

W.S. 941

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 941

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 941.....

**Witness**

Frank Donnelly,  
15 Upper Irish Street,  
Armagh City.

**Identity.**

Member of:

I, R.B. and Irish Volunteers, Armagh, 1917 - ;  
O/C. Armagh Battalion, 1921-1922.

**Subject.**

- (a) National activities, Armagh-Down,  
1917-1922;
- (b) General raid for arms, May 1920;
- (c) Tribute to Seamus Connolly and  
Eamon Donnelly, deceased.

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

Nil

File No. S. 2249.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT BY FRANK DONNELLY.

15, Upper Irish Street, Armagh City.  
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I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the year 1917. Jim McCullough was the centre of the I.R.B. Circle into which I was introduced and initiated. Amongst the older men in the Circle which I joined was my father, Jim McCullough and Terry Finn. Amongst the younger men was Fred Tobin who later joined the Guards in 1922 and is now a Garda Inspector.

Shortly after I was initiated into the I.R.B. I was approached to join and did join the Irish Volunteers. The reorganisation of the Volunteers in 1917 was carried out locally by the I.R.B. and all the Volunteer officers were selected from members of the I.R.B.

In all there were about fourteen members in our Circle of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Circle met about twice a month and the business of the meeting was directed by the older members. Those older men had apparently been linked up with the I.R.B. organisation for some years before 1917 and they assumed a form of control over the activities of the younger members within the organisation. These older members also indicated that they intended to have a deciding influence on the activities and the policy of the newly formed Irish Volunteer units.

Sometime after I got linked up with the Irish Volunteers it became evident that the younger men in both the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteer organisations were becoming somewhat restive about the influence of the older group whose attitude was one of caution which tended to restrict the younger generation from undertaking any of the activities that most of the young men who had recently joined the Volunteers wished to take part in.

The spirit of the men of Easter Week was the ideal that the younger generation aimed at and the older men with their experience of trying to carry on with and hand down a rebel tradition against the opposition of the then popular parliamentarians and the active attention which the British Secret Service directed on all who were inclined to be extreme in their national outlook. These older men were drilled in a policy of caution which in the I.R.B. restricted its membership to those who were carefully selected and whose parentage and background would stand the severest scrutiny. This conservatism whilst tolerable in the I.R.B. with its tradition of secrecy was not popular with the more ambitious in the Volunteer organisation. This state of affairs created a tendency amongst the younger men to get rid of the I.R.B. influence in the Volunteer organisation and after a short time the I.R.B. seemed to assume a role of secondary importance. The Volunteers, to all outward appearances, took over the control of their own organisation but it must be remembered that all the original Volunteer officers were appointed from members of the I.R.B. organisation.

As late as the year 1920 I found that the I.R.B. had some influence over matters pertaining to the Irish Volunteers. The principal point I have in mind is the case of an officious R.I.C. man then stationed in Armagh about whom orders came to the Volunteers in Armagh to shoot. The orders came to my knowledge through the Irish Republican Brotherhood channels. I was on the Battalion staff at this time and I should and do know this.

#### Volunteer Organisation.

In the Volunteer organisation during the years 1918 and 1919 there was the usual organising and training for the Volunteer forces. A battalion organisation was got going about the year 1918. The first battalion staff elected was as follows :-

Seán O'Reilly, Battalion O/C., Seamus Connolly, Battalion Vice O/C.,  
~~Dennis~~ <sup>John</sup> Short, Battalion Adjutant, Hugh McKenna, Battalion Quartermaster.

The Companies forming the Battalion were as follows :- Armagh City, Ballymacnab (Allestragh), Blackwatertown, Derrynoose, Middletown, Keady.

In the autumn of the year 1920 Seán O'Reilly was arrested and Seamus Connolly was appointed to replace him as Battalion O/C. Frank Hannaway then became Battalion Vice O/C. Connolly was arrested in the year 1921 and interned. Frank Hannaway was appointed to succeed Connolly. In June, 1921, Hannaway was arrested and I succeeded Hannaway and continued serving as Battalion O/C. up to the end of things, as far as I was concerned, in 1922. From the time I was appointed Battalion O/C., Charlie McGle~~en~~an was Vice O/C.

About September, 1921, the 3rd Brigade was formed and Frank Hannaway was appointed Brigade O/C. Frank Mallon was appointed Brigade Adjutant, Jim Garvey was appointed Brigade Quartermaster. The third Brigade was organised to embrace the following battalions :- Armagh, Lurgan and Blackwatertown.

#### Military Operations.

The first operation carried out which I took part in was a raid for arms on a Major Proctor's residence at Tullydoeey. This raid did not prove a success. The next operation was a raid on a large scale on the residence at Loughgall of the Cope family. The Armagh Company was practically all mobilised for this operation. My job that night with another Volunteer named Sheridan was to meet a car on the Newry road leading into Armagh. We met the car at the end of the demense wall. Before we were sent on this expedition to meet the car we were supplied with a password and the password was "Are you Cork?", and the answer to this was "No, I am Tipp". After waiting at the appointed spot, for the car, two cars came along and the leading car stopped on seeing us on the

road and gave us the password and we gave the answer. We then took control of the cars and guided them to the point of mobilisation about threequarters of a mile from the entrance to Cope's house. When we arrived at the mobilisation point we found Seán O'Reilly there with the other members of Armagh Company. Included in the mobilisation were Volunteers from other Companies but at the moment I cannot recall who they were.

The most important impression which this affair created on me at the time was the careful planning of all the different details connected with this raid and the exact timing of the arrival of the cars at the place we picked them up and again our arrival with the cars at the mobilisation centre. The raid had to be carried out with all the precision of clockwork if it was to be a success. The district in which the raid was carried out was unionist to a man and any hitch such as the fumbling of plans causing delay was liable to be dangerous to those participating. Seamus Connolly was in charge of all the outposts and those outposts were placed at the various entrances to the extensive grounds of the Cope residence. Frank Aiken was, I believe, in charge of the raiding party who entered the house and this party comprised Charles McGleenan, John Cosgrove, Harry McKenna and possibly some other men who came from Camlough direction with Frank Aiken. I was detailed to do outpost duty at one of the gate lodges. I think there were about 15 or 16 men in our party. This outpost seemed to me to be rather important as it led on to a three-road cross, one road leading to Loughgall, one to Armagh and a third to Richill. We were in this position for approximately an hour when we got word to evacuate our positions.

I don't know what success attended this raid. I was an ordinary Volunteer at the time and had no responsibility except to obey the orders I received. I, however, heard since that the result of the raid did not reach expectations.

The mining of Irish Street Police Barracks, Armagh.

Sometime late in 1919 the Battalion O/C. got a mine made to blow up Irish Street Police Barracks. This contraption consisted of a metal axel box of a horse cart. This was filled with explosives and clamped with iron plates at the ends. A fuse fitted with a detonator was attached to the mine. On the night of this operation the mine was taken to outside the police barracks. A Volunteer using a sledge hammer broke one of the ventilators near the ground on the footpath in the barrack front wall. The mine was placed in the ventilator hole and the fuse lighted. As a safeguard for the men placing the mine in the barrack wall a few Volunteers were placed with firearms on the opposite side of the street. When the fuse was set alight all the Volunteers cleared off. The explosion did more damage to the houses opposite the barrack than it did to the barrack premises. A lot of windows were broken in the vicinity.

An amusing sequel to the affair was that a Sergeant Collins, who was stationed in the barrack, the next morning went to one of the oldest Sinn Feiners in the town and charged this old man with attempting to blow up his wife and children.

The next item of importance was the general raid for arms in September of 1920. The Armagh Company was mobilised for this affair and a number of houses in the country near the city were raided and searched. We got about six shotguns and one revolver in those houses.

During the summer and autumn of 1920 and the winter of 1921 a series of small operations was carried out such as blocking of roads and cutting of communications. A plan was made to attempt to capture Newtownhamilton barracks. Seamus Connolly came to me and told me about the plan and asked me could I fix him up as a British officer. I was attached to a Dramatic Class at this time so I took Connolly in hands and I can claim to have fixed him up in a British Officer's uniform so that he could pass a careful examination as the real thing.

The plan was a simple one. A party of Volunteers dressed as soldiers under the command of two officers approached the barracks and demanded admission as military on foot. This demand was refused by the barrack orderly and the attempt was abandoned.

In May 1920 plans were made to have a large-scale attack on Newtownhamilton barracks with a view this time to capturing and destroying the barracks and disarming the garrison. The following officers and men in the Armagh Company were mobilised for this operation :- Frank Hannaway, myself, Jim Garvey, James Short, Frank Mallon, John Hanratty, John McPartlin, Pat Loughran. Short and Garvey were detailed to report in the town of Newtownhamilton and take orders from Frank Aiken who was in charge of this operation. The remainder of the men were posted as an outpost at the junction of the Armagh and Keady roads, about 600 or 700 yards north of the town. All the Armagh men were armed with revolvers. It would be necessary to mention that at this junction on the road we erected blockades and if any of the enemy forces came to the relief of Newtownhamilton at this point we were to open fire on them.

The attack on the barrack commenced about midnight and heavy rifle, and machine-gun fire continued during the fight which lasted up to daylight the next morning. The barrack itself was captured and destroyed by fire but the garrison got into the barrack yard with their rifles and it was impossible to dislodge them from this position without the use of hand-grenades of which we had none.

We looked on this operation as a great success although we did not capture the arms in the barracks. When Garvey and Short came to our position after daylight they informed us of the order calling off the attack and we all returned to Armagh on our cycles.

During the summer and autumn of 1920 there were various raids on mails carried out in Armagh City and surrounding districts. In one raid

on mails in which I took part we raided the mails from a horse-drawn van on its way from the railway station to the Post Office. We took the mails outside the town to a hut where we censored all the letters and we closed the envelopes after reading the letters and stamped them with a stamp marked "Censored by the I.R.A." When we had the letters censored we took them to a Post Office box at Umgola to be picked up by the local postman. Umgola is part of the city suburbs.

One incident which I must recall concerns Seamus Connolly who when 'on the run' used to stay regularly with me at Ballycrummev, a mile from the city. On one Saturday evening he called to me and I left him up the road in the direction of Middletown. I think on this evening he was going towards Killylea. About bedtime on that same night around 12 p.m. I was sitting at the fire at my home in Ballycrummev when I had occasion to go outside. I went around the back of the house and at this moment the house was suddenly surrounded by military who had approached it on foot in a noiseless and secretive manner. When I heard them I dropped down flat behind the wall of a pighouse at the rear of the dwelling-house. The next thing that I noticed was that a soldier was standing on top of the wall over where I was lying. I then heard the soldier loading his rifle-"putting one up the spout". I started to say my prayers. The soldier stood on the alert and I remained lying for some time as still as it was possible. The soldier moved away. Other soldiers were on the move also. I got up from where I was lying and the soldier turned round and saw me. He then turned back and he asked "Who are you?" I answered "Who are you looking for?". He said, "Don't mind who we are looking for; you get back where you were", and he took himself away then.

I think this particular soldier was a big fellow from Lurgan who had been for some time stationed at the military barracks in Armagh and had been giving out arms and ammunition to the Volunteers.



It was reported afterwards that the military were led that night to our place by a policeman who was looking for Connolly. My mother was much agitated by the soldiers coming and raiding the house and she asked them who they were looking for and their leader said they were looking for Seamus Connolly who had been seen in the vicinity that evening.

#### Killylea Burnings.

Two catholic houses situated in a predominantly unionist area were burned out by the local "B" men. As a reprisal for this uncalled for outrage Headquarters ordered that unionists' houses at the ratio of three to one or four should be burned for each catholic home destroyed. On a Monday night in April 1921 the Armagh and Allistragh Companies went into Killylea district and set fire to the houses of three unionists. The inmates of the burned houses put up no resistance.

A sequel to this affair was that the British authorities in Armagh area got posters printed warning the I.R.A. that if there were any more reprisals in the local areas the British would carry out counter reprisals, ten to one.

#### Todd's Corner.

Todd's Corner is the name of a townland situated about three miles north-west of Armagh city. This townland is thickly populated with a predominantly Orange population. All the young men of this place joined the "B" and "C" Specials towards the end of the year 1920 and were supplied with rifles and revolvers which they were allowed to retain in their own homes. There had been no incidents of friction between these men and their catholic neighbours and as far as the I.R.A. were concerned they were looked on as a decent crowd.

In the spring of 1921 these young Specials started to carry out the nightly patrols which they were ordered to do by those in command of them. There was nothing officious or aggressive in the manner they carried out their patrol duty. However, the display of their newly

acquired arms aroused the attention of the arms hungry I.R.A. leaders in Armagh city and neighbouring units and the question arose of raiding for and capturing those arms. This matter was discussed and plans made for the operation. The district having previously been so quiet and nothing in the nature of political differences having developed it was believed that the capture of the arms from the "B" men in Todd's Corner would be an easy operation; that in fact it would be simply a matter of going quietly from house to house and by force of numbers overpowering the inmates and disarming them.

It was decided that those participating in this operation were to mobilise for it at McGlone's (known as the Councillor House) about 11.30 p.m. on a Saturday night. This mobilisation point was about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Todd's Corner. Whilst the boys were mobilising and waiting for the appointed time to arrive a sing-song started amongst those who had arrived earlier. The raid on the first house was timed to take place at 4 a.m. on a Sunday morning. This first house to be raided belonged to a family named Georges and it was selected because it was the house nearest the place of mobilisation. About 3.30 a.m. the men mobilised from the Armagh Company moved from McGlones in the direction of Georges' house. This party numbered about 40 all told and many of the party were young recruits on their first operation. There were only about 20 men armed with revolvers.

When we arrived at Georges' house Frank Hannaway and about six others went up to the halldoor of the house and the remainder of the men surrounded the house at the sides and at the back. Hannaway's crowd, after rapping on the halldoor, demanded that it should be opened. The reply to this demand was instantaneous, a volley of shots through the doors and windows. The attacking party then took cover in a manner which enabled them to reply to the fire from the house. There must have been about six men fully armed in Georges' house all using rifles and carrying on a most intensive fire on the positions outside occupied by the I.R.A.

When the firing had been on about fifteen minutes Jerry Hughes, one of our men, got shot through both legs. Hughes was shot whilst he was lying in a position in front of the house and the position of his feet and body at the time of the shooting goes to prove that the bullet that wounded him was not a bullet from the house but was fired from a position away from the house. When Hughes was hit he showed evidence of being in great pain and it was necessary to have him removed from the vicinity of the house with all possible speed. I and Tom Fearon, Pat Garvey and Patrick Loughran got Hughes in our arms and we carried him across into the second field from Georges' house. Hughes was losing blood rapidly and we had to make an attempt at stopping the flow of blood by crude bandaging. We then removed him to a local farmhouse about a mile from the scene of the fight and got a door there which we used as a stretcher on which we carried him to a friendly house, John Loughran's, situated about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Armagh. I left Hughes here in Loughran's house in the care of the other men mentioned above and I went into Armagh to get a Doctor. I first called at Jimmy Troddyn's house in Irish Street. Troddyn went for Doctor Lynch in his car and drove Dr. Lynch out to Loughran's place where the Doctor attended Hughes. This Dr. Lynch had served in the British Navy previously and was looked upon by local unionists as a loyal citizen. When Dr. Lynch was called out it must have been about 7 a.m.

When Dr. Lynch had attended and dressed Hughes' wounds he was put into another of Troddyn's cars and driven to John McArdle's place at Madden. Hughes remained at McArdle's for a few weeks during which he got daily attention from Dr. Walter McKee and some Cumann na mBan girls from Armagh city. After two weeks in McArdle's he was removed to the Mater Hospital, Belfast, where he remained a patient for a considerable time. Hughes never afterwards got the proper use of his legs.

To return to the scene of the fight at Georges' I heard the following version of what took place after I had to leave with Hughes. As the shooting continued the Volunteers found that their limited supply of ammunition was almost exhausted, so at a few points they were able to get close enough to the house to set fire to its thatched roof. When the roof took fire it was found that the position occupied by the Volunteers at Georges' house was under fire from other directions. I have already said that nearly all the young men of the locality were armed "B" men. Considering the time during which the firing was taking place and the close proximity of the military in Armagh it was decided that the Volunteers should retreat, which they did. This retreat was carried out across the fields in small parties of twos or three men. The men retreating from Todd's Corner mostly made for the Cathedral in Armagh where 8 o'clock Mass was being celebrated and they mixed up with the congregation at Mass. A lot of the boys who were armed dumped their arms in the graveyard and more of the arms were dumped in a local quarry.

It was learned afterwards that some person from the vicinity of Todd's Corner got into Armagh to give the information that Georges' house at Todd's Corner was being attacked. The military got on the road to go to the relief of Georges, but in mistake went in the Loughgall direction to another place belonging to a man named George. This fact in itself made it easy for the Volunteers to get back into the city, without interference from the British Forces.

After the attack on Todd's Corner a series of raids was carried out on Volunteer houses in Armagh. Frank Hannaway was the only Volunteer arrested during these raids. He was subsequently charged with raiding a local unionist house and was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

This brings my narrative up to the 11th July, 1921, the date of the Truce.

Truce Period.

During the Truce period I had the usual training in various training camps. I spent about a month at a Divisional Training Camp at a place named Killeavey, South Armagh. After I and the 3rd Brigade officers had gone through the course of lectures at the Divisional Camp we held several camps throughout the battalion area where the ordinary Volunteers got courses of instruction.

About May, 1922, Derrynoose Company had a camp across the Border in County Monaghan. During the period in which this camp was held I received a complaint that the Camp was being carried on in a crowded condition owing to the fact that many Keady fellows who had no business in the camp went there to stay with friends who were receiving instruction at the camp. I visited the camp for the purpose of straightening out the irregularities. I took a car with me from Armagh for this journey. The driver of the car was a man named Pat Maguire. Patrick Vallely, who was Vice O/C. of the Battalion, also accompanied me.

After examining the camp and inquiring into the reported irregularities we started out on the return journey to Armagh. We were intercepted by Special Constables and we were arrested by them.

At the time of our arrest we had a few Cumann na mBan girls with us in the car one of whom later became my wife.

In Armagh we were charged with being in possession of 200 rounds of ammunition which the authorities found in the car in which we were travelling. The girls were remanded for two weeks and then remanded again. Vallely and I were tried and were sentenced to four months imprisonment. We were released in September, 1922. On my release from prison I was re-arrested a few days later and was interned in Larne Workhouse until February or March, 1923, when I was finally released.

Before I close this narrative I would like to pay a special tribute to two outstanding men whom the Republican movement in Armagh City produced.

The first man I shall deal with is Seamus Connolly, a great figure in the military side, and the second man is Eamon Donnelly, a great political figure, an organiser, a worker and a thinker.

Seamus Connolly (R.I.P.).

Seamus Connolly was a member of the I.R.B. before I joined that organisation and was a person with considerable influence in I.R.B. circles. About the time I joined the I.R.B. Connolly came to Armagh from Maralin and was formerly, on his own admission, an active member of Hibernians before he linked up with the I.R.B.

In my early days in the Irish Volunteer organisation Connolly was most active in organisation work and he became Battalion O/C when Sean O'Reilly was arrested in 1920. In 1919 and 1920 Connolly must have been one of the leading I.R.B. men in the province of Ulster. It is impossible for me to be sure of this owing to the secrecy maintained in I.R.B. circles. One thing is certain and known to all who worked for the cause of Irish Independence in the years from 1916 to 1921, that there was no man in the North who did more for the Republican cause or who suffered more for it. He must have spent at least a quarter of his adult life in British prisons. This estimate of his prison experience is moderate as at every time where political excitement was in evidence from 1917 onwards Connolly was picked up by the British. He was arrested and interned in early 1921, released in December, 1921, arrested again in May, 1922, released in 1926, rearrested in 1939 at the outbreak of the Great War and was interned until the second world war ended. He died on the 10th December, 1948. Had he lived I suspect he would have been in jail a few times since.

Eamon Donnelly (R.I.P.).

My earliest recollection of Eamon Donnelly's association with the Republican movement was when he called a meeting for the City Hall, Armagh, in or about 1917, to organise the formation of the Volunteer organisation in Armagh City. Jim McCullough then informed Donnelly that there was a surprise Company in existence. This information seemed to ~~shock~~ surprise Donnelly who had been previously a member of The Ancient Order of Hibernians and had only been assimilated into the Republican Movement. Donnelly then joined the Volunteers but did not, as far as I can remember, parade with them for any length of time.

Donnelly transferred his energies and great ability to the Sinn Fein or the political side of the Republican Movement. He soon made his presence felt, not alone in spreading the Sinn Fein organisation all over North Armagh area, but his push and enthusiasm was felt over wide areas in neighbouring counties. Donnelly was capable of doing the work of at least half a dozen ordinary men. He was a human dynamo and became one of the greatest organisers of election machinery that the Sinn Fein Movement or any other movement threw up in this country during our generation. He took part in all the early bye-elections fought by Sinn Fein from 1917 onwards. He was fully occupied in the General Election of December 1918. He organised the collection of Dail Eireann loan, Belfast Boycott, Republican Courts and took part in the Local Government Elections of 1920. He was elected a member of several local bodies.

When the Truce came along Donnelly took the anti-Treaty side and was engaged in all the political discussions that the Northern leaders had with the Southern Republicans during the period before the acceptance of the Treaty for the 26 Counties was decided by Dail Eireann. He opposed the acceptance of the Treaty provisions agreed on in London in December, 1921. His opposition was prompted to a great extent on the betrayal of the Northern Republicans in the Six North-Eastern Counties to the Orange Bigots who were then commencing to function as the Government of Northern Ireland.

It was at this time that Eamon Donnelly's great energy and ability became widely known, not alone in the North of Ireland but all over the country. His ability as a public speaker was widely recognised. He fought elections for the Northern Parliament and as a Republican was returned a member of that Parliament for West Belfast constituency. He refused to take his seat in the Northern Parliament. He was arrested by the orders of the Northern Government and was a prisoner for some time. He was banned from living in Northern Ireland by the Stormont Government. He defied this ban and was imprisoned as a result. On his release he persisted in his defiance and was again arrested. He continued in defiance against the ban until he won out and eventually was allowed to live in the North. He went down South at the start of the Fianna Fail organisation in 1926 and became Mr. De Valera's right-hand man in his organisation. He was appointed Director of Elections for Fianna Fail and Secretary of the Fianna Fail organisation. He was elected a Fianna Fail T.D. for Leix-Offaly. When the second Great War of 1939-1944 commenced, Donnelly returned to the North when a widespread arrest of active Republicans took place in the Six County Government area. He organised what was called the Green Cross Fund for the Dependents of Republican prisoners and he administered this fund.

His life was devoted from 1917 onwards to the work for an Irish Republic up to the time of his death about ten years ago. He continued the work with the full enthusiasm of his younger days up to the end.

Signed: Frank Donnelly  
(Frank Donnelly)

Date: 28-4-~~1954~~ 1954

28.4.1954.

Witness:

John Hanratty  
14 April  
28-4-1954.

(John Hanratty)

28.4.1954.

