

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 520

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 520

**Witness**

Patrick McMeel,  
Ca rryarabeg,  
Emyvale,  
Co. Monaghan.

**Identity.**

Member of Carrickroe (Co. Monaghan) Company  
Irish Volunteers, 1918-1921;  
Brigade Quartermaster 1921.

**Subject.**

Raids on Unionist houses, South Tyrone and Monaghan,  
1918-1921;  
Wounding of Lester, 'spy', March 1921.

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

Nil

File No. S.1787

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK McMEEL,

Corryarabeg, Enyvale, Co. Monaghan.

I joined Carrickroe Company of the Irish Volunteers in 1918. Before 1918 there was no Volunteer Company organisation in my side of County Monaghan. I was in sympathy with the Volunteers for some time before 1918. Charles Emerson, a wood-working instructor in the Technical Education Department, whose headquarters were in Monaghan Town, organised Carrickroe Company. This man availed of visits to rural districts in which he was holding wood-working classes to organise the Volunteers, and after he organised our Company he kept in touch with us.

At the time Mr. Emerson organised our Company there was a rule that no Company was to be organised without the prior permission of the Battalion staff. Emerson did not seek such permission and he got into some controversy with Dr. Con Ward who was then I understand on the Battalion staff.

At the time our Company was organised companies were in existence in Donagh, Ballyocean, Scotstown and Monaghan town. Later companies were formed at Tydavent, Enagh, Knockataloon and Clara.

Shortly after the formation of the Company we had a roll call of fifty active men. Our early activities consisted of drilling, route marching and training in the use of arms. Our first Company Captain was Mick McKenna, who later joined the National Army. McKenna was our Company Captain up to June 1921, when he was

appointed Battalion O/C.

I was an ordinary Volunteer up to the autumn of 1920 when I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster. I was previous to this doing the work for John McGeough who was my predecessor in the rank of Battalion Quartermaster. McGeough was a man of more advanced years than the average volunteer, was a County Councillor and never did much volunteer work, leaving all his duties to me. McGeough was arrested before my appointment as Battalion Quartermaster.

At the time I was appointed Quartermaster of the Scotsstown Battalion the Battalion Staff was as follows :-

O/C.	-	James McKenna (now Superintendent, Civic Guards).
Vice O/C.	-	Thomas Brennan, Drumdescoo,
Adjutant	-	John McCabe, A.M.A.R.C.A.G.H., Glasslough.
Quartermaster	-	Patrick McMeel.

As far as I can now remember I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster in October 1920. The Battalion was then acting directly under G.H.Q., there being no Brigade then in existence in County Monaghan.

In June, 1921, a meeting was held at Knockatallon for the purpose of re-organising the Battalion organisations in County Monaghan into Brigade areas. As far as I now can remember the staff appointed for the North Monaghan Brigade was as follows :-

O/C.	-	James McKenna
Vice O/C.	-	
Adjutant	-	Seamus McDonnell

When the Brigade staff was set up a re-election of

officers was necessary in the Battalion. The Battalion staff after those new appointments were made was as follows :-

O/C.	-	Mick McKenna (Formerly O/C. Carrickroe Company).
Vice O/C.	-	Joseph McKenna (Civic Guards, Castleblayney).
Adjutant	-	John McCabe.
Quartermaster	-	Patrick McMeel.
Intelligence Officer	-	John McKenna.

During the years 1918 - 1919 and up to early 1920, the routine work of the Volunteers was drilling, training and the procuring of arms. One raid for arms which we carried out in 1919 produced unsuspected good results. We travelled into County Tyrone and raided the house of a Unionist named Ealwood Hopkin. Mick McKenna was in charge of this raid, accompanied by about eleven others including myself. We had only one Toy revolver amongst the lot of us. We gained admission to the house by a ruse and when inside got control of Mr. Hopkin and his household. In the search of the house we located three rifles (two large bore and one service rifle), a shotgun, four serviceable revolvers and a large quantity of ammunition of various classes and sizes. During this raid we came on a large box which was locked. I demanded the keys of the lock from Mr. Hopkin's daughter. She reluctantly procured the key and I opened the box. I found that the box contained a large sum of money in silver and notes with a book and pencil on top of the money. When I saw what the box contained I locked it up and gave the woman the key. As we were leaving the house I heard the woman telling her father that we were not so bad as we did not touch the cash in the box.

In our Battalion area there was a big Unionist population who were well organised, first in the Ulster Volunteers and later at the end of 1920 in the B Specials. In my particular Company in Brogan area we were living in a mountainous district which was predominantly nationalist and republican. In some other parts of the Battalion area we had a large Hibernian population which were bitterly opposed to the Volunteers and Sinn Féin.

The first military operation which we took part in was the Tonysillago Ambush. A relief car containing military mechanics was travelling to the relief of a disabled military lorry. We had been mobilised to proceed to the scene of the disabled lorry and attack the soldiers guarding it when the relief car came in sight. We opened fire on the relief car and the crew evacuated the vehicle, and "took to their heels" across country. We burned the car. As the firing at the car took place at long range there was little danger of casualties on either side.

We lay in ambush on several occasions for enemy patrols which did <sup>not</sup> materialise. Plans were made to attack Clogher Barracks. It was arranged that the local Clogher Volunteers would furnish guides to meet the Monaghan men and take them into the position for the attack. A large mobilisation of men from County Monaghan - Clones, Newbliss, Monaghan Town, etc. - marched to the arranged rendezvous and the guides failed to turn up. We awaited their arrival until near morning when we gave up hope and returned home.

A house belonging to Unionists named Millers in Auger area, South Tyrone, was attacked by some Volunteers, a few from my own Company. This attack was unofficial -

no official orders having been issued for the attack. An exchange of fire took place, the Volunteers being forced to retire. This attack took place in 1920. In May or June, 1921, plans were made to attack Millers again, this time on official orders, nine or ten men taking part in the attack. Millers were B Specials and were armed with service rifles. Apparently from the time of the first attack on Millars their house was used by other local B men who occupied the house at night for protection purposes. The attackers on the second attack on Millars' house pressed home the attack vigorously until they saw some lorries carrying a relief party approaching their positions which forced them to retreat. During the retreat of the attackers, the defenders of Millars' house got out of the house and opened fire on the retreating Volunteers. Two of the defenders of Millars' house were killed; none of the attackers was injured.

About March, 1921, we sent a few men to a place named Roslea to contact a man named Lester who had been very active as a spy. Those men lay in waiting for Lester and when he approached they opened fire on him, wounding him. Immediately after the shooting the "A" and "B" Specials in Roslea area ran amuck, burned out a number of catholic houses and even fired into the local priest's house. This was a reprisal for the Lester shooting.

We decided that to let the "Specials" away with those reprisals would not be good policy, so we held a meeting to organise counter reprisals, and to severely punish the men whom we believed guilty of the burnings. I took charge of a party to attack the house of a man named Leary. This man and his two sons were "B" men.

We engaged a guide who was intimate with the location of the Leary house and he took us part of the journey to the house and then turned back. We had to approach the house in the darkness. When we got close to the house I placed men to cover the back of the house and one of the gables. When the firing commenced we found that the defenders were using the front portion of the building, so a Volunteer named Sherlock and myself got round to the front of the house. There was a raised platform at the gable opposite that which our men had covered. I got on to this platform and broke an upstairs window with stock end of my rifle. At the time I was doing this I was fired on from the window, a man discharging the two barrels of a shotgun at me. I got some of the charge in my face. Then Sherlock and I got back to the front of the house and opened fire on the eaves of the thatched roof. After firing about a dozen shots the inmates showed that they wished to surrender. The father and two boys came out with their guns over their heads and were placed under a guard. The mother came out carrying some of her belongings with her. We then allowed the men to help the mother to remove all their valuables and belongings from the dwellinghouse as they then understood that the house was being burned. We allowed them an hour to remove whatever valuables they wanted to remove. We found that the old mother was hiding a rifle and ammunition in bedding amongst other articles being carried by her. We burned the house. After the surrender we got two service rifles and a double-barrelled shotgun. Later I heard that a few revolvers were got also but were not reported to me.

Another of our parties attacked a house belonging to a family named Nixon's. A fight occurred here in which Nixon was killed. Nixon was alone in the house. He was

an officer in the "B" Specials and had a bad local reputation. A rifle was got in the house. His house was not burned although the original intention was to burn all the houses.

Another house attacked was Beattley's. The attackers on this house were beaten off. An attack was made on another house. I don't now remember the name of the owners. This attack was successful; the house was burned and arms captured. Tom Brennan was in charge of this attack.

On the night all these attacks were carried out we sent three men to Roslea R. I. C. Barracks to keep the Specials from getting out from the Barracks. Those three men remained at their post the whole night and successfully achieved their mission. The Specials in the Barracks had "the wind up" and sent up verrey lights for reinforcements. I had great admiration for the action of those three men on that night. These were all the attacks which our Battalion carried out during those reprisals. Those attacks are known since as the Roslea counter reprisals. The Clones Battalion also took part in the nights operations. I can't give any detailed information about their work which I know, however, was successfully carried out.

Plans were made to attack Specials' houses in Augher village, County Tyrone, on the night of 23rd June, 1921, the day the Northern Parliament was opened. In Augher village the population was about seventy-five per cent Unionist and the young men mostly members of the Special Constabulary. On the night of the attack I went in charge of a party of twelve men to within a mile of Augher on the Augher - Ballygawley road to protect, on that



side, the men engaged on the attack. A courier was to have been sent to us when it was proper for us to leave our position. James McKenna, the Battalion O/C., was in charge of this operation.

It appears that when the attacking party approached the houses in Augher, which were selected for attack, from the rear, carrying petrol and other incendiary material to set the houses on fire, they were allowed to approach to within a short distance of the houses when the owners of the houses and all the local "B" men opened a concentrated fire on them from positions in which they were apparently awaiting them with exact knowledge of the attackers' lines of approach. Our men were forced to beat a hasty retreat.

We, in our outpost, heard the firing and when no messenger came to us with instructions, we thought that the attack had been a success. We were anxiously scanning the night sky to see the reflexion of the fire showing. We saw no fires and remained in our position until well after the dawn of the morning - until about 5 a.m. As we were leaving our position we saw a man running some distance from us, apparently intending to give the alarm, and we fired on him. This shooting by us brought a very heavy return fire and we were forced to fight a vanguard action for some distance in our retreat from the vicinity of Augher. When we arrived home at Bragan we found that the main body of the attackers on Augher had been home for some time before we arrived.

For the last eight months of the Tan War an intensive boycott of Belfast goods was in operation in our Battalion area. One of the principal activities of the

Volunteers in this matter was preventing the sale of Belfast bread. Three of our men held up a big bread lorry at Bmyvale. They were not satisfied to burn it where they intercepted it; they drove through Bragan and into County Tyrone and burned it there. The Special Constabulary had got information about the lorry's seizure and they came on the scene just after the Volunteers had set the lorry on fire. The Specials opened a heavy fire on the retreating Volunteers, and getting away from the vicinity proved a hazardous escapade, which was successfully accomplished. Another Belfast bread lorry was also burned in the area.

Our activities during the last few months of the Tan War also included several laid ambushes where we remained in an ambush position for a considerable time on many occasions. We were constantly receiving reports about Special Constabulary carrying out a regular procedure of patrols or duties and we made several attempts in lying in ambush for the purpose of attacking them. To give one instance. We were told by the Clogher Company about a regular patrol of Specials which travelled each night on the Five Mile/<sup>Town/</sup>road. A party of us went at least a dozen times to this road and remained in ambush for several hours but we never got an opportunity of attacking the patrol.

On another occasion we were told that if a Sinn Féin Flag was put up on the Tower on Tower Hill, Clogher, that the Specials would come and pull it down and thus we might get an opportunity to ambush them. On many occasions a flag was put up at this place and was always promptly removed by the Specials. We had a flag put up and about 24 of us went to near the Tower hill and lay waiting

in an old house on some hay for two days and three nights for an opportunity to attack Specials attempting to remove the flag. During this time no attempt was made to remove the flag. On the third morning of our stay in the old house we sent a friendly man from Clogher into that town for some food for us. We gave him cash to pay for what we required. This man when he went into the town, called into a pub and got drunk and was arrested by the police for being intoxicated. When we heard this we decided to evacuate immediately the position as we did not know what a drunken man might do or say. We heard afterwards that the Specials did not remove the flag until three days after we evacuated the old house.

In March, 1921, we seized the dog licence money. We had given orders that no person was to take out licences for their dogs. Notwithstanding this prohibition a number of people went in to the local Petty Sessions Clerk and took out licences. On the 31st March - that evening when all the licences had been issued, we came along and seized all the money.

We carried out dozens of raids on mails; some of those raids were on postmen and others on post offices.

Notwithstanding the strong hostile elements in many parts of our Battalion area - elements which were better armed than we were - and with all the support of a hostile Government who would not question any action that the Unionist population, including the "B" Specials took against the Volunteers or our civilian supporters, we carried out a series of acts which, if not on a big scale, provided us with the feeling that the initiative lay in our hands, and the forces of the Crown and their Unionist

supporters; were kept more or less on the defensive. Our system of exacting reprisals for wanton acts of vandalism or worse had the desired effects and preserved a control without which we could not operate. That the Volunteers of our Battalion area justified their existence from a purely military point of view is a matter of little doubt. That we reaped some of the benefits we hoped and fought for by the establishment of a native Government, which included most of our Battalion area, is a matter of pure chance. A few miles to our North are located men who were up against the same forces as we had to contend against and who are now separated from us and living under an alien despotism.

SIGNED Patrick McMill

DATE 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1951

WITNESS

John McBooy

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