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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 519**.....**Witness**

Thomas Donnelly,  
Glasslough Street,  
Monaghan,  
Co. Monaghan.

**Identity.**

Member of Newbliss (Co. Monaghan)  
Irish Volunteers 1914 - ;  
Battalion Adjutant, 1920.

**Subject.**

- (a) National activities 1914-1921;
- (b) Capture of Ballytrain R.I.C. Barracks  
14/2/1920;
- (c) General raid for arms, Co. Monaghan,  
August 1920.

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

Nil

File No. **S.1788**.....

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

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BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

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Statement by Thomas Donnelly, Glasslough St.,  
Monaghan, Co. Monaghan.

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I am not sure what year I joined the Volunteers. I think it was 1914 as the Great War was on at the time. I joined Newbliss Company. General Owen O'Duffy was my first Company O/C. Later Pat Boyle was my Company Captain.

There were no activities in Newbliss in 1916. No mobilisation and no orders were received as far as I know up to 1917-1918. The Volunteers took part in drills and training practices; no other activities took place. In 1918 the conscription menace created a scare and a large number of new recruits flocked into the ranks of the Volunteers. The steps taken to combat conscription in local areas were route marching, thus making a show of strength.

In the early days of the Irish Volunteer movement the idea behind the organisation in the minds of the local men was to create an opposition to the Ulster Volunteers who were strong and well organised in North Monaghan. About 1918 I came into Monaghan town to work and I was appointed Company Adjutant of Monaghan town Company. About the end of 1918 the Volunteers in North Monaghan became somewhat disorganised. The Great War was then over and all danger of conscription was past.

The General Election of 1918 aroused considerable activity of a political nature in the Volunteer organisation. Ernest Blythe was the Sinn Féin candidate. The main part of the election was carried out by the Volunteers. After the closing of polling, on the day of the election, the ballot boxes had to be guarded by Volunteers.

for two weeks until the count took place. The police authorities at first attempted to prevent the Volunteers guarding the ballot boxes. When a Volunteer guard was first posted by Seamus Stack of Kerry, who was in charge in Monaghan, Mr. Stack carried his point and a guard of Volunteers remained on duty night and day from the 14th December - date of polling - up to the 28th December when the counting of votes took place.

After the General Election the Monaghan Company was reorganised. Charles Emerson was then Company Captain. As far as I can remember the Company strength was only 14 or 15 men. This strength grew later until we had a large number on the rolls.

From 1918 up to early 1920 the main activities of the Volunteers were drilling and training. A small section of the Citizen Army was in existence in Monaghan town in 1920 for some time. Peadar O'Donnell was in Monaghan in 1919 in connection with Labour trouble, and I think it was Peadar who organised the Citizen Army then. This section of the Citizen Army came over to the Volunteers in a body on one night and were accepted by us.

About 1919 a Battalion organisation was set up. The following were elected as members of the Battalion Staff: -

Batt. O/C	-	Charles Emerson
Vice O/C	-	John McCann
Adjutant	-	Cannot now remember. I was appointed later.
Quar/Master	-	?

Emerson was replaced as Company Captain of Monaghan Company by Frank O'Duffy, later Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education.

A Co. Monaghan Brigade was formed in 1919. This Brigade embraced the whole county. The new Brigade Staff were as follows: -

Brigade O/C - General Owen O'Duffy  
" V/C - P.J. O'Daly, Carrickmacross  
" Adj. - John McCabe, Monaghan  
" Q/M - ?

In the late summer of 1920 a complete change in the Volunteer organisation in Co. Monaghan took place. The Brigade organisation was abandoned and each Battalion was put under G.H.Q. direct.

The Monaghan Battalion was reorganised in the summer of 1920. Mr. Emerson, who was a married man with family responsibilities, and who had been a most valuable man in Volunteer affairs and had the confidence and respect of the rank and file in the Volunteers, was, on account of his family responsibilities, displaced in favour of a young man who would be more suitable for the position. I was appointed Battalion O/C, and the Battalion Staff when changed was as follows:-

O/C - Thomas Donnelly  
V/C - Patrick McRory (now living in Sligo)  
Adj. - Joseph Brannigan (Costume Barracks  
Athlone)  
Q/M - Edward Connolly.

An important activity carried out by the Volunteers was dealing with the manufacture and traffic in poteen. A number of raids were carried out in the mountain areas where poteen stills were being worked, and both stills and poteen were destroyed where found. This campaign put an end to the manufacture and sale of poteen in the north Monaghan area. The destruction of poteen making equipment and the loss of the manufactured spirit put an end temporarily to this evil practice.

A short time before the attack on Ballytrain R.I.C. Barracks early in January 1920, Ernie O'Malley came to Co. Monaghan as a G.H.Q. organiser. He spent a good part of the time he was in the county in Monaghan town. O'Malley worked very hard whilst in Monaghan, travelling from one Company area to another, drilling, lecturing and training the Volunteers. He proved a great organiser. He was in Monaghan when the attack on Ballytrain came off and he took part in it.

Ballytrain R.I.C. Barracks was attacked on the night of the 14th February 1920. Ballytrain is between 18 to 20 miles from Monaghan town. Six men were detailed from each Company in north Monaghan to travel to Ballytrain for the attack. The following, as far as I can remember, travelled from Monaghan Company for the attack; - Phil Marron, George McEnarney, Gerald Gillanders, Joseph Hamill, James Flynn and myself. Another man, not selected to travel, Gerry McCourt, got into a car and came along also. Charles Emerson and John McCann also travelled to the attack as members of the Battalion Staff.

I cycled from Monaghan to Ballytrain accompanied by E. O'Malley and Phil Marron. The rest of the Monaghan men travelled by car. Ballytrain Barracks was built in a row of houses. My allotted place was to assist in the mining of the gable wall. The charge of the explosives was placed against the upstairs portion of the barrack gable and was tamped in by stones etc. to insure that the explosives took effect on the barrack wall. When the shooting commenced on the barracks the police were asked to surrender by Owen O'Duffy, who was in charge of the attack, through a megaphone or long horn. The police refused to surrender. The fight lasted in all about four hours. When the mine was exploded the police signified their willingness to surrender and came out with their hands up. We captured

rifles, revolvers and ammunition in the barracks.

I cannot now state how much stuff was captured in the barracks.

There were no raids or arrests made immediately after this attack. About a month later the following were arrested: Owen O'Duffy, Dan Hogan (arrested in Clones), Phil Marron, John McCann, Charlie Emerson and McEnarney arrested in Monaghan town. A number of others were arrested in various places throughout North Monaghan.

In April 1920 raids took place on two income tax collectors' offices. One of the raids took place on the office of a Mr. Coombs in the town, and the other raid on the office of Patrick Toal, situated a short distance outside the town. All papers and books were destroyed in both instances.

The next important activity was the general raid for arms in August 1920. All the Unionist houses where arms were expected to be held were raided. Some Catholic houses were raided also when the owners refused to hand over their guns to us. One Volunteer, Owen Keenan, of Corcaghan Company area, was mortally wounded in a raid on a Unionist house. The general raid for arms taken as a whole proved successful and a number of shotguns and a few revolvers were captured.

About September 1920 Owen O'Duffy called to Monaghan and took me with him by train to Dublin. We attended a meeting in a Dublin Hotel at which there were a lot of other delegates. I have only a vague memory of what took place at this meeting. One thing I do remember was a discussion on the proposed shooting of District Inspector Nixon of the R.I.C., then stationed and serving in Lisnaskea.

In October 1920 I was consulted by Dan Hogan, O/C of Clones Battalion, on the formation of a north Monaghan Flying Column. Hogan went to Dublin to see Headquarters in connection with this matter. During Hogan's absence in Dublin, I was one day crossing to the County Council offices, The Courthouse, Monaghan, where I worked, when I was accosted by a Constable Blair who asked me to accompany him to the Courthouse, which I did. The Military were stationed there at the time. When I arrived in the Courthouse, Constable Blair informed me that I was a prisoner. Later on that day James McMahon, Jun., and Charles Maguire, both Volunteers in Monaghan Company, were also brought in as prisoners. We were all taken that evening to Armagh barracks and kept there all that night. Next morning we were transferred to Crumlin Road prison, Belfast. I was later tried by courtmartial in Victoria Military Barracks, Belfast. I was charged with the holding up of a man during the general raid for arms. I was found guilty on the charge, and sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. I served a few months of this sentence in Crumlin Road prison, and was then sent to Walton prison in Liverpool from which prison I was again transferred to Bristol. I was released from Bristol jail in September, 1921.

Signed: Thos. Donnelly

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1951.

Witness:

John Mc Coy  
22/5/51

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