

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURD STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. **W.S. 528**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 528

Witness

John McAnerney,
Erne Mineral Water Company,
Clones,
Co. Monaghan.

Identity.

Member of:

- (a) I.R.B. Armagh, 1917 - ;
- (b) Irish Volunteers, Armagh, 1917 - ;
- (c) I.R.A. Clones, 1920 - .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Armagh-Monaghan, 1917-1923;
- (b) Engagements with B/Specials 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S.1799**

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by John McAnerney.

Erne Mineral Water Works, Clones, Co. Monaghan.

Previous to 1917 I was a member of the Gaelic League. Associated with me in the Gaelic League was Mr. Patrick McGilligan, now T.D. and Minister for Finance in Dail Eireann and then a Professor in St. Patrick's College, Armagh.

In 1917 I was asked to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood by Seamus Connolly, now an Excise Officer in Dublin. I expressed my willingness to join and he swore me into the organisation. There were certainly more than one Circle and perhaps more than a couple of Circles in existence in Armagh in my time. The I.R.B. in Armagh City area had a direct continuity down from the Fenian days. Blaney Rice was for a time Head Centre for Armagh. This man was a native of County Monaghan but living practically on the County Armagh border. He was grandfather of the late Eamon Rice who died a few years ago and was T.D. for County Monaghan.

Each Circle of the I.R.B. contained about twelve members. Owing to the secret nature of the organisation it was difficult to get to know members of other Circles. The main function of the I.R.B. was the collection of intelligence, especially the location of arms and in addition keeping track of police spies, and others doing British Intelligence work.

At the time I joined the I.R.B. I would not be taken into the Irish Volunteers as I was considered both too young and of rather small stature. Shortly after I joined the I.R.B. I was admitted into the Irish Volunteers without further question.

The first activity of a military nature in which I participated was a raid for arms on a family residence - Copes,

Dromilly. This was a very large house and was occupied by the Copes family. We had information that Ulster Volunteer Force arms were stored in this house. A large contingent of Volunteers took part in the raid - Volunteers from Armagh, Ballymacnab and East Tyrone. Frank Aiken and some of his men from South Armagh and John Doran and men from East Down also participated. This raid proved abortive as we only got one old shot gun.

About early 1920 I went to Clones in North Monaghan to work. I got a transfer from the I.R.A. in Armagh to the Clones Company. Thomas Cosgrave was O/C., Clones Company, at this time and the Company strength was about seventy men. Dan Hogan and Eoin O'Duffy were both on the 'run' at this time. When I arrived in Clones it was the practice of the I.R.A. to parade the streets of the town at night and the R.I.C. remained within their barracks during the hours of darkness.

Whilst in Clones I took part in a few raids for poteen and I also took part in the kidnapping of Railway men who had disobeyed a G.H.Q. order not to take part in the moving of British troops or munitions on the Railway. One of the men we kidnapped was named Wallace. This man was released after a caution and following his release he continued in ignoring the G.H.Q. order, so he was fired on and wounded. After a few months in Clones I again returned to Armagh.

On my return to Armagh we kidnapped a Railway man named Stutt. This man's record for disobeying G.H.Q. orders was bad as he got several cautions before we were forced to kidnap him. He was tarred and feathered as a punishment. This affair caused a bit of a sensation in the town.

In September 1920 we carried out a general raid for arms as ordered for the whole country at this time. Our

party raided several Unionist houses and one Nationalist house. We met no opposition in any of these raids. This general raid for arms in the Armagh district provided a haul of about twelve shot guns and a few revolvers.

We had at this time a fair number of revolvers in the Armagh Company. The I.R.A. were in touch with soldiers in the Military barracks and some of these soldiers were selling us guns. One soldier who deserted from the Army here handed us his rifle and some of the boys provided him with civilian clothes.

I took part, with seven or eight others, in a raid for arms on the house of a Mr. Coote. This man was a Commander in the B/Specials. The raid was carried out one evening about 3 p.m. during daylight. We met no opposition in this raid. We only got a miniature rifle, a shot gun and two pairs of binoculars. A few other raids took place on the same evening in which I did not participate, in which a considerable amount of arms was obtained.

About April or May, 1921, two Nationalist houses were fired into by B/Specials. One Nationalist was wounded in the shooting and his house set on fire. An order was given to the I.R.A. that a reprisal for this outrage should be carried out as a punishment and a deterrent against future happenings of a similar nature. Two B/Specials' houses were set on fire and burned. None of the inmates of the houses was molested but they were warned of most unpleasant consequences if any more Nationalist property or persons were destroyed or attacked.

My next operation was an attack on a B/Special's house - since known as the attack on Todd's Corner. The Armagh Company decided to raid a number of B/Specials' houses in a

district about four miles from Armagh city. There were about sixty men in all mobilised for this operation of which only about twenty carried arms. It was anticipated that the operation would be a simple one. Some of the houses which we planned to attack were in Charlie McGlennon's area and he had promised to co-operate with us.

The first house we approached to raid about daylight in the morning belonged to a family named Georges. It proved most unfortunate for us that all the B/Specials from the other houses to be raided were accidentally assembled in Georges' house for the purpose of getting refreshments after coming off patrol. As soon as we came quite close to the house a heavy fire was opened on us from the house and we were forced to take cover. One of our men named Gerry Hughes got wounded in both his legs. It appeared that a B/Special was on a hill some distance from us and he started to snipe our position and shot Hughes. The bullet which caused the wound was Dumb-Dumb and inflicted horrible wounds on both legs. Hughes had to be taken away at once for medical attention. After we removed Hughes some distance from the danger near Georges' house and seeing that he was being taken to where he would receive medical attention we returned to Georges' house and the attack on it was resumed. The house was burned down but we got no arms from the defenders who succeeded in holding us off until we had to retreat from the vicinity when the danger of reinforcements of military coming from Armagh became urgent.

The above is all the military operations I took part in up to the Truce but in addition an intensive campaigning of road blocking and trenching was carried out in Armagh area for most of the Tan war. Telephone and telegraph wires were frequently cut and mails were seized. This road blocking, wire cuttings and raids had a particular nuisance

value as the British Authorities were given much trouble and expense in watching out for and trying to prevent such activities.

During the Truce period I attended at training practices and training camps in the Company area where we participated in the usual military training and lectures on military subjects.

About May, 1922, a Column was formed to take part in a general attack which was planned to take place on the British Forces in the Six Counties' area. The British Authorities, when they heard or got to know of the attack plans, made a widespread series of raids and arrested a large number of known I.R.A. All over the Six County area many others and myself who had escaped capture went on the 'run' to evade arrest. A camp was started at Castleshane in County Monaghan for the reception of all men who could not live at home owing to the danger of arrest or capture.

Charles McGlennon and Frank Hannaway were in charge of this camp and it was not long until we had about 120 men at least serving in the Camp. This Camp was set up in the Castle and the outoffices at Colonel Lucas's place and we converted the buildings into a military camp where all the men serving there received an intensive training in the use of arms and in military tactics. Whilst serving in this Camp I took part with others in a few incursions into the Six Counties' area. In one instance we went in to protect a Nationalist area in which the B/Specials had threatened to carry out reprisals, and on another occasion to remove a consignment of arms to safe dumps.

On the 15th July, 1922, a party of us were sent to the military barracks in Dundalk, which was then our Divisional Headquarters, to mount guard as part of the garrison there.

On Saturday night, 16th July, the Military barracks in Dundalk were captured by soldiers from the 5th Northern Division, County Monaghan area, and we were all made prisoners.

On Sunday, 17th July, Colonel O'Donohue addressed us and asked us to join the National Army, and he stated that the men joining up would get the same rank in the National Army as they held in the I.R.A. One of our men inquired from Colonel O'Donohue what was the alternative to joining the National Army and the answer he got was "Mountjoy". We refused to join the Army and we were released that evening. General Frank Aiken and his Staff Officers who were in the Military Barracks when it was captured were made prisoners, as we were on Saturday night, and were removed to Dundalk Prison on Sunday evening.

On Monday the 18th July, we started back towards Castleshane and duly arrived there. We remained in Castleshane up to September, 1922. We had dumped our arms shortly after our return to Castleshane from Dundalk in late July and from then up to September we were unarmed.

In September, 1922, our Camp at Castleshane was surrounded and we were made prisoners. It was the 5th Northern Division - Monaghan men - who took charge of us and removed us all to the Military Barracks in Dundalk. We were kept there a few days and from there we were taken to Newbridge, County Kildare, where we were interned.

In October, 1923, I took part in a general hunger strike and in November, 1923, I was released from Newbridge.

Signed: John McConerney

Date: 6th June 1951

Witness: John McBoyle
6/5/51

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