

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1548

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1548.

Witness ◦

Stephen Donnelly,
Vocational School,
Ballina,
Co. Mayo.

Identity.

Company Commander, Ballina Company.

Subject.

Activities of Ballina Company, Irish
Volunteers, Co. Mayo, 1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2866.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1548

STATEMENT BY STEPHEN DONNELLY

Vocational School, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

I was born in Ballina, Co. Mayo, on 21st December 1901 and grew up a normal boy. My father, Thomas Donnelly, a carter employed by John Egan & Sons, Mineral Water Manufacturers, was one of the founder members of Ballina G.A.A. (The Stephenites). At the moment he is 92 years of age and the last surviving member of the original team. My mother was a native of Castlebar and the daughter of a stone-mason. There were seven in the family, two boys and two girls older than I, and one girl and one boy younger.

I attended Ballina Boys' National School until I was about 15 years and took part in all the normal activities of boys of that age. At home we were more or less a happy family. My mother, when her housework was finished, was very fond of reading and I suppose I followed her example. Whenever I got a chance I read anything of interest. At school we were not taught anything of Irish history or the Irish language with one exception. When I went into the 4th standard our teacher was Pat Kilduff and, strange to say, his father was a sergeant in the British army who deserted his mother when Pat was a young lad. Pat Kilduff was the only teacher in our school to teach Irish history. He was a hard taskmaster and what he told us we retained, or we'd know all about it on the following day with the cane, strap and his boot. As a result of his severity, anything that had any bearing on Irish history was swallowed by me. I must have gone through all the old books belonging to my mother to seek any reference to Ireland. When I went into 5th standard, Pat changed with us, so we had another tough year of Irish history.

About this time we had a big company of National

Volunteers in Ballina and their training grounds were the Show Grounds and Camp Field (opposite where I lived at Station Road). I spent a lot of my time watching them training and drilling. Early in 1913 or 1914 I remember a huge review by Colonel Maurice Moore and I felt very proud of my teacher, Pat Kilduff, marching at the head of his company. When I was still at school, the first world war broke out.

Early in 1915 my two elder brothers joined the British army and, shortly afterwards, my father lost his job through slackness of trade. He and my two sisters left for work in England. I had reached the 7th standard by this time and left school and went into Cafferty's drzpery shop as a messenger boy. Next came the 1916 rebellion and all Pat Kilduff's Irish history came out in me. We had no news here in Ballina how things were going until about the Thursday of that week when the previous Monday and Tuesday papers arrived. I actually devoured the news. To the best of my knowledge, now, according to the 'Independent' and Freeman's Journal' the British were winning hands-down. I couldn't understand how all the Volunteers I had seen in Ballina at Colonel Moore's review two years before couldn't do something. It seemed awful that the whole fight should be left to Dublin, but I was then only 15 years old and could do nothing to help. I remember very clearly getting three pieces of green, white and yellow ribbon in the shop where I worked and pinning them in my coat. At that time the flags of the allied nations were sold as buttonhole badges and my pals were under the impression that my colours were the colours of another ally of England.

After the rebellion and executions, things got back to normal here, but I still felt that we and the rest of the country had missed a glorious opportunity to strike a blow

for Ireland and that I personally would never get a chance to fire a shot. Later in 1916, I with a few other boys around my own age rented an old house in the Hill St. at 1/- per week from Michael Beirne, Bridge St., and started a branch of boy scouts. We told Mr. Beirne, whom we knew to be with us, why we wanted the house and he let us have it. We took possession and, with boxes for tables and seats, and candles for lights we started our boy scouts on Fianna Eireann lines. At our first meeting, I was appointed captain or scoutmaster. On Sundays we used to go for a march and, at night, we practised drill, which I had earlier learned when the National Volunteers were training. Early in 1917, the Irish Volunteers were formed in Ballina and a Sinn Fein Club started. They took over an old drapery shop named Erskine's, owned by John Moylette, at the corner of Garden St. and King St. Through the good offices of Michael Tolan, a crippled tailor who helped us in Hill St., we got permission to hold our meetings in the Sinn Fein Hall. Tolan, who was later murdered by the Black and Tans, took complete charge of us. He had us affiliated with Fianna Eireann in Dublin and received all the necessary instructions from there. During the week we had drill nearly every night except Saturday. On Sunday we had a route march with the Volunteers, and every Sunday night we had an Irish concert. All members of Sinn Fein, the Volunteers and Fianna Eireann who could sing or dance took part. There was an admission charge of threepence. These concerts were very enjoyable.

In the autumn of 1917 a big Sinn Fein rally was held in Foxford which was addressed by Arthur Griffith. The local company of Volunteers agreed to march from Ballina to Foxford but as the distance was too great for the Fianna we decided to borrow and hire bicycles for the occasion.

On the morning of the meeting, about 30 of us cycled to

Foxford. Each carried a day's rations. We halted about a quarter of a mile outside Foxford, left two boys in charge of the bicycles. The remainder marched into Foxford with our banner - the rising sun - the flag of the Fianna. During the day the boys in charge of the bicycles were relieved every four hours. After the meeting we marched out of Foxford, collected our bicycles and cycled home.

Early in 1918, the R.I.C. became very active and arrests were made for drilling. The first arrest was Senator Tom Ruane who was O/C. Ballina Company. He was sentenced to four months' imprisonment. Others arrested around this time were Paddy Hegarty, Lahardane; Paddy Gallagher, Ballina; Willie Lydon, Ballina; Frank Jordan, Ballina, and Martin Lacken, The Quay, Ballina. All drilling had now to be done on the quiet and our boys were detailed to act as scouts and do outpost duty. We also continued to drill, attend lectures, etc. in the Sinn Fein Hall.

In September 1918, we received instructions from Fianna Eireann H.Q. to hold a Thomas Ashe Memorial parade through the town on the anniversary of his death (29th September). At about 12 noon on that date I fell-in the company of Fianna outside the Sinn Fein Hall. Headed by a black banner held by two poles with a large photograph of Ashe in the centre, we marched up King St. At the top of King St. Head Constable Dwyer and an R.I.C. sergeant halted us and ordered us to disperse. We refused and, in a scuffle that followed, one of our lads, Paddy Farrell, was arrested. We continued our march down Knox St. and at the Imperial Hotel, about twelve R.I.C. rushed out with drawn batons and attacked us. As we had nothing to defend ourselves with, only the flag poles, we retaliated with these. During the fight I got a blow of a

baton on the forehead and was knocked out. When I came to, I found myself with four others in a cell in the R.I.C. barracks. Those arrested with me were John McHale (now a solicitor in Ballina), James Walsh (now a doctor in England) and Anthony Merrick, Ballina. We were held in the R.I.C. Bks. until the following Saturday, when we were tried at a special Court with unlawful assembly, assault on R.I.C. and resisting arrest. We were remanded until the following Tuesday. On Tuesday we were charged before two R.M.s - Milling and Glass - and were sentenced to five months' imprisonment. We refused to recognise the Court. Two of the party - McHale and Walsh - recognised the Court and were bound to the peace. Farrell, Merrick and I were removed in custody to Sligo Gaol.

My first experiences in Sligo were not very pleasant. We were treated as ordinary prisoners. Out of bed (if one could call it a bed) at 6 a.m., wash, empty slops, clean and polish cell utensils. At 8 a.m. we got a mug of cocoa, a thick lump of hard bread and a piece of margarine. We had to spread the margarine with a sort of bone spoon as we were not allowed a knife and fork. At 10 a.m. we were brought out and had to cut timber for firewood until 12 noon. I understand this timber was sold in the shops in Sligo at a penny a bundle. We were again locked up until 2 o'clock. During this two hours we got dinner which consisted of three potatoes, a bit of beef or mutton and a mug of what was supposed to be soup. At two o'clock we were marched out again, this time around the exercise yard, five paces apart, and not allowed to talk to one another. This continued until 4 o'clock, when we were again locked up. We got more cocoa, bread and margarine about 5 o'clock. After tea, there was a sort of ropey stuff put into each of our cells. We were supposed to tease this until 8 o'clock when lights were put out. The light consisted of a gas jet. After that it was

try and sleep, which I found very hard to do. At that time there were about eight political prisoners in Sligo Gaol. They were from Sligo, Ballinamore, Cavan, Foxford and Ballina.

About three weeks after our arrival in Sligo, I was brought before the Governor who informed me that one of my brothers had been killed in France. He informed me that if I signed an undertaking to cease my activities with all illegal organisations he would release me. I refused and returned to my cell. Naturally, I felt my brother's death very much, especially now that my mother was alone at home with a younger brother and sister. However, about a week afterwards, we decided to go on hunger-strike for political treatment. After one and a half days' strike we were removed to Derry Gaol. Derry Gaol was a paradise in comparison with Sligo. We were allowed out of our cells from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. and permitted to eat together in one large cell and to stay together until about 8 p.m. There was only one snag - In another part of the prison we learned that Tom Derrig, a university student and later Minister for Education, was serving a sentence of twelve months for stealing a rifle from a British soldier home on leave in Westport. Derrig was being treated as a criminal. About that time, too, the Sligo and Foxford prisoners had served their sentences and were released. This left only the Ballinamore and Cavan prisoners and ourselves in Derry.

We spent Christmas there and, two or three days after, a warder named Deedy, who was on temporary transfer from Belfast, informed us that Austin Stack in Belgast Gaol had ordered us to strike to get to Belfast. As we were being treated very well in Derry, we found it hard to stage a strike, but we decided to strike to get Derrig political treatment. We informed the Governor and, before we got a chance, we were

put into a bus, brought to the railway station, and sent to Belfast. I would like to mention that while travelling in the bus from the gaol to the station we were attacked by mill workers with bottles and stones. We escaped injury, but one of the R.I.C. was hit with a bottle or glass from the windows of the bus and his face was badly cut.

Belfast Gaol, housed about 600 political prisoners. We had our own officers and only took orders through them. Austin Stack (Kerry) was in charge. Dr. Ryan (Wexford) was in charge of our wing; Ernest Blythe, another wing, and so on. Fionan Lynch, now a judge, was also in charge of a wing. Previous to our arrival, the 'flu epidemic raged there and all the prisoners with the exception of about ten were down with it. A lot of the prison staff were also affected. As a result, cell doors were open night and day to give those who had not caught it an opportunity of bringing hot drinks to those laid up. The hot drinks were boiled over gas jets in the corridors. When we arrived, this was the position. We were marched out to exercise each morning by our own officers. Food was issued through our own orderlies. We had an Irish class two or three times a week. Ernest Blythe was our teacher. Lectures were also given on the quiet during these class hours. In short, the prisoners ran the prison. But this was too good to last. After about three or four weeks our cell doors were locked in the evenings and opened every morning. One morning, some time later, our cells were not opened as usual. We kicked and hammered at the doors and, after a time, a warder came to each cell and read a statement from the Governor stating that, owing to an incident the previous evening, our treatment as political prisoners was withdrawn. The incident referred to, we learned later, was - there was a political prisoner in the criminal wing of the gaol; what he

was charged with I don't know, but it appears that on the previous evening while at exercise, Austin Stack and two or three others tried to rescue him and take him to the political wing. Whether they succeeded or not I don't know, as that was the last of my fellow prisoners I saw until I was released on 15th March 1919. Immediately after the warder had notified us of the Governor's decision, Stack ordered us to barricade our doors and break up our cells. This order was carried out and after a short time R.I.C. and warders, armed with sledge hammers and hose pipes, started to break down our doors. Some of our cell doors were so well barricaded that the hose pipe was turned on the inmate, while the R.I.C. and warders smashed down the doors with sledge hammers and crowbars. When our cell doors were broken down, we were pounced on by R.I.C. and warders and handcuffed behind the back. All bedclothes and other articles were removed and all that was left was the plank bed. Our cell doors were later repaired by soldiers and warders and, where doors and cells were unrepairable, the prisoner was removed to another part of the prison. After this, the warders brought our food, took the handcuffs off, put them on in front while we ate and, after meals, put handcuffs behind the back again. At night, the handcuffs were changed from back to front. I cannot remember how long this lasted, but I do remember that we were sleeping in our own clothes on the wooden bed until released on expiration of sentence.

During our solitary confinement we had a concert every night. We used to put the plank bed on its edge up to the small window, climb up and sing through the bars. There was no glass in the windows, as we broke it on the first day of the strike. I recall one incident about these concerts. One night, when it came to my turn to sing, I sang "The Men of

the West". After I had finished, I heard a whisper from under my window: "Hi, what part of the west do you come from?" "Ballina", said I. "So do I" said the voice, "what's your name?". I told him my name and asked him his. He told me he was Patrick McNulty from The Quay, Ballina, and was an R.I.C. constable stationed there. I asked him for a smoke and a match (we were not allowed cigarettes from the start of the strike). He threw up a packet of Woodbines with a match or two in the packet. I got down from my window and lit my Woodbine. To this day, I think that was the nicest smoke I ever had. Up to the time of our release, whenever he was on duty, he always kept me in smokes. He resigned shortly afterwards and died of T.B. during the civil war.

On arrival in Ballina after release, the town turned out to welcome us home. We were carried shoulder high from the station to the Central Hotel and entertained. That night I was told that our Fianna Eireann Company had fallen away during my absence. The parents of the younger members would not let their sons attend, and some of the older boys had joined the Volunteers. I joined the Volunteers with the rank of section commander and, at my first or second drill, I was agreeably surprised to have my old schoolteacher, Pat Kilduff, in my section; also P.J. Rutledge, later Minister for Justice, and now deceased. My first official job in the line of raids, I think, was the raid on Income Tax office in April of that year. Ten or twelve of us raided the office, held up the collector - an ex-R.I.C. Head Constable - and his family, cleared everything into bags, brought them to the railway line on the Killala road and burned them. After this, I was continually out at night with different parties raiding for and collecting arms. These raids were made throughout the Ballina battalion area.

I would like to mention that after my release from gaol I went into Moylett's Bakery and Confectionery as an apprentice. For a time during this period I used to fall asleep lying on the bags of flour in the bakehouse. I used to be out until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning raiding and had to start work at 6 o'clock in the morning and finish at 2 p.m.

My father and sisters returned from England about this time and I expected that he would put a stop to my late hours. His first greeting on arrival was to clap me on the shoulder and say: "Thank God I have one son who is prepared to fight for Ireland". This expression was very encouraging and afterwards he never questioned my late hours, but advised me to rest after I finished work at 2 p.m. I took his advice and I felt better prepared for any night work.

We continued the raids for arms, drills, parades in the country districts of the town and, in addition, I used to go to Rehins Company one night each week and help in their training.

The Tans had now arrived in town and one of their first acts was to close the Sinn Fein Hall. We then held our meetings in a forge in Clare St., owned by Willie Wade. It was in this forge that I first met the present secretary of the Department of Defence, Peadar McMahon. He lectured to us there and instructed us in the use of arms and explosives. At the end of 1919 I was elected company captain, with Jack Jordan (now in America) my 1st lieutenant, and Pappy Coleman, 2nd lieutenant. I did my best to stir things up in town.

About February 1920, I decided to raid the gunshops in town and, with the assistance of Frank Flynn (battalion commandant), Denis Sheerin (brigade Q.M.), Jordan Coleman and a few others, we raided three gunshops (Coolican's, Ahearn's and Kavanagh's) and collected shotguns, cartridges

and, I think, one or two .22 rifles. Later we raided two Co. Council stores and removed gelignite and detonators. In addition, to our Volunteer duties, we took over police work when we got the opportunity.

On one occasion J.J. Murphy's drapery shop was broken into and a lot of clothes taken. A few days later, I got the wire from a secondhand clothes dealer that another dealer was selling new clothes in the country towns around. That night, we raided the dealer who at first denied he had any new clothes, but when he saw that we were determined to search his packs, produced the stolen goods and told us that he bought them from two men named Boylan and Tully. We took the clothes, arrested him and then arrested the two robbers. We held a Special Court before Mr. J. Dodd, who was a republican judge. Mr. Murphy identified his stuff and gave the value of what was still missing. The robbers were sentenced to be deported for ten years, The receiver was ordered to pay the price of the missing articles and, in addition, to pay the prisoners' fare from Ballaghaderreen to Dublin and across to England. We hired a car, drove them to Ballaghaderreen, bought their tickets to Dublin, gave them cash for the crossing to England and sent them off. The receiver also paid for hire of car to Ballaghaderreen. These fellows never returned to Ballina.

The railway goods store was the scene of our next activity. We learned that a number of steel shutters had arrived there for the Ballina, Enniscrone and other R.I.C. barracks. As these shutters were very heavy, I organised a party of about 30 for the job. We called on the station-master, collected his keys and brought him with us to the store. We removed the shutters, carried them about a quarter of a mile to the River Moy and dumped them into it. About a

week later, we made another raid on the store; this time for treacle consigned from Belfast to merchants in Ballina. We loaded the treacle into a wagon, pushed the wagon about a mile up the line; here we burst the barrels and allowed the treacle to flow down the embankment. We then pushed back the wagon and left it at the railway siding.

In the month of July 1920, the R.I.C. used to patrol the town in batches of four, six and eight. At a meeting attended by Tom Ruane, brigade commandant; Frank Flynn, battalion O/C.; I and a few others decided to ambush them and collect their arms. A few nights later, an R.I.C. patrol of one sergeant, two constables and a Tan appeared on patrol. We decided to ambush them at the May Lane on their return to the barracks. We took up positions. Frank Flynn, Jack Jordan, Willie Lydon and I were at the mouth of the lane. The remainder of the party on the opposite side of the street in another laneway. When the patrol came opposite our party they got the order to put up their hands. The party on the opposite side of the street closed in immediately. The Tan pulled his gun and started to fire. Fire was exchanged with our party on the street. We pulled the sergeant and another constable into the lane and again shouted to them to put up their hands. The constable immediately did so, but the sergeant made an attempt to pull his gun. I immediately fired and he fell. We disarmed the two of them; the third man was disarmed in the street, but the Tan got away up the street. We were hardly away when more R.I.C. came from the barracks firing wildly through the town. On the following day, several business premises and private houses were raided by the R.I.C. but without any effect. I would like to mention an incident that happened that day. Where I worked in Moylett's, the bread was delivered by horse and van. It was

part of the driver's job to bring about two stone of oats in a bag to the stables in Knox St. for the horse every day. This day, a round dinner time, John Moylett rushed down to the bakehouse and told me the Tans and R.I.C. were raiding Shanley's in Knox St. and if I had anything in the place to get rid of it. I assured him I had nothing, but I knew I had about 30 rounds of revolver and rifle ammunition there. When he left the bakehouse, I got the ammunition. In the meantime, the workman came to collect his oats. We all started talking about the shooting and raids. Then I had an idea. I told the man I would put the oats in the bag for him. I took the bag, went to where the oats were, filled it and put the ammunition in through the oats. He took the bag and went off. Shortly afterwards, I prepared to go to my dinner and, on coming out on the street, saw that the raid was still going on in Shanley's. Curiosity got the better of me. I went down to have a look at what was going on. Imagine my consternation when I saw the workman with the bag of oats still on his back standing at Shanley's door gaping in to see what was going on. I got a lad to go over and tell him the boss was waiting for him to come back. He went off down to the yard and I followed him into the stable, removed the ammunition and when he saw what was in the bag, he nearly had a heart attack.

Up to this time, the local clergy had not come out in the open and we did not know how we stood with them. We decided that one of us would go to confession and state that we were in the attack. I volunteered to do the job and, on the following Saturday night, I presented myself to the Administrator in confession. He told me that, although he was sorry and sympathised with our movement, he had instructions from the Bishop that anyone implicated in the attack would have to go to His Lordship, and he advised me to do so

immediately. The Bishop's confession box was on the opposite side of the Cathedral facing the Administrator's box. I left the Administrator's box, crossed the seats instead of going around the cathedral and went into the Bishop. He held me for nearly two hours, told me I was a murderer and demanded that I sever my connection with the I.R.A. He insisted we were a secret society. I argued that we were at war with England and as far as what I had done, my conscience was clear. I refused to resign from the I.R.A. and said that we would continue to fight. When his patience was worn out after about two hours, he gave me absolution and let me go. In comparison, I would like to mention that later when I was with the active service unit, I went to confession to the parish priest in a country parish. I mentioned that I had missed Mass on one or two occasions on account of being on the run. His first question was: "How many policemen have you shot?". I knew he was our way of thinking and I told him "three". His answer was: "You're no bloody good if that's all you have shot".

In the following month (August), Enniscrone, Co. Sligo, Coastguard Station was attacked, captured and burned. The garrison consisted of six coastguards and four Marines, and a large number of men took part in the attack. I, with Pappy Coleman, Frank Flynn, Denis Sheerin and a few others were with the main attacking party. We rushed the door and captured two coastguards in the wash house and held them. Firing started from the top of the stairs by the Marines. We then used the two prisoners as a cover. After a short time, the coastguards shouted to the Marines to stop firing as they would be shot. Keeping our prisoners as cover, we rushed the stairs, ordered the Marines to drop their arms, which they did. We kept the men as cover until we had rounded up the garrison.

We then discovered that we had only five coastguards and three Marines. We continued to search for the two missing men, but without result. We learned later that they were taken prisoner in the town by some of the outposts after the station was attacked. We captured a very big amount of rifles, revolvers, ammunition and other equipment. When everything was cleared out, we sprinkled the station with petrol and paraffin oil and set it on fire. The arms, etc. were taken away by cars and brought to Corbally. After the station was set alight and all stuff safely away, we released the prisoners.

Although the R.I.C. had the bridge at Bruere barricaded and were searching everybody coming from Enniscrone that night, our party got safely back to Ballina by a roundabout way.

Between September and October, with the assistance of some members of Rehins company, we burned Cloghans unoccupied R.I.C. barracks. There was no opposition. On the evening of the general round-up in November, a friend of mine informed me that while drinking in a publichouse in Garden Street, Ballina, he heard an R.I.C. sergeant who was in the snug at the bar tell the publican that there was going to be a round up that night. I passed on the information to all I thought likely to be arrested. Jack Jordan, Michael Mahon and I decided to go out to the country for the night and see what would happen. Early next morning, Mahon left us to come in to work in town. During the day we learned that all prominent I.R.A. men were arrested during the night. These included Tom Ruane (brigadier), Frank Flynn (battalion commandant), and Mahon was arrested at work during the morning. I also learned that I was sought for twice during the night as was also Jack Jordan. We decided to go "on the run".

Shortly afterwards, Eamon Gannon was appointed brigade O/C. and George Delaney, battalion O/C. Jordan and I continued to move about the different companies drilling and raiding for arms.

Some time previous to the round up, the brigade were in communication with H.Q. about the supply of arms to be shipped from Liverpool to Ballina Quay. Early in December, Eamon Gannon sent me to H.Q. in Dublin to try and get things fixed up. I got my instructions to stay in Fleming's Hotel, Gardiner's Street and contact a Sean Forde who would call there. I boarded the train at Foxford (unarmed) and got to Dublin O.K. On arrival at Broadstone, the Galway train had just arrived before the Mayo one. The passengers from both trains left the station together and started to walk towards Dominick St. We had only gone about 30 yards when a fusillade of shots rang out behind me and a man about two yards in front of me fell. The crowd scattered and ran and I did likewise. I arrived at Fleming's wondering what the shooting meant and who was the shot man. Next morning I learned from the papers that he was a prominent I.R.A. man named Howey, I think from Galway. Anyway, I contacted "Sean Forde" whom I later knew to be Tom Malone. He instructed me to call to 133 Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) at a certain hour on the following morning. I called at the appointed time. The place happened to be a monumental workshop and there I met my man. After a lot of questioning and when he was satisfied as to my bona fides, we made arrangements as to how to get some arms from Liverpool to Ballina Quay. I gave him a list of merchants in Ballina whose names could be used. He gave me two moulds for pellet-making. I addressed the moulds to two members of Cumann na Mban in Ballina and posted them in Brunswick St. P.O. Dublin was a hot spot at the time and I was glad when I got out of it. I reported back to Eamon Gannon, but I think very little came out of the arrangements.

Early in January 1921, we learned that some shotguns we had taken in earlier raids and dumped in Beckett's Saw Mills, beside the River Moy, were discovered by Isaac Beckett and that there was a danger of him telling the British authorities. We rounded up a crowd of the boys (about 16) immediately. We posted an outpost, and P. Coleman, D. Sheerin, James Nicholson, Paddy McCann and I entered the mill to collect the guns. We were only in a few minutes when we heard a barrage of shooting from the street. Almost immediately, a lorry of Tans and R.I.C. stopped at Beckett's gate and rushed in; one of our lads inside fired to warn us. We got away through the river side of the mill, but had to wade body-deep in the river. The R.I.C. and Tans captured the shotguns and also captured Coleman.

Things were getting very hot now in Ballina. The Auxiliaries arrived in town and made the Imperial Hotel their H.Q. They flew a Union Jack from an upper window. My home was continually raided and my father and younger brother abused. On one occasion they beat up both of them and smashed the furniture in the house. My mother and sisters were also subjected to a lot of abuse. One of my sisters - Margaret - was a member of Cumann na mBan and was very active at this time. The R.I.C. patrols numbered about 16 and marched in extended formation, so we had no chance of holding them up or ambushing them. Some nights we used to snipe the barracks from Green Hill across the river. The garrison used open up and continue for hours. Curfew was imposed and markets prohibited.

In March of that year we decided to remove the Union Jack from Imperial Hotel. Jim Devaney procured a ladder from some building at Hopkins Garage and, about 3 o'clock in the morning, in our stocking feet, we brought the ladder to the Imperial Hotel, placed it gently against the wall near the window.

Joe Healy (later killed in the civil war) climbed the ladder, cut the ropes and dropped the flag to me. We left the ladder against the wall, brought the flag about 100 yards from the hotel, sprinkled it with petrol and set it on fire. Later that month, an anonymous letter was sent to the R.I.C. barracks stating that I was to attend a dance at Bonniconlon School on the following Sunday night. At the time, I did not know about the letter as I was staying in Corbally 5th Battalion area. I was summoned to a meeting by Seamus Kilcullen. There were between 20 and 25 at the meeting including Jack Jordan, Joe Healy and Jim Devaney from my own company who were now on the run. Seamus informed the meeting that he expected the R.I.C. and Tans to raid a dance in Bonniconlon on the following Sunday night and it was decided to ambush them. The ambush was laid just outside the village. The night was very dark and, as we waited, several people passed along the road to the dance as we thought. We didn't hear any lorries coming and, suddenly, there was a whistle signal and immediately there was a barrage of shots from behind the ditch and road nearer the Ballina side. What happened was - the Tans and R.I.C. halted their lorries about two miles from the village and walked in twos and threes to the village. We learned later that when the barrage started, about ten Tans and R.I.C. were actually raiding the dance hall and remained in the school until reinforcements arrived later. The R.I.C. party, who were attacked, took to their heels and ran across country towards Ballina. Our party were ordered to withdraw. We heard later that two of the police were wounded.

In April of that year, Jordan, Healy and I asked to be allowed into Ballina to see if we could do anything in the line of having a potshot at members of the R.I.C. who were continually raiding our homes and abusing our people. We were told that as we were too well known it would be too dangerous.

But we were promised that a crowd from the 5th Battalion, armed with revolvers, would go in and attack the patrol. The 5th Battalion people went in on two Saturday nights in succession and came back with one hand as long as another. I got word from a girl friend that two Tans were continually visiting a publichouse in Ardnaree and were courting the barmaids (two sisters). On the third Saturday night, Jordan, Healy and I went into town. As we were going up by the Cathedral we spotted two Tans about to cross the road at the upper bridge. We doubled up and then walked fast until we got within ten or fifteen yards of them. They were then at the end of Bridge St. We called on them to halt and put up their hands. They immediately opened fire, but we got the first shots in. We killed one and wounded the other. We collected their revolvers and ammunition and ran across Ardnaree, down Bunree and down to Quignaligant.

My next encounter took place on 21st May. Curfew was in force in Ballina at 8 o'clock and at about 6 p.m. Tommy Howley, a section commander in my company, came to me Walsh's, Quignalicka, and told me that D.I. White and his wife and R.I.C. driver were after motoring down to O'Malley Ormsby's below the Quay. Michael Byron, another of my company, was with him. Joe Healy, Howley, Byron and myself left for the Quay. Before leaving, I told one of the Walsh boys to go to Tony Clarke, Carrane, and tell him to make arrangements in case White should go to Enniscrone after leaving Ormsby's. We collected Jim Devaney on our way to the Quay. We saw White's car still at Ormsby's door and got into position on the side of a hill, the Ballina side of Ormsby's. We were hardly in position when the car came out and came towards us. We opened fire which was returned by White and his wife; I understand both were wounded. We cleared away across the fields to Quignashee. It was then after curfew time and as Howley and

Byron couldn't return to Ballina, we decided to go to Quinn's of Bruree and remain there for the night. In the early hours of the morning the house was surrounded by R.I.C. They hammered on the front door and ordered us to come out with our hands up. We burst out the back door, firing. When we were nearly on the Ballina road, Howley was shot. I took his gun and Healy and I continued to return the fire until we got around the corner at Bunree Bridge. We ran along until we came to the residence of John Garvey, Downhill (Crown Solicitor). We went in his gate around the back of the house and escaped to Quigamanger. A few days after this, several prominent merchants in Ballina were arrested, brought to the Auxiliaries headquarters. They were marched through the town at revolver point, made carry Union Jacks and, at the Market Cross, go down on their knees, kiss the Union Jack and shout 'God save the King'.

About this time, the brigade decided to form two active service units, one to operate on the west side of the Moy, and the other on the east side. I was allotted to the west unit with Eamon Gannon in charge. Seamus Kilcullen was in charge of the east unit. Others in my unit were Jack Jordan, Denis Sheerin, Ballina; Martin McHale, Rehins, Seamus Gaughan, Geesala; John Neary, Bangor; Anthony Farrell and Carol Munnelly, Lackin; John Barrett, Pakey Timony, Flip O'Donnell, Martin Loftus and Stephen Fleming, Crossmolina; M. Waters, Lahardane, and M. Lynn. We knocked a round Crossmolina, Dooliage and Bangor hoping to contact lorries of British forces going to Belmullet. Later, we moved to the Ballycastle district. On the night of 23rd June, we arrived at the village of Clydagh outside Ballycastle. Arrangements were made to attack a patrol from Ballycastle the following day. Guards were supplied by the Ballycastle company and we retired to bed in the houses

in the village. About 3 a.m. we were awakened by heavy firing. We jumped into our clothes and got our rifles and came out on the street. Fire was immediately opened on us from two or three different directions. We took shelter and returned the fire. Denis Sheerin, Jordan, McHale and I were together. After some time firing, we retreated and got away through the mountain. One of the guards (Tommy Neilon) was shot dead and two police wounded. Seven of the column, including Eamon Gannon, Anthony Farrell, Carol Munnelly, M. Waters were captured. Later that day, while the local I.R.A. were blocking the road at Heathfield, Keelala, under our protection, a lorry load of police travelling very fast was fired on by us - including D. Sheerin, McHale, J. Jordan and myself. As the road was not fully blocked at the time the lorry did not halt. After this last engagement, it took us about a week or so to get the column together again. When we did meet, Johnny Barrett was elected O/C. We moved out in the Bangor Erris direction again, but again had no luck. Shortly afterwards, came the Truce when we all returned to our respective areas. So concludes Ballina's small part in Ireland's fight for freedom.

Signed: Stephen Donnelly

Date: 29-11-56

Witness: [Signature]

| |
|------------------------------------|
| BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 |
| BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21 |
| No. W.S. 1,548 |