

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 695

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 695.....

Witness

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Dundalk,
Co. Louth.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Dundalk, 1914 - ;
Captain 'A' Company, Dundalk Battalion, 1917 - .

Subject.

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Statement by Thomas McCrave,

Mill Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth.

I joined the National Volunteers in Dundalk in May, 1914. All shades of nationalist opinions in Dundalk joined the Volunteers when formed. The strength of the Dundalk Battalion at the time I joined was about 800 men drawn from various age groups, from youths to grandfathers.

At the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, the local British military garrison in Dundalk when leaving town for the war front, were conducted to the railway station by the Dundalk Emmet Band, and they got an enthusiastic send-off from the townspeople. The majority of the nationalists of the town in 1914 was so carried away by the propaganda of the Dublin daily papers and the local Dundalk "Democrat" that they were absolutely anti-German even that at the same time they could not be described as pro-British.

About August 1914, a serious split took place in the Volunteers. The skating rink in the Athletic Grounds at the ramparts had been used by the Volunteers as a meeting place and for drilling purposes. A meeting was called for the rink and was convened so that the Volunteers should decide what their policy towards the war should be. This meeting, shortly after it started, became a most rowdy and bad tempered assembly. Seán McEntee, who had been taking an active part in the discussions, was attacked by those who disagreed with him and was lucky to escape serious injury. The meeting broke up in wild scenes of disorder.

This meeting showed that both those who wished to support England in her war effort and those who opposed helping her had become unduly intolerant and hot over the question. I would estimate that amongst the 200 or so Volunteers at the meeting that about fifty per cent were on opposing sides.

The section of the Volunteers who opposed the policy of John E. Redmond's offer of help for Britain's war effort, broke away from the Volunteers and ceased all Volunteer activity. The Redmondite supporters remained on in the Volunteers and continued at meetings and parades up to about Christmas 1914. The Redmondite section were in possession of all the rifles of the National Volunteers. When their Volunteer activities ceased at Christmas 1914, they collected all these rifles - about 100 in all - and they stored them in a few places in town; this ended all parades and drills in town for the time being.

After the break-up of the Volunteers I joined the Gaelic League and I attended language classes in the Gaelic League rooms. The first intimation I got of an effort being made to revive the Volunteers was a visit paid to the Gaelic League rooms by Seán McEntee and the late James Toal. As a result of this visit James Hanratty and myself joined on being requested to do so. When we joined we found that drilling was being carried out in the John Boyle O'Reilly Hall, Clanbrassil Street, every night, and that route marches were being held two nights per week. We also found that the people of Dundalk were generally most hostile to the Irish Volunteers. The R. I. C. were constantly watching our hall and noting all frequenting it.

We continued our training programme of drills in the hall and route marches up to about three or four weeks before 1916. It was then that Donal O'Hannigan came down to Dandalk from G.H.Q., Dublin, to take charge of us, to give lectures, training exercises and instructions on the use and care of the rifle. He gave us an intensive course of drills in the hall and took us out to the country each night for manoeuvres, attacking and defending positions, etc. We were extremely active for those three weeks before the Rising.

Coming near Easter Sunday we were told about the seriousness of the times and although we were not informed that a rising was definitely planned, we knew well that our intensive military preparation could only mean one thing. On Good Friday we suspected that a rising was coming off soon.

On Good Friday, 1916, James Hanratty and I got orders to mobilise all Volunteers for a parade in the Boyle's Hall on Saturday evening. We went around notifying the men of this mobilisation on Friday evening. On Saturday all mobilised as ordered at 10 p.m. At this mobilisation we received orders for a general mobilisation at the Workhouse Hill on Sunday morning at 10 a.m.

On Saturday night, Seán McEntee asked me to get his push bike which he had stored in Williamson's shop in Francis Street. He told me to call for the bike at 9 a.m. when the shop would be opened. When I called the shop was closed and I had to go to the Fair Green and get Williamson's Manager - McDonald - to open up for me. I got the bike and handed it to McEntee and then proceeded to the Workhouse Hill to take part in the general mobilisation. The main body of the Volunteers were mobilised at this point. A small section was ordered to

mobilise at the Boyle's Hall at 9 a.m. and this section was to take charge of all the available arms and to march through the town as an armed party joining the main body at the Workhouse Hill.

When the entire force - those mobilised for the Workhouse Hill and the armed party - got together we numbered 75 men. I would say that we had roughly about twenty shotguns and rifles in all. I am not clear how many rifles we had in those twenty. As ordered each man mobilised carried rations for at least one day.

About 11 a.m. we commenced our march from Dundalk in the direction of Ardee and we arrived there about 2 p.m. We were standing about on the street in Ardee in a cluster when a man arrived travelling north. He spoke to O'Hannigan and Paddy Hughes. I know since that the man informed our officers that he was a messenger travelling north to Co. Tyrone and other places with orders calling off the rising.

During our stay in Ardee some of our men raided for and captured about 26 rifles and some thousands of rounds of ammunition then in the custody of the Redmondite - National - Volunteers. About 26 Volunteers, including myself, got a rifle each and about 250 rounds of rifle ammunition.

We then resumed our march from Ardee in the direction of Slane. We arrived in Slane about 8 p.m. on Sunday evening. I and another Volunteer on our arrival in Slane, got orders to do sentry duty on the street in Slane, and from 8 p.m. until midnight we marched up and down whilst the other Volunteers sat around on a wall at the Castle gate. At midnight we were taken off sentry duty and were taken into a bakery premises - stables and cart houses - which

had been commandeered by our officers. We remained here sitting and lying about on the floors until about 4 a.m. on Easter Monday morning. At 4 a.m. we got orders to form up in marching formation and to march back slowly towards Collon. I understood at this time that whilst I was doing sentry duty the previous evening a messenger had been sent to Dublin for definite orders and that this messenger was expected back and that our march was to be carried out slowly as the possibility of having to again retrace our steps towards Dublin would not cause us to travel extra mileage. We arrived at Collon at 7 a.m. to find all the villagers in bed.

From the time we commenced our march from the Workhouse Hill on Easter Sunday morning we had two members of the R. I. C. with us and giving us their strict attention and close observation. About 3 a.m. on Monday morning it commenced to rain and after we started our march to Collon the rain became a regular deluge. About 6 a.m. the rain cleared off but at this time we were all soaked through with not a dry spot on our bodies.

When we arrived at Collon the two R. I. C. men - Sergeant Wymmes and Constably Connolly - seemed most anxious to get the pubs opened. They went to Mrs. Garrigan's and she and other members of her family got up, got a fire lighted and commenced to serve us with teas, bread and butter, in relays of seven or eight men at each sitting. The partaking of this meal took up to about 12 noon on Monday.

When we were ready to leave Collon Paddy Hughes called us all together and he explained the position to us, detailing the confusion caused the Louth officers by the

countermanding orders which had been issued early on Sunday, and explaining the sending of a messenger to Dublin for definite orders. He then said that all the men who wanted to stick to their arms should do so, and that any others not willing to continue and obey orders were free to leave and return home any way they wished. The majority of the men elected to remain on and the rest started for home.

We then restarted our march towards Dundalk via Dunleer. It had again started to rain heavily and about 4 p.m. we arrived in Dunleer, hungry, tired and very wet. We got in under the railway bridge across the main Dundalk-Drogheda road and were numbered off, and our force now numbered 45 men. One of our men got sick on the road to Dunleer and we had to get him on the train at Dunleer Station for Dundalk.

We then continued our march towards Dundalk, passed through Castlebellingham, and arrived at Lurgan Green where Seán McEntee overtook us on a motor bike. As McEntee came alongside of us he shouted "Dublin, a Republic! Dublin, a Republic!" We were then halted and at this point we held up and made prisoners of the two policemen. An ex-policeman who was passing us in the direction of Castlebellingham, was ordered to halt and refused to do so. A shot was fired and the man was wounded in the hand. A side-car loaded with seven soldiers came on the scene and they were held up. We then started to hold up motor cars and in some cases we took the valves out of the tyres and threw the valves into fields. We, however, commandeered eight cars for our own use.

At this point I and three others started away on Pat Walsh's mineral water van which we had commandeered and we proceeded in the direction of Castlebellingham. We passed through Castlebellingham and arrived at Sarsfield's Cross. The horse in the van was here showing signs of distress and we discarded him. We got into one of the commandeered motor cars which overtook us. When we came to Dunleer it was dark and I imagine that we took a road here to the right that would take us into Dublin by the "backway". We must have travelled a long way from Dunleer and we must have crossed the Boyne at Slane. It must have been around 12 midnight when we realised that the four cars that were behind the car I was travelling in were not following us. There were three cars in front of our car and four cars behind - eight in all. We dismounted from the four leading cars and got out on the road. Richard Jameson and I were put on outpost duty and we remained in the position assigned to us until daylight. When daylight came we took a car and scouted the roads back as far as the Hill of Tara looking for the missing cars, which we failed to trace. We returned to the party we had left and reported our failure. We then proceeded towards Dunboyne and on our arrival in Dunboyne we took over a building known as the Red House. We remained here until about 9 p.m. on Tuesday night. We then started towards Dublin on foot. About 3 or 4 o'clock on Wednesday morning we arrived at a large gentleman's residence known as Tyrellstown House near or at Mullhuddart. We took possession of the out-buildings at Tyrellstown House and we posted sentries at all approaches to the place to prevent surprise.

The routine of guarding the approaches to Tyrellstown House proved a most exhausting business. There were so many points to be watched around the large farmyard

and so small a number to do the work that each man had to do six hours at a time and in most cases we had to get up for further guard duty after being lying on hay on a floor for three or four hours. We soon got exhausted with this routine of little sleep and constant watching.

O'Hannigan sent Paddy Hughes (brother of Vincent Hughes) and another young fellow named Denis O'Neill out on bicycles to scout the countryside around us and try and get in touch with the Fingal Volunteers under Thomas Ashe. Those boys were out on Thursday and on Friday and they failed to get in touch with the men they sought. I heard at the time that the Fingal crowd were moving about on cycles which made it more difficult to locate them.

The people from Dunboyne district kept us fairly well supplied with food. We did our own cooking in the Coach-house. On one day when we were on short rations a man went into a field and caught a sheep and carried her over a few fields to our billets. The sheep was slaughtered and cooked. When she was being eaten the man who took her in was the only person in our whole party who got none of her as he was always on guard duty when the mutton was being distributed.

Each night from Wednesday to the end of the week we could see the flares in the night sky of the buildings burning in Dublin City, and on both day and night we could hear the sounds of shooting and the bombardment with big guns.

It was probably about Thursday when our officers sent in a despatch to Pádraig Pearse in the General Post Office that we were at Mulhuddart and requesting orders to move into the city. Pearse's reply came back to the effect that it would be impossible for us to get in to the centre of the

city as the whole north side of the Dublin suburbs were held by the British and that they were not allowing any person to pass through their cordons.

We carried out our regular guard duties at Tyrellstown House until the Monday following Easter Week. On Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 27th-30th April, inclusive, there was nothing exciting taking place, just watching and waiting in a mood of intense tension. We did not hear of the surrender on Saturday. On Monday morning a girl came to us with a large dish of cooked rice ready for eating. When the girl delivered the rice O'Hannigan and Paddy Hughes sent her into Dublin City to get in touch with the Volunteer officers there and to find out the exact position.

This girl returned to our camp about 7.30 p.m. on Monday. I knew by her urgent haste in passing my guard post that she had some important news for our officers. We were all called in from the various guard points about ten minutes after the girl arrived back, and we were told to prepare to evacuate the camp at once carrying only the bare necessities, rifles, ammunition and equipment, rations, etc.

Shortly after 8 p.m. we evacuated the camp and proceeded across country towards Dunboyne. About 2 a.m. on Tuesday we arrived at Dunboyne where we found all the inhabitants of Dunboyne up and awaiting us with food prepared for us in many houses. All Dunboyne seemed to be one hundred per cent republican. About 3 a.m. we all had one really good feed.

We then got orders to march from Dunboyne to a vacant house about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant. I don't know the name of this place. It was a large house with six or seven rooms, and lay along a road. A cross-road lay about 200 to 300

yards from this house and at about 7 a.m. on Tuesday morning we noticed that two British soldiers - Lancers - had taken up position on the cross-road.

We learned later that after we evacuated Tyrellstown House the Lancers came and raided the place. They then followed us in the direction of Dunboyne where they occupied the village and sent out the two Lancers to watch the cross-road.

We had to remain in the house all that day without food. That evening our officers told us that they had decided that we were to dump our arms somewhere in the vicinity of the house and that we should then disperse. There were 13 of us who refused to believe that the Rising was over. All our arms were buried somewhere near the house that night about 8.30 p.m. and the men started to break up and move away in small batches of three or four men. The thirteen who still hoped that the Rising was not yet over, decided to remain together under the orders of Paddy Hughes and we moved to a herd's house about one and a half miles from our last billets and we remained there for some time. The next morning - Wednesday - we got a feed ready from foodstuffs we had with us. There were two large cakes of home-baked bread left over after our meal.

Sometime on Wednesday night in the herd's house we got word that everything was over, that the armed attempt had failed. Our feelings were gloomy and dispirited. We decided to break up into small batches and each batch to make out as best they could.

Simon Hall, Feely, O'Neill and myself started out together. We set our course in the darkness by the stars. We made great progress and we reached the outskirts of Drogheda about 5 a.m. on Thursday morning. We went into

a field and as we found no person yet up and moving about we remained in the field for about an hour. We started into the town about 6 a.m. We met a man on the road who told us to be careful as the police were looking for and searching in the town for fellows like us.

We then went to a small house and rapped on the door. The house belonged to a widow woman who got up and let us in and made tea for us. It was a poor house but the poor woman did all she could for us. We remained here until about 11 a.m.

We then proceeded along the south side of the Boyne valley in Slane direction until we came to the obelisk where we washed ourselves and attended to our feet which were in bad shape. We crossed the Boyne near the obelisk and kept walking until about noon when we got into a field for a rest and we soon fell asleep and slept for about two hours. On awaking we started out again and fell in with a tinker who came along with us and whom we could not shake off. Some time later two R.I.C. men came after us cycling and when about 100 yards from us called on us to halt. We halted; the police came up and searched us and then marched us back in the direction of Collon and took us into the police barracks there.

Shortly after our arrival in Collon I asked the police for tea as we were all very hungry. They provided the facilities for us, getting the tea rather ungraciously by getting Mrs. Garrigan from the nearby pub to take us in the tea. I paid Mrs. Garrigan 2/6d. for the tea.

About 8 p.m. two cars with R.I.C. in them arrived at Collon Barracks and we were removed to Millmount Military Barracks, Drogheda. We were put into a lock-up off the guardroom. That night we slept on a bench in the guardroom.

The soldiers who were on guard when we arrived treated us nicely. There were all Englishmen. On Saturday we were removed to the railway station in Drogheda by the R.I.C. and put on a train travelling to Dublin. On this train were a large number of other prisoners from various parts of Northern Ireland including Belfast and Dundalk. The prisoners were being collected at each station as the train passed along from Belfast southwards.

On arrival in Dublin all prisoners were taken to Richmond Barracks. The Barracks at this time was packed full of prisoners. We remained there on Sunday and on Monday we and about 800 others were taken from Richmond to the North Wall where we were put into the hold of a cattle boat, packed like sardines in a tin. On the boat we were split up into different batches and on arrival in England (I don't remember now where we landed) we were sent to different prisons. My batch contained about 200 men and we were sent to Wandsworth Prison. At this time part of Wandsworth was used as a military prison. There must have been about 400 British soldiers then serving sentences in Wandsworth together with the usual criminal population of such places. Some of the criminals were doing life sentences. We remained in Wandsworth for about one month. When the courtmartial of Seán McEntee, - Sally, Frank Martin for the shooting of the policeman in Castlebellingham was being held in Dublin, John B. Hamill Solicitor, Dundalk, who looked after the defence of the prisoners, called for James Hanratty and myself to appear at the courtmartial as witnesses for the defence. We were taken from Wandsworth to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. There we were interviewed by Mr. Tim Healy, K.C., M.P., who defended the prisoners at the courtmartial. Mr. Healy

was anxious to find out what evidence we could give in the case. He enquired if we were carrying rifles on Easter Monday and I said we were. He then told us that he would not call us as witnesses as on cross-examination we might have to make admissions that would put a rope around our necks.

After being about a month in Richmond Barracks every republican prisoner was removed and taken across to England to Knutsford Prison. One of the men whom I met in Richmond was David Kent who had taken part in the defence of his home in Cork, when it was being raided by British forces. He was badly wounded in the hand; his fingers being shattered by gunshot fire. Kent may have been then sentenced. Another prisoner I met in Richmond was Austin Stack. I can't now recollect if it was during my last visit to Richmond or on my first that I met those men. If it was on my last visit they were removed with me to Knutsford.

We must have been nearly a month in Knutsford; about the 1st August we were all removed to Frongoch Camp in Wales. When Frongoch Camp was opened all unsentenced prisoners were sent there for internment. Immediately after Frongoch was opened there were about 1,800 prisoners there. About September batches of prisoners were being regularly released and sent home. I was kept in Frongoch until the general release of unsentenced men on Christmas Eve, 1916.

When the Dundalk internees returned to Dundalk on that 1916 Christmas Eve, no notice whatever was taken of our arrival by the townspeople. The town had an air of subjection which took us a few months to overcome by patient preliminary attempts at re-organisation. The first signs of a re-awakening of any republican spirit in the

town was the appearance of Jack O'Sheehan's P. and C. concert party who were billed to appear in the Forester's Hall in or about 1917. After the concert party's first opening night and when the R.I.C. found out the seditious nature of the concert items they locked the doors of the hall for the second night's performance and would not allow the party to continue their concerts in town. O'Sheehan and his party had to leave town.

After about a month O'Sheehan and his party again visited the town having being billed to appear for a week in the Forester's Hall. By some means they seemed to have overcome the police ban on their holding concerts. They played nightly to a full house in the Forester's Hall. The concert items were reall rebellious and seditious stuff. All the rebel songs of the Raising in 1916 were sung. The propaganda effect of those concerts was tremendous and those attending got worked up to such a pitch of patriotic feeling that it can't be estimated how much good the concerts really did. It soon became apparent to those attending the concerts who were republican in the town and who were not. We then realised that we had much more support in town than we had hoped for.

On the Sunday night following the concerts a céilí was arranged for the Forester's Hall as a grand send-off to O'Sheehan and his party. This céilí proved a great success and ended up in scenes of wild enthusiasm.

Shortly after this - about mid-summer 1917 - a meeting to re-organise the Volunteers was called for Fegan's loft in Bridge Street, Dundalk. About 14 of the released prisoners attended this meeting. Fegan's place was nearly opposite the R.I.C. Barracks in Bridge Street and when the question of holding a second meeting was being discussed, Fegan expressed his fear of the R.I.C. taking action against him.

for allowing his place to be used by us. We had to move to the yard of Mr. MacDonald, Veterinary Surgeon, Market Square, for our next meeting, where about 40 men attended. All our subsequent meetings for a time were held in MacDonald's yard. We formed two companies of the Volunteers in Dundalk - "A" and "B". James McGuill, Tom Callan and Philip McQuillan were the officers at this time. It was about this time - mid 1917 - when the sentenced Dundalk prisoners who were released came to town. I can't now remember much of the details of what took place when they arrived in town. This event caused great excitement at the time.

From mid 1917 up to the General Election in December, 1918, the Volunteers held drill meetings each week and went on manoeuvres in the country each week-end. At the end of 1918, there were about 120 men in "A" and "B" Companies. About the end of 1918, "B" Company, which was originally recruited from members and supporters of the O'Rahilly Gaelic Football Club and their supporters, dissolved and ceased to exist as a company. The members of "B" Company divided, some went into "A" Company and the remainder formed a new "C" Company.

The General Election being principally political work was the occasion for the Volunteers to do police work, which included the protection of Sinn Féin workers and voters at the various polling booths in the Dundalk and district area.

In 1919, when the raid on Ballyedmund Castle took place, I was only a section commander in "A" Company. I was not mobilised for this job. As far as I can remember, outside the Battalion and Company Officers, and some of the older Volunteers, none of the younger men was asked to go.

Burning of the Income-Tax Offices, Dundalk.

On the 14th April, 1920, I was mobilised at the Sinn Féin rooms, Seatown Place, at 11 a.m. When I arrived there I found about 12 other Volunteers waiting. Patsy Culhane, R.I.P., was in charge of this mobilisation. He got us into a large room and put each man into a position in the room to correspond to where he would be when the job for which we were being mobilised was carried out. He explained the layout of the Income-Tax premises in Park Street and detailed to each man what part he would play in the operation of burning the offices and destroying all the official papers. This briefing of each man continued until every person knew exactly what he was to do. My part in the operation was to take charge of the main door into the premises and when all the Volunteers had gained admission to remain on duty at the door and prevent any outsiders or enemy forces gaining admission. We were told to be convenient to the Tax Offices in Park Street at 1 p.m. and to wait there until John McGuill appeared on the scene. It was John's job to go up to the door and rap on it and gain admission if possible by peaceful means. John McGuill came up Park Street at 1.55 p.m. Previous to his appearance the street was crowded with people walking about. About 1.50 a heavy shower of rain started which soon cleared the streets of people. When John came along the streets were deserted except for the Volunteers waiting to take part in the operation, John went up to the Income-Tax Office door and rapped loudly on it. The Manager came to the door and opened it. When he saw who was at the door he immediately attempted to close it. John, however, got in his foot and was able to gain admission. We all then rushed into the office, each man to his allotted

job. I remained inside the main door with a revolver, and when all the Volunteers had gained admission I closed the door, and remained there to prevent surprise from the outside. I remained in this position for about 5 minutes when Sean Gormley, who was inside, came and told me that the operation was completed. We both then walked out of the offices together passing down Francis St. and home.

The burning of the Dundalk Income Tax Offices was a complete success in every way. All the official papers and books were completely destroyed as was the office premises which were completely gutted by fire. The operation was carried out in daylight within 150 yards of a large R.I.C. barracks in Anne Street, which was also a District Inspector's Headquarters.

During the summer and autumn of 1920, "A" Company carried out an active campaign of raiding for arms, Belfast boycott work, burning of Belfast papers at the railway station. Each week there was something on. Nothing big, but a lot of small activities.

About the end of 1920, all the officers of "A" Company were arrested and the rank and file of the Volunteers were sadly depleted by wholesale arrests. Many of those arrested were due to the capture of lists of names on captured officers. About the beginning of 1921, a young officer named Paddy McKenna came to Dundalk. He was sent to us by G.H.Q. Dublin, to take charge. McKenna's first job in town was to mobilise "A" Coy. On a few occasions and he gave us instructions in throwing hand grenades. On another occasion he mobilised the Company, and whilst the men were standing to attention he called me out from the men and told me he was appointing me Company O/C. I refused the honour as I did not think I was suitable for such a position and I would much prefer to be an ordinary Volunteer. McKenna, however, insisted, and I had to agree.

When I took over the company I found only three sections where there should have been four. There were no company lieutenants, no company quartermaster. I divided the company into four sections and when I tried to appoint officers all the men I approached refused to act, claiming that they preferred to remain ordinary Volunteers. I was annoyed over this attitude and I then got the idea of holding an election by ballot to fill the positions vacant and thus make the men select their own officers.

I called a full company mobilisation for the Boyle's Hall in March 1921. I addressed the men on parade and I told them that they would now have to elect their own officers by ballot, and that men selected would have to act and do their duty, and that back-door methods would not be tolerated in future. At this meeting the following officers were appointed:

1st Lieutenant	-	Paddy Cunningham
2nd "	-	Michael Morton
Adjutant	-	Sean Lynch
Quartermaster	-	Jemmy Flood.

This election proved that the company had good material in it and in a short time everything was running smoothly.

One of the great faults in the previous running of the company was the fact that so many Volunteers had been arrested owing to their names being found on a company list on some captured officer. Sean Lynch, who was our new company adjutant, took a most effective way of noting his company roll so that the British authorities could not make anything of it. He was a schoolteacher and a good Greek scholar. He kept his company roll in Greek, which I am sure was a most efficient code.

Some time about the end of March we got orders to block all the roads surrounding Dundalk. We took a whole night at this job and in many cases did a fine job of work. In a few places where stones were plenty we built two walls right across the road a few feet apart and we filled between with small stones. Nothing could then force such a blockade quickly.

Creggan Ambush, 10th April 1921.

On Saturday, 9th April 1921, Felix Dawe, who was later on Battalion Vice O/C., and may have been promoted even then, mobilised me for an ambush on the next day, Sunday morning. He told me to select two good men from my company and for the three of us to travel to Creggan Church arriving there at 11 a.m. He explained that he intended ambushing nine Special Constabulary who travelled armed each Sunday morning to Divine Service in Creggan Protestant Church. I mobilised Jimmy Walsh and William Lawless and we travelled from Dundalk on Sunday morning arriving at Creggan at 11 a.m. On arrival at Creggan we met Dawe and the remainder of the men who included Jim Rogan, Charles Heeney, Owen O'Dowd, Paddy O'Hare, etc. There were about twelve in the ambushing party all told.

Shortly after we arrived at the ambush position which was at the publichouse at Creggan, we got orders from Dawe to hold up all persons passing on the road and each person held up was to be put into the publichouse at Creggan. I was put on duty at the door of the publichouse to keep the people in the pub and to see that there was no disorder inside. There were so many persons passing at this time, some going to Protestant service in Creggan, and others to Catholic service in Crossmaglen, that the publichouse was soon almost packed full. I would estimate that at the time the ambush took place there must have been about 200 persons of both sexes of all ages on the premises. So many people huddled together created a problem in itself as some of the women got panicky, and the situation at times became most embarrassing for me especially when some of the women fainted. Just before the ambush started most of the people detained were saying their prayers.

I will now try to describe the scene of the ambush. The publichouse at Creggan is built at a three-road crossroad, one road leading south towards Dundalk, and Creggan Church - which is only about 100 yards from the pub. A second road leads

east to Silverbridge and to Newry, and the third road leads north and westerly towards Crossmaglen. This is the road the Specials came over. The publichouse is built on the junction of the three roads on the corner of the Silverbridge and Crossmaglen roads, portion of the building on each of those roads and forming at the corner an angle of about 33 degrees.

The Specials were due to arrive at 12 noon and the Volunteers about 10 minutes to 12 took up positions directly opposite the publichouse behind a stone wall where the road to Silverbridge and the road to Dundalk joins. Those positions controlled the front of the pub on the Silverbridge road and, to a lesser extent, the portion of the building along the Crossmaglen road. The Volunteers were armed with shotguns and revolvers and some hand grenades.

I can't describe what actually happened outside; before and during the shooting I was stationed inside the main street door of the pub. I understand that the Specials who were cycling dismounted some distance back the road from the pub and approached on foot rather cautiously. As far as I was directly concerned the first thing I noticed was a gentle knock was given to the publichouse door on the outside. Felix Dawe was standing beside me inside the door when this knock was heard. He was holding the latch of the door in one hand and he had a hand grenade in his other hand. I had a revolver in my hand. When the knock was heard neither of us paid it any attention and we remained waiting in silence. After about 30 seconds the door was gently knocked again on the outside. We were not sure who was outside the door as we could not see out. Next an impatient knocking and banging with the butt ends of revolvers commenced on the outside of the door accompanied by demands to open the door in pretty lurid language and the use of threats. Whoever was then in charge of our men in the positions outside must have been hesitant in giving the order

to fire and, as I learned afterwards, Jimmy Walsh fired his hand grenade at three Specials who were banging at the outside of the pub door. After the grenade exploded amongst the Specials at the door the shooting commenced.

Dawe and I ran into some of the rooms at the front of the house to see what was happening at the door and we could see nothing. We then opened the front door and went out on the road. As far as I can remember, the shootings were all over when we went out on the road.

I can't now remember how many specials were dead on the road. I have a hazy recollection that I saw three dead men lying at the publichouse door. I know that some of the Specials were wounded as I saw lorries travelling up Castletown Road, Dundalk, when we were near Dundalk and walking into town, which contained wounded men.

This is all I can tell of the Creggan ambush which I personally saw and heard as my post did not permit me to actually see what was happening outside. Others who were there can give first hand details of what they saw happening on the outside of the publichouse. I can't give any details of the Plaster ambush which took place on the Sunday following the Creggan fight. I was not mobilised for this affair.

From April 1921 up to the Truce there was blocking of roads and similar activities carried out. A pick of men for a flying column was made and the men selected for the column went out to the country for active service about a week before the Truce. This column was organised and trained by Paddy McKenna, who also took charge of it during its short existence.

Signed: Thomas M. Crane

(Thomas McCrave)

Date: 16/6/52Witness: John McCoy

(John McCoy)

16/6/52.

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