

ORIGINAL

W.S. 142  
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRA MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 142

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 142

**Witness**

James O'Connor

**Identity**

Member of St. Margaret's Coy. I.V.

**Subject**

- (a) St. Margaret's Coy. from 1913.
- (b) Ashbourne 1916.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

File No. S.1005

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY JAMES O'CONNOR, ST. MARGARET'S  
POST OFFICE, CO. DUBLIN.

I joined the I. Volunteers in Nove,ber 1913 at the Parish Hall, St. Margaret's, Co. Dublin. There were present at the time Tom Devenish (dead), Michael Dunne (dead), Thos. Reilly, The Ward, Co. Dublin, Thomas Duke of Finglas and Walter Farrelly of The Ward. I did not sign any documents on joining, but was given a membership card and we had to pay twopence per week subscription towards the purchase of arms and uniform and equipment. Michael Masterson was the instructor. He was a British Army Reservist.

Thomas Duke was the Coy. Captain. We had parades for training twice per week and route marches on Sundays. We had no arms and did our drill with wooden guns. We had firing practices with a .22 rifle at Mr. Tyrrell's place at Dunsoughley Castle. Mr. Tyrrell was also a member. One or two of the R.I.C. always attended our parades and accompanied us on route marches.

I was not at the Howth gun running but after that we got about half a dozen Martini Henry Rifles.

At the time of the Split in the Volunteers nearly all of our members went with the Redmond side. Our Captain (Thos.Duke) remained with the Irish Volunteers and also Thos. Reilly, Richard Duke, Walter Farrelly and myself. Nicholas Teehan joined afterwards.

All the rifles were in possession of the National Volunteers and were kept by them. We had only shotguns for which we made some buckshot.

I remained with the I.Vols. because I did not like the way John Redmond was behaving.

Con Colbert abd Paddy Daly used to come out from the city and drill us on some week nights. The people were generally hostile to us and called us "madmen". We used also to go to

Swords for drill with the Battalion. We were now the 5th Bn. Dublin Brigade. We had drills and exercises there with the rest of the Brigade from the city also.

There was no special activity during Holy Week, but on Easter Sunday the whole Bn. mobilised at Rathbeale Cross Roads. We had all the arms we had with us including shotguns and some rifles and rations for 24 hours. I had a shotgun and twelve (12) rounds of ordinary shot, a haversack and a slouch hat. Tom Ashe was there and the Lawlesses. We were there until about 12 p.m. on Sunday night when we were told to go home and be prepared to mobilise again at short notice. It was while we were at Rathbeale that I first became aware that there was going to be a "rising". We were not told officially, but it was the talk amongst the fellows. We had not been warned previously about going to confession or anything of that nature. I went home and went to bed.

On Easter Monday I got up and went to the Races at Fairyhouse. While at the Races I heard that the Rising had started in Dublin. It was the general talk at the Races that evening. I came home and on Tuesday, bringing my shotgun and cartridges, I joined the Battn. which was in camp (billets) at Killeek. This was about 12 a.m. There were not near as many there now as there had been on the Sunday at Rathbeale. I would say there was only about 60 all told. I noticed Dick Mulcahy there. He was not with us on Sunday. I was on guard duty the rest of that day up on a hill watching the two roads that lead into the camp. My orders were to give the alarm if I saw the R.I.C. or military coming but not to fire. That night after being relieved we lay in our clothes on straw and hay in the sheds. We had plenty of food as they had killed some lambs and they had a bread cart full of bread which had been commandeered. I think it was one of Kennedy's bread vans. It was a motor van and was driven by a Volunteer.

On Wednesday night the whole Battn. moved to a place near Garristown. I should mention here that every man had a bicycle. On Thursday night, starting from that camp, a small party of us raided the R.I.C. Barracks at Garristown. I think Dr. Hayes was i/c of this party. We walked up to the Barracks and walked on without any resistance being offered. I do not remember if we got any arms there. I am nearly sure we did not. We also raided the P.O. there and destroyed the telegraph instruments. We then returned to Camp and that night we moved to a new camp. I cannot remember the name of the place.

On Friday, after leaving a small party in the camp, we set out in the direction of Ashbourne. I understood our job was to destroy the railway line near Batterstown. We were on bicycles, and I was in the leading section. Charles Weston was in charge of this section. Near the cross of the Rath there was a barricade across the road leading to Garristown. That was the road we were on. Two policemen surrendered there without firing. After they had been disarmed we tied white handkerchiefs on their helmets and they were sent forward to the Barracks to tell their comrades that they were prisoners and to tell them to surrender. The police did not return. We had now taken cover on the side of the road. Tom Ashe came along and gave me a sledge and told me to go with him that I was to break in the barrack door. Just as we arrived at the barrack door, the R.I.C. opened fire from the upstairs windows. They were not firing at us, but at our comrades down on the Garristown road. Ashe ordered me away from the door. We had to return down along the ditch to where we started from. Firing between the garrison in the barracks and our men was now general. Just then I noticed cars and lorries pulling up on the north side of the main road near the cross roads. R.I.C. were dismounting from them and were heavily engaged by our men who had rifles. I did not fire then as my shotgun had not sufficient range. I saw several of the R.I.C. fall as if they had been hit. Firing continued and some

of our men got slight wounds. After some time Frank Lawless and the men who had been left in the camp joined us.

Dick Mulcahy then came along and he brought us across the fields keeping under cover of the hedges and ditches on to the main road, on the north or Slane side of the place where the cars were halted. We moved up along the road firing at any R.I.C. man we could see. Just at that time D.I. Gray was shot by Frank Lawless. After that the remainder put up their hands and surrendered. There seemed to be a lot of them killed and wounded. We had one man killed and three or four wounded. I thought Dick Mulcahy was a very brave man as he went up the middle of the road disregarding any cover and firing at the R.I.C. as he went. He had a big pistol. The name of the man who was killed was John Crinnigan and Tom Rafferty died the following day from his wounds.

After the surrender we took all the arms and ammunition belonging to the R.I.C. and packed it into the bread van which Frank Lawless had brought up, The R.I.C. in the barracks on seeing their comrades on the road surrender also surrendered and we collected their arms and equipment also and put them in the van. The van was now very heavily loaded. The wounded R.I.C. men were placed on a farm cart and brought to the barracks where they were attended to by Dr. Hayes. The R.I.C., who were prisoners, were paraded by Tom Ashe and warned that they were not to fight again against the Irish people. Dr. Hayes treated Tom Rafferty and he was left in a house nearby as he was too bad to move further. The remainder of our wounded were able to proceed back to camp without us. Two priests arrived shortly after the R.I.C. surrendered and attended to the dead and wounded. They were very hostile to us and called us "murderers".

The Battn. then proceeded back to camp where we had a good meal of meat, bread and tea. We were then issued with one of the rifles belonging to the R.I.C. and 50 rounds of .303. We were all in good humour and spirits after our victory at Ashbourne.

We now had plenty of rifles and ammunition and plenty of good food.

A rumour spread around camp that evening that the British Cavalry were coming and that night we moved to a new camp at "New Barn" near Kilsallaghan. It was dark when we got there and we lay that night in the sheds on straw. Strong guards were mounted on the camp.

Saturday morning found everybody in good spirits and looking forward to further action. About 2 p.m. on that date Ashe told us that it was all over, that they had surrendered in Dublin and that it would be ridiculous for us to hold out. He seemed very disappointed and naturally we were very disappointed too. He told me to go home and make the best of it. A few others who were the youngest also went home. I left for home immediately without my bicycle; he would not let me take it, but told me to keep to the fields.

On the following Monday the R.I.C. from Glasnevin came to the house and arrested me and brought me to Glasnevin Police Bks. That night I was brought by some of the Berkshire Regiment to Trinity College, Dublin, and put into a room there under guard. There were a few other fellows there that I did not know. Tuesday evening the Guard Commander told me to get out and I got out and went home. When I was in bed that night I was arrested again, this time by the police from Santry and taken to Santry R.I.C. Bks. I was there in the cells for two days; no bed, only a flagged floor. There was an old chair in the cell<sup>in</sup> which I managed to have some sleep. I got one good meal from them there. They did not molest me but one constable threatened to shoot me and I had to shout for the sergeant.

On Friday I was taken by another party of the Berkshires to Trinity College again on foot. We were given a few hard biscuits known as dog biscuits to eat, I now learned that my release from here had been a mistake by the guard in carrying out their orders.

On Saturday, a week after our surrender at New Barn, I was taken under a very heavy escort of soldiers to Richmond Barracks and put into a dormitory there with some hundreds of others. We were given red tea and more dog biscuits to eat and had to lie on the floor as no bedding was supplied to us.

On the following Tuesday we were taken under escort to the North Wall and put on a cattle boat down in the cattle stalls. No food, with the exception of some dog biscuits was given to us. On Wednesday we sailed to Holyhead and thence by train to Wakefield. We got no food until we were in Wakefield Prison. During our movements through Dublin no one seemed to take any notice of us but we got a bad reception at Holyhead and throughout England. We were in Wakefield about a fortnight as far as I can remember and then removed by train to Frongoch. After about 4 months there we were brought to Wandsworth Prison and from there in batches to London and before the Sanfey Commission after which we returned to Frongoch.

I was released at the time of the General Amnesty in \_\_\_\_\_ and returned to Ireland and home.

X I should have stated that after the fight at Ashbourne and when we returned to Camp some of the men started grouching that the thing was not right and that the Rising had not the sanction of the I.Vol. Executive Council. Dick Mulcahy gave all a lecture on our duty to our country and when he had finished he asked all those who were prepared to continue the fight to take a pace forward. All the men with the exception of two men from St. Margaret's took the pace forward. These men left for home immediately. In fact they continued active by carrying dispatches for us.

During the period of our internment in England conditions were good and we were fairly well treated.

X MK O'Connor now states that this incident took place at Balwinstown on Thursday morning 31

Signed: James O'Connor  
 Date: 31 8 48

*NOTE  
 MK O'Connor  
 now states  
 that this incident  
 took place at  
 Balwinstown  
 on Thursday  
 morning  
 31/8/48*



*James O'Connor, St Margarets Coy I.V. under arrest by Crown Forces (BMH WS142)*



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EIRO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
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