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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 572

## Witness

Thomas (Sweeney) Newell,  
"Alma",  
74 College Road,  
Galway.

## Identity.

Member of Castlegar, Co. Galway, Company  
Irish Volunteers, 1914 - ;  
Lieutenant do. 1915 - .

## Subject.

National activities, Co. Galway,  
1914-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS (SWEENEY) NEWELL,  
"Alma", 74 College Road,  
Galway.

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I was present with John Conroy at a meeting held in the Town Hall, Galway, in December 1914, at which the Volunteers were started. The late George Nichols was chairman; the meeting was addressed by Eoin McNeill and Roger Casement. John Conroy and I handed in our names at the meeting and became members of the Galway City Company of the Irish Volunteers. The officers of the Company were: George Nichols, Seumas Carter, Tom Flanagan and M. J. Allen (Solicitor).

Parades were held each week in O'Donnell's Hall. We were instructed in foot drill, and also rifle drill with wooden rifles by reservists of the British Army. The Company took part in the parade which was held in Athenry on St. Patrick's Day, 1914. The parade was reviewed by Colonel Maurice Moore.

Shortly after this parade a company of the Volunteers was started in my own parish - Castlegar. John Conroy and I transferred to it. A week or so after the formation of the Company, a meeting was held to elect officers. I was elected Captain; Brian Molloy, 1st Lieutenant, and Michael Burke, 2nd Lieutenant. The Company was 58 strong. Parades were held two nights each week; two ex British soldiers - J. Walsh and M. Colburn - came out from Galway to instruct us. At the split caused by John Redmond asking the Volunteers to

join the British Army, all officers and every man of my Company remained loyal to the Executive. Following the outbreak of the Great War all British Army Reservists were recalled to service. By this time we had gained sufficient knowledge to be able to carry on ourselves.

About August, 1915, Alf Monahan came as organiser. Training was intensified; many manoeuvres were held and field exercises against other companies carried out.

About Christmas, 1915, the Company was re-organised. Brian Molloy was elected Captain. I was elected 1st Lieutenant and Michael Burke was re-elected 2nd Lieutenant.

Shortly before Easter, 1916, Alf Monahan was served with a deportation order to leave the country within seven days. Before the expiration of this order, Fr. Feeney called at our Forge at Brierhill with a man named O'Dea. I think his christian name was Michael, and that he came from Clarenbridge. Fr. Feeney told me that he was going to get Monahan away before he was arrested. Alf was staying in Togher's Hotel; it was under constant watch by the R. I. C., and everywhere Alf went he was followed by them. Fr. Feeney told me that he had planned to dress O'Dea who resembled Monahan in build and appearance, in clerical attire, and that he and O'Dea would go to Togher's Hotel, and that Monahan would change clothes with O'Dea, and Monahan would leave with him (Fr. Feeney). He asked me and a Volunteer named John Fallon to be at the Grammar School, College Road, where a motor car would be to take Alf to a safe hiding place, and we would take their bicycles. We went to the Grammar School as arranged, and after a short time

Fr. Feeney and Monahan, who was dressed as a priest, arrived on bicycles which they handed over to us.

Fr. Feeney and Alf got into the car which drove off in the direction of Cranmore. Almost immediately two R.I.C. men came along on bicycles. We cycled off in the direction of Clare-Galway. The R.I.C. followed us, apparently thinking we were Fr. Feeney and Monahan. They followed us as far as Killeen Barracks. We did not see them after that. The ruse was successful. Fr. Feeney succeeded in getting Monahan to a place of safety.

Shortly before Easter 1916, the Company collected shotguns from the farmers in our company area, in addition to some we had purchased in Dublin. We had about 35 shotguns altogether, a few revolvers, and between 30 and 40 pikes which my brother and I made in our forge at Brierhill. We also made pikes which we gave to other Companies.

During Holy Week, Fr. Feeney told us that the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday, and that definite instructions would be sent later. He advised us to get all Volunteers to go to confession and receive Holy Communion on Easter Sunday. Fr. Feeney called to our forge on Holy Saturday morning and told Brian Molloy, my brother Mick and I that the Rising was to take place at 7 p.m. on Easter Sunday. The Company Captain issued orders for the Company to mobilise at 12 noon on Easter Sunday with arms, equipment and two days' rations. Practically all Volunteers went to confession and received Holy Communion. The Company paraded about 74 strong. When the Company Captain was told that the Rising was to

take place, he was instructed that the Castlegar Company was to attack and capture Killeen R. I. C. Barracks, capture all arms and ammunition, take the R. I. C. prisoners, and proceed to Oranmore and link up with other companies there.

At about 6 p.m. on Easter Sunday the Company was about to move off to attack Killeen Barracks, when Joe Fleming, Clarinbridge, and Pat Callanan (the hare) arrived with a despatch from Mellows saying that the Rising was off for the present, but the Company was to hold themselves ready for re-mobilisation at short notice. The Company was dismissed and told to remain convenient.

In the early hours of Tuesday morning, Joe Fleming and Pat Callanan arrived with word that the Volunteers were "out" in Dublin, and that the Company was to mobilise and wait for further instructions. Later that day I went to Galway town to mobilise the Galway Company and to instruct them to come to Castlegar. When I reached Galway I heard that George Nichols, Carter, Flanagan, Hardiman, Ó Droighneáin and some others had been arrested by the R. I. C. I went to the house of M. J. Allen (Solicitor) and left the mobilisation notice for him. Only one member of the Galway Company reported to Castlegar; his name was McDermott. When I returned to Castlegar I found the Castlegar Company at Kiltulla, and the Clare-Galway Company at Carnmore. I went to Carnmore with the Company Captain, Brian Molloy, and a few others to discuss the position with the Captain and officers of the Clare-Galway Company. We had been waiting instructions since the early hours of that morning but none came. We had heard that

Mellows with some other Companies was at Athenry. It was decided that I should go to Athenry with two Volunteers of the Clare-Galway Company - John Walsh and Pat Feeney - and see Mellows and ask him for instructions for the two Companies.

We cycled to Athenry where we were told that Mellows was in the Farmyard. We went there and saw Mellows. He instructed me to bring the Castlegar and Clare-Galway Companies to the Farmyard, Athenry. We returned to Carnmore and delivered Mellows' orders. Word was sent to the Castlegar Company at Kiltulla to come to Carnmore. Sometime later when John Walsh, Pat Feeney and I were having tea we heard the sound of shooting in the direction of Carnmore Cross Roads. We went towards the Cross Roads but by the time we reached there the shooting was over, as it had lasted only about five minutes.

The two Companies marched across country to Athenry. As we approached the Farmyard, fire was opened on us by the R. I. C. We replied to the fire and continued to the Farmyard. Later that day (Wednesday) the Farmyard was evacuated and we marched by road to Moyode Castle where we remained till Friday.

On Friday evening we left Moyode Castle and marched to Lime Park. Shortly after arriving at Lime Park, a meeting of the officers was held. The meeting was addressed by Fr. Fahy (now Professor in University College, Galway). He advised us to disband. He said it was a waste of lives to carry on as the British Army was advancing on us. Mellows did not want to disband. I left the meeting to look after the Company, and soon

afterwards Brian Molloy told me that it had been decided to disband. The men were assembled on the lawn. Fr. Fahy addressed the men and told them that it had been decided to disband, and he advised them to hold on to their arms. We left Lime Park in batches. I returned home.

On Monday I went to work in the forge. After a short while the forge was surrounded by R. I. C. and military and I was arrested. I was not allowed to put on my coat. I was put into an open car, and handcuffed to the side of the car. We were taken to Carnmore, Kiltulla, Clare-Galway, etc., the R. I. C. raided for Volunteers in each place. Seven or eight Volunteers were arrested on the journey. Eventually we were brought to Eglinton Street R. I. C. Barracks. It was there my sister brought me my coat. I was kept in Eglinton Street Barracks that night. Next day I was brought to Galway Gaol.

The following Saturday, 6th May, I was taken to Arbour Hill Barracks, Dublin, and remained there a week. During the time we were in Arbour Hill we heard volleys in the early morning; one of the sentries told us it was the execution of some of our leaders. One morning shortly after hearing the volley we saw the remains being brought into the yard for burial. The following Saturday we were transferred to Richmond Barracks and left on the Square. Other batches of prisoners arrived and we were marched to the North Wall, where we were put on a cattle boat and brought to England to Stafford Gaol.

We were kept in solitary confinement for about

three weeks. After that we were allowed to associate with each other. We were also allowed to smoke, receive parcels and papers, and purchase extra food if we had money to do so.

After about two months in Stafford we were transferred to Frongoch. I was a few weeks in Frongoch when I was taken to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison to appear before the Sankey Commission. I was asked was I a Volunteer. I said "I was". I was then asked: "How long are you in the Volunteers?". I replied, "since they started". The next question was: "Did you know you were going out to fight on Easter Monday?". I said, "Yes". I was then asked did the rest of the Galway Volunteers know they were going out to fight. I said, "I am answering only for myself". I was sent back to Frongoch.

After about three weeks I was brought back to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison in mistake for another man named Newell from Killeeneen. When the mistake was discovered I was returned to Frongoch. Almost immediately trouble arose over the cleaning of ashpits. The British wanted us to remove the refuse from the ashpits. A meeting of the prisoners was held in connection with this and it was decided that we refuse to remove the refuse from the soldiers' ashpits. We, of course, had no objection to cleaning up or removing our own refuse.

Each morning eight prisoners were detailed by the British Sergeant Major to remove the soldiers' refuse. When they refused they were placed under arrest and brought before the British Camp Commandant and tried for refusing to obey an order. The prisoners so tried were sent to the North Camp. This went on for some time.



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Eventually it came to my turn to be detailed for this duty. I refused to obey. I was placed under arrest and tried by the British Camp Commandant. He asked me did I refuse to remove the refuse. I said, "Yes". I was then transferred to the North Camp and put in solitary confinement. Visits, letters, parcels, etc. were stopped. After about five weeks I was transferred back to the South Camp. We were not asked again to remove the soldiers' refuse, so what was known as the "ashpit strike" came to an end.

I was released on the 23rd December, 1916.

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SIGNED

*Thomas (Sweeney) Newell*

DATE

*7<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1951*

WITNESS

*Seán Brennan. Comdt.*

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