to preside. There, I heard some extra details, the general trend of which was to present the occurrence in a less serious light. In

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<sup>230</sup> Translation: Irish dancing session. The modern spelling is ‘céilí’.

<sup>231</sup> In Clontarf in Dublin.

<sup>232</sup> On 13 Apr. 1916 Joseph Kenney, chauffeur, and Patrick Doyle, labourer, both from Ferns were charged with possession of 8 new shotguns, 4 revolvers, 10 homemade bayonets and a quantity of magazine and revolver ammunition, *Irish Times*, 14 Apr. 1916.

<sup>233</sup> Home of the Dublin Orchestral Society located at 42 Great Brunswick (now Pearse) Street.

short, instead of indicating anything like a concerted raid by the government it was merely a stroke of luck for them arising from the stupidity of one of our men. As it was, we had acquired sufficient prestige by the recruit parade to warrant us claiming upon the whole to have had the best of the day. It was now some hours after the seizure of the arms and any effort at recapture was out of the question. I got permission from MacNeill to send an orderly to Kimmage to inform Captain Plunkett of the exact state of affairs and that there was no need for any beyond his ordinary detail of guards.

One feature of the arms seized excited considerable comment at the time. The weapons were mostly shotguns and there were bayonets for use with them. This shotgun bayonet was an invention of The O'Rahilly, a 14-inch single edge blade of good steel with a screw adjustment for the barrel of the gun. This weapon was quite satisfactory to thrust, but we had no data as to the power of the barrel to stand the lateral strain caused by the dead weight of an impaled man or by a sudden wrench. (Our instruction had [been] *not to club* the shotgun [p. 8] but to strike with the butt prior to issuing these bayonets for the same reason). But at all events, these bayonets, now known outside our ranks for the first time, were sufficient proof that we were determined that our shotgun men should have the best '*arme blanche*'<sup>234</sup> we could provide for them. We had paraded with shotguns for over half a year and the benign smile that greeted them at first was no longer visible. The 'bayonet to match' was a guarantee it would never return.

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#### NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND, J. J. O'CONNELL PAPERS, MS 22,117 (ii)

##### REORGANISATION – 1917<sup>235</sup>

The term 'reorganisation', as applied to the Irish Volunteers during 1917, must be understood in a somewhat special sense. It must not be understood as meaning that they have become disorganised after Easter 1916 and had to be drastically reformed. On the contrary, the reorganisation of 1917 merely marks the date of pulling together the strings that had, to some extent, fallen asunder by reason of the flow of events.

After Easter 1916 and its consequences, the Irish Volunteers became split up into a number of categories:

1. Those, mainly leaders, who had received formal sentences and who, as a result, were unlikely to be available for a very considerable time.
2. Those, also mainly leaders, who, though not tried and sentenced prisoners, nevertheless, were segregated from the main body and interned apart up to Xmas 1916 in point of fact.

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<sup>234</sup> Cavalry sword or lance.

<sup>235</sup> MS 22,117(ii) contains both a manuscript and typescript version of this document.

3. Those who were not so segregated but who were, for all that, retained as prisoners in Frongoch until Xmas 1916.
4. Those who were originally rounded up after the insurrection, deported to England for a longer or shorter period, and released during the later summer or early autumn.
5. Those who evaded arrest and imprisonment altogether.

It can be said, upon the whole, that the majority of all five categories were quite ready to 'have another try' as soon as circumstances generally might seem sufficiently favourable. Moreover, there was now the assurance that their renewed efforts would largely meet with the approval of the country at large, which formerly was very far from being the case. Indeed, this was one solid national gain from the insurrection of Easter 1916.

Such being, broadly speaking, the dispositions of the 1916 men as a whole, it is not surprising to find the men of each category in succession doing the best they could, in a general way, to keep the flag flying. Each successive addition [p. 2] of released men added further strength to the nucleus available from the beginning outside. And in this context, it is satisfactory to record that the main aim was cooperation for the future, rather than possible recrimination for mistakes of the past.

Although perhaps the matter comes more suitably into another context, it is of value to here record the fact that about this time it came to be perceived that there were certain tactical disadvantages for the Volunteers in operations of a mass or stabilised character. It came to be realised, dimly at first, that something looser and more mobile was desirable. One natural outcome of this tendency was a readiness to adopt the guerrilla form in future operations.

Another, and most important, factor was the realisation that the Volunteers, prior to Easter 1916, were by no means sufficiently widely and generally organised: a certain county might have a considerable strength of men with at least a rudimentary military training, while some or all of the adjoining areas might have only a handful of willing men, and those quite untrained. It was realised that this was a fatal condition of affairs, and that one of the first requirements in future was to have the Volunteer force far more numerous and spread far more evenly over the country.

Now, it so happened that simultaneously with recognition of this requirement there was presented the machinery for solving the problem. The widespread and indiscriminate arrests by the British ensured that men from every single area were roped in, and that in considerable numbers. Men who had never been Volunteers before Easter 1916 became Volunteers during internment by force of association with the others. As a result, many counties, which through no particular fault of their own had been backward in the national military sense prior to this period, became later on excellent in that line.

[p. 3] It may quite fairly be said that the 1916 prison camps were a very important factor in the 'militarisation' of the Volunteers. In these camps most of them for the first time



in their lives were compelled to live collectively as units of men and in a military atmosphere, even though it was that of a military prison camp. At all events, the entire surroundings were absolutely non-civilian: the prisoners, who already had a certain elementary military training, now became thoroughly familiar with precisely the side of military life of which they had never had any previous experience: guard duties, escorts, interior economy, inspections, cooking, sanitation, and military routine generally. Even though this knowledge was acquired by the way, and very unwillingly, it sank in nevertheless and left its mark. The man who was released from Frongoch at Xmas 1916 was a professional soldier – quite another man from the enthusiastic nationalist who turned out in Easter week.

He was, moreover, toughened mentally rather than physically by his prison camp experiences. He had been ‘up against it’ and, at times, in a very serious way. He had conquered adverse circumstances mainly by means of comradeship and solidarity in the camps. There thus came about a great homogeneity among the released Volunteers, an unconscious unity of military outlook that contained very far-reaching possibilities.

Take, for example, the case of a man who spent, say, three weeks in a huge military prison like Wandsworth,<sup>236</sup> where himself and his comrades occupied one or two wings, the remainder being occupied by military prisoners. And it is to be remembered that this was with the World War in full swing when practically every man that was a man at all was fighting in France or elsewhere. The military prisoners in such circumstances were, with few exceptions, men of a really bad stamp – deserters, [p. 4] malingers, looters, etc., etc. And, naturally, the NCO warders in charge of such bad characters were specially picked because they were exceptionally severe and drastic disciplinarians. The atmosphere was one of uncompromising and iron discipline, well calculated to strongly impress the mind of the young Irish Volunteer.

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<sup>236</sup> In London.