

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILITARY

No. W.S. 997

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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**Witness**

James Feely,  
Great Meadow,  
Boyle,  
Co. Roscommon.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish Volunteers, Boyle, Co. Roscommon,  
1914 - ;

O/C. 1st Batt'n. North Roscommon Brigade.

**Subject.**

National activities, Boyle, Co. Roscommon,  
1914-1921.

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

Nil

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## STATEMENT BY JAMES EDWARD FEELY

Great Meadow, Boyle, Co. Roscommon

My father was a member of the Fenian organisation. He had to leave the country and go to America after the '67 Rising. He lived in the United States in New York and was linked up with the Clan-na-Gael there. When he returned to Ireland he was an active member of the Land League. I was brought up in the Fenian faith with a rebel outlook.

In 1914, a company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Boyle and I joined them. The company was about 100 strong, but about 40 of them went to the British Army when the first Great War started. A man named Charles Devine was in charge of the company then. We had no arms of any sort. When Redmond finally split the Volunteers by recommending the Volunteers to take service in the British Army, all but about a dozen men went over to the Redmondite side and became members of the new Irish National Volunteers. The dozen or so of us who plumped for the Irish Volunteers now became inactive and the Irish Volunteer organisation died out.

About February 1915 Alec McCabe visited Boyle and took a number of us into the I.R.B. A circle was formed in Boyle and I was appointed secretary. I cannot remember now who was centre or head. Members of the circle were: James Dodd, Martin Killilea, John Sheerin, James Flanagan, Paddy Sheerin, John Scanlon, James Turbot, Pat Delahunty, Paddy McGarry, Stephen Brennan, Tim Leonard, James Pettit, Luke Donnelly, James Haran, James Doogeruey. There may have been others that I cannot recollect now. We met regularly and had discussions on topical political matters of the day and on incidents of Irish history, particularly the Fenians, '98 and suchlike. We paid a subscription of sixpence a week towards the purchase of arms, but we never got any.

On the Sunday before the 1916 Rising Alec McCabe came to Boyle and mobilised the circle. He told us to be ready that arms were coming from Kerry and Donegal. No arms came and no further mobilisation took place and no action was taken in the Boyle area during the rebellion or immediately afterwards. None of our members were arrested subsequent to the rebellion and our circle continued to meet and carried on drilling in secret in the countryside some distance outside the town.

The North Roscommon election in 1917. Seamus O'Doherty came down from Dublin and contacted us and got us working for Plunkett. He visited all the circles in North Roscommon on a similar mission and everywhere was successful in getting them interested in having Count Plunkett elected. The weather was very bad at this time and the whole area was covered in a heavy layer of snow which made our work very hard to accomplish. Count Plunkett was returned at the head of the poll and there were no serious incidents. This was the first victory for Sinn Fein and showed how the 1916 Rising had awakened the spirit of independence in the people.

Early in 1918 we got fed up waiting to be supplied with arms and decided that we would get them for ourselves. James Flanagan was a herdsman in Rockingham Castle, a large estate lying on the Carrick-on-Shannon side of Boyle. Lord French, who was then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Lord Dudley used to stay there. Flanagan told us there were arms in the Gun Room and gave us the details of the house. The R.I.C. patrolled the demesne at this time.

We arranged to raid the place at 9 o'clock at night. Alec McCabe came to Boyle to take part in the raid and could be said to be in charge. Others taking part were Batty Keane & John Maguire of Ballymote, Pat Delahunty, Martin Killilea, James Turbot, Jimmie Dodd, Johnny Sheerin, "Packy" Sheerin and Stephen Brennan. We were all armed with revolvers supplied by Alec

McCabe. We went up to the door of the mansion and knocked. The butler opened the door and Turbot and I grabbed him and dragged him out and tied him up. The rest of our party entered the Castle and made their way to the Gun Room and took from there about six rifles and ten or twelve shotguns and two revolvers and an assortment of ammunition to suit the weapons seized.

A few of the rifles were service pattern Martinis, the remainder being sporting weapons of heavy calibre type. We met with no resistance from the staff. The owners of the place were away from it at this time. All the commandeered arms were taken by Alec McCabe in a car to the Ballymote area and we never saw them again.

About a week afterwards three of us were arrested including George Plunkett, Pat Delahunty, James Turbot, Jim Haran and myself. I was identified by the butler - Farrelly - as was Haran, and we were returned for trial, while the remainder were discharged. George Plunkett was not in the raid but had come to Boyle subsequent to it. We were transferred to Mountjoy Prison and then to Galway Prison. We were finally brought up for trial in Belfast where we were discharged, the authorities having no case against us. While we were in Mountjoy, Austin Stack was in charge of all political prisoners. He applied for political treatment for the prisoners, which was refused. Stack told the prison authorities he would wreck the prison if political treatment was not accorded to us. The following Sunday morning Stack told us to bring the Bible which was in each cell with us to Mass and when we returned to our cells we placed the Bible between the doors and the door jambs. A sudden swing of the doors, which were of heavy iron, was then made in a closing direction and every hinge was burst and the doors fell off the cells. About forty cells were so treated.

The raid on Rockingham House or Castle was purely an I.R.B. affair. The Volunteers had not been organised in the area as yet. About a week after the raid, George Plunkett arrived in Boyle and organised the Volunteers there. All the I.R.B. men joined the Volunteers. I was in jail at this time. When we were arrested and brought up for trial we refused to recognise the Court and during the proceedings we sang songs and did not listen to what was going on. The magistrate - Kilbride - went ahead with the proceedings, however, and we were remanded for eight clear days. The magistrate asked the prisoners if they had anything to say and Turbot, who was a great wit, said: Yes, how will it be if some of eight are wet days?" Even the magistrate had to laugh at this.

c When I returned to Boyle after my release in Belfast I was appointed Commandant of the 1st Boyle Battalion of the Volunteers by Ernie O'Malley, who was organising the Volunteers in the area then and who was staying in my house. A sergeant of the R.I.C. was in the habit of wandering into our yard, which was a Monumental Works, for a chat, and when he arrived O'Malley would grab a hammer and chisel and start pounding away at a stone. The sergeant thought he was an apprentice and he never inquired who he was or where he came from. O'Malley was in the "Hue and Cry" at this time and was on the run, but the sergeant did not recognise him and did not seem to bother either.

The 1st Battalion, Boyle, comprised the companies of Boyle, Doon, Breedogue, Crohan, Ballinameen and Frenchpark. Philip Murray was battalion adjutant and Johnny Sheerin was battalion quartermaster. Two ex-Connaught Rangers who were members were employed for training purposes. Boyle Company was about 30 strong and the other companies were about the same strength. The company commanders were Stephen Brennan, Captain of Boyle. Johnnie Sheerin, the Q.M., was also captain of Doon,

Ned **ROBINSON** , Captain of Breedogue, John Kelly, Captain of Ballinameen, Malachy Doddy, Captain of Frenchpark, and Mick Devanney, Captain of Croghan.

I was in jail awaiting trial for the raid on Rockingham House and so missed all the excitement of the conscription crisis, and when the general election took place towards the end of that year, we had no fun either, as Count Plunkett was elected for North Roscommon unopposed. The First Dáil met in early 1919 and re-affirmed the declaration of the Republic. All members of the Volunteers were now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the governing body of the Republic. All members of the battalion subscribed to this oath without any defaulters.

The Dáil floated a loan and we collected a large amount of money for this. The collection for the Loan was organised by Sinn Féin but was really carried out by the Volunteers. There was a collection made for the I.R.A. that year also and a goodly sum was realised. All farmers were required to pay sixpence in the pound on their valuations. We did not ask the townspeople unless where we knew them to be supporters of ours. In all we got about £150 in the battalion area. We also organised a few dances but they did not bring in very much.

In the harvest time of 1919 we made several raids for arms and collected a number of shotguns and a few revolvers from ex-members of the R.I.C. We held up a British soldier who had got disconnected from a patrol of which he was a member. This man was one of the Yorkshire Regiment and his cycle got punctured about half a mile outside Boyle on the Elphin road, We had no arms but four of us walked up to him and grabbed him. He was frightened and cried for mercy thinking, I suppose, he was going to be shot. We took his rifle and 25 rounds of .303. We did not take his cycle. The rifle came in very handy for training purposes and was sent around from company to company

in the battalion. It was the only service rifle we had.

Regular Battalion Council meetings were held at which all company commanders attended and training which was done in secret went ahead as usual, and so on into 1920. About February or March 1920 the R.I.C. began to evacuate their small outlying stations and to concentrate their men in the larger posts. In this battalion area Ballinameen, Croghan and Greevish were evacuated and the garrisons taken to Boyle. On Easter Saturday night of 1920, we burned down Ballinameen barracks and, a fortnight later, Greevish without any trouble. After burning Greevish I went on to Cootehall and, with the help of some of the local Volunteers, burned the Income Tax papers in the Income Tax office there. There was no resistance from the Inspector of Taxes. The burning of the evacuated barracks and Income Tax papers was a countrywide operation.

In May 1920, two wagon loads of petrol in two-gallon tins arrived at Boyle railway station for the military garrison in Boyle - the Yorkshire Regiment. We decided to seize the consignment and take it away for our own use. The petrol was stored at the station awaiting removal by the military but no guard was placed on it. A man named Doogue, who was a foreman on the railway, gave us the tip about the consignment being due. We went to the Matron of the hospital, Miss K. Devaney, who was a friend of ours, and she told us that we could store the petrol in the hospital morgue. When the petrol arrived we mobilised the Boyle and Doon companies of about forty men each to remove the petrol and carry it to the hospital which was only across the road from the station. A party of Volunteers was put on the railway bridge which covers the road approach from the town to guard against a surprise approach of the enemy on us. This party was armed with shotguns. The remainder were organised into working

parties. Each man took two tins or four gallons and passed them over the wall into the hospital grounds where another party took them and stored them in the Dead House. It took a couple of hours to complete the operation - each man making several trips. The roads leading to the station were also guarded by small parties of Volunteers. Portion of the hospital was at this time occupied by the Auxiliary Police as a barracks.

At any time that we, or any of the brigade units, wanted petrol, the man who collected the swill from the hospital - Tom Gormley - and who was also a Volunteer, took ten or twenty gallons out in his cart covered by an old sack. To do this he had to pass the Auxies guard, but no one ever suspected him. The police and military never suspected that it was stored in the hospital right under their noses and beside the railway station and they searched the countryside for about six or seven miles in all directions, to no avail.

About June 1920, I was in Elphin one Sunday evening after a football match. A man named Hunt, who had resigned from the R.I.C. and had started a taxi car service, was sitting in his car with two other men. The car was parked near the police barracks. I went over to talk to him as I had known him before he joined the R.I.C. in 1914, and sat into the car in the front seat beside Hunt. An R.I.C. man came out of the barracks. I think Tanner - one of the men in the back seat - shouted "Up the Republic" or something like that. The R.I.C. man pulled his revolver from its holster and fired at us. The bullet passed through my coat sleeve and entered Tanner's chest, severely wounding him. Tanner was taken to a Dublin hospital and operated on and, after a protracted illness, he recovered. The R.I.C. man was brought to the depot in Dublin the following day and that was all that happened in the matter. I believe it was Hunt he meant to shoot, as he knew Hunt and that he had resigned. I would say the R.I.C. man had drink taken as he was



acting like a madman.

The North Roscommon Brigade had been organised for some time before this with James Ryan of Strokestown as Brigade O/C. The battalions comprising the brigade were - No. 1 Boyle, No. 2 Elphin, No. 3 Strokestown, No. 4 Arigna and No. 5 Aughrim. Brigade Council meetings were held usually in the Elphin and Ballinameen area and were attended by the Brigade staff and battalion commandants. Mostly routine business was enacted, such as training, organisation, recruiting and intelligence reports. When the R.I.C. evacuated their barracks the Volunteers took on the job of policing the country and this was done even in the areas where the police still had strong detachments. This duty was carried out very successfully by the Volunteers although it meant an amount of difficult work by men who had their normal vocation or professions to follow. Arrests, trials and detentions had to be undertaken. The Sinn Fein Courts were now operating very successfully in all areas and the people as a whole were making good use of them and loyally abiding by their rulings or decisions. Although the Courts were really the responsibility of the Sinn Fein organisation, most of the work in connection with them was carried out by the Volunteers. I was a judge in these Courts and indeed most of the Volunteers were also members of Sinn Fein. A place at Knockarush which we nicknamed "Brixton" was used by us as a place of detention. Such places were known as "unknown destinations". This name was given to them by the Press which, when a person was arrested by the Volunteers, published that he had been arrested and taken to an unknown destination. The Volunteers had to keep a continual guard on the unknown destinations and to collect food from the farmers, and at other times buy it out of our funds. Cooking facilities at such places usually did not exist and had to be rough and ready in consequence. The British Courts by now had practically ceased to function

were  
and solicitors and barristers/practising at the Simm Fein  
Courts.

By the time the general raid for arms was ordered we had already collected all the guns in our area. They were concealed in a dug-out and the Volunteers used to go there and oil and clean them.

In October 1920, my brother and I were sleeping in a shed at the back of our house. We were not as yet on the run but were doing this as a precaution against the house being raided and we being caught therein. The door of the shed was kept closed by an ordinary latch only so that we could get out quickly if a raid started on the house. One night I was awakened by a flashlight being shone on my face and immediately an English accent stated: "This is the                      here". There were a number of men in civilian attire and wearing masks and carrying arms. I jumped out of bed and started to dress. I was in pyjamas at the time. They would not let me dress. I saw my brother being dropped to the floor by a blow of a gun and rendered unconscious. I was marched down the road towards the town by six or seven masked men, being kicked and hammered as I went. On reaching the railway bridge I put my hand on the battlement or parapet of the bridge and vaulted across it landing on the grass margin alongside the rails. This was a drop of about eight or nine feet, but was well known to me as I had often done this jump as a boy for fun. I crawled into a gulley and then the shooting started, the bullets striking all around me. I lay where I was in the cutting in the side of the bank. They came down and ran up and down the railway looking for me but did not find me and eventually went away. They then went up to Pat Brennan's on the Elphin Road and gave them a bad beating up. The Brennans put up a stiff fight and fought back, actually knocking out one of the raiders. The raiders were Black and Tans.

Things were rather quiet until about February 1921, when the Scramogue and Keadue ambushes took place. However, I was not here for them. I had gone on the run after the masked raid and was staying out in the country. I had come into Mass and Communion in Boyle one Sunday morning and after Mass walked out the road towards Carrick with the intention of getting into the fields further on when I ran into a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans. They picked me up as I was well known to them and took me to the R.I.C. Barracks in Boyle. I was handed over to the military the following day. They did not ill-treat me or even question me. I was kept in the military barracks for a couple of months and was there when the Brigade O/C. - Dockery - was brought in, and also when he escaped, but I had no part in the planning of it. I was subsequently transferred to the internment camp, known as the Rath Camp, in the Curragh, and kept there until the general release of prisoners after the signing of the Treaty.

The only attempt to make munitions in the area was the construction of home-made bombs and the filling of cartridges with buckshot which was made locally. A man named Roche, who was a blacksmith in Ballinameen, made the cases for the bombs from the boxes of cart wheels. These were filled with gelnignite and had a commercial detonator and fuse. Some of these were tried out during the attack on Elphin R.I.C. barracks and were a failure.

An Intelligence Section was organised and working inside the battalion, but with the exception of keeping watch on movements of British forces and other individuals, were not of much value in getting advance information about enemy intentions. We had no friends in the local post office either and could not get anyone to work for us there. The local Parish Priest was on friendly terms with the police and was able occasionally to pick up useful bits of information.

There were no spies or informers dealt with in the area and I don't think any were operating. Boyle was a garrison town and such places were dangerous, as they always had a large percentage of "hangers on" of the British garrison and soldiers' wives and suchlike, as well as a portion of the well-to-do who liked to associate with the military and police officers. Early on in the time we had strong suspicions that two individuals were giving information, but had nothing definite against them. We took them out and gave them a good beating and this seemed to have a good effect on others who were so inclined.

Signed: *James E. Feely*Date: *August 25<sup>th</sup> 1954*WITNESS: *Matthew Barry*

(Matthew Barry)

(James E. Feely)

August 25th 1954.

BUREAU OF MILITARY RECORDS	1913-21
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