

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 578

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 578

Witness

Commandant Peter Woods,
Annagh,
Annyalla,
Castleblayney,
Co. Monaghan.

Identity.

Member of Clontibret (Co. Monaghan) Company
Irish Volunteers, 1917 - ;
Captain Annyalla Company, later.

Subject.

National activities, Co. Armagh and Co. Monaghan,
1917-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Mr. Peter Woods, Annagh, Annyalla,
Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan.

I joined the Volunteers in 1917. The Unit which I joined was Clontibret Company organised by General Owen O'Duffy. About twenty-five men joined the Company at the start: this small number of members remained constant during the years 1917 and 1918 and for a portion of 1919. In August 1920 a re-organisation took place. The number of members then rose to about 50.

The first activity of the Volunteers carried out in an organised way was our taking part in the South Armagh Election. Clontibret Company on Election day travelled on bicycles to the village of Camlough, Co. Armagh, and did police duty there. Our next activity was in the General Election in December 1918. The Volunteers took part in all the political activities of this election - canvassing voters, propaganda work, bill posting and on Election day we did police work protecting our voters etc. We planned an attack in the month of January 1921 on the town of Castleblayney. This was a joint operation to be carried out by the picked men of Annyalla and Clontibret Companies. Castleblayney Company got orders to scout the town on the night planned for the operation. When we arrived in town on foot we could not get in touch with any of the local Company. We had 16 men who moved into town - 8 men from each Company - and we remained in Castleblayney for about two hours. During that time we saw neither an enemy patrol nor any of the local Volunteer Company who should have been on hand to meet us. We made a report on this

fiasco to Owen O'Duffy and as a result he disbanded Castleblaney Company and made Oram an outpost.

Our next activity was intercepting a train at Glasslough Station. Dan Hogan was in charge of this operation. He sent eight men to cover off the local police barracks and the remainder of the party - perhaps about 90 men - dealt with the train. The driver and fireman of the train were made prisoners and the train was thoroughly searched for Belfast goods and all such goods taken off the train. The train was then set on fire and Dan Hogan started it off in the direction of Monaghan town.

The next activity was a raid in Co. Armagh on a hall at Drumhillary which was used as an assembly and drill hall by the A & B specials. Eugene Sherry was in charge of this operation which was carried out by about 18 men, 9 from each Company, - Annyalla and Clontibret. We captured a number of B/ Specials' uniforms and web equipment. This operation was carried out on Keady fair morning about 9 a.m. We had gone into the area on the previous night and stayed at Donnelly's place at Lislanley. Our idea in waiting until 9 a.m. to carry out the operation was to ensure that all the young men of the district who were going to Keady fair would have left the vicinity of the Hall before we commenced the raid. After raiding the Hall we dressed ourselves in the captured police caps, haversacks belts, web equipment etc. and we made prisoner of a B/Special named Leyburn and took him along with us as a hostage. We then proceeded to raid B/men's houses, and at each house we used Leyburn as a shield when approaching the house. A number of members of the Derrynoose Company accompanied us as Intelligence men and scouts. We raided about 14 or 15 houses in all. We captured 4 or 5 rifles and about 8 shotguns, 4 revolvers and a quantity of ammunition and a few pairs of binoculars. All those raids were carried out

without the firing of a shot.

In the Autumn of 1920 the Volunteers took action to prevent the sale of Belfast goods in the Company area. One of the largest operations we carried out was on Creighanroe Railway station where we moved into the station premises, took control of the place and awaited the arrival of the Belfast train. When the train arrived we removed the engine-driver and fireman off the train and placed them under a guard. We proceeded to search the train and confiscated all the Belfast goods on the train. We divided the food and clothing confiscated to the poor of the district. The operation took place about 8 a.m. Another constant activity of ours was dealing with the distribution and sale of Belfast bread, tobacco and cigarettes. We raided shops selling boycott goods and burned Belfast bread carts.

About Easter Sunday night 1921 we got orders to trench all the roads in Annyalla area. As the eighteen members of our Company could not properly do this work I went to a dance which was being held in the locality and commandeered all the young men attending the dance to give us a helping hand at the road trenching. Immediately after this incident a lot of those young men joined the Volunteers and brought the Company strength up to 80 men.

When the 5th Northern Division was formed about May 1921, I was promoted to the rank of Capt. of Annyalla Company. Brennan was then 1st Lieut. and Boyd was 2nd Lieut. Annyalla Company took in about two-thirds of the area of Clontibret parish. In this parish there were townlands with practically an entire Unionist population. The Unionists in our area were not organised into B or C Specials but they had the remnants of the Ulster Volunteer organisation in existence and held a lot of the Ulster

Volunteer Rifles. We attacked houses where we suspected those arms were kept on several occasions. The Unionist elements were antagonistic to the I.R.A. They gave information concerning the I.R.A. to Crown Forces and maintained a most hostile attitude to everything republican. There was also a considerable Hibernian population in the area which, although not in sympathy with the I.R.A., were not actively antagonistic.

In the first week in May 1921 we got orders to move into the town of Castleblaney and to take up positions near the barracks and prevent the R.I.C. from leaving their barracks. We were also to move into Hope Castle grounds where the Auxiliaries were stationed and to prevent them from leaving the Castle. This operation formed part of the plans made to attack Carrickmacross R.I.C. Barracks. About 20 of our men accompanied by 2 First-aid men moved into Castleblaney and took up positions opposite the R.I.C. Barracks and in the Castle grounds. I took 6 men to a hill - Cannaberry Hill - and opened fire on the barracks. We remained in the town for three hours and carried out intermittent fire on the R.I.C. barracks. Neither the R.I.C. nor the Auxiliaries made any attempt to leave the barracks but replied to our fire. They also used rifle grenades from the R.I.C. Barracks.

Our next activity was the Annyalla ambush. This took place about the first week in June 1921. A car load of Tans came each day for a week previous to the ambush to Annyalla. On the night before the ambush we trenched the road at Annyalla and took up positions on a hill overlooking the trench. About 11 a.m. the next day Tans in a motor tender came and stopped about 400 yards from where we trenched the road. They had apparently got information about the trench being opened. They then commandeered some local civilians to fill in the trench. The Tans and

civilians arrived at the trench and commenced to fill it. Owing to the presence of the civilians we could not fire on the Tans at the trench. We, however, fired one shot in the air in order to test the reaction of the Tans. This shot alarmed the civilians who ran away along a fence. We then opened fire on the Tans. A Constable - Fay - was shot in this exchange of fire. The Tans collected Fay off the road, got him to the tender and drove away leaving Fay's revolver behind on the road. Shortly after this reinforcements arrived from Castleblaney and we retreated in the direction of the Armagh border.

On the night that Matt Fitzpatrick was rescued from Monaghan Infirmary we were mobilised and waited at Clontibret Chapel until the cars with Fitzpatrick came along. We took charge of him there and transferred him into a spring van which we pulled ourselves - dispensing with the necessity for a horse - for about 4 miles to Brennan's of Tasson. Fitzpatrick remained in Brennan's for about 6 weeks. We maintained a guard of about 5 men on him night and day all through the period he remained at Tasson.

On the 28th June 1921 we carried out an ambush at Carrackaduff, Carnagh, Co. Armagh. For some time previous to the date of this ambush a breadvan, Bernard Hughes's, engaged in selling Belfast bread, travelled each day from Keady and proceeding to Hill's shop at Creighanroe was escorted by five R.I.C. men armed with rifles. In preparation for this ambush we sent a man into Keady to keep the bread cart under observation and to return to our position with information re the number of the armed guard on the breadcart. We moved into position, 18 men in all, armed with 10 rifles and 8 shotguns, on the night previous to the ambush. Our position was on the railway line at Cafrackaduff at a point where the railway line runs parallel to the road. Our scout came to our position about

12 noon and gave us an arranged signal informing us that there were five R.I.C. in the escort. The Police came to within view of us and when we were in the act of firing on the police four Crossley tenders of Auxiliaries drew up on a road bridge overlooking our position and opened fire on us with a machine gun and rifles. Part of our men were ordered to fire on the Auxiliaries and the remainder to fire on the R.I.C. Our first volley on the Auxiliaries put their machine gun out of action, at least it stopped firing. Before the machine gun stopped two of our men were shot dead and one of our men wounded. The two men killed were : Thomas McEnaney, Corlealackagh, Castleblaney, and Mick McEnaney, Billeady, Annyalla. Thomas Carragher, Lislanley, was wounded. We now found ourselves completely surrounded by superior forces with better equipment. We had to fight our way out of the position and were able to effect a retreat. It took us about 1 hour before we got clear of the enemy. Carragher (the wounded man) was lying on the ground where he fell and when the Auxiliaries came up to him one of them fired on him wounding him in the face. The Auxiliaries removed the dead men and the wounded man on leaving the scene of the engagement. The dead men were later handed over to their relatives for burial. After they had been handed over we had them conveyed to Annyalla Chapel and buried in the graveyard there. I took charge of the firing party at this burial and we rendered full military honours to our dead comrades. Eugene Sherry, Liam McNally and myself were jointly in charge of the plans and the carrying out of this operation.

Shortly after this ambush the Truce was called and all fighting ceased.

Our next activities included the training programme which commenced by the holding of a Divisional training camp at Loughbawn near Ballybay. All Brigade Battalion

and Company Officers were taken in for training during the period the camps were in existence. I did a two week's course in the camp. The programme of instruction included Camp Drill, Musketry, the throwing of grenades and the use of short arms including the Thompson sub-machine gun. The officers' course of instruction as given at the training camp was later transmitted to the rank and file in each Company. I took my local Company for instruction purpose on an average of one day per week.

In Annyalla Company area during the Truce period Volunteers had to do all the duties usually carried out by the Special (Republican) Police force. We had to enforce licensing regulations in the local public-houses to see that the decrees of Republican Courts were carried out and collect fines imposed. In the case of persons arrested for criminal offences the Volunteers had to provide prison accommodation and guards whilst the prisoners were awaiting trial. Vacant houses were used as prisons for prisoners on remand and also for those serving prison sentences.

About April 1922 I got orders from Brigadier Terence McGee to proceed with twelve men selected from my Company to the town of Castleblaney and to take over Lord Hope's Castle which up to then was in occupation by Auxiliary Cadets. When we arrived at the Castle the Auxiliaries had departed and we took over the Castle from two old ladies who acted as caretakers. Later on that day Lord Hope's Solicitor - a Mr. Gillespie - called on me to make inquiries as to the duration of our stay in the Castle.

We were about six weeks in Lord Hope's Castle when the Castleblaney R.I.C. Barracks was handed over. I got instructions to take some of the men I had at the Castle and to proceed to the R.I.C. Barracks where I met Comdt. P.J. O'Daly and we assisted him in taking over the barracks from the R.I.C. As far as I can remember the men in charge of

the departing police was a Head Constable Kennedy.

During the time I was in Lord Hope's Castle I got a dispatch from General Dan Hogan to select a number of picked men and to proceed by car to Clones and that at Clones I would receive further orders. On my arrival in Clones I got orders to proceed five miles on the Omagh side of the Omagh-Armagh road and there to take up a position to ambush any Crown Forces passing on this road. The position we occupied was to be an outpost for a large planned attack on Crown Forces which was to be carried out about four miles from Omagh. We took up the position as ordered and no Crown Forces came our road and the main attack did not materialise.

The next activity of note in which I became connected was the shooting at Clones Station in which Comdt. Matt Fitzpatrick was killed. On that day I travelled by car from Castleblaney to Clones and on my journey to Clones passed through Ballybay. I called at the Barracks in Ballybay and Brigadier T. McGee who was there told me he was going to Clones with me. When we arrived at Clones Barracks we were told that there was trouble up at the Railway Station. We then proceeded to the station to find that the shooting was over and Comdt. Matt Fitzpatrick killed. I cannot give much details about this affair as my presence at the station was accidental and not early enough to witness the shooting.

In the Spring of 1922 Major General Dan Hogan and a number of Divisional and Brigade Officers from the 5th Northern Division were on their journey to Derry to play a football match and at Omagh they were halted by Special Constabulary and a number of them made prisoners. This incident caused a feeling of tension on both sides of the Monaghan-Armagh, Monaghan-Tyrone and Monaghan-Fermanagh frontiers. On our side we carried out raids on Unionist

houses and attacks on Special Constabulary patrols. These activities were in the nature of reprisals for the arrests of Major General Dan Hogan and the other officers with him. They were not really official but were tolerated by G.H.Q.

After the handing over of Castleblaney R.I.C. Barracks I remained there and assisted Comdt. P.J. O'Daly in carrying out the various duties which were part of our work at this time. These duties included policing the town and the neighbouring districts near the town, escorting prisoners to Dundalk Jail and also conveying lunatics to Monaghan asylum. Recruits were taken into the Barracks as part of the garrison from Broomfield, Clontibret, Annyalla and some from Doohamlet. I was appointed Capt. of No. 1 Company on the formation of the National Army in May or June 1922. My headquarters were at Castleblaney.

This brings me up to the eve of the Civil War with which I do not want to deal.

Signed: Peter Woods

Date: 18/9/51

Witness:

John Mc Coy
18/9/51

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