

W.S. 1,024

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1024

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,024.....

Witness

James Power,  
Ballycraddock,  
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Mem. Dunhill Coy. Irish Vol's.  
Co. Waterford, 1914 - ;  
Comd't. 2nd Batt'n. Waterford Brigade, 1917 -

Subject.

National and military activities,  
Dunhill, Co. Waterford, 1914-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S. 2344.....

# ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT OF JAMES POWER,  
Ballycraddock, County Waterford.

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I was born in Ballycraddock, Co. Waterford in the year 1886. My parents were farmers and I, too, have been a farmer all my life.

Since I was a young chap of sixteen years of age, I was always interested in Gaelic football and hurling, so I joined the local G.A.A. club and played with the boys until I got too old to play in competitions. I still take a great interest in Gaelic games.

About the year 1914 when a Company of the National Volunteers formed in this district, I joined up along with a crowd of the local lads. Our O.C. was a man named Michael Veale (deceased) and a man called Norris was Secretary of the Company. We had practically no arms or ammunition, only one rifle, a shotgun or two and a few .22 rifles. This Company was known as the Dunhill Company.

When the split in the Volunteers came only James Norris and myself stood by the Irish Volunteers. We had no idea what was happening in Easter, 1916, so we took no part in the Rising.

I re-formed the Dunhill Company after the 1916 Rising, with myself as Captain and a man named Billy Burns as second in command. The meetings of the Company were held in a hall at Killowen, nearby, about once every month. The strength of the Company about that time (late in 1916) would be about twenty men. They came from a big area within a couple of miles radius of my place. There were about twelve shotguns in the Company and a few .22 rifles which were used before that by the National Volunteers for training purposes.

After Easter, 1916, or maybe it was early 1917, a Sinn Féin Club was started in Dunhill by P. C. O'Mahoney, a Sinn Féin organiser from Kerry who was, at that time, going around the country organising for Sinn Féin. This man had a job in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, but he lost it when he was arrested in 1916 and he was then going around doing this organising of Sinn Féin clubs. I was appointed chairman of the Dunhill Branch and James Norris was made the Secretary.

We attended election meetings all over our part of the County Waterford. The Volunteers used to be armed with sticks to defend supporters of Sinn Féin from attacks by supporters of John Redmond who were very bitter against us. I myself was in charge of about twenty of our lads during the Waterford bye-election of 1918, when Dr. White of Waterford was going up as the Sinn Féin candidate against Captain Willie Redmond. We were all armed with sticks and it was as well we were because the blackguardism of the Redmondite mobs was something awful. They used beat up any of the Sinn Féiners they could lay hands on, particularly if a Sinn Féiner was caught walking alone. Speakers at our election meetings were assaulted with sticks and bottles and our election canvassers were constantly being beaten up by the mobs from Ballybricken district of Waterford from where the pig-buyers came. The Waterford City Volunteers had to ask for help from outside counties; some came from as far away as Dublin.

Sometime about the year 1917, I happened to be speaking to Paddy Brazil of Waterford City, who spoke to me about joining the I.R.B.. Seán Matthews of Waterford, a head man in the I.R.B. there, also mentioned about joining it to me. I did join

and was made Head Centre for the Dunhill area which included Ballycraddock where I live. The first men I swore in were Billy Keane, Martin Cullinane and Tom Brien. There were about nine of us altogether in the I.R.B. in my centre. The meetings were always held in my house in Ballycraddock. That would be about the winter of 1917. Our principal discussions concerned the prospect of getting arms so that we would be fit for fighting when the time came. We weren't successful in getting any arms at that time but our members formed the backbone of the Irish Volunteers in the district.

In 1918 and 1919 I was mainly concerned with the spreading of the Sinn Féin organisation and the enrolment of new members in the Volunteers. In selecting men for the Volunteers I picked out lads that I thought were strong nationally, members of the G.A.A. for instance, and I gave preference to men who were not fond of drink. I was dead against meetings being held in public houses and I always stressed the harm that drink was doing. I constantly told my men that the British killed everything in this country bar the drink and I urged them to keep away from it, if they wanted to become good fighting men.

In the year 1919, we were active in preventing Jurors from attending British Courts. At that time the Sinn Féin Courts were being set up and people were urged to boycott the British Courts and if they had to go to law to take their cases to the Sinn Féin Courts. The idea was, of course, to put the British Courts out of action. British Justices of the Peace were warned by us not to carry out their duties in Courts run by the British. As the result of this, all the Justices of the Peace resigned in East Waterford and no Jurors would attend the Assizes.

During the early part of 1920 I had about twenty men in my Company who were all fairly well armed with shotguns and revolvers and I decided we should go into action.

In July, 1920, it was decided to attack Annestown R.I.C. Barracks about four miles from Dunhill. As it so happened the barrack was evacuated on the day of the planned attack, so we decided to burn it to prevent it's being reoccupied by the police. I took about twenty men with me and we went across the country on foot late at night equipped with petrol and bundles of straw. We put out scouts about two hundred yards distant from the barracks to signal the approach of any enemy forces. These scouts were armed with revolvers and were instructed to fire a warning shot should they see anything suspicious approaching. We started in to burn the barracks when word came back to us from one of the scouts that there was something approaching along by the ditches on the roadside, but, in the darkness, the scouts could not make out who it was. It turned out that the police were returning from Fenor about three miles from Annestown and saw the flames from the burning barracks at Annestown. In company with a party of British military they got out of their lorries and came along the roadside on foot. At first our scouts didn't recognise them but, when fire opened up, our lads on outpost duty replied. As the job of burning the barracks was, by then, almost finished I withdrew my men and ordered the scouts to get away too. We did not reply to the fire of the enemy because I knew that we had so little ammunition my lads could not keep up a running fight for any length of time, so we retreated in the direction of my own farm house at Ballycraddock where we dumped the arms and dispersed. We suffered no casualties from the enemy fire. The action finished at 2 a.m.

It might be interesting to describe the dump where we kept the guns and ammunition.

The first dump was on my land and consisted of a dry ditch over which big flagstones were placed in the form of a path over which cattle used to pass. However, this was found to be unsatisfactory as the guns used to become damp and might become unserviceable altogether, which would be disastrous for us, seeing that they were so scarce.

We decided to change the make of the dump so we knocked out the centre at a gap in a fence on my land, made a large box covered with felt and put it into the opening made in the centre of the ditch. We left the sides of the ditch undisturbed, so that anyone passing it by would never suspect there was anything there in the nature of an arms dump.

This idea of the box covered with felt was successful in keeping the arms and ammunition dry and it was used by us subsequently on very many occasions.

In the dump about the time I am speaking of (July 1920) we had two revolvers, one Lee Enfield rifle and about a dozen shotguns. We also had a quantity of gelignite and a few home-made bombs. We got the two revolvers and two shotguns in a raid on Major Congreve's house known as "Mount Congreve", about five miles from my house. Sean Matthews, O.C. of one of the Waterford City battalions sent us out the bombs. The gelignite was obtained from County Council workmen who were employed in the quarries.

Following the evacuation of Ballyduff R.I.C. barracks by the police (eight miles west of Waterford), it was decided to

burn it to prevent it's reoccupation by enemy forces. I proceeded to Ballyduff with about twenty men of my Company, set fire to the Barracks with petrol and burned it out. I placed four scouts armed with webley revolvers to watch for any sign of enemy forces, but none of them (the enemy) appeared. None of the men, except myself, who destroyed the barracks was armed.

Shortly before the burning of Ballyduff barracks an attack was made on Kill R.I.C. barracks situated about three miles east of Bonmahon, Co. Waterford.

This barracks was occupied by about ten R.I.C. men. It was a two-storied stone and slated building and was fitted with steel shuttered windows to strengthen its defence. It was planned to attack it with riflemen and shotguns, but first we were to throw mud bombs up on to the roof of the barracks and when the bombs exploded and blew holes in the slates we would spray the roof with petrol and set it ablaze, thereby forcing the garrison to leave the barracks and come up against us out in the open.

The mud bombs I have mentioned were made up by filling a short bit of steel tubing with broken metal and gelignite. A detonator was fitted and then a fuse. The lot was covered with a soft lump of clay called, locally, "poddle". When thrown on to a slated roof the soft clay stuck so making sure that when the bomb did explode it exploded on the surface of the roof.

It was about 9 p.m. on a night in September, 1920, when we went into the village of Kill, and, as we entered, there was an R.I.C. man crossing the street. When I saw him I called on him to halt, but he wouldn't stand, so I fired at him with a revolver but not to hit him. He stopped and we took him prisoner. We then took over possession of a house beside the barracks, sending

the occupants out. I placed the ten shotgun men in positions about thirty to forty yards from the barracks and four riflemen in charge of Paddy Paul (afterwards Colonel in the National Army) somewhat farther away.

The pump we were to use to spray the barrack roof with petrol was a potato sprayer which weighed about a hundred-weight. The pump and the mud bombs were brought into the house beside the barracks to commence the attack, when we discovered that the handle of the pump was missing and, of course, this rendered the sprayer useless for our purpose. After a consultation I decided to send off one of the Volunteers to locate the man who loaned us the pump and try to get the handle. Meanwhile we were to attack the barracks with rifles and shotguns.

When I fired earlier on at the R.I.C. man whom we captured on the street, the garrison in the barracks began sending up Verey lights to summon assistance. However, fire was opened on the barracks by the riflemen and shotgun men, when word came to us from our scouts that the military were approaching in force. We had the roads blocked with fallen trees for about five miles radius and our scouts could see the headlights of the military lorries halted at the blocks, whilst the soldiers cleared the road.

In view of the evident superiority in numbers of the approaching British troops and the small amount of ammunition which our men had, I decided to break off the attack. Word was then given to retreat and the men moved out of the village eastward towards our own country, Dunhill. We suffered no casualties and I cannot say whether we inflicted any on the R.I.C. men who formed the Kill garrison. About forty Volunteers altogether took part in this engagement. Approximately, half of them, under my command, were engaged in the actual attack, i.e. the Dunhill Company.



The other half, belonging to the Kill Company, were engaged in blocking the roads and scouting.

I would like to add here that the Dunhill district was in late 1920 the 2nd Battalion area of the Waterford No. 1. Brigade and comprised the districts Newtown, Bonmahon, Portlaw, Dunhill, Tramore, Fenor and Ballyduff.

After the attack on Kill barracks the weapons and ammunition were brought back to the dump on my land to which I referred earlier. I had to leave my own home and go 'on the run' about this time.

Shortly after the Kill affair, six of us all armed with rifles, lay in an ambush position at a place called Whitfield near The Sweep about eight miles west of Waterford on the Cork-Waterford main road. The five men were Paddy Paul, Tom Brennan, Paddy McGrath, Tom Walsh and Micky Bishop and myself. It was our intention to have a crack at any enemy forces who might pass along the road.

We were lying in position from an early hour in the morning with nothing happening until about 10 a.m. when three military lorries full of British soldiers came into view. At the very moment the lorries appeared, there happened to be three or four carts with civilians driving to the creamery also on the road. We decided not to open fire as if we did it was almost certain that the civilians would either be caught accidentally in the crossfire, or, more likely, they would be shot afterwards by the British military when the return was over. We left the ambush position shortly afterwards.

In December, 1920, the same six of us referred to in the abortive Whitfield ambush, went into an attacking position at a place called Ballyduff-Kilmeadon about ten miles west of Waterford city on the main road to Cork. Military lorries used often pass on this road en route to Kilworth and Fermoy, Co. Cork. This ambush is usually referred to as the Ballyduff (Glenn) ambush.

Our ambush position was in a forrestry plantation overlooking the main road and about sixty to one hundred yards distant from it. We were armed with Lee Enfield rifles. No attempt was made by us to block the roads, as we were, numerically, too few to have a stand up fight with a large enemy force and besides, our ammunition was scarce enough.

It was a grand clear, frosty morning when, about half past ten or so, we spotted lorries of troops in the distance. A Crossley tender came first with about a dozen armed soldiers, a lorry came next with soldiers and then came another Crossley tender with more soldiers. I would say there were about fifty soldiers altogether, all of whom belonged to the Devonshire regiment.

We opened fire at about one hundred and fifty yards range on the first Crossley tender which swerved and stopped. The military then climbed out of their lorries, lay along the ditch underneath us in extended formation and opened heavy fire with machine guns and rifles on our position. We kept up the attack for about twenty minutes, with an occasional lull, when I decided it was best to retreat as I feared an outflanking movement by the enemy who were in much superior force. Besides, our ammunition was running very short.

I cannot say what was the effect of our fire but I do know that one officer of the Devonshire regiment was badly wounded. We suffered no casualties.

I learned afterwards that the second lorry of the military convoy contained a party of I.R.A. prisoners who were being taken to Kilworth Camp, Co. Cork. One of these prisoners was Liam Walsh, Officer Commanding the Waterford No. 1. Brigade (East Waterford).

About this time, i.e. late 1920, there were seven of us on full time active service operating mostly in the Dunhill area eight miles to the west of Waterford. The names of these men were Brigade O.C. Paddy Paul, M. Bishop, Martin Cullinane, - McGrath, two men named Walsh and myself. We were all armed with Lee Enfield rifles. Bishop had brought his home with him when he was leaving the British Army where he served during the 1914-18 war. The other rifles were sent out to us from Waterford by Liam Walsh, O/C. of the East Waterford Brigade. I might mention that none of us had slept in our own homes since the attack on Kill barracks, but we did have our main meals in my house in Ballycraddock (in the Dunhill district).

On the 7th January, 1921, my Company was mobilised at my house in Ballycraddock to take part in the ambush known as the Tramore ambush. We left my place about 4 p.m., about twenty of us altogether. Most of the men were armed with shotguns and a few with rifles. I was in charge of the party. As we proceeded across country we picked up others en route to Tramore and we arrived at the race-course about a half mile north of the town at about 6 p.m. where we met Commandant Pax Whelan with a number of his men from west Waterford and Commandant Paddy Paul.

The idea was to go to the Marine Hotel, Tramore, and fire on the Black & Tans there. They (the Tans) would send word to Waterford of the attack and we would then ambush the enemy forces coming out from Waterford to relieve the Tans in the Marine Hotel. When some of our men went to the Marine Hotel, they learned that the

Tans weren't in there that night, so, after consultation with Pax Whelan, Paddy Paul and Pat Keating (killed later on in the ambush at Burgery, West Waterford) we decided to stage a feint attack on the R.I.C. barracks in Tramore, with a view to drawing the military out from Waterford.

I went in charge of the party to attack the R.I.C. barracks. I had with me Mickey Bishop, Martin Cullinane, Pat Keating, William Gallagher and Nicholas Whittle. Bishop, Cullinane and myself went to the rear of the barracks; the others went to the front. We all opened fire with rifles and shotguns and after about ten minutes, during which the enemy replied with rifles and bombs at the same time sending up Verey lights for help, I ordered a retreat and we made our way back to the main ambush party.

The scene of the ambush was in the vicinity of what is known as the "Metal Bridge" which carried the railway line from Waterford to Tramore and which is situated about three quarters of a mile east of Tramore town on the main Waterford-Tramore road. A barricade was erected just around a corner of the Metal Bridge on the Tramore side and it was our intention to allow whatever enemy lorries came along from Waterford to run up to this barricade before our attack would open.

Our forces consisted of about fifty men, about twenty of whom were from the West Waterford Brigade under Pax Whelan. The remainder were drawn from the East Waterford Brigade under Paddy Paul. About half were armed with rifles and the remainder with shotguns. Approximately eighteen riflemen and ten shotgun men were placed in position on the north (Pickardstown) side of the main road, and about a dozen riflemen and the same number of shotguns on the south (Ballynattin) side of the road. Both positions were on high grounds overlooking the road leading to the Metal Bridge, with the exception

of two riflemen who were placed at a junction of the main road and what is known as the "old road" to Waterford. These latter men faced towards the Metal Bridge and were about one hundred yards from the bridge on the Waterford side, i.e. on the east side of the bridge.

When I had returned to the ambush position after the feint attack on the R.I.C. barracks, about ten minutes elapsed before we saw the headlights of military lorries approaching from Waterford on the main road. It was about midnight: the night was dark but fine. Before the lorries had got to the barricade at the Metal Bridge a shot rang out and immediately fire was opened on all sides, both by our men and the British. One of the British lorries which did run into the ambush position at the barricade came under fire from our men in position there, but the remainder of the lorries - four in all - stopped near the junction of the Old Waterford-Tramore road where our two riflemen were, and the soldiers got out and proceeded to advance in extended formation up the hill towards the Ballynattin road where our rifle and shotgun men engaged them in heavy fire.

Whilst all this was going on, Bishop, Cullinane, Paul and I went across, under fire, to the rifle party engaged on the Ballynattin road. Whittle and Gallagher (who were with me on the barrack attack earlier on) had taken up their positions in this area a short time previously. With great difficulty and under a cross-fire from our own men and the British we eventually made our way up to our comrades on the Ballynattin road and took up position with our riflemen there.

Our shotgun men on the Ballynattin side and nearer the main Tramore-Waterford road than we were now retreated under orders up towards us under heavy fire and I learned that the military were

working their way slowly towards our position. In fact, I could plainly hear the British officers urging their men on to the attack.

As officer in charge of the riflemen on the Ballynattin road I gave orders to retreat over a fence on the road where the Shrine now stands about two hundred yards north of the main road junction, and carried on the engagement from there. However, the British threw a Verey light into our position and as a result I ordered a retreat northwards up the hill, firing as we went. When we reached a point about a hundred yards further up the hill I gave orders to break off the engagement.

One of our men, Wyley, was badly wounded in the leg and was carried on the retreat to a place of safety. Nicholas Whittle of Tramore was also badly wounded, but we were unaware of this at the time owing to the darkness. Two others of our men, Mick McGrath and Tom O'Brien, were killed in the fight, but it transpired afterwards that they were, in fact, taken prisoners by the British and shot after being captured. The bodies of both of these men were subsequently found on the Ballynattin road near where the Memorial Shrine now stands. I do not know whether the military suffered any casualties, but, I heard that one R.I.C. man was wounded in our attack on the R.I.C. barracks, Tramore.

When the fighting at Ballynattin ended and we retreated up the hill in the darkness eastwards towards Waterford city we got a pony and trap and brought Michael Wyley, who was wounded, away to a place of safety. Our arms were dumped in a house near the city on the Old Tramore Road and the men dispersed.

About the end of January, 1921, George Plunkett came down from G.H.Q., Dublin, to organise the Waterford No. 1. Brigade (East Waterford). He visited all the Companies in the Brigade area with me.

He outlined the way the Battalions should be run - regular battalion weekly meetings etc. - and arranged for the setting up of special services such as engineering and First Aid and said that more action was wanted in the area.

All the special services were got going in each Company and more arms came into the district with men 'on the run' who were billeted in my area.

Our strength at that time (January-February, 1921) was as follows :-

"A" Company, Dunhill (where I live) - 20 men; "B" Company, Ballyduff (3 miles from Dunhill)-27 men; "C" Company, Fenor (about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-east of Dunhill)-16 men; "D" Company, Tramore (about 6 miles south-east of Dunhill)-12 men; "E" Company, Kill (4 miles west of Dunhill)-16 men; "F" Company, Newtown (5 miles west of Dunhill)-12 men.

There were, at that time, about a dozen Lee Enfield rifles and thirty shotguns in the Battalion, together with some gelignite and a fair amount of ammunition.

About the month of May, 1921, "B" Company destroyed Kildermody road bridge off the main Cork road. Their outposts, who comprised a rifleman, two men with revolvers and four with shotguns, came into contact with British military driving in an open car and a lorry. Fire was kept up until the party of Volunteers engaged in demolishing the bridge had retreated. No casualties were inflicted on our men and I cannot say if the British suffered any. This job was carried out at nighttime.

In March, 1921, an ambush was prepared at Carrolls Cross railway station on a military train. Carrolls Cross is about four miles east of Kilmacthomas where the railway crosses the main Cork-Waterford road.

I was in charge of the party of twenty men who were armed with shotguns and rifles. It was night-time when we reached the scene of the ambush.

When the time for the arrival of the train, which (we learned) had military on board, was due, the rail signals were put against the train on Commandant Paddy Paul's instructions. The train came but, instead of obeying the signals which were at 'stop', it dashed through the crossing gates which we had closed and continued on its way. We didn't fire on the train as it passed at too great a speed.

During the period March - July, 1921, intensive destruction of roads and bridges in the battalion area was undertaken on the orders of Commandant Paul. The Cork main road was not broken up until May 1921. We destroyed the minor roads first. The roads were ripped up with pick axes, a narrower passage being left for a horse and cart, but a military lorry couldn't get over the trenches we made in the roads or through the narrower passage. We were out on this kind of work the night Johnny O'Rourke was killed at the Holy Cross, Butterstown, about six miles west of Waterford city on the main Cork road.

Johnny belonged to "D" Company, 4th Battalion, East Waterford Brigade, and he was on outpost duty at the Holy Cross when he was surprised and shot by British officers in mufti whom he had mistaken for two Volunteers. He was conscious when found at daybreak by men of his Company, but died later that evening.

In April, 1921, I was instructed to prepare a Brigade arms dump on my land. This dump was to be used to keep arms and ammunition captured from the enemy in other Brigade areas. I was instructed by G.H.Q. to have the dump in as close proximity to a road as possible. It was built by men 'on the run' who were billeted in my house and in the surrounding district. They started it in April, 1921 and finished it early in May, 1921.



The dump was constructed on the slope of a hill. A trench was dug about fourteen feet long by eight feet deep. It was lined with timber and felt and covered with the same materials. Soil was placed on the top of the dump and turnips sown in it. Entrance was through the side of an adjoining ditch. The dump was in use long afterwards and was never discovered by the British.

Early in June, 1921, an Active Service Unit for men 'on the run' in East Waterford was formed and they made contact with the West Waterford Active Service Unit. All the rifles we had went to the Active Service Unit, with the result that we had only a few revolvers and shotguns left. About this time, Mickey Bishop was appointed O.C. of the East Waterford Brigade, instead of Paddy Paul, who had gone off with the Flying Column. G.H.Q. would not, however, accept Bishop's appointment and Sean Hyde came up from Cork to hold an inquiry into the matter. As the result of that inquiry the East and West Waterford Brigades were amalgamated shortly before the Truce in 1921.

When the Column was formed and went out of my area we had so very little arms and ammunition left that it was not possible to carry out any active engagements prior to July, 1921, when the Truce was signed.

Signed: James Power

(James Power)

Date: 15 / 10 / 54

15@10/54

Witness: T. O'Gorman

(T. O'Gorman)

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