

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 988

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 988.....

**Witness**

Martin Dunbar,  
Railway Road,  
Gorey,  
Co. Wexford.

**Identity..**

Member of I.R.B. Ferns, Co. Wexford, 1912- ;  
Member of Irish Volunteers. 1913 - ;  
Adjutant 3rd Battalion North Wexford Brigade,  
1920-1921.

**Subject.**

National activities, Ferns, Co. Wexford,  
1912-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2311.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Mr. Martin Dunbar,  
Railway Road, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

About 1912, at the age of 18 years; I joined the Ferns Circle of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was sworn in by Willie Roice of Enniscorthy. Myles Breen was sworn in with me. When we joined there were seven or eight in the Circle including Barney McGuire, Brian Bolger, Tadhg Bolger, my brother Pat Dunbar and Tom Roche. Later on Tom Roche became Centre. Occasionally on Sundays we held rifle practice with a single loading German Mauser. Later we got a .22 rifle with which we practised.

Meetings of the Circle were held every fortnight. At the meetings we had discussions on ways and means of making Ireland Gaelic speaking and independent. We also discussed any young man we thought was a good Irishman with a view to his becoming a member of the I.R.B. Practically all the I.R.B. men were also enthusiastic members of the Gaelic League. One of our chief occupations after the outbreak of the 1914 war was the tearing down of recruiting posters for the British Army and replacing them with anti-British recruiting posters.

When the Irish Volunteers were started in Dublin in 1913 we were delighted at the opportunity of starting a Company in Ferns. The Ferns Circle of the I.R.B. organised and took complete control of the Company. Patrick Ronan was elected Company Captain. I was appointed Section Commander. The other Section Commanders were: Owen Redmond, Stephen Pender, Myles Breen and Paddy Murphy; all were

I.R.B. men. At the start we had about 50 men in the Company.

As no member of the Company had any military experience or knowledge the I.R.B. Circle decided to ask W.J. Brennan Whitmore, who had been in the British Army for a number of years and had actually served in India, to take charge of the training of the Company. Brennan Whitmore willingly agreed to do so. He worked very hard and was most enthusiastic. He was a strict disciplinarian; even those coming late for parades were made stand aside and were not allowed to take part in the drilling. He was not a member of the I.R.B. and, in fact, did not even know of its existence.

Parades were held weekly, usually on Sundays. The training included drilling, musketry, rifle practice and field exercises. We had occasional sham battles. On one occasion a big sham battle was held between the Ferns Company and the Enniscorthy Company at Scarawalsh Bridge. The Ferns Company was given the task of defending the bridge and the Enniscorthy Company to attack and capture it.

When the split occurred in the Volunteers a parade of the Company was held. Patrick Ronan, the Company Captain, addressed the parade and said that any man who wanted to follow Redmond was to leave the ranks. About twenty fell out. All the I.R.B. men remained faithful to the Executive.

The Redmondites started a Company of the National Volunteers but it faded out after a few months.

Late in 1915 or early in 1916 the Enniscorthy Company of the Irish Volunteers sent word to the Ferns Company that there was a large supply of gun cartridges at the Enniscorthy Railway goods' store and to come in and seize it. The cartridges, which were consigned to one of the big merchants in Enniscorthy, weighed about half a ton and were packed in four strong wooden cases. Patrick Ronan and Myles Breen went with a horse and cart to the goods' store and took the cases and brought them to Tincurry. The Enniscorthy Company acted as scouts and outposts while the cases were being removed from the goods' store. As had been previously arranged, I went with six or seven other members of the Ferns Company (all I.R.B. men) to Tincurry to meet Ronan and Breen. When they arrived with the "stuff" we broke the cases and put the cartridges into sacks which we hid for the time being in a "knock of bushes". The next few nights we spent in bringing all the cartridges to Ferns. Later half of them were returned to the Enniscorthy Company. On that occasion the cartridges were brought by John Kenny on his ass and cart; I went with him as an armed escort, with instructions to hand it over to Pat Keegan at Scarawalsh Bridge. Notwithstanding intense police activity none of the ammunition was recaptured. The cartridges were afterwards filled with buckshot.

Now we had plenty of ammunition but had only a few guns. We had rifles but not much ammunition for them. We got into communication with Headquarters in Dublin and they agreed to exchange buckshot guns for our rifles. Arrangements were made for two men, Pat Doyle and Joe Kenny, to bring the rifles to Dublin and bring the buckshot guns back. Fr. Michael Murphy, C.C., Ferns, a great Irishman and Gaelic Leaguer, who was aware of the arrangements offered to lend his motor car to do the job. His offer was accepted and the registration number was changed. It was arranged that they would return to Ferns by a back road through Clonee. Late that evening my young brother, Jim, went to Clonee to get a ferret and he noticed three R.I.C. men at Clonee Cross with what looked like rifles concealed in a cloth bag. On his return home he told me about it. I immediately thought of our men who were to come that way with the guns and I suspected that the R.I.C. were there for the purpose of intercepting and seizing the guns. I told some I.R.B. men what I had heard, and Pat Ronan sent word to all available Volunteers to arm as best they could and to proceed across country and to meet at a point on the road on the Dublin side of the police as soon as possible. About twenty men turned up; some were armed with guns, others had daggers and some had pikes. Pat Ronan was in charge. He placed us behind the hedge which we could see through while waiting for the men to come with the guns. Ronan remained on the road so as to stop the car. At about

10.30 p.m., after being in position for a few hours, we saw the lights of a motor car approaching from the Dublin direction. We were delighted as we believed this was our men with the guns. Ronan went down the road to meet the car. We heard him shout "Hello Joe". (Joe was the name of the driver of our car). He was answered by several voices saying "Hello", but the car did not stop. When it passed the hedge, to our amazement we saw it was filled with armed police, and concluded they were going to reinforce those already at the crossroads. After a further period of time we wondered why our men were not coming with the guns. The situation became so awkward that we decided to send for Brennan-Whitmore, who came and took charge. This was about 12 o'clock midnight. He re-arranged the men and sent out scouts to watch the police at the crossroads. Nothing happened until about 2 a.m. when our scouts returned and told us that the police had been withdrawn from the cross. Brennan-Whitmore then said: "Go home boys, your men are captured", a fact which was only too true as we saw by the next day's "Independent" that our men had been captured with the guns in Dublin. That was about a month before the Rising. Pat Doyle and Joe Kenny were charged with being in illegal possession of arms and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

During Holy Week 1916 Pat Ronan issued instructions for the Company to parade at 3 o'clock on Easter Sunday evening, to wear full equipment and bring all arms and three days' rations. On Good Friday Tom Roche, I.R.B. Centre for Ferns, told me and some other I.R.B. men

that a Rising throughout the whole country had been arranged for Easter Sunday and that that was the reason for the mobilisation for that day. Roche did not tell me from whom he got that information. Also during Holy Week W.J. Brennan-Whitmore received instruction to proceed to Dublin on Good Friday.

On Easter Sunday morning we got word from Ronan that the mobilisation for that evening had been cancelled but that we were to hold ourselves in readiness for any further orders we might receive. We kept in touch with each other and Ronan kept in touch with the Volunteer officers in Enniscorthy. Late on Easter Monday we heard that Dublin had risen, that the Volunteers had taken all before them and were sweeping through the city. When we got this news we decided to rise in sympathy with Dublin whether we got orders or not. Enniscorthy also decided to rise and it was agreed to take over the town of Enniscorthy on Tuesday. The Ferns Company mobilised at noon on Tuesday. About thirty-four or thirty-five men turned out. Most of them were armed with shotguns and buckshot ammunition; others had pikes and a few had revolvers. We marched along the main road to Enniscorthy. Near Ballinahallen, which is nearer to Enniscorthy than to Ferns, we were intercepted by a couple of dispatch riders from Enniscorthy. They informed us that Enniscorthy was not yet ready to rise. We were instructed to proceed to Ballinahallen wood and wait there for further orders. About midnight word came from Enniscorthy that they would not be ready to rise for another day or two. We had no option but to return to

our homes in Ferns. On Wednesday we still kept in touch with each other and the Company Officers kept in touch with our Headquarters in Enniscorthy. On Thursday about noon we got word from Enniscorthy that they were rising and intended right away to take over the town. Capt. Ronan instructed me and Seán Kavanagh to go to the railway line and remove a length of rail on the Gorey side of Ferns. We did so and put the rail in the ditch. Some of the Ferns Company went to Enniscorthy on Thursday evening. Seán Kavanagh and I walked there on Friday morning. When we reached Enniscorthy we reported to Capt. Ronan. He detailed us for picket duty in the town. In addition we commandeered mattresses, foodstuffs, motor cars and anything else we thought would be necessary. We also raided the houses of British loyalists for arms. We procured some guns as well as old type rifles and revolvers. The town was completely held by the Volunteers. The R.I.C. were in their own barracks and were afraid to move out. The Volunteers had established their headquarters in the Athenaeum. At 5 o'clock on Saturday evening Phil Murphy, who was O/C outposts, instructed Seán Kavanagh and myself to<sup>a</sup> post at the Asylum gates - about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile outside Enniscorthy on the Wexford road - and to relieve the pickets there. He told us this was a very important post as the British Forces would come this road from Wexford to attack Enniscorthy. We relieved the three Enniscorthy men who had been on the post for about four hours. We were armed with buckshot guns and had a good supply of buckshot cartridges. We were still on the post at 11 p.m.



not having yet been relieved, when a woman, Miss Forrestal, who lived in a small cottage nearby, came to us and asked us to come to her house and recite the Rosary with her and offer it up for the success of the "boys". We told her we could not leave our post but we would kneel down outside on the road and answer it, which we did of course. When the Rosary was finished Miss Forrestal bid us "good-night" and went to bed. About midnight a dispatch rider came up to us with a message that the British soldiers were on the march from Wexford and that the advance party would be passing our post within an hour. Our orders were to open fire on the advance party and to get back to Enniscorthy if possible. We spent an anxious time waiting for the enemy advance guard which, however, did not come. We heard afterwards that the British decided not to march into the town but to shell it from a distance outside. That probably explains why the advance party never came.

We were relieved by three Enniscorthy men at 5 a.m. on Sunday. We marched back to the Athenaeum and reported to Phil Murphy, O/C outposts. He apologised for leaving us so long on the post. I asked him why things were so quiet and where were the Volunteers, particularly the Ferns men. He said he got word late on Saturday evening that British soldiers had arrived in Ferns, that all the Ferns men and some Enniscorthy men had gone out to Ferns to attack them, and that he did not know if the fighting was still going on or not as he had received no further information.

Kavanagh and I asked his permission to proceed to Ferns, which he granted. We then had a hurried meal, after which we set out for Ferns on foot. We arrived there at five minutes to eight. We reported to Captain Ronan at the R.I.C. Barracks which, as well as the village, had been taken over by the Volunteers. Pickets had been placed at various points. We were told that the British soldiers had gone back to Gorey and the R.I.C. had evacuated the barracks before the Volunteers reached Ferns. Capt. Ronan instructed us to have a rest, which we were badly in need of, and to report back to him in the evening. We reported back that evening. Nothing further happened until about 10 o'clock that night when dispatch riders arrived from Enniscorthy with orders that all men in Ferns were to return to Enniscorthy. We concluded that British soldiers had arrived there and that fighting was in progress. We immediately got into motor cars or other means of transport and set out for Enniscorthy by different routes. The car in which I travelled was immediately behind Captain Paul Galligan's car. When at Strahert Cross Captain Galligan's car crashed through a fence and all the occupants were injured, three of them being rendered unconscious. We had a priest from Ferns and a doctor from Bunclody brought to attend the injured. The lights on our car having failed we were obliged to remain at Strahert Cross until dawn. Then Tom Barnes, Jimmie Doyle and I continued our journey by car via Ballycarney. At the Protestant Church there we met a motor car coming from Enniscorthy going towards Strahert to take the

injured to hospital. The driver of this car asked us where we were going, and did we not know that on orders from Dublin the Volunteers in Enniscorthy had surrendered. I refused to believe this and continued on to Enniscorthy. Barnes and Doyle went back to Strahart. On arrival at Enniscorthy I went to the Athenaeum, to find the place deserted, with everything in order just as if nothing had happened. I was dumbfounded. I then heard the sound of footsteps on the path. On looking round I saw a priest whom I recognised as Fr. Pat Murphy, C.C., Enniscorthy, who was an enthusiastic supporter of ours. "Where did you come from" he said, I was armed and wearing full equipment. I told him I was from Ferns and of the accident at Strahart. He told me to get back to Ferns immediately as he was expecting the British military there any minute. He advised me to throw my gun and ammunition into the Slaney. I told him I would bring them back home again, military or no military, which I did. When I arrived home I hid the gun and the ammunition in a recess behind the dresser, took off all equipment and had breakfast. I then went out to have a look down the street towards the R.I.C. barracks, over which a short time previously the tricolour had flown in glory. I perceived a column of 40 police and behind them 200 British soldiers, fully armed, halted at the barrack. I concluded that was no place for me, so I went back into the house and kept a watch out to see what was happening. After about a quarter of an hour I saw a Ferns policeman

accompanied by six soldiers coming towards my house. I then went out. The policeman came to me and put his hand on my shoulder and said: "I arrest you for taking up arms against your King and country". I asked him if he could prove his charge. He replied: "I am answering no questions, and anything you say may be used in evidence against you". Two soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets stepped up, one on each side of me. I was their prisoner. The policeman and some other soldiers then went into my house and searched it. They found and took away my military equipment and bayonet. They failed, however, to find the gun and ammunition which I had hidden behind the dresser in the kitchen. I was brought to the barracks where I discovered six other men were already under arrest. They were: my brother Pat, Tom Barnes, Seán Kavanagh, Tom Roche, Bill Kavanagh and, I think, Jimmie Doyle. We were marched to Camolin Railway Station, escorted by over 200 soldiers and forty police, and put on a special train for Arklow. On arrival there we were dumped into a vault-like stone building which had no windows and, therefore, no light or fresh air. It had a clay floor which was wet. They refused us anything, even straw on which to lie. We were given bread and so-called tea. After two days we were brought by boat to the North Wall, Dublin, and marched along the Quays to Richmond Barracks. While we were detained here we heard the shots which we knew were entering the bodies of Padraig Pearse and the other leaders who were executed. After about a week we were shipped to England in a cattle boat. Also on board

were a number of coffins which we believed contained the bodies of British officers who had been killed in the Rising in Dublin. We were brought to Wandsworth Prison. I was shoved into a cell and the door banged. After about half an hour the door was opened and three soldiers stood at it. I was ordered to take off my clothes and throw them over to the soldiers, who searched them thoroughly and took everything except my rosary beads. They then flung the clothes back at me and departed to the next prisoner's door, when I could hear the same thing being repeated. We were confined in our cells for  $23\frac{1}{2}$  hours out of the 24. We had to scrub out our cell occasionally. One day a soldier remarked to me: "Ye are here for fighting and we are here for not fighting".

Signed: Martin Dunbar  
(Martin Dunbar)

Date: 15-8-1954

Witness: Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col.

(Sean Brennan)

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