

W.S. 1,378

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,378

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,378

Witness

Thomas Donnellan,
Carrareagh,
Milltown,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Q/M. Milltown Company I.R.A. Co. Galway,
1921.

Subject.

Milltown Company I.R.A. Co. Galway,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2704

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS DONNELLAN,

Carrareagh, Milltown, County Galway.

I was born at Carrareagh, Milltown, County Galway, in the month of March, 1904, and was educated at Milltown National School until I reached the age of about fourteen years. I joined the Milltown Company of the Irish Volunteers just about the time I left school. That would have been some time about the end of 1917. The Company Captain was Thomas Feerick and the two Lieutenants were Patrick Burke and John Thornton. Those three officers are all now deceased. The strength of the company was about thirty at the time I joined. Later on the number increased to about forty and remained roughly at that figure up to the truce. Parades were held once a week. I am not sure if they were held twice a week but I do not think so.

The Company Captain always took charge of the parades and of the drilling of the company. Drill was very simple. It consisted entirely of foot drill as no arms were carried on parade. I cannot remember any route marches. We had no arms in 1917 or 1918 but almost all the members of the company, with the exception of the few who lived in the village of Milltown, were farmers' sons and had their own shotguns. The weekly parades continued during 1918, 1919 and well into 1920 as far as I can remember. I remember the general election of 1918 and that I canvassed on behalf of Dr. Brian Cusack, the Sinn Féin candidate. Lieutenant Patrick Burke accompanied me on the canvass. I remember that all the members of the company canvassed the company area which corresponded with the Milltown parish area.

The canvassing was done by Volunteers working in pairs. The work was easy as the great majority of the people of the parish were in favour of the Sinn Féin candidate. The Remondite candidate was a man called Sloyan from Bishop St., Tuam. Dr. Cusack won by a large majority.

I think it was fairly late in 1919 when we collected shotguns all over the company area. The people who owned them gave them willingly. All we had to do was to go and collect them. There is nothing worthy of recording that I can remember in 1920. I was too young at the time to take any great interest in the Dáil Éireann loan, or in the formation of the Republican police.

I remember distinctly an attack on a patrol of R.I.C. in the middle of April, 1921. We had information that five or six R.I.C. went every night from their barrack in the centre of the village of Milltown to the railway station, a little over a quarter of a mile from the village. Ten or eleven of the company took up positions near the post office to attack the patrol on their way back from the railway station. The post office was actually in the village but there was no other more suitable place for the attack nearer to the railway station. It was late at night, probably about 10.30 when the attack occurred.

There were only two R.I.C. men in the patrol the night of the attack. When they came opposite our position we opened fire on them with shotguns. The range was only five to ten yards as we were in position right inside the fence of the road on one side only. Both R.I.C. men fell and we concluded that they were killed outright. The scene of the attack was only a little over a hundred yards from the R.I.C. barrack and fire was opened from the barrack in our direction almost immediately they heard our shots in

the barrack. That prevented us from taking the arms of the two R.I.C. I now remember another reason why we took up position so near the barrack. Sometimes the R.I.C. patrol did not proceed beyond the outskirts of the village and if we took up positions further away we were afraid they would turn back before they reached them.

Most of the attacking party withdrew in a northerly direction towards Millbrook and on to the Roscommon border. I returned home through the fields as I was not suspected by the R.I.C. of being in the I.R.A. on account of my youth. There was nobody engaged in this attack but members of the Milltown Company. The names of those who took part, as far as I can remember them, were: Captain Thomas Feerick (now deceased), Lieutenant John Thornton (now deceased), Lieutenant Patrick Burke (now deceased) and Volunteers Patrick Walsh, John Patrick McCormack, Daniel McCormack (now deceased), Martin Slattery, Peter Burke, Peter Brennan (now deceased), Michael Donnellan and myself. We were all armed with shotguns. No arrests or reprisals of any kind followed the attack. I cannot say whether the two wounded R.I.C. men died but they never again came back to Milltown. Their names were Brennan and Dunne.

In June, 1921, there was a second attack on the R.I.C. near the village of Milltown. Shortly after the first attack movements of R.I.C. patrols were very closely watched by Company I/O Michael John O'Donnell, whose mother had a publichouse next door to the R.I.C. barrack in Milltown. Volunteer Lawrence Sullivan and I often went into the village to watch R.I.C. movements. I was Company Q/M and Volunteer Sullivan was a lad about my own

age. Patrols of R.I.C. numbering four to eight went out in some direction every Sunday evening, but they never went regularly in any one direction. It was impossible to predict the route they would take on any particular Sunday evening.

One Saturday night towards the end of June the Battalion Flying Column under the command of Thomas Dunleavy, Commandant, Tuam Battalion, arrived at Carrareagh, about half a mile to the south of Milltown. They came as far as I know with the intention of attacking the Milltown R.I.C. Sunday patrol. I think they contacted Company I/O Michael John O'Donnell, who contacted me and I in turn contacted Volunteer Lawrence Sullivan. Volunteer Sullivan and I went into the village on Sunday evening about 6 p.m. We knew that the patrol never went out early on Sunday evenings.

We met Company I/O O'Donnell, who told us that a patrol would surely go out some time during the evening. We watched the barrack until we saw a patrol of four go out, sometime between 9 and 10 p.m. When they left the barrack they took a short cut by an old path through the fields in the direction of Banagher village on the Kilconly/Milltown road. Volunteer Sullivan and I followed them, taking advantage of the ground and of hedges and fences so that they would not see us trailing them. They walked very leisurely along the path. They were armed with rifles. After walking about a mile along the path they came out on the main road at the village of Banagher. We were still watching them from the fields and saw that they were returning to Milltown by the main road instead of the way they had gone out. We ran as fast as we could to notify the Flying Column at Carrareagh.

We met them between Carrareagh and Milltown proceeding in the direction of Milltown along the grass margin of the main Tuam/Milltown road. They were coming close to the village to be on hand in case of a call. I remember distinctly that they were coming along the side of the road in single file.

We reported to Commandant Dunleavy the number of R.I.C. in the patrol and the direction they were taking. Commandant Dunleavy sent us back immediately to confirm that the R.I.C. were still returning to Milltown by the main Kilconly/Milltown road. We went back to the junction where the Kinconly/Milltown road joins the Tuam/Milltown road about two hundred and fifty yards to the south of Milltown. Volunteer Sullivan went into the fields and I went along the road in the Kilconly direction. The Flying Column quickly followed us and were soon in position to attack the patrol.

The position taken up by the I.R.A. was on the right-hand side of the main Tuam/Milltown road as one goes from Tuam to Milltown and about ten to twenty yards on the Milltown side of the junction made by the Tuam/Milltown and the Kilconly/Milltown roads. The I.R.A. occupied positions only on one side of the road.

I had gone only about twenty yards along the road in the direction of Kilconly when I heard the patrol coming. I then reported to the Flying Column that they were very close at hand, and remained with them as my work was finished. The R.I.C. rounded the bend in a few minutes and when they got into the ambush position fire was opened on them. Two of the R.I.C. were killed outright and one badly wounded. The fourth member of the patrol escaped.

He got inside the fence opposite to where the I.R.A. were in position and escaped to the barrack in Milltown.

The names of the two killed were Sergeant Morrin and Constable Day. I cannot remember the name of the man who was wounded. The man who escaped was named Carter. He afterwards wore a cap which was holed by a bullet the night of the attack and boasted of his narrow escape. I think that Sergeant Morrin was the only one of the four who belonged to the regular R.I.C. The other three were Black and Tans as far as I remember.

Volunteer Lawrence Sullivan, who was scouting with me, had a bad time when firing opened as he was right in the line of fire from our own men. He told me afterwards that he had to crawl on his stomach until he got cover in a fold in the ground. The firing from our men did not affect me as I was with the attacking party after having told them that the patrol was close at hand.

The members of the Milltown Company who took part in this attack were: Captain Thomas Feerick (now deceased), Volunteers John Patrick McCormack, Daniel McCormack (now deceased), Patrick Walsh, Peter Brennan (now deceased), Peter Burke, Martin Slattery and Company Q/M Thomas Donnellan (myself).

It is difficult to say how many men took part in the attack as the night was very dark. I would say roughly fifteen in all. No reprisals followed the attack and no arrests were made. The R.I.C. threatened to shoot people in the village and searched all the houses there. Curfew from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. was imposed the day following the attack and it continued to the truce. The attack took place about a fortnight before the truce.

After the attack we withdrew southwards across the fields. The arms of the dead and wounded R.I.C. could not be collected by the I.R.A. owing to the fire of the R.I.C. man who escaped to the far side of the road, and to rifle and machine-gun fire from the barrack, the garrison of which at the time was between thirty-five and forty, all R.I.C. and Black and Tans. We all got away safely under cover of darkness.

I opposed the Treaty and was taken prisoner by Free State forces in the summer of 1922. I was interned first in Athlone, then in Mountjoy and finally in the Curragh Camp. I was held prisoner for eighteen months - about six months in each of the three places.

Signed: Thomas Donnellan
(Thomas Donnellan)

Date: 22 March 1956
22nd March, 1956.

Witness: C. Moynihan (C. Moynihan)
(Investigator)

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