

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 552

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 552.....

**Witness**

John McKenna,  
Newbliss,  
Co. Monaghan.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish Volunteers,  
Newbliss, Co. Monaghan, 1918 - .

**Subject.**

Irish Volunteer and I.R.A. activities,  
Co. Monaghan and Co. Cavan, 1918-1921.

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

Nil

File No. S.1823.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JOHN McKENNA,

Newbliss, Co. Monaghan

I joined the Volunteers about 1918. One of the first duties I was asked to carry out as a Volunteer was to help at the East Cavan election. I travelled to East Cavan and did duty there on polling day. Later on, at the East Tyrone election, I did Volunteer duty there on polling day.

At the time that Newbliss company was organised Pat Boyd was Company O/C. Later on, John McGonnell and James Beggan became company captain in succession. In the years 1918 and 1919 Volunteer activities took the form of drilling and training. In the years 1920 and 1921 the Volunteers took part in an extensive campaign to stamp out the poteen traffic which was being manufactured extensively in some areas. In one night's poteen raiding in which I and other members of the Newbliss Company took part, we destroyed poteen in the course of manufacture and poteen making equipment to a value which was estimated at £800.

In Newbliss area about 50% of the population were Unionist. Some of the Unionist young men did armed duty on the roads at night. On one occasion William Quigley, Drumbrain, a Volunteer in Newbliss Company of the I.R.A. was fired on and wounded by a party of Unionists.

In the general raid for arms in September 1920, the Newbliss Company raided all the Unionist houses in the Company area, and, in addition, we raided Nationalist houses in which the owners refused to hand up their firearms. In Aughbog Company area a Volunteer was wounded during an exchange of fire in raiding a Unionist house and, as a result, lost one of his eyes. Immediately after he was wounded he was removed to the house of

Mick McGee, Kill, Cootehill, Co. Cavan, where he was attended by Dr. Reynolds, who had him removed to the Eye and Ear Hospital in Dublin. In Rockcorry Camp area a Volunteer named Reilly was shot dead during an exchange of fire in the raid on a Unionist house.

In the Newbliss Company area we got very little arms in the general raid. We had, however, a fair share of arms which came to us through the good offices of Mr. Patrick Whelan, deceased, Dooskey, Newbliss. Those arms were, previous to our getting them, the property of the Redmondite National Volunteers, and contained 8 or 9 rifles.

I travelled to Ballytrain in February 1920 and took part in the attack on the R.I.C. barracks there. About a week before the attack General Headquarters in Dublin sent on a consignment of hand grenades by train to Newbliss station. The Newbliss Company had prior knowledge of their arrival in Newbliss and we took charge of them and conveyed them from the station to the house of Mr. James Fitzpatrick, Cordoo, Newbliss.

On the night of the attack on Ballytrain I called at the house of John Donnelly, Shanco, Killevan, Newbliss, and took him in my hackney car with a bag of gelignite which was for use in the attack on the barrack. We also picked up the parcel of grenades stored at Fitzpatrick's place and took it along with us also. When I drove the car to about a mile from Ballytrain I remained there at an outpost with the car. The roads from this place into Ballytrain were blocked and could not be used by cars. I carried out the orders I received to remain at this particular outpost until the attack was over. After the capture of the barracks the men I had conveyed to the outpost returned there with the additional of General Eoin O'Duffy. I drove General O'Duffy and the other men back to Newbliss. O'Duffy went to the residence of the Parish Priest

of Killevan and remained there.

About September 1920 two R.I.C. men appeared in the village of Newbliss. They went into a public-house and commenced drinking. Both were armed with revolvers. John McGonnell and I, and a few others, decided to ambush these men and disarm them on their journey back to Ballybay R.I.C. barracks. They were members of this particular garrison. We detailed some of the Volunteers to join the R.I.C. and encourage them to consume a good quantity of intoxicating liquor, as much as was advisable from our point of view. As a matter of fact the policemen consumed too much drink as they were not able to ride their bicycles back to Ballybay. They hired a car and one of our party drove the car.

About five of us lay in waiting for the police at a place named Doapey. The man who drove the car had instructions to make a loud noise when he was approaching our hiding place. He did this by the use of a siren which was fitted to the exhaust pipe of the car. We rushed the car when it came level with our position and the driver stopped the engine. I grappled with one of the police and pulled him out on the road. It took me all my time to disarm him. The other man was also disarmed and we captured two Webley revolvers and over 50 rounds of revolver ammunition. We also took the two bicycles which the police used and were tied to the car at the time the disarming took place.

A G.H.Q. order was issued in 1920 forbidding railwaymen taking any part in the handling of munitions for the British forces in Ireland or in the conveying of Crown forces on the railway system. Four other

Volunteers and I got orders to proceed to Smithboro where we took off an engine driver and, I think, a fireman from the Belfast train on its journey to Clones. We seized the men about 9 p.m. and took them away by car to Latton Company area where we handed them over to the local Volunteers, who kept them as prisoners for some time. On another occasion I took Mr. Donaghey's car to Newtownbutler accompanied by other Volunteers and we "lifted" a railway worker (ticket checker). We took him off his train and conveyed him also to Latton Company area for detention. Later on, after this man's release, he was reported as having been sentenced to be shot for giving information to the Crown forces about the Volunteers. An attempt was made to shoot him at Newbliss Station; he became alarmed and got out of a carriage on the side opposite to the platform and escaped down the railway line under fire. I was on several other raids for railwaymen in which I drove the motor car. On a few occasions Thomas McGonnell drove the car.

I took part in a raid for mails at Glasslough Station, meeting the Belfast train and taking all the letters off it. Other members of Newbliss Company took part in similar raids for mails at Clones Station. In all those mail raids, the letters were always taken to Latton Company area for censoring. On one occasion I went to Latton Company and took letters which had been censored to Ballybay Post Office, where I left them for re-inclusion for postal delivery.

A Unionist named Lester was fired on at Roslea and wounded. I heard that he was fired on as a result of his giving information against the Volunteers to enemy forces. The

/night that

Lester was shot the Unionists burned down a number of Catholic houses in Roslea. After those burnings the Brigade staff held a meeting and it was decided to carry out reprisals for the Roslea burnings. A number of individual Unionists were listed to be shot, and in other cases the houses of individual Unionists were listed to be burned.

On the night of the reprisals I was mobilised with a number of other Volunteers and we were instructed to attack a certain house. A guide was provided to take us to the house. This house was to be burned down, but none of the inmates were to be harmed. This operation of ours, like all the others, was timed to start promptly at 12 o'clock midnight. Commandant Mat Fitzpatrick was in charge of my party. When we arrived at our objective, Comdt. Fitzpatrick demanded admission to the house. This demand was not complied with and no movement was made by the inmates. Comdt. Fitzpatrick then threw a grenade in through a window of the house. This did not bring any response from inside. Comdt. Fitzpatrick then, accompanied by Pat McCabe, Newbliss, Pat Monaghan, deceased, Aghabog, and myself, went to the rear of the dwellinghouse. When we got there a shotgun was fired from one of the windows and Comdt. Fitzpatrick fell to the ground. Pat McCabe received slight wounds to his legs. I immediately emptied my revolver into the window and I asked the other men to open fire so that I could pull Comdt. Fitzpatrick to safety. He was badly wounded in the arms.

We procured a pony and trap from a Mr. McQuade and took him over 5 miles to Joe Duffy's, Annagoes, and left him there. I then proceeded to Rockcorry accompanied by Joe McCarville on cycles and got Dr. Canning, now deceased, to come out and attend Comdt. Fitzpatrick. The wounded man remained for some time in Duffy's, but owing to a doctor and a nurse having

attended him there, he was removed to another house in the same townland - Joe Beggan's - for safety reasons.

Some time after his arrival in Beggan's the house was surrounded by military and Tans early one morning and he was arrested and taken into <sup>the</sup> Monaghan Infirmary where a military party of one sergeant and six men were placed on guard to prevent his rescue. Pat McCabe of Newbliss, and the Beggan family were arrested and taken to Clones Barracks on the same morning.

A meeting was held in Farmers of Threemilehouse, where the question of rescuing Mat Fitzpatrick from the Co. Monaghan Infirmary was discussed and plans drawn up for the carrying out of the rescue. The men were picked for the operation and, as far as I can remember, the following took part:- Colonel Frank Tummon, Major General Dan Hogan, James Winters (deceased), James O'Donoghue, Joseph McCarville (now caretaker of the military barracks, Cavan), Paddy Kearns, James McConnell, Threemile-house, Joe Shannon, ... Mulligan, Pat Monaghan, Aughabog, CAPT. Paddy McCarron, Monaghan Town.

The above men proceeded towards Monaghan Town for the rescue in three motor cars; one driven by James Nolan, another by a man named Stephens who worked in a garage in Monaghan, and was a native of Co. Donegal, and the third by myself. All the cars used in this operation were commandeered so that no blame could be attached to the owners. The cars proceeded by by-roads to within a short distance of Monaghan Town. When we arrived at about half a mile from the Infirmary we stopped. The cars that Nolan and Stephens were driving remained at this point. The car I was driving was switched off and the rescue party from the three cars took off their boots and pushed my car up to the infirmary gate. I remained with the car and the rescue party proceeded into the Infirmary. After waiting some

time at the gate, I heard shooting in the Infirmary and this unlooked for development prompted me to take precautions. After some time <sup>SOME OF</sup> the rescue party returned to my car bearing Comdt. Fitzpatrick and each man dressed in British soldier's uniform. When I saw the men approaching me in uniform I got a scare until I recognised Phil Marron as one of the party. We got Fitzpatrick into the car together with Dan Hogan and some others, and I drove to the place where the other cars had been parked. Dan Hogan then arranged that one of the cars would precede my car and that the other car would follow it. The first car was to keep a proper distance from my car and act as an advanced guard. The last car was to protect our rear from surprise and each car was to engage the enemy if the occasion arose.

We all proceeded to Clontibret where Fitzpatrick was taken over by the Clontibret company of the I.R.A. who had a pony and trap in readiness in which Fitzpatrick was taken to Derrynoose on the Armagh-Monaghan border. All the members of the rescue party, with the exception of Stephens, Joe McCarville and myself, were on the run and parted with us at Clontibret. I accompanied by McConville, drove the car to Rockcorry district, abandoned it there, and took across the fields, each to his home district.

On 28th April 1921, I was arrested by a party of military. I was taken into Clones Workhouse, then a military post, and detained there with <sup>JOHN</sup> Joe Harte and Patrick McGoldrick for two weeks. We were then taken to Belfast and later transferred to the Rath Camp, The Curragh, Co. Kildare, where we remained prisoners up to December 1921.

Signed: John Kennel

Date: 26 June 1951

Witness: John McCarville

26/6/51

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