

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 224

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. ....224.....

Witness

Mr. John Shields,  
Lake View,  
Benburb, Co. Tyrone.

Identity

Captain, Benburb Coy. Irish Volunteers 1916;  
Member of I.R.B.

Subject

Delegatè at I.V. Convention Dublin 31/10/1915;  
Preparations for and activities during Easter  
Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. ....S.589.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Jack Shields, Benburb, Co. Tyrone.

I joined the Volunteers in 1915. After I joined I was selected as a delegate to attend a Convention of the Irish Volunteers held in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 31st October, 1915. I represented the Benburb Company at this Convention and also other local Companies which did not send on a delegate of their own. Patrick Quinn, Clogher, travelled with me. He represented Clogher Company. An American named McRory, residing then in Carrickmore area, also attended this Convention and carried a despatch to Dublin to Tom Clarke from Dr. Patrick McCartan.

In 1915 the Volunteers in Co. Tyrone were well organised. A training camp was established in Donoughmore area in the summer of 1915. I attended this camp for a week's training. The late J.J. O'Connell, an ex American Army Officer, gave lectures at the camp. During my week's training at the camp I joined the I.R.B. The I.R.B. took the initiative in organising the Irish Volunteers. The following Companies had been undergoing a training course at the camp : Dungannon, Donoughmore, Benburb, Clogher. I knew that there were three Companies in Coalisland district at this time.

Generally there was a circle of the I.R.B. in each Irish Volunteer Company area and the I.R.B. held the controlling influence in each Volunteer Company. It was not considered essential that an Irish Volunteer Officer should be a member of the I.R.B. Most of the officers were, however, in the I.R.B. Only I was a member of the I.R.B. I would not have been selected as a representative at the Irish Volunteer Convention.

From 1915 onwards I knew that a rising was contemplated. Training was intensively carried out in the Benburb Company area. We did target practice on a miniature range with a .22

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rifle. A fund for purchase of arms was raised and arms were purchased wherever they were available. We never raided for arms pre 1916.

From the time the Company started we had some arms, a few revolvers and automatic pistols. We also had a number of shotguns. We never intended to put shotguns into use for a rising as they were then considered poor military weapons. The idea of manufacturing slugs for use in shotguns was a post 1916 development.

I got the first news of a mobilisation on Easter Sunday. On Holy Saturday night I received a message to call in to Dungannon. When I arrived there some of the Belfast Volunteers had arrived in Dungannon. I got my orders that night from Jack McElvogue for my Company to mobilise on Sunday morning in Coalisland. I also remember getting instructions from William J. Kelly, Senior.

On Easter Sunday morning 16 men from Benburb Company mobilised in Coalisland; our Company was detailed for despatch and communication work. We were all equipped with cycles and each man carried a revolver or automatic pistol and one day's rations. I would estimate the time of our arrival in Coalisland as 11 a.m. When we arrived there we saw the Belfast Volunteers were in occupation of a hall near the Square in the town. We were ordered to stand-to at the hall and await instructions.

The first orders we got were to act as an escort to a body of Belfast Volunteers through a hostile local area on their way to Cookstown to board a train for Belfast. We left Coalisland on this duty between 2 and 3 p.m. We knew at this time that the Belfast men were going home to Belfast. I did not know any of the Belfast men at this time and I can't say who was in charge of them on their return journey to Belfast. We returned to Coalisland after carrying out our orders about one hour after we departed with the Belfast men.

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Shortly after we arrived back to Coalisland I saw a small Company of Volunteers from Belfast marching into Coalisland. After their arrival a despatch rider arrived in the hall in Coalisland and read out a despatch to us to the effect that the rising was countermanded by Eoin MacNeill. I understood that the despatch rider came from Dublin. I heard afterwards that he was the author of a book named "The Wasted <sup>Ireland</sup> Ireland". After the reading of the despatch it was decided that all should disband. I can't remember who told me to disband my men. I took the Benburb Company home to Benburb district.

There were rumours during the early days of Easter Week that orders were issued for a remobilisation. We did not get any orders to do so. Donoughmore Company got orders to remobilise and did so.

On Thursday night of Easter Week I took some of my Company into Dungannon and joined up with three <sup>men</sup> of the Dungannon Companies. We raided St. Patrick's Hall, Dungannon, the H.Q. of the National Volunteers, and seized about 30 old Italian rifles belonging to the National Volunteers. At the time we raided the Hall for the rifles the British Military were in Dungannon and were being billeted around the town.

I was young at this time and the British Authorities did not trouble me. I was not on the run or evading arrest. The Benburb Company met and remained together under arms each night in a vacant house in the district. I was in constant touch with Dungannon all during the week.

Signed: J. ShieldsDate: 20/10/48Witnessed: John Mc Coy.Date: 20/10/48.

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