

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 534

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 534.....

Witness

James Short,  
Lower Irish Street,  
Armagh.

Identity.

Member of:

- (a) Irish Volunteers, Armagh, 1916 - ;
- (b) I.R.B. Armagh, 1916 - ;  
First Lieutenant, Armagh Company 1921.

Subject.

- (a) Activities of Irish Volunteers, Armagh, 1916-1922;
- (b) South Armagh Election, February 1918;
- (c) General raid for arms, September 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ....S.1771.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF JAMES SHORT,

Lower Irish Street, Armagh.

I joined the Irish Volunteers about August 1916 at a meeting in the City Hall. This meeting was called by Eamon Donnelly in an effort to re-organise the Volunteers. I was then about 17 years of age. Local members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who were all anxious to have the Volunteers re-organised, attended this meeting and joined the Volunteers. About five or six others not connected with the I. R. B. also joined.

After this re-organisation we held weekly parades in the country districts and we used a vacant house for our Company meetings.

Shortly after joining the Volunteers I joined the I. R. B. Seumas Connolly was, I think, Centre of our Circle; at least it was Connolly that swore me in as a member of the organisation. It was, however, Connolly's duty in those days to swear members into the organisation in Circles to which he was not himself connected.

In 1917-1918 our activities in the Volunteers were mainly drilling and training. In 1917 a consignment of ammunition was made available to Armagh. I took part in carrying some of this ammunition to Armagh from Belfast in small parcels on a bicycle. I made four or five journeys in all. This ammunition was procured through the I. R. B. organisation and was all .303 rifle ammunition.

Some time about 1919 a raid took place on a large mansion, the property of a family named Copes, known as Dromilly House, Lough Gall. It was reported to us that a large quantity of Ulster Volunteer arms was stored in this house. About twenty Volunteers from Armagh Company, a number from Ballymacnab and others from other areas took part, including about four men from Blackwaterstown area. The house was entered and a most exhaustive search was made. With the exception of a shotgun and a revolver which the lady of the house attempted to use on us we got no arms.

The Armagh City Volunteers took part in the South Armagh Election. The contingent with which I was mobilised travelled by cycle on the Sunday before the election from Armagh to Crossmaglen. On this Sunday both the Hibernians and the Sinn Féin parties decided to hold meetings at the same time on the Square in Crossmaglen. A series of fights took place but eventually both meetings were held simultaneously on the large Square in the town.

On Election Day which was the first Friday in February, 1918, about 24 Volunteers from the Armagh Company were detailed for duty in a place named Cladymilton. We travelled to Cladymilton with about 50 Volunteers from Carrickmore, County Tyrone, who had marched from Carrickmore to Armagh on the day previous and remained in Armagh for the night. Our duty in Cladymilton was to protect our votes from attempted interference by either Hibernian or Unionist elements in the district. One incident I remember was the action of a protestant parson who headed a party of Scutch Mill workers in a march into Cladymilton to record their votes

for Patrick Donnelly, the Hibernian candidate. When the Mill workers came within sight of the Volunteers they turned back and did not go near the polling booth. The parson, when his men turned back, also returned home and he did not record his vote. We made no effort to prevent those men recording their votes. Apparently they were seeking an excuse not to vote for a Nationalist.

Our next important activity took place in September, 1920, when the general raid for arms took place. About sixteen of us in our party raided about six houses - five Unionist houses and one Nationalist house. No opposition was encountered in any of those raids. The general raid for arms got the Armagh Company in all about six shotguns and one or two revolvers.

During the year 1920 and up to the Truce in 1921, there was continual activity in the cutting of telegraph and telephone wires, the blocking of roads and raids on postmen and on mails.

I travelled with about eight others from Armagh to Newtownhamilton in May, 1920, to take part in the attack on Newtownhamilton R. I. C. Barracks. We took up position with a few Newry men at the corner of the street where the Armagh road joins the Newry road very close to the Barracks. We occupied this position from about 12 midnight and remained there until the signal was given calling off the attack. When the Barracks became completely gutted by fire and the R. I. C. had got into a back yard behind the Barracks, where it was impossible for us to dislodge them, the attack was called off, and we started for home at about 4 a.m. on Sunday morning.

I took part with others in dealing with a man named

Stutt. This man had persistently disobeyed a G.H.Q. order against railwaymen handling trains on which British military or munitions were being carried. Stutt was arrested by the I.R.A. and tarred and feathered as a punishment for ignoring our repeated warnings.

About October, 1920, an old man named Arthur Gribben, a member of the I.R.B., was arrested by the British Authorities for refusing to signal a troop train which was travelling over his section. Gribben was over 65 years at the time of his arrest. He was sent to Crumlin Road Prison in Belfast but was released after a short time.

About October, 1920, I with five or six others took part in disarming two "A" Specials at Ungola, near Armagh. We were all unarmed on this occasion and we succeeded in disarming both men. Padna Vallely, one of our men got seriously wounded in this affair.

We were ordered to carry out reprisals on Unionist houses for the burning of Nationalists' houses. Those Unionist houses were situated at a place named Cullenstown. In this affair three Unionist houses were burned by myself and some others. Those burnings are since known as the Killylea burnings.

A raid for arms was carried out in the summer of 1921, on the residence of a Major Boyle. I with about three others took part in this operation. We held up the inmates of the house and made a thorough search. We got no arms nor ammunition. However, we took away two pairs of binoculars and a Sam Brown belt and some large rifle ammunition suitable for elephant shooting.

The night before the Election - General Election 1921 - I was at home and on my way upstairs going to bed I looked out of a window and saw a man wearing civilian clothes and a soft hat on a wall outside the back of our house, holding a revolver in his hand. He was getting down from the wall when I noticed him. I then went into a front room and looking out on Irish Street I found that a man was at the front of the house. As a rap came on the front street door I threw up the upstairs window a few inches. The man then asked me was I James Short. I said I was not James Short. He then asked me to come down to the door as he would like to see me in connection with the Election. I said I would not come near the door. During this conversation the man outside was speaking to me in a low tone of voice and I was answering him in a loud penetrating voice. He requested me to speak easy. He then opened fire on the window. I dropped to the floor. He emptied his revolver into the room and then withdrew. After he withdrew I got out of the house at the rear. Shortly after the shooting a patrol of R.I.C. came to our house to make enquiries into the circumstances of the shooting.

Shortly before this occurrence a man named Igoe, who was in charge of a murder gang in Dublin, came to Armagh with a few others and put up in the Beresford Arms Hotel. Warning notices were posted all over the town, warning the I.R.A. that if any further operations were carried out, serious reprisals would be taken, and the notices ended up with the slogan "God Save the King". I have no doubt that it was one of Igoe's gang that attempted to shoot me.

This takes me up to the Truce on the 11th July, 1921.

During the Truce period we took part in the usual training and drilling lectures and other military exercises of this period with the object of making the I.R.A. better soldiers. I attended training camps at Killeavey, County Armagh, which was run by the 4th Northern Division, and a camp at Derrynoose, which was organised by the 3rd Brigade. The training which we received at the camps was passed on by us to the rank and file in the Companies. This training programme was carried out all through the winter of 1921 and the spring of 1922. None of our men was "on the run" during the period from July 1921 until May 1922. The "B" and "C" Special Constabulary were carrying on their usual procedure of patrols, etc., with which we did not interfere, and they on their part did not annoy us in any way.

About May, 1922, a Column was organised to take part in the general attack on the British forces in the Six Counties area which was to have received the support of both sections of the I.R.A. in Southern Ireland, who had split on the question of the acceptance or otherwise of the Treaty. The plans made for this rising in the North were to operate as from the 19th May, 1922. On the eve of this date the plans made for the rising were cancelled by our Divisional O/C., Frank Aiken. As the rising took place in a few isolated areas due to conflicting orders or the non arrival of the cancellation orders, fighting started in County Antrim, North Down and County Derry. The Northern Government apparently got to know about the rising plans and they made a general round up of all known I.R.A. all over the Six Counties area. A number of our men were captured in Armagh district, and I and others who had

escaped had to go "on the run". We moved across into County Monaghan and took up possession of Colonel Lucas' residence and out-offices at Castleshane where we established a military post and engaged in an intensive programme of military training.

About a month after we took over Castleshane the Civil War broke out in Southern Ireland. General Frank Aiken and our Divisional Staff took up a policy of neutrality towards the contending parties in the Civil War. We remained on in Castleshane up to about September 1922. At the middle of July, 1922, the 5th Northern Division under General Dan Hogan attacked and captured Dundalk Military Barracks - our Divisional H.Q. - and made prisoners of General Aiken and many of our Divisional and Brigade Officers. We got orders at this time to maintain still the policy of neutrality. We had our Camp in the 5th Northern Divisional area, so we dumped our arms. About September, 1922, troops belonging to the 5th Northern Division surrounded our Camp at Castleshane and made prisoners of many of the garrison of the Camp who were later sent to Newbridge Internment Camp, Co. Kildare.

The outbreak of the Civil War had a most demoralising effect on the outlook of the I.R.A. in the Six Counties area. The Northern Government were not slow to realise the weakening effect the Civil War had on the position of the I.R.A. within their area and they applied the pressure; raids and arrests were the order of the day. In areas where there were Unionist majorities the "B" and "C" Specials took complete control and instituted a reign of terror for republicans, to which we had no answer.

SIGNED:

James Short

WITNESS:

John McFoy  
11/6/51

DATE:

11 June '51