

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 576

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 576

**Witness**

Eugene Sherry,  
Clontibret,  
Castleblayney,  
Co. Monaghan.

**Identity.**

Member of Clontibret (Co. Monaghan) Company  
Irish Volunteers, 1916 - ;  
Captain same Company, 1919 - .

**Subject.**

- (a) The Irish Volunteers, Co. Monaghan, 1914 - ;
- (b) Military activities, Co. Monaghan, 1920-1921.

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

Nil

File No. S.1831.

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Eugene Sherry, Clontibret,

Castleblaney, Co. Monaghan.

I joined the Volunteers early - probably before 1916. This organisation was of little value. We took part in drills and training. A man named Cusack came from Monaghan town and put us through training exercises. Easter Week 1916 passed without any local incident taking place.

The start of re-organising the Volunteers after 1916 took place in our area about 1919. I then joined the Clontibret Company. I was the first Company O/C and remained in charge of the Company until 1922. About thirty men joined at the start of the Company and the membership gradually increased up to the Truce when we had 63 or 64 on the rolls. Clontibret Company was part of the Monaghan town Battalion from 1919 onwards.

In 1919 we had little arms - some shotguns, a few pin fire revolvers of antiquated make and some ammunition for the revolvers. We had to rely on what we had or on what we got by raiding for arms. I purchased a few revolvers myself. This was all the purchase of arms as far as I know in the Company area.

In 1920 at the general raid for arms we made a canvass amongst all friendly houses within the Company area and we handed over a number of shotguns. In the houses where we were refused arms and in the unfriendly houses we raided for the arms on the night of the general raid for arms. In this raid we captured 20 to 30 shotguns, about 3 Ulster Volunteer rifles and a parabellum pistol. We also got a number of other revolvers, mostly .32 and .38 bore. This general raid for arms was the first military activity as

far as I can remember that we carried out. During the general raid for arms we were fired on at one house. We demanded admission when we found the door of the house closed firmly against us and when the inmates refused us admission we broke in the door. We then proceeded to a bedroom door and found it also firmly closed against us. We had also to force this door and on going into this bedroom a young son of the house opened fire and wounded me in the arm. The inmates of the house were Wm. J. Raddock, his wife and his son - Unionists. Young Raddock's determination in defence of his house forced us to retreat and we failed to disarm the young man as we did not relish the endangering of the lives of his father and mother.

I was attended by a local doctor for the wound in my arm. He sent me to Dublin to have the .38 bullet which was embedded in my arm removed. I received medical attention for about three weeks in Jervis Street Hospital.

About January or February 1921 we went into Castleblaney to attack a police patrol. About eight to ten men from both Annyalla and Clontibret Companies went on this operation. A scout from either Castleblaney or Doohamlet Companies was to have met us outside the town and take us into the selected position for the attack. This scout did not turn up and we waited. After we had waited for a long time we went into the town and made a search of the streets for a police patrol. We did not see any police on the streets and we left the town and returned home.

About three or four weeks later we received orders to go into Castleblaney again to cover the police barracks in order to prevent the Castleblaney R.I.C. from going to the assistance of the Carrickmacross police whose

barracks was to have been attacked that night. I had about nine or ten men of the Clontibret Company and about the same number from Annyalla Company. We took up a position about 150 yards from the barracks and opened fire on it remaining in the position for a few hours. The police returned our fire and put up Verey lights.

A horse-drawn cart was in the vicinity of Castleshane delivering Belfast meal to the local shopkeepers and other customers. The cart was stopped at a house in Castleshane when four of us - members of the I.R.A. - came on the scene. The four were Philip Marron, Battalion O/C, "Cutty" Sherry, Ned McNally, Captain of Annyalla Company and myself. We were armed with three rifles and one revolver. We destroyed the meal. We remained in the vicinity of where we destroyed the meal for about two hours when a Ford car came along and halted at a tree which we had knocked as a blockade on the road. One of our men, "Cutty" Sherry, went down to investigate who was in the car. Sherry carried a police carbine. When he got close to the barricade in a lane a man approached him dressed in civilian clothes. "Cutty" challenged him to put up his hands and the man produced a revolver and opened fire on "Cutty". Immediately prior to this shooting we spotted a motor tender of Black and Tans approaching us from Monaghan direction and going towards the road blockade. Phil Marron told me to go down to the road and warn "Cutty" if the Tans were in the vicinity. I was on my journey down when I heard the shooting. I proceeded along a lane which ran parallel to the road. When I reached "Cutty" I asked him about the shooting. He informed me that a man had opened fire on him with a revolver and that he replied with his rifle and that the man ran back towards the car. He

was of the opinion that the man must have been a police officer. I then informed him of the tender load of Tans having arrived and we both returned back up the hill to where the others were. About this time the Tans had got out of their tender and were approaching the hill on which we were. We opened fire on the Tans. The Tans then took cover from our fire. In order to prevent the Tans surrounding our position we retreated to a better position across the road to a place called Clarenrock. From this position we maintained a steady fire on the position taken up by the Tans for about three-quarters of an hour. The Tans then vacated their position and returned to their tender and drove away from our vicinity.

There were no special constabulary in Co. Monaghan and therefore no B/Special patrols. The R.I.C. and Tans were keeping mostly within the defences of their barracks. We made several efforts to carry out operations by crossing the border in Co. Armagh and attempting to ambush B/Special patrols. We went into Middleton district on several occasions and awaited Specials in ambush positions but did not encounter any of the enemy. It was reported to us that four or five Auxiliaries had passed on the main Castleblaney-Monaghan road in a car on a few occasions and we lay in ambush position for this party for about four or five days without result. Apparently the car ceased coming our road.

On the night before Keady fair in April or May 1921 about ten men from both Annyalla and Clontibret Companies including myself travelled to a place named Drumhillary where we put up at a house belonging to a family named McDonalds who owned Scutch Mills. The next morning when daylight came at about 7 a.m. and when all the local men were up out of bed and any of those who were going to Keady Fair had gone we were led by scouts from Derrynoose

Company of the I.R.A. to various Unionist houses which we raided for arms. We met with no opposition in any of the houses and we captured between three to six shotguns, three or four revolvers and one Ulster Volunteer rifle. We next went to Drumhillary Hall and raided it. We got nothing of value here as the only things in the place were a number of old orange drums.

When Mat Fitzpatrick was rescued from Monaghan Infirmary he was taken by his rescuers to Clontibret where our Company took him over. We took charge of him at Clontibret Church corner and we conveyed him by a horse and trap to a house owned by the Brennan family at Tassan. We guarded Fitzpatrick in this locality for about a month. Fitzpatrick either stayed in Brennan's or in another house in the same district and my Company provided the guards for his protection whilst he remained in our area.

On the 30th June 1921 about 17 or 18 men from the Clontibret and Annyalla Companies went to a place named Carna in Co. Armagh on the road from Castleblaney to Keady to ambush a police escort. The police escort had been sent to protect a Belfast bread cart doing its rounds distributing bread. Another bread cart had been destroyed at this place some time previously. At a place where the road and railway run parallel to each other at about twenty yards distance we waited in an old shed for information as to the approach of the police escort. A scout had been sent into Keady to return in advance of the escort and warn us giving us the number of men in the escort. The scout, who was from Annyalla Company, came along and in passing the shed gave Peter Woods - the Captain of Annyalla Company and more or less in charge of our men - the signal which conveyed the information we were awaiting. We then took up position along the railway embankment overlooking the road. When we had been in this position

for about five minutes one of my men shouted, "Jesus", look at the bridge". This bridge was over the railway where a cross road branched from the main road almost at right angles to our position and overlooking and enfilading it. When we looked at the bridge we saw two motor tenders filled with auxiliaries, one tender turned into the cross road and on the railway bridge and the other tender proceeded down the main road opposite our position. The Auxiliaries in the tender at the bridge dismounted and took up a position behind the stone wall "brestwork" of the bridge and the men in the tender on the main road opened fire on our position with a machine gun. We immediately retreated across the railway line. We had to run some distance down along the line before we could get into the fields. In the fields we had no cover and we had to run about 150 yards more to the brow of a hill which gave us cover from view and cover from fire. Some of the men had to proceed further down along the railway line than we did and got into cover away from us.

After the first couple of bursts of fire from the machine gun the gun ceased firing. The Auxiliaries on the railway bridge continued firing with their rifles until we escaped from their view. When we got to the cover of the brow of the hill we opened fire on the Auxiliaries on the bridge firing a few shots each. The Auxiliaries had such perfect cover behind the parapet of the bridge that our firing had little effect.

The first burst of machine gun fire killed two of our men - cousins named McEnnaneys - and wounded Tom Carragher, now serving as a Civic Guard in Blackrock, Co. Louth. The killed and wounded belonged to Annyalla Company.

We evacuated our position on the brow of the hill and retreated in the direction of Clontibret. The Auxiliaries made no effort to follow us. They collected the two dead men and also took the wounded man with them into Castleblaney.

I heard later that the machine gun used by the Auxiliaries jammed after the first two bursts of fire. Only for this I am afraid our casualties would have been very heavy.

This affair has all the appearance that our position for this ambush was given away to the British authorities. The Auxiliaries must have got minute details of the position we were to occupy as they proceeded without hesitation to the best points of attack and it is most unlikely that they could have seen us before they opened fire on our position. We never got the slightest "inkling" as to by whom or how they procured their information.

In addition to the activities which I have detailed above we carried out a campaign of road cutting, raids for mails etc. I took part with others from my Company in the raiding of a train at Glasslough station from which we took mails and then burned the train which contained Belfast goods.

From about Xmas 1920 I was on the run and the house was raided at least once or twice per week by military. My home was on a few occasions stripped of everything which attracted the raiders fancy - my football medals, delph, musical instruments etc. From the time that I was in hospital in 1920 I was under suspicion and I had to be careful. An amusing incident took place on the occasion of one of the first raids on my home. I was walking on the road about 100 yards from the house when a lorry load of Crown Forces met me on the road. They stopped and halted me. They asked me my name and I told them that it was Ned Sherry. They then asked me where I was going. I said I was going to see a cow that was near calving. They then left me and proceeded to raid my home. I later heard that they were looking for the house in which Eamon Sherry lived. They apparently did not know that Ned was the English form



of the name Eamon.

That is all of interest I have to relate about the pre Truce period.

During the truce I attended a training camp at Laughbawn for a week's training. About the Spring of 1922 I went into Castleblaney Barracks as one of the Garrison and I remained there for about a month. When the split in the army took place in May 1922 I returned home and took no further part in any of the activities of the Civil War period.

Signed: Eugene Sherry

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> September

Witness:

John No 402.  
18/9/51

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