

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRCE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. <i>606</i>

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 606

**Witness**

James P. Flood,  
25 Frascati Park,  
Blackrock,  
Co. Dublin.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish Volunteers, Granard, 1913 - ;  
Adjutant, Longford Brigade, 1918 - .

**Subject.**

- (a) National activities, Co. Longford, 1907-1921;
- (b) Reorganisation of Irish Volunteers, Longford, 1919;
- (c) Attacks on R.I.C. Barracks, Longford, 1920.

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

Nil

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Statement by James P. Flood,  
25 Frascati Park, Blackrock, Dublin.

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STATEMENT OF MR. JAMES P. FLOOD,  
25 Frascati Park, Blackrock, Co. Dublin - formerly of  
Granard, Co. Longford.

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I made my first contact with Sinn Féin when I came home from school in 1907. I then joined the branch of the National Council in Granard. John Cawley, who was manager of the local Creamery, was a member. Two others whom I also remember were Cassidy and Kenny who were shop assistants in the town. At this time there was great opposition to Sinn Féin. This emanated from the United Irish League and the Hibernians. At the head of the League was Mr. J.P. Farrell, M.P., who also owned the local paper, the "Longford Leader". Very little headway or progress was made by the local branch of Sinn Féin against this opposition until some years later when a man named William Ganley, who was a very prominent member of the United Irish League, broke away from that body and joined Sinn Féin.

Amongst the activities at that time was the collection of funds for election purposes. Later we organised "Myles the Slasher" meetings in Finea to which we brought down speakers from Dublin, with a view to spreading the light of Sinn Féin. P.T. Daly and Walter Cole were amongst the speakers who came down. That more or less covers the activities up to 1913.

In 1913, helped by Dr. Brian Cusack, then a medical student and now living in Lusk, we established the Irish Volunteers in Granard and organised the spread of it throughout Co. Longford. When we had the North Longford Battalion established, we had a very successful Review

and March Past, which was attended by Major Crean. The only arms we had were one converted Mauser rifle, .22 bore, some shotguns and some sporting rifles. Then the split in the Volunteers took place.

As the vast majority of the local Volunteers at that time were in sympathy with Redmond's side, we did not precipitate a split in the local Company. In other words, we allowed the thing to simmer. We were in a position to force the issue, of course, but we thought that it would blow over. The Volunteers in Longford more or less died out from 1914 to 1916. Our activities were mainly anti-recruiting and there was practically nothing of positive Volunteer work being done at all. We were very much in the minority and there was a certain amount of war fever grasping the country then. In fact, we who still supported the Sinn Féin ideal were often called and alluded to as "Pro-Germans".

We in Granard were not aware that a Rebellion was intended until after it started - actually on Easter Monday night. As we were concerned to know what help if any we could give, John Cawley and Paul Cusack ( a brother of Dr. Cusack) set out on Easter Tuesday for Dublin in a car owned and driven by Larry Kiernan, with the object of finding out what was happening there and to get instructions regarding what we were to do. They returned the next day and told us that the Rebellion was well under way, but they did not know what was happening as they could not get any nearer to the city than Lucan and could not contact anyone. The only thing we did was to cut some telegraph wires.

John Cawley was at that time the I.R.B. Centre in Granard. I was not then a member but joined later in 1917. I was told afterwards that some sort of message had been sent by Headquarters in Dublin but probably on account of

the confusion arising from the countermanding order, nothing was done about it and nothing happened in Longford with the exception of the cutting of the telegraph wires referred to. Who received the message from Dublin - if any ever came - I am not in a position to state.

After Easter Week, 1916, John Cawley and Paul Cusack were arrested and interned in Frongoch Camp. They were the only two arrested in the Granard area. Presumably their arrest was due to the fact that they tried to get into the city on Easter Monday.

At the end of December, 1916, the prisoners were released from Frongoch. The Volunteers, however, did not get going again until the Longford election campaign in May 1917. The victory of the Sinn Féin candidate - Joe McGuinness - gave a great boost to Sinn Féin and provided a foundation for building up the Volunteers. In July, 1917, after the Clare election, in which I also took part, Mick Collins and Tom Ashe came to Granard and stayed there for a few days. During their stay, we brought them to Ballinalee to hold a public meeting for the purpose of establishing a branch of Sinn Féin there. We used Sinn Féin as a cover for recruiting and organising the Volunteers. Ashe at first did not want to attend this meeting as he was tired. He came, however, and made a very fine speech. None of the rest of us could speak well. Mick Collins also made a speech but he was not so fluent as Ashe. It was as a result of this speech that Ashe was arrested and imprisoned in Mountjoy, where he died whilst being forcibly fed.

Around this time, we called a meeting in Granard of various officers from North Longford. Mick Collins attended and urged upon us the necessity of starting the Volunteers. He said we would have to get moving and get the organisation going. As far as I can remember, Seán

McKeon and Seán Connolly attended that meeting. Tom Reddington, who was afterwards Brigadier, was there also. He, Reddington, was constantly in contact with us around that time and previously. He was a technical school teacher and, as he had to travel around the county a lot in performing his duties, he had an opportunity of meeting people. Cawley and Paul Cusack also attended this meeting. This meeting was held in Cusack's house at the end of July, 1917. I don't remember meeting McKeon or Connolly very much earlier than that.

In the autumn of 1917 Mick Collins again came to Granard. He went out to Drumlish and spoke at a public meeting there. As a result of the speech he made at this meeting he was arrested and sentenced to three months imprisonment in Sligo Jail. Before his sentence was served he was instructed, <sup>By SH & JP</sup> owing to the conscription crisis to give bail.

With the threatened advent of conscription there was a terrific increase in the Volunteer ranks and the small organised force that we had was very severely strained in trying to deal with them. The pattern in Longford for the rest of that period was the same as in other parts of the county, that is, when the conscription scare died down we reverted to our original numbers.

In June, 1918, quite a number of our people, including Cawley, were arrested in connection with the "German Plot". I was Director of Elections for the Cavan election and, later in the year, I was appointed organiser for the General Election for the whole of Leinster. On this account most of my activities in 1918 were political.

The Volunteer organisation in 1918 consisted of Tom Reddington as Brigadier, Ned Cooney as Brigade Quartermaster and myself as Brigade Adjutant. There was no such thing

as a <sup>organisation</sup> Brigade proper, although there were Battalions existing in North and South Longford. The officers of the two Battalions met at intervals, usually in Reddington's house in Shroid. Those who attended the meetings were Reddington, Ned Cooney, myself, M.F. Ryan and Leo Baxter of Ardagh. Our energies were directed towards keeping the organisation going. Reddington in addition to being Brigadier also acted as O.C. of the Sth. County Battalion. There was no really watertight organisation at all. Leading up to the general election, the Volunteers were kept going on political work rather than on Volunteer work.

After the General Election there was a terrific upsurge. I was away in North Derry where I had been sent to try and increase the poll in our favour at that bye-election. When I returned the Dáil loan had been floated and I did some work in connection with it. I was also busy finishing up the loose ends of the General Election. I was away from home as a result quite a lot throughout 1918 and early in 1919.

On my return I was informed that the Longford Brigade had been reformed and that I had been appointed Adjutant. Reddington was still Brigade O.C. Sean Connolly was Vice O.C. of the Brigade and Ned Cooney was Brigade Quartermaster. This was early in 1919. As far as I can remember, there were five Battalions organised in the county, three in the north and two in the south. There was also a sixth Battalion but this was at a later stage. The Battalions in North Longford were Columcille, Ballinalee and Granard, and in south Longford, Ardagh and Longford, Lanesboro and Rathclyne. When the Dáil assembled early in 1919 it took over the responsibility for the Volunteers and the organisation became known as the I.R.A.

One of the first things the Brigade did was to re-form all the Battalions and replace officers where necessary with

new men who would really be efficient. The Companies within the Battalions were also well organised. We got a communication system working and it ran very smoothly. We had Volunteer dispatch riders and other means of communication such as the Cumann na mBan. Battalion and Brigade Council meetings were held regularly.

One Brigade officer was always present at Battalion Council meetings to see that the work was being carried on efficiently and to check up on activities and see that all instructions issued by the Brigade had been received and likewise to see that all reports and such were rendered by the Battalion to the Brigade. I and Seán Connolly generally attended the meetings of the North County Battalions while Reddington and Cooney did South Longford.

Nothing of a military offensive activity happened in 1919 except active organising work.

The first offensive action occurred on the 5/6th January, 1920, when a rather abortive attempt was made to take Drumlish Barracks. I was not there myself and I don't know who took part in it, but I know that it was mainly organised by Reddington.

When Reddington's wife got very ill, he left the Brigade area and Seán Connolly was acting Brigadier. An arrangement was made to attack the Barracks in Edgeworthstown. After a lot of preparations, we were actually all in position on the night of the 27th May, 1920, when it was called off, as word came that the British military were moving into the area.

In the early months of 1920, we were being pushed very hard by Mick Collins to do something definite. This pressure resulted in the abortive attempt on Drumlish and the attempted attack on Edgeworthstown. Shortly after the Edgeworthstown affair, I called over to see Connolly - I think Reddington was still away. This was on a Sunday



morning and I asked him what report we would send to Headquarters regarding our failure to attack Edgeworthstown. He replied, "We will send no report at all". I said, "We will have to send a report". He replied, "We will send a report when I have another scheme which is under my hat carried out". I said, "What scheme?". He then said, "There's too much talk and I'm only going to tell you and a couple of others. I'm going to attack Ballinamuck Barracks". I remarked that that was a pretty formidable undertaking and asked him how he was going to do it. He replied that he would take it with four or five men. I laughed at this. I could not see how it could be taken as it was ~~a fortress~~ <sup>fortified 9/4</sup> with four castellated towers. Connolly drew a plan for me and described how he was going to attack the Barracks.

This plan was not submitted to the Brigade ~~Comdt.~~ <sup>Council 1/24</sup> and Sean Connolly alone was responsible for it. He was the man who planned it and to him only must go the credit for it. He and a few others did all the planning and preparation for the attack. Although Ballinamuck Barracks was not captured it was completely destroyed and the attack which took place on the 9th-10th June, 1920, was a great success for it raised the morale and prestige of the I.R.A. in Longford immensely. I think it pleased Mick Collins very much because he had been in Ballinamuck and knew what a formidable undertaking it was and the pressure from Headquarters eased off after this.

The Barracks was rendered untenable to the R.I.C. and was evacuated almost immediately. The Brigade now started planning our next attack. As the police were now very active in North Longford, we decided to attack Ballymahon R.I.C. Barracks in South Longford. Again Sean Connolly comes into the picture. Connolly made a complete reconnaissance of the R.I.C. Barracks, and at a

Brigade Council meeting afterwards, he outlined his plan for the attack and capture of it. This plan was approved by the Brigade but there was the difficulty that we had not enough rifles. Up to this we had destroyed Ballinamuck Barracks, but had captured no arms. This time we wanted to get arms and ammunition. We had got some grenades from Dublin and the <sup>plan</sup> idea was that the back of the barracks would be held by men with those grenades, thus forcing the police to come out in front on the street. When the plan was originally considered by the Brigade Council it was considered that it was not feasible for the lack of rifles. This was not, however, the fault of the Brigade as we had tried hard to obtain some from Headquarters.

Some months previous to the attempted attack on Edgeworthstown Barracks, we had collected £37. 10. to get six rifles at £5 odd each and a hundred rounds of ammunition for each rifle. We had been told by Headquarters that, if we could provide that money, we would get them. We sent the money to Dublin by Frank Thornton. Frank used to visit Longford in connection with his business - the New Ireland Assurance Company - and he was also organising for the I.R.B. When Frank returned with the "stuff", we found the Quartermaster General had fooled us, as all we got was six revolvers - four Webley revolvers at £7.10 each and two .38 revolvers at £5 each. What we wanted was rifles; we had enough revolvers.

At a Brigade Council meeting the question arose as to what we were going to do about getting rifles in order to attack Ballymahon. It was decided that someone would have to go to Dublin and see the "Big Fella" (Mick Collins) and that he was not to part with the money until he got the rifles. Seán McKeon was chosen for this job. Seán went

to Dublin and saw the "Big Fella". He returned and brought back six rifles. He was delighted with himself but, when we opened them up, we found we had been <sup>frustrated</sup> fobled again. Two of the rifles were .22; the other four were service rifles alright.

We were now almost on the eve of the attack on Ballymahon Barracks and still we had only about six or seven service rifles. Some said <sup>at Brigade Council</sup> that the position was hopeless as the police would probably spot the position and we would be sunk. Finally it was decided that we would have to fall back on the "Geordie" plan. "Geordie" was a deserter from the British Military Barracks in Longford who had come to us a few months previously. He was sent to work for a farmer in the Ballinalee area and kept under observation by us. He had a plan to disarm the guard in the Top Barracks in Longford. Seán McKeon, with three others, carried out this operation on the night before the attack on Ballymahon Barracks, and with the rifles thus obtained the plan to attack Ballymahon was completely successful.

The attack on Ballymahon Barracks provided the Brigade with all the arms needed, and how well these arms were used is now well known. For my part I was denied the privilege of taking part on any further Brigade activities for on the night before the attack I was arrested by the British Military when returning from a Battalion Council meeting. I was subsequently charged with possession of seditious documents and sentenced to twelve months imprisonment from which I was not released until the Saturday after the Truce in July 1921.

While I was Adjutant of the Longford Brigade, the chief means of communication with General Headquarters was through a Miss Skeffington, daughter of the stationmaster in Longford. A lot of it was done through

the guards on the trains. They, of course, were railway officials. Miss May Maguire, Main Street, Longford, was an alternative address where communications could also be left and collected. I do not know who were her contacts.

There was no Intelligence officer appointed in the Brigade, and the Brigade Adjutant had to carry out these duties also. As an Intelligence officer, I was in touch with a man called Mick Maguire in Mullingar. He was able to get me copies in cipher of all the police messages passing through the Post Office in Mullingar. We got occasional ones from the Longford Post Office but the bulk of them ~~were~~ <sup>came from</sup> Mullingar. Dublin Headquarters used to send us the key to the cipher, but generally I was able to work it <sup>out</sup> before this arrived. The information I got in this way related to pending raids, arrests and other information the police had picked up concerning the Volunteers. I did not travel to G.H.Q. concerning any of these reports.

There are in the Archives of the Department of Defence reports and despatches which passed between the Longford Brigade and General Headquarters.

Signed: James P. Flood  
(James P. Flood)

Date: 6 Nov 1957

Witness:

Matthew Barry  
(Matthew Barry, Comdt.)

