

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MIL TA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,664

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1664

**Witness**

Thomas Lillis  
Railway Road,  
Kilkee, Co.Clare

**Identity.**

Acting Section Commander, A.S.U. Dublin Bde.  
Commandant (Post Truce)

**Subject.**

Kilferia Coy. I.Vols. Co.Clare, 1913-18  
2nd Battalion Dublin Bde. and A.S.Unit,  
1918-21

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

Nil

File No S.2985

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS LILLIS,

Railway Road, Kilkee, Co. Clare.

I am a native of Tarmon (Lisdeen P.O.), Co. Clare, where I was born in 1896.

I attended the National School at my native place until I reached the age of 14 years. I then took up farming work at home.

I think my father was a member of the Land League. However, when in 1913 I joined the Irish National Volunteers he told me to have sense and to stay at home. This unit of the Irish National Volunteers covered, as a company, the area around Tullaroe, Co. Clare. The officer then in charge was an ex-policeman of, I think, the South African Police Force. His name was O'Keeffe. We held the usual training parades. These took place twice weekly, usually consisting of close-order drill. We also had a big parade of the Volunteers from most of West Clare. It was held in Kilkee and the principal speaker in addressing the parade was Fr. Alfred Moloney, curate of Kilkee.

In 1914 there came the "Volunteer Split". In our case those siding with Redmond or the National Volunteers gradually dropped away, and those of us left adhered to MacNeill or the Irish Volunteers. Our numbers were small and Tullaroe combined with Kilferia to form one company. Things were more or less in a state of suspended animation and the company faded away for a while.

As far as I can recall, it would be some time in 1915 when the company revived and we met regularly for arms drill with wooden guns. We also had a few shotguns and picked up here and there an odd revolver or two. Our strength would then have been about 20 men. The Company Captain was Simon McInerney; McGrath was 1st Lieutenant, and Tim McInerney, 2nd Lieut.

Around this time we were engaged in making ball ammunition for shotguns. For this we had a mould. The ammunition consisted of a single lead bullet, moulded to fit the shotgun cartridge case. It had a range of about 200 yards using the existing explosive charge of the shotgun cartridge. We made this ammunition in a disused house at Kilfera which we used as our meeting place.

We continued routine Volunteer work in the unoccupied house in Kilfera after the 1916 Rebellion. (We got no orders for any action in the Rebellion). Recruits were carefully selected and only those considered "sound" were asked to join. During the winter I was asked by Simon McInerney to form a company or half-company in Blackweir. I did so and got about twenty men. We carried on much the same work as in Kilfera. I was ordered to form a Sinn Féin Club early in 1917, and Thomas Shannon, who was afterwards a Sinn Féin Magistrate and was shot by Crown forces on St. Patrick's night, 1921, was one of the first members. The conscription scare swelled the ranks and the making of pikes and public drilling was the order of the day. It was not much different up to March, 1918, when I went to Dublin and joined Peadar Clancy's company of the 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, with Simon McInerney.

After the 1917 East Clare election of de Valera there was a spate of flag waving. I sent two men to hang a flag on the railway telephone wires at Blackweir one night and the station-master apparently heard them and came out with a shotgun. The flag was up but he made them leave the ladder. The following morning when I heard of it I took one of the men of the previous night and took away the ladder. The station-master came out with his gun again. There was a wordy battle - I doing most of the talking -

and I'm sure the language scared him as he made no attempt to stop us.

In Dublin I went to work for Kavanagh's of the Coombe (later K. & S.), and Simon McInerney came a week later to the same job. Our activities then were collecting rifles from different parts of the city with Peadar Clancy for transfer to the country. We also attempted the disarming of a British military guard at Amiens St. P.O. We mobilised twice at Banba Hall and the raid was to take place if the sentries slept, as it was reported they did. We were in place on two different nights at Amiens St. but the sentries were always awake. We made a raid on the N.A.C.B. garage at York St. and captured three or four Ford vans. Peadar Clancy was in charge. We also raided for ammunition consigned to R.I.C. at Sir John Rogerson's Quay. We found ammunition boxes but they were filled with chalk. On the way home Pat McGrath of Aungier St. was shot by detectives at College Green after an exchange of shots. One or two detectives were killed, it is believed, by Peadar Clancy who accompanied McGrath. Time of shooting was about 1 a.m.

I was then under an assumed name (Tom McNamara). About June, 1920, both Simon McInerney and I were advised to leave the city. The British were after a man named McNamara who was a member of the Squad and they had already shot one McNamara, and I was only just in time as the military raided Kavanagh's of the Coombe for a McNamara the day after I left. Both McInerney and myself then worked in Roundwood, Co. Wicklow, in the making of a reservoir for the Dublin Corporation until December, 1920, when we were called to Dublin to join the A.S.U. under Paddy Flanagan as Captain.

Micky Sweeney of Harold's Cross was our Section Leader, and our area of operations was the south side - Cork St., Thomas St., Meath St., Dolphin's Barn, S.C. Road, Harold's Cross, and generally in the 4th Battalion area. I cannot recall our first operation and the following record of jobs may not be given in sequence. We used to assemble at a disused brickworks in Mount Argus and did some revolver practice there until it was surrounded one morning by military and R.I.C. Fortunately for us (about twelve men) they were too early. There were four Crossley tenders of R.I.C. and Tans and about four more of military and also Auxiliaries. I met them as they were coming back. I was going over Dolphin's Barn Bridge at the time. I had three revolvers and three bombs and it is still a mystery to me how I wasn't halted. The guns and bombs had been left by myself and two others the previous evening at my sister's, Mrs. Coyle's, Rehobath Place, Dolphin's Barn.

There was an ambush of a Ford car at Dolphin's Barn by the section. Five R.I.C. were in the car. Five of our men at Dolphin's Barn opened revolver fire. Jim McGuinness and myself were at the White Heather Laundry with bombs. It was reported that one bomb landed in front near the driver and wounded him severely. He drove the car to Wellington Barracks and we were informed that all were wounded and that the car was on fire. Later on we captured two Crossley tenders and one touring Crossley from a British working party coming from Baldonnell. We dumped the tenders in the mountains and returning with the car were spotted by a plane. We burned the car and crossed the mountain into the Pine Forest, reaching Edmondstown village about midnight. The following morning, at revolver practice before breakfast, I shot a cow accidentally, which made us hurry away. We were gone

about fifteen minutes when military surrounded the village, fired several shots and were blamed for shooting the cow. The owner got £20 compensation. But for shooting the cow we would be captured. Then there came the ambush of a military lorry at Half Way House, Crumlin, containing sixteen soldiers. The plans for the capture miscarried but it was reported that most of the soldiers were killed or wounded as bombs exploded inside the lorry. Micky Sweeney was wounded as one bomb bounced off the lorry and exploded in front of him. He was taken to Mrs. Sullivan's, Kimmage Road, by Simon McInerney on a bicycle, with Simon riding another and Micky's hand across his shoulder. He was then taken to the Mater Hospital, where he remained until shortly before the Truce. This ambush was about May, 1921, I believe.

The shooting of two mules by Simon and myself at Harold's Cross Road and the capture of a Ford van near the canal at Portobello Barracks took place around this time, also the capture of two bikes from British soldiers near Leonard's Corner (self only), capture of bike at Harold's Cross Bridge by Jim McGuinness and self.

I was at the Custom House burning with Pádraig O'Connor and Jim McGuinness. We fired on Auxiliaries who had I.R.A. party held up against Brooks Thomas's wall. Our fire enabled them to get away. I believe one of them was Oscar Traynor.

An ambush of a troop train at Ballyfermot came on the Friday before the Truce, nine of the section taking part. I believe the train pulled up at the next station and that some of the occupants were wounded. An ambush of four R.I.C. also occurred at this period. We fired

from behind a wall as the R.I.C. cycled along the road. It was reported two were killed and two wounded. Also at this period we captured two military lorries at Dolphin's Barn brickworks. We burned one and went for a joy ride in the other, Micky Sweeney driving with a soldier's cap on. We dumped the lorry into a quarry filled with water in Kimmage Road. We also made a raid for a military officer's laundry at the Metropolitan Laundry, Inchicore. The manager slipped out the back way and informed the military at Kilmainham. The military delayed on the way to hold up a van which was to take away any stuff we captured. Our men got away in a horse and trap. Pádraig O'Connor said one man was missing and I went into the laundry to look. There was no trace of him. I then went down the elevator to search - still no trace. I came back up and as I opened the door of the elevator the military were in the hall. I immediately went down again and dumped my parabellum in a bag of sawdust and came out the back way, which was beside the jail. As I came on to the road the military were searching Paddy Rigney and the others who had been in the van. One of the soldiers was looking at me as I walked along by them and I recognised him as one of the men in the lorries we captured at Dolphin's Barn. I am certain he recognised me, but he turned his back. I went into a pub and when the military were gone I went back and recovered my gun. When I got back to the boys they had already informed my sister that I had been captured. I was also in an ambush of private cars containing Auxiliary officers at Thomas St. and Meath St. It was reported that a Colonel Winters

was wounded. I was with Paddy Rigney on that job. Then I took part in an ambush of two dispatch riders (a motor cycle and a side-car) at ~~some~~ place. I was with Simon McInerney. It was reported that one dispatch rider was killed. Simon McInerney was wounded in forearm by return fire. I took his gun and brought him to Jim Harper's house near Francis St.

One evening we fired shots in Cornmarket in order to get military or Auxies out from the Castle as we had an ambush prepared. There was also an attempted ambush of two lorries of Auxies in North King St. Simon McInerney, Tom Cowley, and myself went at Bob Oman's request as he was in charge of the job. (Oman was Captain after Peadar Clancy).

Before the Truce I had for a period acted temporarily as Section Commander in the Active Service unit. I took part in the Civil War against the Treaty and ended my I.R.A. service as a Commandant.

Signed:

Thomas Lillis

Date:

28<sup>th</sup> August 1957

Witness:

James Larkin  
(Investigator).

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