

W.S. 911

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 911

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 911.....

**Witness**

Patrick McKenna,  
Nicholastown,  
Kilcullen,  
Co. Kildare.

**Identity.**

Member of I.R.B., Dunamore, Co. Tyrone, 1916 - ;  
Captain Dunamore Company, Irish Vol's. 1920 - .

**Subject.**

National activities, Co. Tyrone,  
1916-1922.

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

Nil

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Statement by Mr. Patrick McKenna,

Nicholastown, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare.

I was born and reared in Killuckan, Kildrass, Co. Tyrone. My people were farmers and when I left school I went to work on my father's farm.

I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (known as the I.R.B.) in the year 1916 - Dunamore Circle. The man who was Centre of Dunamore Circle in 1916 was John Small (Cailtea). Charles Conway, Dunamore, swore me into the organisation. Small only turned up at one Circle/<sup>meeting</sup>when an important meeting was held. There were about 30 to 40 men members of this Circle. Some of the Circle members were old-timers who had been members for a considerable time previous to 1916. Those old fellows dropped out about 1917 and left the organisation in the hands of the younger men. A number of the men who joined the I.R.B. had been members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (known as the A.O.H.) previous to joining the I.R.B. and they remained in both organisations for some time. Later these men were able to smash up the organisation of the local division of the A.O.H. in 1917.

The I.R.B. were responsible for the starting of the Volunteer organisation locally in the year 1918 - just previous to the East Tyrone By-Election. The I.R.B. were also the driving force behind the Sinn Féin organisation. Sinn Féin was really started by the men in the Volunteer organisation, and the Volunteer Officers were men appointed to take charge by the I.R.B.

The older men who before 1916 held meetings were looked on by the A.O.H. as enemies. These men were only a very small handful. Some of them were relations of my own. When I was only a boy I got posters for posting on the walls from a cousin of mine named Barney McKenna. I posted them up. One poster read, "Any Irishman who joins the English Army, Navy or Police is an enemy to his country and a traitor to his people". I don't know

anything further of those men but I expect that they were linked up in some revolutionary organisation before the I.R.B. as such became organised locally.

We held I.R.B. meetings in a most careful and secretive manner. We held our meetings generally in the centre of a field where there was no possibility of any outside person overhearing our business. The business of our meetings concerned the means of furthering the revolutionary movement. I have now no clear idea of the various matters we dealt with. Meetings were held once a month. The notice to attend an I.R.B. meeting was passed around by word of mouth.

I looked on John Small as a man high in the councils of the I.R.B. Arthur McElvogue should be able to give more details about Small than I can.

One of the most persistent memories I have in connection with the I.R.B. is the efforts I had to make in order to become a member of the organisation. I got to know that some kind of a select Republican organisation existed and I was determined to join it. My observation told me that a secret organisation existed and that it was against the British Government. I approached those I believed to be members and expressed my willingness and my anxiety to join. I was put off from time to time and I found that the I.R.B. considered me too young to become one of their members. I was supposed to wait until I was eighteen years of age. With a certain amount of constant pressure, I was allowed to join before I reached my eighteenth year.

When the Irish Volunteers were organised, the I.R.B. continued to function with the same care and secrecy in holding their meetings. When the Volunteers got strong and properly established, the I.R.B. ceased to exist.

After the start of the Volunteers, with a membership of about 30 men, Charles Conway assumed the Captaincy of "C" Company - Donamio r.e. This assumption of the captaincy was by virtue of his position as Centre of the local I.R.B. Centre. Later Charles McGuirke, Tullnacross, was appointed Captain. I was elected Captain by a ballot of the Company members some time in 1920. Previous to my election as Captain, the Company members considered that there was a lack of aggressiveness and push in the Company's leadership and they switched the captaincy on to me.

The first incident of importance which took place after the formation of the Volunteers was the anti-conscription campaign of about April, 1918. Anti-conscription meetings were held after Mass at all churches. The danger of conscription passed and this phase did not have much effect on the Volunteer organisation. The Volunteers made no effort to "cash in" on the enthusiasm of the people in their determination to fight the conscription menace by enrolling large numbers of men who were then willing to join the Volunteers. Our policy in the Volunteers was conservative. Quality not quantity in numbers was our motto.

In 1919 we had very little arms, no rifles, some shotguns and a few revolvers which were handed over to us by friendly sympathisers. Those weapons were mostly of a class which could be considered as ineffective in the military sense.

About this time we held a Sinn Féin dance in a large farmer's loft. This dance was a huge success. Songs and recitations given at this dance were both extremely national and revolutionary. When the R.I.C. heard of the affair and probably got secret information as to the treasonable items that made up the programme, they went around to people whom they suspected of being at the dance and made exhaustive inquiries about the affair. Those inquiries continued for several days. The police, by their mode of inquiry, seemed to be determined to scare the people from attending all future functions of a similar nature.

Burning Evacuated R.I.C. Barracks & Income Tax Papers:

In or about April, 1920, orders were issued by G.H.Q. to all Volunteer Companies to burn any evacuated R.I.C. Barracks in the Company area. The order also covered the burning of Income Tax offices and papers. A man named Joe Quinn, Broughderg Bridge, was an income tax collector. We raided his house, collected all his income tax papers and we burned them on a green near his residence.

Broughderg R.I.C. Barracks was evacuated by the R.I.C. some time in the summer of 1920. This barracks was situated in a mountainous district in the foothills of the Sperrin Mountains. We proceeded to the barracks as soon as we learned of the evacuation. We conveyed to the barracks a supply of petrol, with which we saturated all the floors of the barracks. We then set fire to the building which was soon completely gutted by fire.

General Raid for arms:

In or about September, 1920, we received a G.H.Q. order for a general raid for arms all over our Company area. In carrying out this raid, we called at a number of friendly houses and were handed out willingly any arms they possessed. Friendly disposed people were anxious that we should get the arms as there was a feeling that the R.I.C. might get around and raid for all arms in civilian possession. The houses we really had to raid were belonging to people who were antagonistic and who would not freely give us their guns. We carried out a raid on a large house in the mountain named Dourväll Lodge. This was a residence and a shooting lodge combined. We carried out this raid in broad daylight on a Sunday afternoon. The people who lived in the lodge were having their tea when we called on them. After a most exhaustive search of the premises, we found no arms.

We raided another place across the border in County Derry. This place belonged to a family named Dean - Unionists. Our raiding party numbered 7 or 8 men. We also raided this place on a Sunday

and during daylight hours. The owners of the premises were absent when we called. As far as I can remember, the key of the house was in the main door and we had no difficulty but walk in. We carefully searched every room in the place. We got two or three shotguns and a quantity of shotgun ammunition.

Whilst raiding in one of the rooms in this house, we made an interesting discovery in a corner of the side of the chimney. We found a tin box and from its weight we concluded that it contained ammunition. However, when we opened the box we found that it was full of gold sovereigns and half-sovereigns. This find was something of a novelty to all of us, as we never had seen so much gold together in our life before then or since then. We had all a good look at the gold and we then left it back again in the place we found it. One of the local Derry papers in its description of this raid told how the raiders were not interested in gold, as none of it was taken.

We decided to raid the house of a Unionist who was known to be in the B. Specials, named Hopper. This man's place was about a quarter of a mile from the local R.I.C. barracks which is beside the Kildress Hotel in Drumshanbo. On this raid we had to split our forces. One section was sent to the vicinity of the R.I.C. Barracks to deal with the police in the event of their coming out from the barracks during the raid. The other party took part in the raid. I was on the party sent to the vicinity of the barracks. We went to a good position within effective rifle range of the barracks, where we could effectively deal with the police had they come out, which they did not. The party attacking Hopper's were met with considerable opposition of rifle fire from the house. There must have been several persons using rifles from the house in its defence. The attackers were beaten off and the attempt on the house proved a failure.

In our Company area there were very few Unionists and there were no active B. men. On the outskirts of our area there were considerable Unionist populations. As an instance, on our Eastern side - that was

in Cookstown direction - B. Specials were so well organised that they came into our area and took part in raids and round-ups, especially after ambushes, etc.

#### Belfast Trade Boycott:

The Volunteers took over the carrying out of the boycott of Belfast goods in our area. The methods adopted for the prevention of the sale of those goods were: a canvas of all shopkeepers in the area to get their co-operation in not stocking any goods manufactured in Belfast or handled by Belfast wholesalers; raids were carried out on the shops of those who refused to comply with the Volunteer orders in connection with the boycott. In addition to those plans, the roads had to be watched to prevent Belfast bread carts or travelling shops to operate.

One case concerned a Belfast dealer in dress and suit lengths, who came into our area in a motor car in which he used to retail his goods from door to door. We intercepted this man and burned all the cloths and fabrics he had in his car. This operation led to an ambush known as the "Cock of the North ambush" which I will describe later.

Another incident concerned the burning of a bread cart belonging to Inglis, Bakers, Belfast. This firm had a very large sale for their bread all over the Ulster counties and occupied a high priority position on the boycott list.

#### Poteen Raids:

About the middle of 1920, when the R.I.C. had evacuated all the local isolated barracks in country districts and had ceased to give their former attention to their usual police duties, there sprang up a considerable traffic in the manufacture of poteen. This was a matter of grave concern to all rightminded people. The consumption of this raw spirit in any appreciable quantities had such a demoralising effect on the people who used it and created such bad example generally that even the Volunteers might fall victims to the evil. Something had to be done about it. Orders were issued to

the Volunteers to get to work and to take strenuous and drastic steps to stamp out the making and the handling of poteen.

As an instance of the danger of taking this spirit, there was a man in one district - not actually in our Company area - who was at one time a member of the Volunteers. His name was Mullen. This man was engaged in the making of poteen. We went along to raid his place and to destroy his poteen-making utensils and equipment. When we approached the vicinity of the house, he opened fire on us with a double-barrelled shotgun, after he had previously threatened us as to what would happen if we approached. We replied to his fire and, in the exchange of fire, he received a bullet wound in his stomach. When we realised the man's serious condition, we sent word to the local priest, asking him to come at once to the man. This man died the next morning after getting the Sacraments of the Church.

After this poteen raid and its aftermath our local Parish Priest denounced our actions in raiding for poteen. The denunciation was probably promoted by the death of the young man who had resisted us in carrying out our orders.

The next important event was the raiding of the local mails when being distributed by the local postman. This raid was carried out shortly after the death of Mullen. We felt that some of the local people who might have a feeling of resentment on account Mullins' death would try to get in touch with the R.I.C. and give information by writing letters to them. Immediately following this raid on the mails two of our local Company were arrested, Seán McDermott and Michael McElwee. Both these men were tried and sentenced to a term of penal servitude. The evidence produced for their conviction was their identification by the raided postman. McDermott was a Lieutenant in the Company at the time and was a very promising Volunteer and had the making of a very efficient officer. The imprisonment of McDermott and McElwee was a great loss to the Company as both were active men. Both were sent to Dartmoor Prison in England

and were serving their sentence there when they were released with the other convicted prisoners about January or February 1923.

For some months before the Truce we carried out a vigorous campaign against the sale of Belfast goods in our area. On Sunday in June, 1921, a man who had been selling Belfast drapery goods in our area in defiance of our boycott regulations was intercepted on the road by a number of Volunteers. This man was travelling in a car at the time. All his drapery samples were removed from the car and the stuff burned on the roadside. After the stuff was destroyed the man went off in his car. He, apparently, went direct to the British authorities and reported on what had happened. A party of police arrived that evening in two lorries and when they came to the vicinity of where the goods were destroyed about ten Volunteers who were mobilised and were awaiting their arrival opened fire on the police. The police replied to this fire. Both the Volunteers and the police took up extended positions over a fairly wide area of country and shooting went on for a considerable time during that evening. Although some of our men had a few 'narrow shaves' none of them was hit. One of the police had the stock of his rifle shot out of his hands. Another of the policemen had his uniform cap holed with a bullet. I was not in this action myself. This operation has since been known as "The Cock of the North Ambush" from the place where the shooting happened.

During the progress of this ambush a number of us who had no active connection with the ambush mobilised and got some arms together. The place where we mobilised was about two miles from the scene of the fight. We started in the direction of the firing and when we came to about a quarter of a mile from where the firing was taking place we took up a position along a road we expected the police to travel on their journey home in Cookstown direction. At the time we were taking up position the firing suddenly ceased. It was now getting late in the evening and we heard lorries approaching. As soon as the lorries

came within firing distance from us we opened fire on them. We had only a few rifles and the remainder of our arms were shotguns. The police, when we opened fire, slowed up their lorries and appeared to be getting out to make a fight of it. However, they seemed to have changed their minds and they put up speed again and cleared off, firing from their rifles as they went.

These two incidents did not produce any immediate consequences. About two weeks after 'The Cock of the North' affair a big round-up was staged in the area surrounding 'Cock of the North'. Four or five square miles of country was invested by both police and military forces who carried out a minute search of every house in the area. We had previously got good information from the town of Cookstown. This information was acquired purely by careful observation of the movements of the police in this town. The police gave the impression to those who were watching them that they were planning the staging of a big round-up. We correctly assumed that it was our district they would raid. In connection with this matter of observing police movements, I would like to explain that the organising of a round-up in which police and military took part in large numbers was bound to create a lot of activity and fuss amongst the senior officers of the Police Force and careful observation would always give an indication when something big was being planned.

The round up was carried out on the night of the 28th and the morning of the 29th June, 1921. As I have already stated we had been informed that some police activity was observed in Cookstown and we were expecting the round-up. Some of our men were sent out to block roads over a fairly wide area on the night of the 28th June and before they had finished with this wide-spread blocking of roads the raiding forces were actually removing the barriers at another end of the area. On account of us being prepared and ready for eventualities we were able to get all our men cleared from one place

to another as the raid was progressing and no arrests were made.

The only incident that took place during the round-up was the action of the Crown Forces in burning a Sinn Fein hall in the townland of Dungate. This hall had been erected by the Republicans of Dunamore (Cookstown) area. This hall had been erected the year previously by voluntary labour and it was a monument to the earnestness of the local Republican population. The hall was an extensive building over 100' long and 20' wide. Its destruction was keenly felt by those who had helped in building it.

Immediately after the burning of the Sinn Fein hall we decided to burn a creamery at Doon as a reprisal. This creamery and attached co-operative stores was situated in a townland of the same name lying between Dunamore and Cookstown. This creamery was a co-operative concern controlled and worked by Unionists. The creamery was situated in a Unionist area and its destruction entailed considerable organisation demanding careful planning. The local police barrack situated about a mile from the creamery was garrisoned by 8 or 9 R.I.C. augmented by "B" Specials who were armed and had been doing patrol work on the roads for some time previously. Our plans were nearly completed for this operation when we heard on the 10th July, 1921, that a Truce was being called on the next day at 12 noon. Steps were immediately taken to carry out the operation early on the morning of the 11th July. Men were mobilised from various places. We commandeered a lorry from a friendly Republican named McCullough. We also had available a motor car belonging to the 2nd Northern Division of the I.R.A. We procured some petrol from Paddy McCullough who owned the lorry and we transported our men to Doon in both the lorry and car. On arriving near the creamery we drove directly into the creamery yard. In the yard an R.I.C. man was standing observing our approach. The unconcerned attitude of the policeman gave us the impression that he was one of a large party of police. So some of the men in the lorry opened fire on the policeman and although a number of shots were fired at short range from the lorry which was moving at

the time, the policeman was unhit. The lorry and car were then stopped. We all jumped off the vehicles and made the policeman a prisoner. We kept him in close custody until we had burned the creamery. Afterwards we took him with us to our home area where we gave him both liquor and other refreshments before we allowed him to depart for his home.

We found a considerable quantity of paraffin oil on the creamery premises in two large tanks. We also found a quantity of petrol in two-gallon tins. We saturated all the creamery buildings and the co-operative stores adjoining with a mixture of paraffin and petrol. In order to make the explosive mixture more inflammable we got a quantity of flax tow from a nearby Flax Mill. We scattered the tow on the floors and sprinkled it with a mixture of paraffin oil and petrol. After we had all preparations made for setting the premises on fire we rounded up horses and carts numbering about 50 which were congregated in the creamery yard awaiting their turn to deliver milk at the creamery. These horses and carts were taken to the various roads surrounding the creamery. The horses were loosed from the vehicles and the vehicles were placed across the roads as <sup>baricades</sup> to stop all fast motor traffic approaching. These blockades on the roads were to safeguard us against surprise by <sup>a</sup>motorised military or police force.

While we were engaged in doping the premises with the inflammable material we found a serviceable revolver in one of the stores. We then applied lights to the creamery premises and the co-operative stores at different points. The work of the saturation of the entire premises with the mixture of petrol and paraffin had been so thoroughly carried out that when the lights were applied the fire raged into top gear at once. I heard afterwards that the light and smoke of the fire could be seen in County Derry 20 miles away although the fire was started just before noon.

Our Company were unable to carry an operation of this magnitude alone so we had helpers from Pomeroy and Carrickmore Companies and a few from County Derry. We had to provide armed guards to protect our rear on all the various roads leading to the Creamery premises. We also had to provide a covering party on the local R.I.C. barracks to prevent them issuing from the barracks and attacking the men engaged at the Creamery. We also had to have a number of men available in the vicinity of the Creamery to protect us against attack by local "B" men. The local "B" men, however, did not come to the assistance of the Creamery. This might have been due to the unexpected manner of the operation. It also might be due to caution on the part of the "B" men.

Charles Daly, the O/C. 2nd Northern Division, was in full charge of this operation. He did all the planning of the operation with local assistance and advice. It was our Company that originated the idea of burning the Creamery as a reprisal for the burning of our Sinn Fein Hall.

From October about 1920 up to the Truce we blocked roads continually. This blockading of roads embraced the blowing up or destruction of road bridges. We had also made it a rule that if police forces came into our area either one solitary policeman or a number, we always got together one or two of us or more and opened fire on them. If we did not get close to our targets it did not worry us. The fact that we fired on them served its purpose. As a result of these tactics our area got a bad name with the British authorities and consequently they did not visit the area very much except when they came in large numbers for raids or rounds-up.

Truce Period.

After the Truce the Volunteers started an intensive course of training. We had a number of training camps in our area. We had two at a place called Broughderg and one at a place called Beaghmore. These camps were carried out for one week at a time. The instructions at the camps for individual Volunteers or officers were confined to a week's duration. Relays of men went to each camp week after week.

Sometime after the Truce I attended a Divisional Camp at which Divisional, Brigade and Battalion officers received courses of instruction. This camp was held in the Sperrin Mountains district. Questions were asked in the British House of Commons about the training activities that were carried out at the Sperrin camp.

Immediately after the Truce the Sinn Fein organisation and the Volunteers continued to support Sinn Fein Courts. The idea in supporting the Courts was to deprive the British Courts of all jurisdiction in the area. When the Sinn Fein Courts were organised and Magistrates appointed, a canvas was made of all likely litigants who were asked to have their cases tried in our Courts. In a short time all cases from our area were tried in the Sinn Fein Court. I can safely say that for months during the Truce period not one case from our area went to a British Court. Whatever feeling of suspicion, if any such feeling existed amongst the people about the ability of our Courts to dispense even-handed justice, was soon dispelled by the efficient and fair decisions which resulted from trials in our Court.

We also established a Volunteer Police Force which was set up to carry out the orders of our Courts, collect fines imposed and to see that all Court decisions were implemented.

The arrest and detention of criminals was another aspect of Volunteer Police work. The Police had also to see that the regulations governing

public house closing etc. were observed. In general the Republican Police efficiently took the place of the former R.I.C.

At this period the R.I.C. had ceased to have any useful functions to perform. To give an example of the type of man we had in our Police Force I may mention one member, Paddy Quinn. Paddy was first a member of our Company and on the formation of the Police Force he was appointed Company Police Officer. He was later promoted to the rank of Battalion Police Officer and in another short time he was promoted to the rank of Brigade Police Officer. Paddy was a man of exceptional ability who had a way of getting things done without causing fuss or annoyance. He joined the Civic Guards on the establishment of that Force under General O'Duffy. He reached the rank of Sergeant and was stationed at Emyvale, County Monaghan, for years until he resigned on reaching the age limit recently.

We did all we could during the Truce period to provide arms and to get over the scarcity of arms that existed in our area pre-Truce. I think it was in the early Truce period that the arms' levy for the purchase of arms was started. I cannot be sure of this however. A cash levy was placed on each householder and the amount was fixed according to the means of each person. When the levy was made each person was notified of the amount placed on him or her and payment was requested. In cases where the amount required was either refused or the payment delayed unduly the Volunteers went and made a forcible collection. This forcible collection was rarely necessary as an overwhelming majority of people paid up willingly. In one case we got instructions to seize a motor car from a man in the Carrickmore area who refused to pay the levy. The car was hired by the local priest for the purpose of going to the Church to say Mass and on the day the seizure was made the priest was actually saying Mass at the time. We took the car and the priest had to walk home

after Mass. This car was used by the 2nd Northern Division in the County Derry area for arms work.

Another amusing incident in connection with the seizure for the non-payment of the arms' levy was the taking over of clothes from a delinquent who could do nothing about the matter at the time and he suffered the loss of his suit in preference to paying the levy placed on him. A considerable time later when the British law was re-established in our area this man took an action in the Courts against a brother of mine for the value of the suit. He was able to prove that my brother was either involved in the act of seizing the suit or that he was responsible for the ordering of the seizure. The man got a decree against my brother for the value of the suit which my brother had to pay.

Some of this arms' levy money was used for the upkeep of the Battalion, Brigade and Divisional organisations all which required cash to carry on and portion of it was used for the purchase of arms and equipment.

From the 11th July, 1921 up to about March 1922 was an uneasy Truce period in most areas in Northern Ireland. The Volunteers were taking part in training exercises all over the area in each Company district. Courts were held openly and a system of police patrols was carried out in all districts where Volunteer Companies existed. Mobilisations and parades were held at frequent times. In one review at Creggan all the Volunteers in the Battalion assembled and carried out military exercises.

During this Truce period in our district neither the R.I.C. nor the "B" Special Constabulary made any attempt to control the area or do any police work. As I have already stated the British Courts had ceased to function as far as about 90% of the population was

concerned. Our area was a considerable distance from the county line between Northern and Southern Ireland and the position was that our area was not then a matter of great concern to the Six-County Authorities who were more concerned with the areas close to their southern frontiers. I suspect that they decided to allow us to carry on as we were doing until the political situation, and the military situation, had become more stabilised, and that when that time arrived they would deal with us.

How long this state of affairs was allowed to last was decided for the British Government by actions by the Volunteers which from the British view threw down the gauntlet and the Northern Government were asked to take action. The first of these incidents was the capture of Pomeroy Barracks. This barracks was situated in our Battalion area and was carried out as a Battalion job. The second was the Evisbrack ambush. This ambush took place in our Company area, and the third operation was the destruction of the road bridge at Dunamore. This last operation was also in our Company area. Now I shall deal with these action in more detail.

#### The Capture of Pomeroy Barracks.

The capture of Pomeroy barracks took place on the night of the 16th March, 1922. The first I heard of the plans to capture the barracks was from Frank Donnelly of Pomeroy. I think that Donnelly at this time was our Battalion O/C. A number of men from our Company area and Dunamore Company area took part in the capture. Both Companies assembled in Christy Meenagh's house. Each one was given details as to what room in the barracks each Volunteer would go to. We all proceeded in our stocking feet from the outskirts of the town of Pomeroy towards the barrack so that we would make no noise in approaching the barrack. The door of the barrack was opened for us by one of the garrison in the barrack, an R.I.C. man named Staunton who was a native of County Mayo. There were about 18 R.I.C. men in the barracks on the night of its capture. When we came to the open door we all moved towards the

different rooms allotted to us without any noise or fuss of any kind. The whole operation of entering the barracks and proceeding to our allotted rooms was carried out like clockwork. We were all able simultaneously to overpower and tie up all the garrison in their bedrooms without the discharge of a shot by either the police or our men. We had a lorry, the property of Paddy McCullough of Greencastle, in the vicinity of the barracks and when all the inmates were properly secured the lorry was backed up to the door of the barrack and all the arms and other useful military equipment was carried out and placed in the lorry. When the lorry was completely loaded the weight was so much over its rated load that all present had to take a hand and give the lorry a push to get it started up the street of Pomeroy. We had previously prepared dumps for the safekeeping of the arms we planned to capture. Previous to the capture of the barracks we put bodies of men on guard on the various roads leading into Pomeroy with orders to break bridges and barricade all roads except the road that the lorry was to travel with the arms. On this road a bridge was partly demolished and when the load of arms passed over it the demolition was completed.

These safeguards prevented the possibility of the arms being intercepted by Crown Forces before they were properly concealed by us. This operation was carried out without a hitch. In fact there was not a shot fired from the start to the end of the operation by either the police or our men. This fact in itself proves that our men were subject to a high standard of discipline.

One of the jokes resulting from the capture of the barracks was the report that during the actual capture of the place I made tea for the assaulting party. This report had travelled as far as New York where I was asked about it years afterwards. What probably started this yarn was that during the time the arms were being carried from the barracks to the lorry I said, "Hurry up boys so that we can have our tea". I'd like to contradict the version of this affair that

got abroad. We went to the barracks for a military purpose and it would not be good military conduct to indulge in tea-drinking in a barrack before our job was completed.

In addition to all the precautions taken by us which I have outlined above I would mention also that it was through our area that the lorryload of arms was taken from the barracks. In this area all the roads were carefully patrolled to ensure that no straggling enemy patrol could get into the area unobserved.

After the capture of the arms in Pomeroy we had plenty of rifles and ammunition and other very essential military equipment. We established a Flying Column of about 10 or 12 men all equipped with captured rifles etc. These 10 or 12 men were constantly under arms. I was in charge of them. We always had facilities to call on additional men if we wanted help or if it was necessary to increase our force. On one occasion we were moving about in Evisbrack area. A lorry of police came along to a road block at Evisbrack and were stopped at the road block. It was in the afternoon and broad daylight when we came on the scene and observed the lorry at about 300 yards range. We took immediate cover and opened fire on the men at the lorry. The police who were with the lorry immediately took cover, and returned our fire with great accuracy. Before the shooting actually happened one of our men on our extreme right flank went away from our position on a message. Paddy Quinn was in charge of the men on the right flank and after the shooting started he observed a man coming in on our right flank. At first he thought the man approaching dressed in a trench coat was the Volunteer who had gone away on the message. Then he noticed a number of other men approaching and he then realised that the man in the trench coat was an enemy officer leading a detachment of men in on our right flank to attack us. Quinn immediately opened fire on the approaching man who quickly took cover. In the meantime I observed what was happening at my right flank and I

ordered the Column to withdraw. By the time that the enemy had observed our withdrawal the party of enemy Forces on our right opened up machine gun and rifle fire in our direction. This fire was not effective. At the time I gave the order to withdraw the main party of our men I saw another section of enemy forces approaching at the double in the direction of our left flank. These men on the left flank proved to be "B" men and they were not able to make contact with us. Our knowledge of the country enabled us to withdraw unobserved from a position which might easily have been a serious deathtrap for us. When we got clear of the enemy forces we withdrew to the Derry border and had tea in a house there. During the following night we returned to our own area. Our first intention in going towards County Derry was to make contact with a South Derry Column which we heard were in the area. When we arrived there we failed to get any tidings of them, hence our return home.

Attempt to blow up Dungate Bridge.

We made plans to blow up Dungate Bridge. This bridge is situated beside McCracken's public house on a road that connects two main roads. Before the operation was carried out a number of us had a discussion on how it should be planned and the best time for carrying out the operation. One of the Volunteers who got to know of our plans was a man named Quinn who had joined the Volunteers after the Truce in July, 1921. I cannot remember if Quinn was mobilised for this operation or not. If he was mobilised he probably did not go with us to the bridge. We know for certain, however, that he went and got in touch with enemy sources and gave accurate information about our plans. After darkness fell on the night planned for the operation we arrived at the bridge and commenced to make a hole in the centre of the bridge large enough to insert a mine containing explosives sufficient to demolish the whole bridge.

As a safety <sup>measure</sup> before we started our work we placed scouts on the road nearby to prevent enemy forces surprising us.

We had the cavity in the bridge nearly ready for the insertion of the mine

when a Force comprising R.I.C. and "B" Specials approached the bridge travelling along one bank of the river and in the adjacent fields. The first intimation I had that any danger to us was approaching was the hearing of revolver shots. The first shot was fired by Lieutenant Frank Ward of our Company who was placed to patrol the road near the bridge. He was walking on his beat when he was ordered to halt and put up his hands by a man who suddenly appeared near him on the road. Ward's reply was to quickly draw his revolver and fire point blank at his assailant. He had shot <sup>and</sup> mortally wounded a Major McKnight who was then in charge of the "B" Specials. This was the unfortunate Major's first night on patrol. Immediately Ward shot the Major he turned towards the main body of our men and rushed in our direction towards the bridge. When Ward reached me he informed me that he was shot twice by the Major's patrol. I ordered the men on the bridge to withdraw. Ward collapsed and we had to carry him along with us. His report about his own condition proved correct. He had one bullet in his shoulder and another in his back. The bullet in his back passed right through his stomach. He was shot on his way back to warn us. When we got a little distance from the bridge Ward told me again that he was seriously wounded. His plight worried me a lot. He said to me, "This is my last action". He took off his Sam Browne belt and handed it to me with his revolver and said "Carry on Paddy". I brought him some distance from the bridge to a house and I sent for a priest and a doctor for him. I made an Act of Contrition and got him to say prayers with me as I knew the boy was done for as he was vomiting up thick dark blood. I think that after I left Ward he was taken by the Doctor to Donaghmore near Dungannon and was placed in a Nursing Home or a small hospital in that village. Shortly after he was placed there military forces came along and captured him and he was taken by them to Belfast where he died in about two days after he was wounded. It is a strange coincidence that Major McKnight was taken to the same hospital in Belfast as Ward was taken to and both

died there about the same time.

The death of Ward had a very great affect on all the comrades who knew him well. He was a very fine lad and was absolutely fearless, and his attitude when he was wounded was a tribute to his outlook. Ward never made any suggestion that he regretted anything he had done. His death was one of our greatest tragedies and one of our greatest glories.

(Signed) Patrick McKenna (Ex-Batt O.C.)  
(Patrick McKenna) (Ex-Batt. O.C.)

(Date) 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1953

22nd Dec'r. 1953.

Witness:

John McCoy

22/12/53.

(John McCoy)

22.12.53.

