

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 575

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 575

**Witness**

Garda Joseph H. McKenna,  
York Street,  
Castleblayney,  
Co. Monaghan.

**Identity:**

Member of Irish Volunteers,  
1918-1922.

**Subject:**

National activities, Co. Monaghan,  
1914-1922.

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

Nil

File No. S.1833

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 575

STATEMENT BY GÁRDA JOS.H. MCKENNA

York Street, Castleblayney, County Monaghan.

I joined the Redmondite Volunteers in 1914 when I was only a boy. This phase petered out after the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 when a Captain White came and addressed the members of our Company and advised all to join the British Army in the fight against the Germans.

There was nothing doing locally in the Volunteer line until the early spring of 1918, when a reorganisation took place. A Company was started at Ballyotin. The recruits came principally from the members of the local Sinn Féin Club. The Sinn Féin Club was formed in the spring of 1917 by Count Plunkett during a visit to the area.

The first officer~~s~~ of the Company ~~was~~ Joseph H. McKenna ~~and~~-myself. About sixteen men joined up. In my area about thirty-five per cent. of the population were Unionists and about fifty per cent. of the remainder were Hibernians who were most hostile to Sinn Féin and the Volunteers.

Our Company activities in 1918 and 1919 were drilling, training, lectures on scouting, signalling and engineering. We made a practice of keeping a watch on the movements of the R.I.C. We paraded in military formation in the presence of the R.I.C. carrying hurley sticks. We carried on an intense campaign in support of all Irish Ireland activities, Gaelic League classes, Irish dancing and the boycott of foreign dances. We started a Gaelic Football Club. Most of our Gaelic footballers had formerly played soccer.

The North Monaghan Battalion, "C" Battalion, was part of the 1st Brigade. Eoin O'Duffy was our first Brigade O.C. Our first Battalion O.C. was James McKenna, now a

Superintendent in the Civic Guards. I think Patrick McMeel was our first Battalion Adjutant. John McGeough was Battalion Quartermaster. About 1920 Patrick McMeel took over as Battalion Quartermaster when John McGeough was arrested and Joseph McCabe became Battalion Adjutant. Joseph McCabe was later arrested and a man named Charles Flood became Battalion Adjutant in McCabe's place.

In August, 1920, the R.I.C. having previously evacuated the R.I.C. barracks in Emyvale, we burned the barrack premises. The next activity we carried out was the general raid for arms in September, 1920. In this raid the whole Battalion was engaged. We swapped the men raiding in each district so that none would be recognised in the locality where they carried out the raids. The population was fairly Unionist and such precautions were necessary. During this raid I and six others in attempting to raid John Wright's home at Killybressal were fired on by Wright and his two sons, and an exchange of fire lasted for some time and we failed to obtain admission. The Wrights were Unionists and well armed. In several other places shooting took place. One of our Camp Captains, Patrick McCluskey, was severely wounded in attempting to raid a Unionist house. He was shot by a Mrs. Hazlett. They succeeded in disarming her. An inmate of this house was also wounded.

The general raid for arms proved satisfactory as we succeeded in getting a lot of arms of various sorts. In one house, Grahams, Corragh, a machine gun was got. This house was fitted up as a block house with steel shutters on the doors. In another place we got a hundredweight bag full of buckshot. Loaded shotgun cases were procured. A big number of shotguns were procured, also revolvers. We got about nine Ulster Volunteer rifles in our area. These rifles were all well hidden in special receptacles made in sofas, etc.

In October, 1920, we carried out a raid at Glaslough railway station, assisted by Donagh and Enagh Companies. We captured most important mails. The mail bag was taken from the train and sent intact to Battalion Headquarters for censoring.

A Volunteer named Kennan was shot in a raid for arms near Monaghan town. I attended his funeral, which received full military honours from the I.R.A. He was buried at Lettercan graveyard. Another Volunteer, Michael Kelly, was shot dead whilst driving Dr. McCarvill in his motor car. The car was proceeding outside and near Monaghan town when from a disused quarry a number of Orangemen who were lying in ambush for Dr. McCarvill opened fire on the driver of the car who they thought was Dr. McCarvill and shot Kelly dead. Dr. McCarvill escaped from the car uninjured.

During the month of October my Company and Donagh Company carried out under my command three raids for mails on Glaslough Station. Each raid was successful and the mails were dealt with as in the first raid. An attack was planned for Monaghan R.I.C. barracks in which we blocked all the roads in our area. This attack did not come off.

Clogher barracks was attacked in December, 1920, and we blocked all the roads for this attack in our area.

In January, 1921, we made an attempt to stop and burn a train which was carrying Belfast boycott goods at Glaslough railway station. This train refused to stop and we could not prevent it running through the station.

In February, 1921, at Mullin's Mills we intercepted a horse-drawn bread cart selling Belfast bread. The cart was escorted by two armed R.I.C. who, when we approached, ran away. We burned the bread cart.

Myself and four men from my Company, assisted by Donagh, Carrickroe and Enagh Companies, went to Glasslough station and held up a Belfast goods train comprising 65 wagons of Belfast goods, which we burned. The train contained a tank of paraffin and a tank of petrol, which we used for incendiary purposes.

In April, 1921, we went to Roslea to take part in the widespread reprisals carried out against the "B" men who had previously burned out all the Catholic houses in that district. I had eight men from my Company with me and at Carrickroe we were joined by men from Tydavnit, Carrickroe and Clara Companies. From Ballyotin to Roslea is eleven miles; the last seven we walked. Our journey to Roslea and back was through a hostile area for three-fourths of the journey. The party I was with took part in the burning of three "B" men's houses. No shooting took place at any of the houses I was engaged at. The "B" men at all our houses were out on duty when we arrived, hence no shooting.

We held up a mail car at a place called Elvey, Ballyotin, which was escorted by military in armoured cars. One armoured car was in front of the mail car. When the armoured car passed we held up the mail car - a motor car - and had it only removed about ten perches over a by-road when another armoured car came along, but failed to see us. When the second armoured car found that the mail car had disappeared they returned back the road and turned into the by-road where we were rifling the mail car. We had only secured the Emyvale mail bag when we heard the armoured car approaching. We fired a few shots and the lorry pulled up. The crew got out and opened fire on us with a machine gun. We covered the retreat of three of our men who had custody of the mail bag. We retreated slowly, firing a shot now and then to keep the military under cover, and we eventually got clear across a hill.

We got together afterwards in the middle of a bog. The military came again within range of us and started to fire bursts of machine gun fire at us, which compelled us to remain under cover. The military made no attempt to approach close to us and after about a half hour they withdrew. We also cleared off.

In this mail bag was found most important Intelligence information. A cheque was enclosed in a letter to a man named Arthur Treanor. This cheque came from Dublin Castle in payment for his information to the British authorities concerning the local I.R.A. The man was subsequently shot as a spy. He was a notorious British supporter from the time the Volunteers first started. This cheque was definite evidence that he was a paid informer.

For a period of nine to twelve months before the Truce we carried out a campaign of road blocking, wire cutting, holding up postmen, etc. In fact when pushed for help to trench a road we called at unfriendly houses and took some of the men out to use pick and shovel at breaking open the trench.

In the month of June, 1921 I was promoted to the rank of Battalion Vice O.C. John McKenna replaced me as Company Captain.

After the Truce in July, 1921, I and other officers attended Lough Bawn training camp for a period of three weeks. Open and close order drill, lectures on musketry, and demonstrations on the Thompson machine gun and Lewis gun were given us as part of the course of instructions.

In September, 1921, a monster meeting was held in Armagh City which Michael Collins, Eoin O'Duffy and other leaders addressed. A review of Volunteers was held before this

meeting and the parade of our Battalion, which numbered six hundred men, was reviewed by Michael Collins.

During the Autumn and Winter of 1921-1922 we kept the men active in drills, route marches, etc.

In or about January, 1922, five of our officers, Divisional and Brigade, went by car to a football match in Derry and were held up at Dromore in County Tyrone by Special Constabulary. Revolvers were got on the party and all were arrested.

On the morning of the 8th February I was in charge of a party of 27 or 28 men in seven cars. We moved into Northern Ireland at Balagh Bridge and secured about thirty prominent Unionists from a district of about eight miles in diameter. We took our prisoners into Monaghan town and lodged them in the courthouse.

At a place named Mullen's Mills we blew up a bridge and I put my Company into position covering the bridge to prevent the Northern Unionists coming into our area to carry out reprisals. This Company remained in this position for about three months. I had a brother living across the bridge in Balagh area. He was burned out by the Unionists who gave him a half-hour to clear out. They then planted an 18-pounder gun in my brother's garden on a concrete platform. My brother is back there now - he returned in 1924 - and he has to sign periodical documents promising to be of good behaviour to be tolerated in this place.

I made application to join the Civic Guards in April, 1922. Eoin O'Duffy asked me to remain on where I was for the time being.

A Border Commission was set up investigating shooting and incidents occurring on the Border. A few British officers

and Dr. Con Ward comprised this Commission. We were all fed up with the activities of these men. They made repeated calls at my house enquiring where I was. Other I.R.A. officers were subjected to similar attention. We received orders from Brigadier James McKenna to ambush this party of officers. We held them up at a place on the Monaghan-Clogher road in the Twenty-six Counties and convenient to the Border. The officers were escorted by a tender and eight British soldiers armed with rifles. We disarmed the officers of their revolvers and the soldiers of their rifles. We also commandeered two Crossley touring cars used by the officers and the tender used by the escort.

I joined the Guards on the 18th November, 1922, and had no further association with events in Northern Ireland from then onwards.

SIGNED Joseph H. McKenna  
DATE 18-9-'51

WITNESS John Mc Coy.  
DATE 18/9/51.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURD STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 575