

W.S. 672

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 672.....

Witness

Thomas Luckie,  
Crossmaglen,  
Newry,  
Co. Armagh.  
Identity.

Member of Crossmaglen Company (Co. Armagh)  
Irish Volunteers, 1918 - ;  
Lieutenant do. 1921.

Subject.

National activities, Co. Armagh,  
1918-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 1968.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Thomas Lucky,

Crossmaglen, County Armagh.

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I first joined the Volunteers after the South Armagh Bye-Election in February, 1918.

The National Volunteers had been organised in Crossmaglen district in the year 1914. A Sergeant O'Donnell, then retired from the R.I.C., took charge. This organisation only lasted a few months. I did not join up then.

When the Volunteers were formed in 1918, Paddy Murphy was Company Captain and Felix Feehan was 1st Lieutenant. Shortly after the Volunteers were organised a branch of the Sinn Fein organisation was started.

I don't remember much activity in the local Volunteer organisation. I do remember on one occasion when a concert party known as the P. & C. Company came to Crossmaglen the Volunteers were mobilised to protect the hall where the concert party were singing from any interference by the R.I.C. This P. & C. Company had been touring the country about this time, giving all the latest revolutionary songs and recitations. The propaganda affect on the people who attended these concerts was great and the R.I.C. had orders to, at least, intimidate the people from attending these functions.

I was placed at the door of the hall with a few other Volunteers armed with hurley sticks. A few police came to the door and attempted to enter the hall. I stopped the police and told them that we would not allow them to pass us.

The police when they saw that we were determined to oppose their interference did not force the matter.

On one occasion I with another Volunteer went to Drumork and we raided a house there where it was reported arms were kept. This place belonged to a Unionist family named Jackson. This raid took place in 1920. We found no arms in the premises.

I was not mobilised for the raid on Ballyedmond Castle in 1919. I heard that this raid was to take place. I discussed the matter of going with Felix Feehan whom I knew would be mobilised for the raid. Feehan promised to let me know when the raid was taking place. Feehan went himself but he did not let me know about the raid until the Monday following.

Sometime about July 1921 the officers of the Crossmaglen Company were as follows: James Quigley, Company Captain, Frank Donnelly, 1st Lieutenant.

Up to the Truce in 1921 there was little local activity by the Crossmaglen Company. No person seemed to have any idea what it was possible to do or make any effort to do anything. It was not a question of trying and things not working out as was planned. As far as I know no effort was made even to make plans to carry out operations..

When the Truce came the I.R.A. came more into the limelight. Local I.R.A. police were appointed to deal with matters of dispute and where breaches of the law or attacks on individuals were feared. One case that comes to my mind at the moment was a dispute over a farm of land which had been purchased by a man named Cunningham who owned business

premises in Culloville. He purchased a large farm of land and residence formerly owned by a Mr. Connolly at a place named Rissan. There was strong local objection to the sale of this farm as an agitation was started to have the land divided amongst small farmers or landless men. Cunningham, by buying the place, defied the local feelings about the sale. The local I.R.A. officers, fearing that serious consequences would follow Mr. Cunningham's determination to retain and work the farm, gave armed protection to Mr. Cunningham and his workmen at Rissan.

In October, 1921, I attended a training Camp at Tillery's for one month where I was put through an intensive course of drilling and training in military formations and how to use and care a rifle and other arms.

During the Truce in July 1921 up to about February 1922 the local police force - the old R.I.C. with the Specials that had been sent in to reinforce them in the winter of 1920 - had been minding their own business attending to matters pertaining to preserving the peace of the district. They were giving very little attention as far as could be observed to the I.R.A. or Sinn Fein. The inactivity of the area from a military and political point of view during the Tan war may have been to some extent responsible for the lack of interest in the actions of local Republicans.

In the early spring of 1922 the Northern Government commenced to send out patrols of Special Constabulary on the roads of South Armagh and the police started to take a keen interest in the movements and activities of known I.R.A. men. The garrison in the local police barracks was increased and a camp was then in existence in a large country house at Urker near Creggan. In this Camp what was then called a "Unit" of

A/Special Constabulary about fifty in strength was located. The increased activity of all Northern Government forces seemed to suggest that a big round-up of I.R.A. would soon be carried out.

About April 1922 about thirty of the Crossmaglen Company moved into County Louth to a place named Cavanore where we took over a large farmhouse and started an armed camp. James Quigley was in charge of the Camp at Cavanore.

At this time we were attached to a County Louth Battalion. Our Brigade Headquarters was in Anne Street, Dundalk. Anne Street were then recognising and taking orders from the Four Court Executive and they had broken away from the 4th Northern Division whose headquarters were in the military barracks, Dundalk and who were taking orders from the old G.H.Q. in Beggars Bush.

I was mobilised to take part in an attack on Jackson's house, Urker Camp about early June 1922. This attack was carried out by Paddy McKenna, (R.I.P.) Brigade O/C., assisted by James Goodfellow and other officers and men from Anne Street barracks. We surrounded the Specials' Camp and commenced a heavy fire on the position from all sides. This fire was vigorously replied to by the Specials who had made their camp a very strong military post. The firing lasted for about three-quarters of an hour. We then withdrew as we could not possibly capture the place.

Shortly after this we moved into the town of Crossmaglen. This time we were under the command of James Goodfellow who was assisted by Sean McGaurain who was an expert engineer. McGaurain supervised the planting of mines on Moban and Monogue Roads. Whilst the mines were being laid a party of

us moved into Crossmaglen and started an attack with rifle-fire on the R.I.C. barracks. This attack was planned as a ruse in the hope that the Specials at Urker Camp would come into town to relieve the attack on the R.I.C. We fired shots for some time at the barracks and we then withdrew as the Specials at Urker showed no inclination to leave there.

About the end of June, 1922, about when the Civil War was about to start, some of our Brigade officers in Anne Street got the idea into their heads that we were disloyal to the Republican side in the Civil War. A number of these officers and some of the Anne Street garrison came to our Camp and disarmed us on the plea that we could not be trusted. The information or the suspicions they had of us, whatever it was, was wrong. Anyhow we were deprived of our arms.

The next item of importance was the invasion of Dundalk by troops of the 5th Northern Division under Dan Hogan and the occupation of the town, the capture of the military barracks occupied by the 4th Northern Division Headquarters, two R.I.C. barracks - Anne Street and Bridge Street - occupied by the 1st Brigade Staff and men taking orders from the Four Courts Executive. This invasion of Dundalk put an end to more than a two weeks' period of neutrality which started at the outbreak of the Civil War at the end of June 1922 when both sections in our Division came together with a policy of trying to make peace between the warring factions in the South. This spirit of unity in the 4th Northern Division at the outbreak of the Civil War can be readily understood when it is realised that about four-fifths of the Division lay in territory in County Armagh and County Down occupied by British Government and Six County armed forces who were then commencing a reign of oppression designed to kill all republican sentiment in Northern Ireland. The outbreak of the Civil War was a tragedy

for Ireland as a whole. It was a major tragedy for the Nationalists and Republicans of the Six Northern Counties.

The reaction of the officers and men of the 4th Northern Division to the invasion of our area notwithstanding our sincerely declared policy of neutrality and the imprisonment of many of our officers and men, including our Divisional O/C., was to demand from the pro-Treaty Headquarters in Dublin the evacuation of the town of Dundalk, the release of all our prisoners in their hands and a guarantee to respect our neutrality. The alteration to a refusal to our demands was a threat of military action against them with a time limit fixed.

On the 27th July when the time limit had expired I was mobilised for an attack on Dundalk prison where a large number of republican prisoners were detained including Frank Aiken, our Divisional O/C, and some other of our officers. This attack was timed for 7 a.m. on the 27th July, 1922. This operation was most successful: everything went according to plan. We got over 100 prisoners out of the prison through a breach we blew in the wall by the use of explosives.

After the 14th August, 1922, I took part in the attack on the town of Dundalk in which we captured all the posts held by National Army troops including the military barracks and the gaol where a large number of Republican prisoners were again set free.

I don't intend to give any more detailed description of my Civil War activities. From August, 1922 until after the Cease Fire Order in 1923 I took part in all the engagements of any account around North Louth. I could not live at home



in Northern Ireland and I could not retain my freedom in Southern Ireland if I decided to drop all connection with the Civil War conflict. I was never captured and when the Civil War ended I returned to Crossmaglen area where I remained on the run for some time before I felt safe from capture.

Signed: Thomas Luckie  
(Thomas Luckie)

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1952

Witness: John McCoy  
(John McCoy)

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1952

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