

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 647

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Edward Boyle,
White Cross,
Newry,
Co. Down.

Identity.

Captain, Ballymoyer Company, Irish Volunteers;
Vice O/C. Newtownhamilton Battalion.

Subject.

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STATEMENT BY EDDIE BOYLE,
Whitecross, Newry, Co. Down.

I joined the National Volunteers in 1914. The local company was composed principally of members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. This phase of volunteer activity only lasted for a few months of the summer of 1914. When the great War of 1914-1918 broke out an attempt was made to get members of the Volunteers to join the British Army. This attempt seemed to have put a quick end to the activities of the National Volunteers locally. A recruiting meeting was held in Whitecross and this only produced one recruit.

About 1917 a Sinn Féin Club was started in Ballymoyer and a short time later another was organised in Whitecross. There were Volunteers in Ballymoyer in 1916, but they did not turn out in Easter Week. There was an organisation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in existence in Ballymoyer area in 1917. Hugh Cooney was the leading man.

I did not join the I.R.B. until about 1918. I think Henry McKenna of Ballymacnab, Armagh, had a hand in starting the organisation. There were only three or four persons joined up in my area and the organisation dropped away shortly after it started. As far as I could find out the men in the I.R.B. were principally older men than those who would be expected to develop into active service men. The Volunteers were first organised and then the I.R.B. was launched and soon died away again.

South Armagh Bye-Election 1918.

It was during the South Armagh Election that our Company was got properly going. The Volunteers took an active part in the political activities of the election campaigning, attending at, and in organising, public meetings, getting voters to the poll on election day, etc.

After the Election the Volunteers increased in strength. When the Volunteers got properly organised the Sinn Féin organisation was gradually dispensed with. Some of the local leaders of Sinn Féin were men who were interested in the Sinn Féin Movement as a political venture to get themselves into the limelight and were not the class to take the risks that a good republican should.

We held drill meetings regularly once a week. We took over a vacant house in Knockavannon during the years 1918-1919 and used it for drill lecture and social purposes. The Company was first known as Ballymoyer Company. Tom Cooney was first Company O/C. A few of the members of the Ballymoyer Company came from Clady district. About 1920 a company was organised in Clady district. John E. O'Hanlon was in charge of the Volunteers in Dorsey and Cullyhanna districts. About the end of 1919 or early 1920 a Newtownhamilton Battalion was formed and O'Hanlon attended all battalion meetings. He was probably the first O/C. of this Battalion.

The population of the Newtownhamilton Battalion area is in parts predominantly Unionist with all the young Unionist members of the Ulster Volunteers up to the end of 1920, and from the end of 1920 members of the "B" Specials.

The strength of the Ballymoyer Company was at the start about 12 members. This increased to about 25 and when a Company was organised in Clady it lost some Clady members. Then the membership started to build up again towards the Truce. We had sections organised in Balleeks and Whitecross.

Some time about the spring or early summer of 1920, a few men from Poyntypass and Lissummon came up to us regularly on bicycles. Those men included Frank and Eiver Monaghan, James Convery, Vincent Govan and another man named Crossey. Those men later on formed a company at Lissummon.

Arms and Equipment.

About the end of 1920, we had about three service rifles. We had a number of shotguns and about four revolvers (bulldogs). We had a dump made in the chapel roof. This dump was accessible by going up on one of the galleries and getting a small step-ladder which was used about the chapel, to reach a ventilator in the roof which could be opened like a trap door, and enabled us to get on to the ceiling where there was ample space for a large quantity of munitions.

In addition to the three or four serviceable revolvers we had a number of defective weapons which we got repaired by a local Unionist. This man was a cripple and was a genius at adaptation and repairs of springs, strikers, etc. He was arrested in 1922 by the Northern Authorities and lodged in Belfast Jail. He was released from Belfast when the police authorities found that they could not extract information about I.R.A. matters and activities from him.

One of our men, Tom Morgan, manufactured gun-powder. He got the recipe for its manufacture from an old British Army Book, which belonged to a Captain Harte Synott. He purchased the chemical ingredients for his work from a Unionist chemist in Newry named McClure. One of the ingredients in the manufacture of the powder was calico. Morgan found out later that he could dispense with the calico by the substitution of sawdust. Morgan also made guncotton.

In the General Election of December 1918, eight or nine men from the Ballymoyer Company volunteered for duty on election day. We were sent to Omeath in Co. Louth and did duty there during the polling.

General Raid for Arms.

In the general raid for arms we attempted to raid the residence of a Unionist family - Hadden's Castle. In this family three or four sons were members of the Ulster Volunteers and all had rifles in the place. When we attempted to effect an entrance to the Castle we were fired on; we returned the fire and the exchange of fire lasted for some time. We were not fit to overpower the well-protected defenders of the Castle and the attempt to raid the place failed. Another section of our Company raided houses in Drumhoney where a number of shotguns were captured from a few Unionist houses. We also had to raid a number of Nationalist houses where the arms were not handed up to us voluntarily. One Hibernian who had a fine double-barrelled shotgun and did not like handing it up to us, took it to the chapel and pushed it up into a ventilator in the ceiling of the roof of the chapel. This spot was the entrance to our dump and the next time we

visited it we found the gun which we put along with the other arms seized.

From the time of the general raid for arms the British Authorities carried out a series of raids on all likely places where the arms might be dumped. They must have had some suspicions about the chapel as they came to the graveyard and dug up the ground in many likely places. There were only about three of us had any knowledge of where the dump was located.

Attack on Newtownhamilton Barracks.

The attack on Newtownhamilton Barracks took place in May 1920. For this attack I got orders to block the roads at Whitecross. We cut down trees and made several blockades. I had several of the Company with me in this work. The remainder of the Company went to other neighbouring areas and barricaded other roads. We also cut all telegraph and telephone wires. Tom Cooney with some of the Ballymoyer men went into the town of Newtownhamilton and was probably on the road leading from there to Markethill. Tom Cooney was Company O/C. at this time and I held no rank.

Attack on Camlough Barracks, December 1920.

For this attack nearly every man in the Ballymoyer Company was mobilised for road blocking. Some blocked the roads leading from Armagh to Camlough. Some blocked the roads in Lisnadian, a local Unionist district. In this area the roads leading through were blocked on both sides. The roads near Carrickeruppen Chapel leading from Beasbrook were blocked and guarded by our men. I and Mick McPartland were mobilised to take part in the attack on the Barracks. I was placed with Johnnie McCoy's squad

on the southern side of the Barracks. We took up positions behind a low stone wall about eight to ten feet from the wall of the Barracks. We opened the attack when we saw a light on the opposite side where Frank Aiken was attempting to put a tube or pipe in an upstairs barrack window. This tube was connected to a force pump which was to be used to force a petrol-paraffin mixture into the Barracks and create a fire which it was hoped would force the garrison's surrender. Before the pipe was inserted through the Barrack window inflammable material was lapped around the pipe and lighted. When this light showed we were to commence the attack so as to attract the Barracks' defenders' attention to our side of the building.

As soon as we commenced firing the garrison concentrated a heavy fire on our side and they started to throw out hand-grenades. Some of those grenades were bursting quite close to us. Johnnie McCoy then told us to withdraw to another low wall which also ran parallel to our first position and also to the side of the Barracks. This second position was about ten yards further back. From here we concentrated a heavy fire on the barrack windows, which were steel shuttered and sandbagged. Verrey lights were put up by the police which lighted up our position like daylight. The police were not able to throw their hand-grenades into this position, but they could direct a more effective rifle fire on our position. We remained in this position until the signal was given to evacuate our positions and cease the attack.

I remember when the signal - a few blasts on a whistle - was given, Johnnie McCoy called us to him and told us that we had to evacuate. He also told us that he found that the police in the Barracks were concentrating their fire

on a small rise or hill on the main road about fifty yards from the Barracks and that although this point was our direct line of retreat going in that direction would be dangerous. He then led us up the Carrickcruppen road for a short distance. Then we got into a large field and got on to the main road some distance behind the hill towards which the police were directing their fire and we were quite safe from fire from the Barracks. We marched with McCoy and the Mullaghbawn men to a small road leading to Carrickcruppen Chapel; when we were near the Chapel and about six hundred yards from the Barracks we heard the Crown Forces from Newry arriving in Camlough Barracks. When we arrived at Whitecross we found that the military from Armagh City were at the Whitecross R. I. C. Barracks and we engaged in cutting their way through filled trees on the road to Camlough. It must have taken them at least eight hours to get through.

Belfast Trade Boycott.

About March or April, 1921, we got orders to put all Belfast breadcarts off the roads as part of the Belfast Trade Boycott. We intercepted an Englis - one of the largest of the bread Companies - breadcarts at Corlett, Whitecross, and burned it. From this burning onwards an armed patrol of a Sergeant and four R. I. C. men were sent out with each Belfast bread cart in our area. We made plans to ambush one of those patrols at a bend in the road at Synott's Wood. About six of us lay in position waiting and when the bread cart appeared we found that an armoured car was following closely behind it. We did not attack as with our equipment attacking an armoured car would be futile. Later on we noticed that the escort on those breadcarts was increased in strength until about ten men accompanied each

cart. At this time nearly all breadcarts were horse-drawn, and the police escorting them being regular R. I. C. , wore police uniform and travelled on bicycles.

Burning of Whitecross Evacuated R. I. C. Barracks.

In the spring of 1921, Whitecross R. I. C. Barracks was evacuated by the R. I. C. The sergeant's wife remained on after the evacuation. We went to the Barracks to burn it after the police had evacuated. We found the sergeant's wife, a Mrs. Tighe, in possession of a portion of the Barracks. Mrs. Tighe asked us as a favour to save her furniture and other belongings. She showed us a watch she got from her brother in the South of Ireland who was then serving as an officer in the I. R. A. This watch had a tricolour painted on its dial. We were careful to only destroy the portions of the Barracks then unoccupied, and we did not interfere with Mrs. Tighe's apartments.

There was a meeting-house at Glenanne which was used by "B" men. (A meeting-house, by the way, is a building used by some of the non-catholic sects for religious and social purposes). The caretaker of this meeting-house told us that there were arms stored in the place. We went there at night, cut the lock from the door to get in and found four .45 Webley revolvers and about 150 rounds of .45 ammunition.

Plaster Fight, 17th April, 1921.

On Saturday, 16th April, 1921, I was mobilised and ordered to travel that night to the vicinity of Faughart in Co. Louth, to take part in an ambush on British troops the next morning. Tom Cooney and I cycled to McCoy's, Tullymacrieve near Millaghbawn, and left our cycles there.

I can't now remember who was waiting for us there but we were taken to the house of John Grant about three-quarters of a mile from McCoy's where we met, - Johnny McCoy, Frank Aiken, Jack McCann and many others. Later on that night we all travelled to Faughart and arrived there before daylight.

The operation planned at Faughart was an attack on a large Leland lorry of military which left the Military Barracks, Dundalk, each morning with a relief party of military for the guard on a house at Plaster near Faughart, belonging to a man named Barrett. The guard on this house was approximately 30 strong and the relief party came out each morning at 8 a.m. and always used the same road.

The position chosen for the ambush was close to Faughart School, on the side of a slight hill facing Dundalk, and about two miles from that town. Barrett's house at Plaster was on the reverse slope of this hill about a half mile from the ambush position.

The first activity that morning was the inspection of the position for the ambush and the selection of the best site. Next the house of John McAllister near the site selected for the ambush was taken over and when those who lived in the immediate vicinity of the ambush position got out of their beds and started to move about, they were taken to McAllister's house where they were detained for their own safety.

A land mine was inserted in the road at the ambush position and I should say that about forty of the men mobilised at Faughart took up positions near the road sides convenient to the land mine. Many of those who were detailed for the ambush position were from the town of Dundalk and this was for them their first large scale

operation. Frank Aiken and Johnny McCoy were in charge of all the men in this position. I was directed with about seven others to take up positions on a side road leading from the road connecting the ambush position with Barrett's house. This side road led, I think, to Faughart graveyard. My position was at an iron gate with stone pillars leading into a field a short distance up the side road. I would say that I was about 400 yards from Barrett's house and our orders were to prevent the soldiers at Barrett's house from coming to assist their comrades when the ambush commenced. A man came out of a farmyard on the Faughart road near us with a horse and cart and a few of our men went down to stop this man travelling in the direction of Barrett's. The man was stopped on the road and compelled to turn back. As far as I can remember it was this incident which attracted the attention of some of the military at Barrett's house and alerted them to the presence of armed men in their vicinity.

Some of the soldiers in Barrett's then opened fire in our direction and we replied to this fire. A number of soldiers got out from the buildings at Barrett's and took up positions behind trees in a small plantation surrounding the house and they kept up a heavy fire in our direction. About half an hour after this firing started two lorry loads of what I believe to have been Tans or Auxiliaries came past the end of the road near our position and about 100 yards from where we were replying to the soldiers' fire. When the garrison at Barrett's saw the two lorries coming down the road towards them they started cheering and we then concentrated our fire on the first lorry nearest to Barrett's. Our efforts were directed at the driver of the lorry. Our fire must have disabled the driver as this lorry crashed into a road fence. The second lorry must have been close to the front one as it ran into the back of the crashed lorry.

I don't know if the men in those lorries opened fire on us or not as the position in which the lorries crashed was a bit sunken with high ditches; we could not see the men clearly after they crashed.

We evacuated our position then as seven men - our strength in this place - would not be able to deal with at least thirty Tans or Auxiliaries who were close to our position. We retreated towards Faughart graveyard so as to get a view of the country towards Dundalk. Whilst near the graveyard a young Dundalk man came to us and said that the ambush was called off and the position at the school was evacuated. I think this man was sent up to inform us of the position.

We then started for home. We reached a little whinney mountain and an aeroplane came flying in our direction from the direction of Dundalk. It flew over us at a very low altitude and a short time later it flew over us again returning towards Dundalk. From this little mountain we went towards Dromintee Chapel and some place on the way there we handed over our rifles to Thomas McGill. When we got near the Chapel the congregation from early Mass were getting out and we met some of them travelling to their homes southwards. We got in with those travelling northwards. We heard later that the part of the congregation who travelled south were held up, searched and questioned by Crown Forces. This delayed those Forces who must have been quite close to us when they met the people coming from Mass.

We travelled along the western side of Slieve-Gullion mountain from Dromintee and we were resting along the main Forkhill-Markethill road in the townland of Longfield when a lorry load of Tans from Dundalk direction

passed near where we were sitting. After this we proceeded to McCoy's, got our bikes. When in McCoy's a lorry of Tans passed on the Newry-Crossmaglen road. We then proceeded towards Whitecross and when on Tate Hill we sat down for a rest and saw what we believed to be the same lorry - as passed us at Longfield - stopped at Carricknagavna School about 800 yards distant.

Near Balleeks we met a few locals and inquired from them if they saw any police or military lorries in Balleeks, and they said, "No." After we passed through Balleeks a lorry passed on the Newtownhamilton-Newry road.

When we arrived at Outlacken we called at O'Hare's house and got a wash and a clean up. Tom Cooney remained there and I went on to Whitecross. When I came to the Plunkett Hall it was opened. I went into a room at the back and I dumped my revolver and ammunition in a stove in the room. I then came out on the village street to find that the same lorry as passed us at Longfield - and that was probably seen at the other places mentioned - sitting on the street, full of Tans. I crossed the road into a field where some boys were playing football. I had a few kicks at the ball and then crossed the field on the opposite side and went home. I was lucky I went so soon as the Tans came into the field and held up and searched all the men and boys in it. This lorry later travelled up the Tullyawe road and the Tans searched all the houses on the right-hand side of the road, including some Unionist places.

Raid on Poyntzpass Railway Station.

We went to Poyntzpass one night in order to capture picks and shovels for use in trenching roads and knocking walls and bridges, etc. The night we called at the station a Catholic was on duty in the signal box. We obtained the equipment. Later a Unionist worker stated that we knew the night to come when he was absent. When we were raiding for the tools we found that Belfast goods were passing through the station in large quantities so we later made plans to again carry out a raid on the station and destroy the Belfast goods found there and to do it on a night the boastful Unionist was on duty at the station.

So we went to the station on a night and held up the Unionist signal man and locked him into a closed cattle wagon. We cut all telegraph and telephone wires and we opened the gates so that all trains could pass through during the raid. We searched all the carriages on the sidings. We burned all stuff of Belfast origin found in wagons, including boots, clothes and hampers of bread, etc. We also commandeered some tools which we required from the railway stores. On our journey back from Poyntzpass on the Markethill line we raided a number of railway workers' huts for tools. In one hut we got a shotgun and about half a dozen picks and shovels and about six red signal lamps.

After the burning of the goods at Poyntzpass Station the local "B" men started to patrol the town and its vicinity. In order to ambush this patrol we mobilised about six to eight of the Ballymoyer Company and went to Poyntzpass. We were joined there by about six men from Poyntzpass and Lissummon Company. We searched for the "B" men and saw them at a distance. They must have got to know of our presence as they cleared off and we got no further

trace of them. We searched all the local roads and we questioned people we met. One man we held up and questioned thought we were "B" men and he went to some length to explain that he was out getting a drench for a sick horse. We could not obtain any further trace of the "B" patrol that night. We heard later that for some time after our visit to Poyntzpass the "B" men ceased patrolling.

From the attack on Camlough Barracks we were all sleeping away from home at night. A lot of raids by Crown Forces on republicans' houses were carried out. Our house was raided nearly every night. Those raids became so frequent that my father told the police during one of the raids, that he would leave the door of our house open at night so that he would not have to get out of bed to let them in.

I think it was about February, 1921, that I was appointed Captain of Ballymoyer Company. Tom Cooney, our former Captain, was promoted Battalion O/C. Some time before the Truce I was appointed Battalion Vice O/C. At the end of this narrative I give a list of Battalion and Company officers as existed on 11th July, 1921.

Truce Period.

When the Truce was declared on the 11th July, 1921, all raiding for local I.R.A. men stopped, and we were all able to come home and live undisturbed there. The "B" men patrols were immediately discontinued. The Divisional Staff immediately initiated a training programme. On all sides it was realised that the training of the I.R.A. was an urgent necessity. A Divisional Camp was started at Killeavey, near Newry. I attended a course of training at this camp for about a week. Later on we started a camp at Ballymoyer.

All those camps were carried out quite openly and the British Authorities did not interfere with us in any way. All the Companies in our Battalion got an intensive course of training as far as the training of our officers equipped us to do such work.

We got some recruits in during the Truce. We did not admit all who wanted to join up as all new members were carefully vetted before admission.

During the Truce we had an unfortunate training accident where a young I.R.A. man named Watters, was accidentally shot during target practice.

Our next activities were making safe dumps for arms. One safe dump, at least, was prepared in each Company area. Those dumps were made in dry locations and where arms and other warlike material could be always readily and quickly got at in an urgent necessity without arousing suspicion. As an example, one rather ingenious dump was made in a flax mill where a large plank was hollowed out on one side and in the cavity rifles, revolvers and ammunition could be placed. A board was nailed against the face of the plank covering the cavity in such a manner as to give the appearance of being part of the plank. By taking out one nail the plank could be dropped down on a hinge arrangement. During the time the mill was working a man scotching flax was leaning against this dump and never realised that he was within inches of lethal equipment. Those dumps were made to accommodate a much greater quantity of stuff than we had available when we first constructed them.

Republican Courts.

Republican Courts were in theory set up. Our district was so predominantly Unionist that it was not feasible to set

up a properly constituted republican court, with duly appointed Justices, etc. A problem existed in how to deal with the illicit manufacture of intoxicating liquor (potteen). The I.R.A. took this matter in hands and the culprits were arrested and taken before a military court who imposed fines and saw that the fines were paid.

In the matter of disputes between neighbours, which in normal times would be the cause of a law suit, the consent of the parties involved was obtained to have their differences decided by arbitration. A few arbitrators were then appointed and the decisions when arrived at in such cases were seldom questioned.

Military Classes during Truce.

During the Truce classes were held in what we called special services. Dr. Frank McDermott attended a Battalion class and gave a series of first-aid lectures to two men from each Company and selected members of the Cumann na mBan. Eiver Monaghan, Divisional Engineer, called to our Battalion and gave a number of lectures on military engineering. We had an Intelligence organisation in existence in the Battalion area but we never seemed to get much worth while information. The "B" men (Specials) were supposed to have a well organised Intelligence organisation, but as far as we could observe their information about our (I.R.A.) activities was as scanty as ours was about their activities. The only explanation for this derth of information was that both parties worked so carefully that nothing of any consequences got out.

Restarting of Military Activity in early 1922.

About the spring of 1922 the Northern Government and the British Army Authorities in the North commenced to put motor lorry patrols of both police and military on the road both by day and night. The "B" Specials restarted to patrol the roads at night and to hold up and question people they met whilst on patrol. During the winter of 1921-1922 we held concerts and entertainments in local halls to provide funds for both Sinn Féin and I.R.A. purposes. One night that an entertainment was being held in a local hall, a Volunteer named James McKeown had a despatch for me. He came to the hall to get in touch with me and was looking into a window of the hall to see if I was there. Two motor lorries of Specials drove up and when he saw the Specials he started to run in order to save the despatch he was carrying from capture. The Specials called on him to halt which he ignored, and fire was then opened on him with shotguns. He got about 42 pellets of shot in his back. He continued to run and got away but was later conveyed to Newry Hospital. The Specials, after shooting McKeown, raided the hall and abused the people in the hall. They put the girls outside of the hall and then attempted to force the men and boys remaining in the hall to get down on their knees and curse the Pope. They beat the people with their guns in a vain attempt to terrorise and force compliance with their orders.

About this time the Plunkett Hall in Whitecross and all the local halls which were being used by the I.R.A. and other republican organisations for recreational purposes or the raising of funds, were burned down - all on the same night. Those burnings were carried out by uniformed Special Constabulary in a sly and secretive manner which was

adopted to leave the origin of the burnings a matter of some doubt and to leave no proof as to who the real incendiaries were. Halls were burned on the same night at Mullaghawn and Lislea and many other places.

About April 1922, the Special Constabulary were formed into what they called Platoons. Those platoons were organised, drilled and armed as soldiers, and were mostly composed of ex-service men. They took over Synott's Castle near Whitecross, and put the Castle and its grounds into a position of considerable military strength. Between 80 to 100 men went into Synott's Castle as a garrison and at once became very active. One of their first activities was the raiding of the local hall I have described above.

Importation of Arms, Ammunition, etc.

Also about April 1922, a lorry load of rifles, revolvers, ammunition, explosives and other war material was sent to our area from the Military Barracks, Dundalk. This lorry first called at Cooney's, Ballymoyer, where a considerable quantity of the stuff was disloaded. It then went to the house of Mrs. Mary McLogan, Cladybeg, where the remainder of our allocation of war material was disloaded. Owing to some unfortunate slackness in dealing with the stuff at Mrs. McLogan's, the Specials in the Castle got "wind" of the affair. Mrs. McLogan's was raided by platoon men, the stuff captured and Mrs. McLogan arrested. Mrs. McLogan refused to give the police authorities any information as to who handled the stuff at her place or, any other information about the matter. She was brought up for trial and secured a sentence of years penal servitude.

The night that the arms and equipment were captured

in Mrs. McLogan's, the platoon men held up Mick Brady, our Battalion Quartermaster, and searched him. He was taken prisoner to the Castle. Later at his trial before a Resident Magistrate he was offered bail which he accepted. His reason for accepting bail was that he was the only man that could lay his hands on all the Battalion's arms and munitions. This man later on joined the National Army. The stuff in Cooney's was never captured. The stuff captured in McLogan's would not have been captured only some of the local Volunteers started to remove it by horse and cart on a Sunday. This act in a Sabbath observing district attracted attention which "gave the game away".

From the time the platoon took over the Castle it was practically impossible for an I.R.A. man to remain at large in our area. About four "B" Specials were put to guard each cross-road in the district in relays, night and day, and Specials were raiding the houses of known I.R.A. men constantly.

On Saturday, 29th April, 1922, Newtownhamilton fair day, Terry Toner, Mick Carragher and Mick McBennett were arrested in the early morning at the fair by Special Constabulary. On the same morning I and a number of my Battalion men were in a district near Mulladuff Orange Hall on the Armagh/Monaghan border, when we saw a man passing near us with a basket of eggs. We asked him for a few eggs and he refused us in a most offensive manner. We then took the basket and the eggs from him. He cleared off and proceeded straight into Newtownhamilton and as we knew later reported the seizure of his eggs to the Specials. After having a feed on the eggs we proceeded to the local Orange Hall - Mulladuff - and broke in the door. In the hall we found a number of wooden rifles which were apparently in use for

drill purposes. We broke them up. We also found a large banner in the hall, with King William on one side of it, which we decided to take with us as a souvenir. At this stage a man passed on a bicycle. I think the man's name was Blackstaff. We called on him to halt and he accelerated and we opened fire on him and brought him off the bicycle wounded. We took the banner with us and the wounded man's bicycle, and we went to a position close to the Monaghan County border, and near the bank of a small river. One of our men noticed a policeman's cap on a head behind a ditch a few hundred yards from our position. We immediately moved to the top high hill (Lockart's) to improve our position in the event of being attacked. Whoever was in charge of the Specials, whose strength later appeared to be about 20 men - extended one half of them in our direction whilst the other half remained in a bunch. I saw a man popping up occasionally to fire at us and I took careful aim at the place and opened fire when he next appeared and I think he was put out of action. I gave some of our men instructions to open fire on the men who remained in the bunch, and I think some of them got hit although the distance between us must have been then four hundred yards.

About this time a girl came along a path in our direction exposed to all the Specials' fire. I called on her to take cover. She ignored me and I pushed her across a ditch where she would have some protection from fire. I then tried to get across the ditch myself when the stones of the ditch fell on me and I got pressed down and could not release myself until Harry Carragher came to my assistance.

This firing between us and the Specials went on for three or four hours. At the start of the firing we had only eight men who were on the raid on the Orange Hall, but after

the firing started ten other of our men who were convenient to our positions came to our assistance. The firing ceased when darkness came and at this time several lorry loads of reinforcement for the Specials came on the scene.

Some time after the first excitement of the shooting had passed the firing became or developed into a somewhat unusual type of warfare. The Specials started to shoot cattle grazing in fields in the Co. Monaghan side of the County border. When we saw this we replied by shooting cattle on the Co. Armagh side. We shot at least one cow, one horse and one pig. The farmer who owned the cattle killed on the Monaghan side went into Castleblayney and complained to the military there about what happened to his stock.

During darkness most of our men remained in their positions and when daylight came the shooting started again from the windows of Blackstaff's house. (Blackstaff was the man who refused to halt the previous day and was wounded by our rifle fire). We replied to this shooting concentrating on the windows and the slated roof of the dwelling house. Another Unionist house actually situated in Co. Monaghan, belonging to a man named Clarke, at which there was a scutch mill, was also occupied by Specials who opened fire on our positions. We treated this house in a similar manner to Blackstaff's. All the windows and the roofs of both houses facing our positions were much damaged by our fire.

When the time for 10 a.m. Mass at Oram Chapel came, most of us evacuated our positions and we went as we were, with all the marks and dirt of nearly 24 hours fighting, on our persons, to Mass. We naturally had to carry our guns and equipment with us. The priest who celebrated Mass took a rather poor view of our attendance at Mass.

We returned to our positions after Mass was over to find that the firing had died down to an odd shot now and again. It appeared that the Specials who had used the houses for firing from were refused by the owners to allow their further use when our rifle fire did such great damage to the roofs. The Specials then moved to Mulladuff School House where three lorries were stopped on the road. The school was about 440 yards from where our original position was. When we observed the lorries halted and then moving at the schoolhouse we moved in closer to them to a position where we could ambush them more effectively. We had two Thompson sub machine guns and about eighteen service rifles. When we moved into our new position we were within 200 yards from the school. The Specials got out of their lorries and collected into a bunch on the road and an officer apparently started to detail them to their different duties. We opened fire on them with all we had and any of them who did not fall scampered for cover and safety. We heard the next day that 22 of the Specials were killed. We got this information from a local catholic butcher who was near the school when the shooting took place.

About the time this operation took place we billeted ourselves in an unoccupied house which had no windows. I think we only used the place for a few nights. The house previously had been the residence of the local protestant Clergyman and was on the Co. Monaghan side of the border. We had to leave this house as the building had the name of being haunted. Some of our boys claimed to have seen a man who refused to halt when challenged and moved about at night in the grounds without making the least noise.

About this time a Commandant Peter Woods who was in charge of the National Army troops in Castleblayney came to

our billets and told some of our men that we would have to clear out of Co. Monaghan as we were only causing trouble there. This occasioned an angry scene from which Woods was lucky to get away unharmed. We remained on where we were for a few further days so as not to give the impression that we were being forced away. During this time we raided Fane Valley Creamery which was controlled and manned by Unionists and members of the "B" Specials. We believed that arms and military equipment might be stored in the Creamery buildings. We ransacked the whole buildings and the only thing we found belonging to the Specials was a "B" man's tunic.

Bridge - a - Crin Camp.

When we evacuated Co. Monaghan we moved to a place named Bridge-a-Crin near Kilcurry, Co. Louth, when we took over a vacant farmhouse as billets. This place was, during the time of our occupation, known as Bridge-a-Crin Camp. We set up Battalion Headquarters here. During the time we were in Bridge-a-Crin I was told about a car which could be got for the taking of it away. We went off to the place where the car was on the Armagh-Monaghan border and found the car minus one front wheel. This fact compelled us to return without the car.

There was little doing in Bridge-a-Crin Camp. About a dozen of us left the Camp and travelled home to Ballymoyer fully armed. We raided the house of Hugh Patterson, Lurgana, and the house of a family named Hamilton at Outlacken. Both those houses belonged to "B" men. At Patterson's house Patterson escaped before we got the house properly surrounded. When we saw that he had escaped we did ^{not}/raid the house as it was very close to

the Castle wall, the Platoon Headquarters. We next went to Hamilton's, surrounded it and threw in a few hand-grenades. Celip Hamilton was mortally wounded. Several "B" men were asleep in Hamilton's when we attacked the house.

Two of our men got injured in this attack. Mick McGee got a blast of mortar in his eyes due to the explosion of a hand-grenade inside which caused total blindness for the time being. Frank Monaghan fell on a broken bottle outside the wall of the house, ripping his knee and causing a serious and disabling wound. We had to carry our two casualties as quickly as possible from the danger zone. In fact we had to carry them to our base in Bridge-a-Crin, a distance of at least ten miles.

Civil War Period.

When Dan Hogan came into Dundalk on the night of the 15/16th July, 1922, and took possession of all the military and police posts in town we were in Bridge-a-Crin Camp. The supplies of food which we had been previously drawing from tradesmen in Dundalk on the order of the 4th Northern Division Quartermaster were cut off, when the National Army under Dan Hogan took control of the town. We were then obliged to procure food as and where we could get it. The strength of the garrison in the Camp before the National Army took over was between 40 to 50 men. After the arrival of the National Army we were reduced to from 14 to 15. After we took over the Camp we captured a motor lorry belonging to Hoggs of Newry. We had been using this lorry for all our transport activities in connection with running the Camp. Shortly after the Staters arrived they seized the lorry and returned it to the owner.

Attack on Dundalk Jail.

On the 26th July, 1922, I got orders to mobilise for an attack on Dundalk Jail where a large number of prisoners were held, including Frank Aiken, our Divisional O/C., and many of our Divisional and Brigade officers who were captured in the Military Barracks on the 16th July. I proceeded to Castletown Mount as per instructions for mobilisation and there I met Johnny McCoy who was then in charge of the active men in the Division. From Castletown Mount I proceeded with about forty other men under the command of Johnny McCoy to the vicinity of the jail, arriving there about 7 a.m. I was detailed in this operation to go to the passenger station Great Northern Railway to look after the station staff to cut telegraph wires and dismantle telephones, which I did. One of my Battalion Officers, Frank Monaghan in charge of a number of our Battalion men, took up position at Castletown road on the northern end of the town to cover the retreat of the escaped prisoners from the jail travelling northwards. During our stay at the station premises we encountered a military guard on whom we opened fire and they immediately decamped. Our instructions were that we were to remain on the station premises until we heard the explosion at the jail wall. The explosion, when it occurred, blew a hole in the jail wall about four feet square, through which a stream of prisoners immediately poured out. When we heard the explosion we hurried from the station, and when we arrived on the main road we found ourselves amongst a crowd of prisoners rushing from the jail. I made for Castletown direction but I got cut off by State troops and could not proceed. I had two of my men, James Convery and James Toner of Whitecross, with me. I opened fire on some enemy troops which I saw on a hill to our rear. When I looked around

later I found that Convery and Toner had gone and that I was cut off by other enemy troops covering the approaches to the Castletown road. I lay down in some whins to see if the soldiers would clear away. Frank Aiken and Johnnie Grant came back to get me. They got me across the road without much trouble and I eventually got as far as Dungooley without further incident.

Attack and Capture of Dundalk Town.

On Sunday evening, the 13th August, 1922, I was mobilised for Dundalk Race Course for to take part in an attack on the town of Dundalk, then held by about 400 troops of the National Army. About 12 o'clock, midnight, I got orders to move in with about ten others, with Barney O'Hanlon in charge. We crossed the metal bridge on the London and Midland Railway line and proceeded to Quay Street Railway Station, there to wait until the Engineers had mined the main gate when we would rush and overpower the soldiers in the guardroom inside the main gate. Our signal for rushing the guardroom was the explosion of the mine at the main gate. The mine at the back gate exploded but the mine at the main gate failed. When we heard the explosion at the back gate we rushed up along the side of the barrack wall towards the main gate, and as the gate was closed we lay down along the wall near the gate awaiting the mine to go off. Whilst in this position a Lancia car came around the corner, and passed along the street beside us, but apparently never saw us. This car proceeded towards the fair green. We tried the gate again but found it still closed and locked. When we realised that the mine at the front gate was still a failure we retreated back to our original position at Quay Street. At this time the buildings inside the Barracks were being

blown up by our men. We had to take cover under railway trucks at Quay Street Station as chumps of stone slates, gutter pipes, etc. were falling thickly around us from the explosions inside. We had to wait here until the front gate was later demolished by the placing of second mine by the Engineers on the top of the defective one. The Engineer then waited to get one of the armoured cars, which was patrolling the town, going in or going out of the main gate and then to blow his mine. He did so when a Lancia car was passing through the gate. This explosion, which was double the quantity of explosives deemed necessary for the job, completely wrecked the armoured car and it killed Brigadier Patrick McKenna, one of our own officers who had captured the car up the town a short time previously.

At this stage the Barracks was practically captured, and our main work was looking after the security of our prisoners and all wounded men.

For the next day or two we were fully engaged in getting all the arms and war material in the Military Barracks transported into the Cooley area for dumping. There must have been about five tons of arms and ammunition put on to a large lorry to my knowledge and transferred into Cooley area. The prisoners we took at the capture of Dundalk were all put into Dundalk prison.

About the 17th August the National troops from Dublin, Drogheda, Co. Meath, Cavan and Monaghan started to converge on the town of Dundalk from different directions. When those forces got near Dundalk we evacuated the town and district. I went with a few others into South Louth district and we remained there for some time. Later we went to Omeath and spent some time there. In or about October 1922, we got orders to move into Co. Cavan. Before going

there we decided to spend a few days at home in South Armagh.

I went to my home and the Specials raided the house shortly after I arrived and early in the morning. I was taken to the Platoon Headquarters at Synnott's Castle and I was kept there for about ten days. I was then removed to Belfast Prison and I was kept there for about three months. I was then transferred to Larne Workhouse where I remained until the hunger strike. I was then removed back to Belfast Prison for about six months. I was eventually released on the 8th December, 1924.

SIGNED

Edward Boyle
EDWARD BOYLE

DATE

13th Febry 1952.
13th Febry. 1952.

WITNESS

John McCoy.
13/2/52

(John McCoy)

13/2/1952.

Battalion Staff as existed on

11th July, 1921.

O/C. .. Thomas Cooney
Vice O/C. .. Edward Boyle
Adjutant .. Charles Cooney
Quartermaster .. Michael Brady

Company Officers:

Ballymoyer: 54 men (P. J. Kearney
(James Callaghan
(Newtownhamilton Section)
(Peter Hughes (Balleeks
Section)

Sections from Newtownhamilton ~~Section~~ and
Balleeks were attached to Ballymoyer Company up to
11th July, 1921.

Cullyhanna: 38 men (Bernard Murphy
(James Quinn

Clady: (John Toner

Poyntzpass: 20 men (John Toner

.....

SIGNED

Edward Boyle
EDWARD BOYLE

DATE

13th July 1952

WITNESS

John McCoy
(John McCoy)

13/2/52
13/2/52.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. <u>647</u>