

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1562

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1562.

Witness

Martin Newell,
7, Liam Mellows Terrace,
Loughrea,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Volunteer.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers and I.R.B. activities,
Co. Galway, 1905 - December, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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No. W.S. 1562

STATEMENT OF MR. MARTIN NEWELL

7, Liam Mellows Terrace, Loughrea,
formerly of
Caheradine, Craughwell, Co. Galway.

My father, John Newell, was Centre of the I.R.B. for the Barony of Dunkellin in the 1880.s. and, during that time, there was considerable agrarian trouble in the area. In 1882, he worked as a ploughman for Dr. Burke of Rahasane, a landlord. About the only good quality Dr. Burke had was that he never interfered with the men who worked on his farm.

Agitation was high against the landlords at this particular time and Dr. Burke left for a holiday in England. On his return from holiday, he had with him for his protection two English soldiers (Redcoats) who were armed with Winchester rifles. In the afternoon of the day of Dr. Burke's return home, he walked to the extreme end of the farm to where my father was ploughing and walked alongside of him, talking to him for a considerable time while he was ploughing. The following morning, Dr. Burke went to Gort to get ejection orders against some of his tenants. He travelled in a back-to-back horse trap accompanied by one of the soldiers who, of course, was armed. On his way home from Gort he was ambushed at Castletaylor by five I.R.B. men armed with shotguns. Dr. Burke, the soldier and the horse were shot dead. The slugs used in this attack were actually in my father's pocket the afternoon before when Dr. Burke walked alongside him whilst he was ploughing.

After the attack, the men crossed the farm of another landlord named Shaw-Taylor, and on the way met Shaw-Taylor himself. Some of the men wanted to shoot Shaw-Taylor, but as all five men did not agree to do so, no attempt was made on him. The men got safely away and, that night, according to plans

previously made, the men brought the guns to my father, who hid them on Dr. Burke's farm.

My father was one of the jurymen at the inquest, and Shaw-Taylor, who was summoned to give evidence, never took his eyes off my father during the whole of the proceedings. When questioned if he knew any of the five men whom he met on his farm after the shooting, Shaw-Taylor stated that he knew intimately every man who lived within a six-mile radius of where he himself lived and none of the men he saw on his land lived within that radius. Although, in fact, two of the men lived within one mile; one lived within three miles; another within four miles, and the other man lived outside the six-mile radius. It was believed that Shaw-Taylor had recognised the men but, through fear, gave the evidence he did.

The Captain Taylor who later introduced a Land Act in the British House of Commons was a kinsman of Shaw-Taylor.

The five men who took part in the attack on Dr. Burke were: William Greene and Martin Connolly, both of Rathcosgrave, Craughwell; Brian Grealish, Kileeneen, Craughwell; Pat Gegan, Gurrane, Kilcolgan, and Patch Connolly, Ballymana, Craughwell. All five went to America. Greene and Grealish returned and died here; the others never returned.

The connecting links between that period and the founding of Sinn Fein in 1905 were certainly the Land League, the I.R.B. movement and the G.A.A.

When the Sinn Fein movement was started in Galway in 1905, Thomas Kilkelly was I.R.B. Centre for the county, but he 'stood by' the Parliamentary Party. At that time, Tom Kenny of Craughwell, became I.R.B. Centre for the county Galway and he was appointed from Dublin to lead Sinn Fein in the county. He was assisted by Stephen Jordan, Larry Lardner, both of Athenry, and many others, and the younger men of the district rallied a round him.

From this time onwards, Kenny used go to Dublin fairly often and became acquainted with Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Austin Stack, Sean Milroy, Eoin O'Duffy, Lorcan O'Toole, Dinny McCullough, Dick Fitzgerald and many of the leaders. I was familiar with the names of these men from listening to him telling of discussion he had with them long before they became known to the general public.

Kenny had come under police notice and was regarded by them as being a dangerous man. On his trips to Dublin and elsewhere he was always followed by two detectives. Often he tried to trick them, but only once was he successful and that was on a journey from Dublin to Waterford when he succeeded in evading them.

In 1909 there was a disputed farm in Craughwell and the walls were broken down twice. Two bailiffs were sent out from Loughrea to build the walls under police protection. A meeting of the Craughwell Circle of the I.R.B. was held to discuss what action should be taken. It was decided to appoint three men to fire at the two bailiffs, not with the intention of killing them, but only to frighten them off. On the appointed day the bailiffs were fired at and both of them were wounded. An R.I.C. man named McGoldrick, who was protecting the bailiffs, fired at the attackers and followed them; the attackers fired back at him so as to stop him from following them. In the end McGoldrick got so close to one of the men that he had no option but to shoot McGoldrick dead. After the shooting, an R.I.C. hut was built in Craughwell to accommodate the extra police who had been drafted into the village. There were 36 R.I.C. stationed in Craughwell between the barracks and the hut.

Two men - Tom Hynes and Michael Dermody - were arrested and charged with the murder of Constable McGoldrick. Both of them were I.R.B. men but were not at the shooting. They were

tried in Galway and Limerick and on both occasions the jury disagreed. They were then brought to Dublin and the jury again disagreed. They were released in June 1910, and on their return home they got a great welcome from the people, even members of U.I.L. joined in.

There was a strong branch of the U.I.L. in Craughwell and the members of it were very antagonistic towards Kenny, due to the fact that he and his associates were attracting many recruits to Sinn Fein from the U.I.L.

About this time, the English Under Secretary made a statement in the English House of Commons which included the phrase "Was Ireland going to be governed by a Water Bailiff in Dublin and a blacksmith in Galway". Major John McBride was the person referred to as the Water Bailiff, and Tom Kenny as the Galway blacksmith.

A fight between the supporters of Sinn Fein and the members of the U.I.L. started in Craughwell on 16th December 1910. The U.I.L. was supported tooth and nail by the rifle butts and batons of the R.I.C. The fights broke out every week and continued for almost two years. The R.I.C. always took the side of the U.I.L.

The U.I.L. initiated a boycott against Kenny. It proved very successful. He worked as a blacksmith for Mr. Concannon of Rockfield, who sacked him on orders from the U.I.L. At this time, Sean McDermott came from Dublin to Craughwell as mediator, but the U.I.L. refused to discuss the matter with him. Eventually the antagonism died out.

I was sworn into the I.R.B. in 1913 by Archie Heron as a member of the Craughwell Circle. Tom Kenny was Centre.

In June 1914, a company of the Volunteers was organised in Rockfield. It was started by the supporters of Sinn Fein. Some time later, a company was formed in Craughwell. It was started and controlled by the U.I.L. I joined the Rockfield

Company on its formation. Drill parades were held twice a week. The instructor was Johnny Naughton, an ex-soldier of the British army. The first captain of the company was Morgan Healy. After about four or five weeks, a meeting of the Craughwell I.R.B. Circle was held. Kenny pointed out that Healy was not suitable for the job, and the Circle decided to have him removed. Subsequently this was done, and Gilbert Morrissey was elected captain. Gilbert was an I.R.B. man. There were approximately 40 men in the company, about half of whom were I.R.B. men.

About the autumn of 1914, a review of all Volunteers in Co. Galway was held in "The Park", Athenry, now the Kenny Memorial Park. The salute was taken by Colonel Maurice Moore and The O'Rahilly was on the platform. The town was decorated with bunting, banners, etc. for the occasion. I remember one of the banners across the street bore the inscription: "Home Rule or else".

I continued with the Rockfield Company until some time in 1915, when I got a transfer to the Clarenbridge Company of the Volunteers and to the Clarenbridge Circle of the I.R.B., as Clarenbridge was nearer to me and all my friends and associates were in the Clarenbridge area. Eamon Corbett was captain of the Clarenbridge Company. The split did not affect the company as most of the members were I.R.B. men.

A monster review of the Volunteers was held in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, at which John Redmond took the salute and addressed the Volunteers. The Clarenbridge Company did not attend this review, but the Craughwell Company, which was controlled by the U.I.L., attended it.

Some time in 1915, Fr. Henry Feeney was appointed C.C. of Clarenbridge and he threw himself wholeheartedly into the advancement of the Volunteers and did everything in his power

to encourage us. Meetings of the officers were held in his house, and even bombs were manufactured there. He always attended our parades.

Soon after my transfer to Clarenbridge, the company was visited by Liam Mellows. He was very boyish-looking and full of enthusiasm for his work. He impressed us tremendously by his determination and, looking at his slight figure and boyish appearance, we wondered where all his determination came from. He visited us several times until he was arrested and deported to England.

On St. Patrick's Day 1916, a parade of all companies of the Irish Volunteers in Co. Galway was held in Galway City. The Clarenbridge Company, under Captain Eamon Corbett, marched from Clarenbridge to Oranmore railway station and went by rail to Galway. All the members of the company carried shotguns. On arrival at Galway we marched to the rear of the County Buildings which was the assembly point. Practically every man on the parade was armed with some kind of weapon. The vast majority had shotguns and a few had rifles; others had long-handled pikes. The parade moved off through Shop Street, circled to the right and through Newcastle back to the assembly point. En route, we were subjected to cat-calls and jeers from the 'separation women', i.e., the wives of British soldiers who were serving in France, etc. R.I.C. men from every barrack in the county were present and placed themselves at different points along the route, and in their notebooks wrote the names of men they knew who carried arms. It was from the lists so compiled that the Volunteers were arrested after the Rising. Later, when the Galway prisoners were being questioned by the Sankey Commission, the chairman of the Commission told them the type of weapon they carried on the parade. We returned to Oranmore by train and marched from there to Clarenbridge where we were dismissed.

Training from this on was intensified. We continued to parade regularly twice weekly. In addition to drilling, instruction in the use of arms and lectures on military subjects, we carried out field exercises and manoeuvres.

On Holy Thursday night 1916, Liam Mellows arrived in Loughrea in disguise and slipped quietly into Mr. O'Flaherty, Draper, by the back way. O'Flaherty was an old Fenian and was one of the pall-bearers at the funeral of O'Donovan-Rossa in Dublin.

At this time, the house of Mrs. Walsh of Killeeneen was the recognised headquarters of the battalion. On Good Friday, John Corbett, Patrick Walsh (both since deceased) and my brother, Ned Newell, all members of the Clarenbridge Company, were instructed to go to O'Flaherty's of Loughrea and to escort Liam Mellows to Walsh's of Killeeneen. Each of them took turn in carrying Liam on his bicycle and arrived safely at Killeeneen. That night, Volunteers armed with revolvers were placed on the roads leading to Walsh's where Liam was staying. I was on duty on the bohereen leading to Rhynn village with Peadar Corbett, since deceased. Our instructions were not to allow any suspicious-looking stranger to pass. We were relieved after a few hours. This outpost duty was continued day and night until Easter Monday night when the Volunteers were mobilised for the Rising.

During Holy Week we received instructions to go to Confession on Easter Saturday and to receive Holy Communion at 11 o'clock Mass at Roveagh Church on Sunday. We were also instructed to bring all arms, equipment and a few days' rations and that we would have breakfast in the church grounds after Mass. The breakfast would be prepared for us by the Cumann na mBan.

All the Volunteers attended the Mass, as instructed, and

afterwards had breakfast in the church grounds. Fr. Feeney, Liam Mellows, Eamon Corbett, Martin Niland and Pat Callanan "The Hare", along with some of the Cumann na mBan, were there.

About 3 o'clock in the afternoon we were dismissed by Eamon Corbett. He told us to remain near our homes and to be ready for a quick mobilisation.

Early on Easter Monday morning I went with another man for a car of seaweed to the village of Tawin, a distance of about 12 miles. On the way home with the seaweed, somewhere between Oranmore and Clarenbridge, we met "The Hare" cycling towards us. He jumped off the bike and said: "Hurry home, Newell. The Volunteers are out in Dublin and I'm going to Oranmore. When you have delivered the seaweed, go to Killeeneen". I arrived home at about 5 p.m. and went to Killeeneen. In the meantime, "The Hare" had been back in Killeeneen and had left again. Later that night, I was sent by Eamon Corbett to Clarenbridge to instruct the Volunteers to come fully armed to Killeeneen. All the men of the company came to Killeeneen that night. Among those present at Walsh's that night were: Fr. Feeney, Liam Mellows, Eamon Corbett, Martin Niland, Padraig Fahy and, of course, Mrs. Walsh. (I would like to say here that Mrs. Walsh was a grand type of Irishwoman. She had an intense love of Ireland and everything Irish. She and her family were heart and soul with the Volunteers. From before the Rising and right through the War of Independence her home was "open house" for the Volunteers and I.R.A. and there was always a warm welcome for them. She was most self-sacrificing and it is well known that very often, having fed the Volunteers at night, that she had nothing left for the family breakfast in the morning; but she was only too happy to help the cause of freedom. She adored Mellows and he held her in the highest esteem).

At about 8 o'clock on Tuesday morning we were lined up outside Walsh's. Practically every man was armed with a shot gun. Before we moved off, Eamon Corbett sang the following song:

I.

"For thee we stand, O native land,
 To thee we pledge devotion;
 Our love for thee will ever be
 As boundless as the ocean.
 For ages past, with voices massed
 Have poets hymned thy story;
 But soldiers now upon thy brow
 Shall poise a crown of glory.

CHORUS

Then forward for the hour has come
 To free our fettered sireland;
 'Mid cannon boom and roar of gun
 We'll for God and Ireland.

FIGHT

II.

What matter if the road be long,
 We'll tread it to the end, boys;
 What matter if the foe be strong,
 Our country we'll defend, boys.
 The star of hope illumines the way
 Our fathers trod before us,
 God send the light of freedom's day
 To dawn in splendour o'er us.

Repeat chorus

III.

Out yonder leaps the beacon fire
 To guide us through the valley;
 Around us throng our martyred sires
 to harken and to rally.
 Strike home for God and Ireland now,
 Strike home for all we treasure;
 And if the foeman drink - we vow
 To give him brimming measure.

Repeat chorus.

We set off to march to Clarenbridge, a distance of about four miles. On the way ~~Martin~~ ~~in~~ ~~land~~ and I collected a quantity of ammunition at Killeeneen New School. We called at the house of Edward Burke, an ex-R.I.C. man ^{and} ~~^~~ seized a single and a double barrel shotgun, a revolver and two bicycles. We continued through the demesne and arrived at the convent gate, Clarenbridge, where we were halted and given right turn. Mellows,

standing at the right-hand side of the company, addressed us. He asked for twelve Volunteers to step out. Practically the whole company stepped forward. He then selected twelve men and instructed them to proceed in front of the main body into the village. We proceeded into Clarenbridge and launched an attack on the R.I.C. Barracks. During the attack, the Parish Priest, Fr. Tully, came on the scene and remonstrated with Mellows to call off the attack. Mellows refused to do so unless the R.I.C. surrendered. He asked Fr. Tully to call on the police to surrender. Fr. Tully did so, but they refused, and we resumed the attack. After a while, the attack was called off.

Before the attack, all roads leading to Clarenbridge had been blocked by trees, mineral water cases, etc.

Shortly after the attack had started, a policeman cycling to Clarenbridge from Kilcolgan was called on by the outpost to halt and put up his hands. He made an attempt to draw his revolver and one of the outpost - my brother Ned - opened fire on him and wounded him. He was brought into the convent where he received medical attention.

About noon, we proceeded to Oranmore to reinforce the Maree and Oranmore companies who were to attack Oranmore R.I.C. barrack. When we arrived there we discovered that they had already attacked the barrack, but without success.

Mellows got a message from Galway that a strong force of R.I.C. had got on the outgoing train at Galway and that they were coming to Oranmore. I don't know who brought the message, but the train had not reached Oranmore when he got it.

Immediately, Mellows received the message, he sent a Volunteer to the railway station, a distance of about three quarters of a mile, to find out if the police got off the train and what their strength was. The train arrived in the station before the Volunteer got there. They got off the train and spotted

the Volunteer and opened fire on him. The Volunteer jumped on his bike and in a stooped position and under cover of a wall got safely away and reported to Mellows that the police had got off the train.

There were three companies of Volunteers in Oranmore at this time. They were: Maree, Oranmore and Clarenbridge, about 130 men altogether. We got the command to 'fall in' and we marched out the Athenry road. Mellows remained behind; he was the last to leave and took cover at the gable of Reilly's public-house until the R.I.C. arrived in the village from the station and, when they were about to enter the R.I.C. barrack, he opened fire on them with, I think, an automatic pistol from a distance of 25 yards.

We marched along the main Oranmore-Athenry road to the Agricultural College, Athenry, a distance of about six miles. We arrived at the college after dark and the following companies were already there: Athenry, Rockfield (Craughwell), Newcastle, Derrydonnell, Cussaun, Kilconiron. We remained in the farmyard attached to the college that night and slept in the outhouses on hay and straw. On the grounds of the college there was an R.I.C. hut garrisoned by a sergeant and three or four constables. Soon after we took over the farmyard, the R.I.C. hurriedly evacuated the hut. On instructions, some Volunteer went to the hut and took away records and documents which the R.I.C. had left in it.

We paraded early next morning (Wednesday). We were ordered by an officer - I cannot remember who he was - to yoke the horses to the carts and load them up with potatoes etc. While we were doing so, a scout named Casserly came with the news that Castlegar and Claregalway companies had ambushed a convoy of R.I.C. at Carnmore Crossroad and were on their way after him across the mountain to join the main-body at the farmyard. They arrived about a quarter of an hour later.

A scout came in from the Athenry direction with the news that a number of R.I.C. men had moved out of Athenry and had gone into the Agricultural College land on the opposite side of the road and were moving in a south westerly direction towards the farmyard. Captain Eamon Corbett got five or six men armed with rifles across the main road into the Mulpit road and opened fire on the R.I.C. men who were advancing towards them. The police returned the fire and retreated back into the town. While Corbett was advancing to meet the R.I.C., a Volunteer named Good from the Athenry Company, took a party of Volunteers and travelled along the north side of the railway towards Athenry with the intention of coming in behind the R.I.C. and cutting them off from the town, but before he had completed the movement, the R.I.C. had already retreated back to the town.

Neither side suffered any casualties during this engagement. We then got the order to 'fall in' and marched to Moyode Castle, about four miles distant. We remained in Moyode that night and Thursday. Mellows established his headquarters in the Castle and there was considerable headquarters activity while we were there. Patrols were sent out on the different roads to get any information about enemy activity and to attack enemy patrols that they might come across.

During our stay in Moyode, Tom Kenny came several times on horseback and had discussions with Mellows. On Thursday, a party of Volunteers went to the R.I.C. barracks in the village of Tallyho. The barrack had been evacuated and the Volunteers took away the documents and records.

The potatoes commandeered in the farmyard proved to be uneatable, and a party of Volunteers were sent out with horses and carts, which had also been commandeered at the Agricultural College, to the farm of Joseph King, an extensive farmer, to

get some good eating potatoes. While the potatoes were being loaded, the escort saw a party of R.I.C. moving in the direction of Moyode. The Volunteers got on the roof of a shed and opened fire on the R.I.C. and drove them back.

On Thursday night, all the Volunteers were instructed to assemble in the yard. Mellows and Alf Monaghan addressed us and pointed out that any man who was not prepared to continue with them was free to leave and that they could do so honourably and that nothing worse would be thought of him. When some of the men were leaving, Martin Niland was standing on the archway leading to the yard. He was waving a tricolour and saying in solemn tones: "This is the flag, boys, this is the flag". His object was to encourage the men to stand firm. The majority of the men who left that night returned the following day (Friday).

On Friday Mellows got word in Moyode that the Craughwell Company of the National (Redmond) Volunteers were prepared to join up with us if we would accept them. On receiving this information, Mellows sent Gerry Deely and myself out to the villages to contact the prominent members of the Redmond Volunteers. Our instructions from Mellows was to tell them that they would be gladly accepted if they came. We carried out these instructions by interviewing several prominent members, but they refused.

On our way back to Moyode we came across a party of Volunteers of the Moyode garrison who were commandeering two loads of potatoes from a local farmer, when two cartloads of flour, being carted from Galway to Farrell's Bakery, Loughrea, came along. We left the potatoes with the farmer and commandeered the flour which we took to Moyode.

On Friday evening, the garrison was assembled in the yard and marched out towards the south and continued for about ten miles. We were halted at a place called Coxtown; two priests had

then arrived on the scene. They had consultations with Mellows and his staff, after which we were marched on a mile further to Lime Park House which was unoccupied at the time. Those of us who were not on outpost duty went into the outhouse for a sleep. After some time we were roused by the blowing of a whistle and told to assemble at the front of the house.

Mellows and a priest were standing on the step in front of the hall door. The priest addressed us. He pointed out that the sacrifice contemplated would be useless, that the position we were in was untenable, resistance futile and that we had nothing to offer in the nature of retaliation, and that for future service to our country as living Volunteers, we would be more useful than to go through the holocaust that would be inevitable. Someone shouted: "What is the captain doing?" Mellows said: "As for myself, I am fighting on", and Tom Fahy of Tawin, Oranmore, and William Kelly of Colwood, Athenry, shouted: "We stand with you".

We disbanded. I went home and then went on the run. I evaded arrest until the morning of 12th May when I was arrested and taken to Moyvilla R.I.C. barracks; from there on the same day I was taken to Athenry Barracks. Later the same day, I was taken by train to Broadstone Station, Dublin, and marched by the back streets to Richmond Barracks. We were put into rooms, 25 in each room. When we entered the room allocated to us there was a young man already there seated on blankets. We got into conversation with him. He told us that he had been wounded in the leg during the Rising in Dublin and that he was not able to stand and that he had not yet received any medical attention. His name was Noel Lemass. Two days later an ambulance came and brought him to King George V Hospital.

During our stay of one week in Richmond Barracks, we were fed on bully beef, dog biscuits and water. After a week we were

paraded on the square and marched to the North Wall, put on cattle boats. Our boat went to Glasgow and we were brought to Barlinnie Detention Barracks, Glasgow. About 60 of the prisoners on our boat were put on the train for Perth. On the voyage to Glasgow the spirits of the men were very high, although we did not know our destination.

We were kept in Barlinnie Detention Barracks for four or five weeks and all the time we were in solitary confinement. We were then served with internment orders which stated that we were to be interned in an internment camp at Frongoch, North Wales. Two days later, we were marched to the station and put on a train. We travelled all night to Balla which was beside Frongoch Camp. We were interned in the south camp which was an old distillery and had been used until a short time before our arrival as an internment camp for German prisoners of war.

'Ginger' O'Connell was the first camp commandant and he was replaced by Michael Staines. There were about 2000 prisoners in the camp. After some time we were brought in batches to London to appear before the Sankey Commission. While in London we were kept in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison. When I appeared before the Commission I was asked if I took part in the rebellion in Galway. I said "Yes". I was asked if I was armed. I said "Yes". I was then asked who was the leader. I said "Liam Mellows". I was also asked why I had taken up arms. I replied that I thought that my country had a right to be free. He then said: "Is that all you have to say for yourself?" His next query was: "Do you know Edward Burke?" I said: "Yes". He replied by saying: "This is what he has got to say about you". "That you with others on the morning of 25th April called at Edward Burke's father's house and took away two shotguns, a revolver and two bicycles." That finished my interview.

During the few days we were in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison we were visited by William Duffy, M.P. for South Galway. He seemed very sympathetic towards us and asked us if we had any complaints. We made no complaint.

As a result of the investigations of the Sankey Commission, about 1500 prisoners were released during the next few weeks. I was one of the 500 prisoners who were not released until Christmas 1916. Some few weeks before we were released, John Redmond stated in the English House of Commons that the best Christmas box the Government could give to the Irish people was to release all the prisoners.

Signed: Martin Newell

Date: 21st January 1957

Witness: Dean Brennan Lieut. Col.

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