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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STÁIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 19



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Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STÁIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

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(Dublin).

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Statement by

Liam Murphy,
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Dated 22 August, 1947.

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1913 - 1916.

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STATEMENT OF LIAM MURPHY, FAIRLEA,
FAIR HILL, CORK.

PERIOD: December, 1913, to May, 1916.

UNIT: 'D' Company, Cork City Battalion, I.V.

I became a member of the I.R.B. in 1914 or early in 1915, being taken into a circle consisting mainly of men of 'D' Company, Irish Volunteers, by Fred Murray, who was then the centre. There were sixteen or seventeen men in the circle at Easter, 1916. These included Tomás MacCurtain, Terence MacSwiney, Fred Murray, Christy MacSweeney, Seán O Tuama, Martin Donovan and Paddy O'Sullivan. Terence MacSwiney became a member of the circle after I did but before 1916. I was elected centre about the end of 1915, and at that election I remember raising the question that it was an embarrassment for me as a Volunteer to be centre when the Brigade Commandant and Vice Commandant were members of the circle. Tomás MacCurtain said it would make no difference whatever, and I accepted the result and acted as centre of the circle. There was no definite information in the circle about the Rising until about a week before Easter at a meeting MacCurtain told us it was to be on Easter Sunday.

I joined the Volunteers at the inaugural meeting held in the City Hall on the 14th December, 1913. The initiative in calling the meeting was taken by a group of men interested in Gaelic League and Irish Ireland activities, the I.R.B., Fianna Éireann, the Industrial Development Association and anti-British activities. They had premises in An Dún in Queen Street. MacCurtain told me afterwards that they formed a Committee and invited MacNeill to attend the meeting. MacNeill brought Casement with him. Their action in calling the meeting was, I believe, taken spontaneously, but they endeavoured to make the Committee representative while retaining control.

I believe there was a conscious intention to keep the control of the Volunteers in the hands of members of the I.R.B. That was evident later in the appointments of Officers who were nearly all I.R.B. men. There was a case in which a vacancy for Brigade Adjutant occurred in 1915 when Daiti Barry, who occupied that post, lost his civil employment and had to leave the city. An examination was set and a man named Liam Rabette, Adjutant of 'D' Company, and Seán Nolan sat for it. It was stated at the time that although Rabette got the highest marks, Nolan was appointed because he was an I.R.B. man.

I do not know of any drilling going on in An Dún before the formation of the Volunteers, except drilling of the Fianna.

At the public meeting J.J. Walsh took the chair, and Maurice O'Connor and Diarmuid Fawcett acted as Hon. Secretaries. I don't think there was any formal proposal for the chair. Small printed forms of application for membership of the Volunteers (printed by Corcoran, Sullivan's Quay) had been distributed before the B.O.H. contingent started the row at the meeting. The A.G.H. was 1,200 strong in the city at the time and had a vigorous organisation. The hall was full, but all the slips handed out were not returned. Most of the slips were returned after the row was over - I should say five or

six hundred of them - but many who then enrolled never turned up subsequently. As far as I know, no Committee was elected or appointed at that meeting and the Committee that had called it carried on, with the exception of Maurice O'Connor who resigned.

Typewritten slips were sent out early in the following week to all who had made application to join, requesting them to attend the first parade in An Dún. The notice ran: "This is to notify you that the first parade of the Irish Volunteers, Cork Corps, will be held in An Dún, Queen Street, at 8 o'clock on Friday night."

At that parade there were only nine men drilling, viz: Tomás MacCurtain, Seán O'Hegarty, Martin Donovan, Paddy Corkery, Seán O'Sullivan, Jack Lane, Tadhg Barry and myself. An ex-serviceman, Bill Goodwin, who worked in Suttons, had been sent to us by Frank Daly, and he gave us our first drill instruction. At the next and subsequent parades more men came in and the strength started to grow steadily. I had had 8½ years of physical culture training at St. Mary's Hall and was the first Volunteer to be put in charge of a squad by Goodwin. After that I did a lot of training.

I think it was about May, 1914, that we moved to Fisher Street. The strength was then about 400 and four Companies had been formed: 'C' and 'D' on the North side and 'A' and 'B' on the South side of the city. The Officers of these Companies were all appointed.

It was understood from the first that the Cork Committee would extend the movement over the whole County and very soon after the start in Cork contact was made with places close to the city. These contacts were gradually extended and when Terence MacSwiney became whole-time organiser in 1915 the whole County was covered.

In June, 1914, the strength of the Cork City Companies was about 400. When the Redmond supporters came in, the strength went up to about 2,000. No new Companies were formed; the recruits were absorbed into the existing Companies. I had 216 or 316 men at this period. There were a number of ex-servicemen instructors at this period, but Bill Goodwin continued until after the Redmond Split. He had been a Schoolmaster in Blarney before he ran away and joined the British Army. The four Company organisation in Cork City continued from the start up to Easter, 1916.

I was in 'D' Company but acted as drill instructor and ran a physical training class. Pearse inspected the P.T. class I had in the Hall in Sheares Street on the occasion of his visit to Cork in August, 1915. He commended the work we were doing. The Officers and Section Commanders of 'D' Company at Easter, 1916, were:-

Captain:	Christopher O'Gorman.
1st Lieut.:	Con Collins.
2nd Lieut.:	
Quartermaster:	
Adjutant:	William Rabbett.
Section Commanders:	Christy MacSweeney, Daiti O'Sullivan, Seán Kenny, Tom Baldwin.

Daiti Cotter had been Company Captain previously, but was taken off it and put in charge of a Signalling Section. He had made a special study of morse and semaphore.

The original Committee functioned up to 1916. Some additions were made to it when the Redmond followers came in; the original members always had a majority, and most of them continued to act up to Easter, 1916. There was a Military Council also and the Company Captains were members of it. That Council was increased in numbers also after the Redmond followers came in, but the majority was still on our side - we had 14 against Captain Talbot Crosbie's 11. Some members of both the Committee and the Military Council held no rank; they paraded as ordinary Volunteers.

The Cornmarket became available to us for drilling after the Redmond followers came in and both it and Fisher Street continued to be used up to the Split at the end of August, 1914. After that Fisher Street only was available until we moved to the Hall in Sheares Street early in 1915.

Parades were held three nights a week and route marches every Sunday. The first drill instructors were all ex-servicemen, Bill Goodwin, John Donovan, Jack Collins and Long. There was no ex-serviceman a member of 'D' Company.

The arms position in 'D' Company in June, 1914, was that we had 2 rifles and a few shot guns. The same position obtained in August, 1914. I am not certain of what the exact position at Easter, 1916, was; I know I had a rifle and so had Paddy O'Sullivan and there were some others, but I do not know how many. Some raids took place before 1916, and stocks of arms and ammunition were increased in this way. We got 6,000 rounds of .303 off a train at Kilbarry in 1915. Four boxes of it containing 1,000 rounds each were brought to my house. We opened two of the boxes and took the ammunition loose to the Hall in Sheares Street. Seán Nolan and Martin Donovan were with me taking this stuff to the Hall. The remaining two boxes I retained for a considerable time. They were painted red and had geranium pots placed on them on window sills. Some time before Easter, 1916, this ammunition was distributed to Volunteer Units in the County.

About the end of 1915, Tomás MacCurtain gave me 36 .32 and .38 revolvers to hold for him. I don't know where he had got them. I held them until he asked me to bring them in after Christmas, 1915. Later I got 8 or 9 rifles to hold until they were issued to individual Volunteers.

I always had very close contact with Tomás MacCurtain, and I did one thing for him about which he was insistent on the need for secrecy. On one occasion before Easter Sunday, 1916, and on two occasions in the following week, he brought me bulky packets in sealed envelopes, apparently containing documents, with instructions on each occasion that I was to deliver the packet to Rev. Father Peter Sheehan, O.F.M., St. Francis, Liberty Street. I delivered each of the three packets to Father Peter.

About 2,000 Volunteers were present at the Cornmarket meeting on 30th August, 1914. Admission was by Volunteer Card and I was on duty at the gate. Starkie, R.M., and Major O'Connor, Douglas, attempted to gain admission but were refused. Starkie had two children with him who wanted to see the show; O'Connor said as an old soldier he would like to be present.

Captain Talbot Crosbie had no connection with the Volunteers before he was appointed Chief Inspecting Officer for Cork County after the Redmond followers came in. At the parade on 30th August he read a telegram he had sent to the War Office offering the services of the Cork Volunteers to the British Government, and said he had received a reply. The Volunteers, he said, would have to decide that day between him and the Committee. No one expected this development and it came as a complete surprise. I think H.P.F. Donegan and Tom Byrne spoke in support of Crosbie's attitude. Tomás MacCurtain and Seán O'Hegarty spoke against it and protested against Crosbie's unauthorised action.

I think there were not many Volunteers absent from that parade. No formal vote was taken, the parade just divided in support of one side or the other. About 60 or 70 Officers and men followed the Committee, the remainder accepted Crosbie's leadership. Some of them rejoined later, and when we moved to Sheares Street early in 1915 we had about 250 men parading. The National Volunteers continued to use the Cornmarket. I don't think we lost any rifles at the Split. There were not many in the Companies at the time and most if not all of them were in the hands of supporters of the Committee. The rifles stolen from Fisher Street by the National Volunteers were dummies.

The Committee and the Military Council continued to function after the Split and up to Easter, 1916. The four City Companies were formed into a Battalion, with Seán O'Sullivan in charge, some time in 1915.

On Easter Sunday, 1916, 154 Officers and men from the four City Companies paraded, plus a small number detailed as a guard on the Hall. A few men were instructed by Tomás MacCurtain not to parade, and to remain in the city. Seán O Tuama was one of them but I do not know the reason for this instruction. Generally, every man on the rolls was mobilised. 38 Officers and men of 'D' Company turned out, out of about 120 on the rolls. The men generally thought it was an ordinary parade and the Officers had no definite information that anything more was intended. The instructions that had been received were for an ordinary two-day exercise, but rumours were going about towards the end of the week that it was "Der Tag." When most of the men were advised to go to Confession on Saturday, colour was given to the rumours and many did not parade because of the possible consequences. I think the instruction to advise the men go to Confession was given by Tomás MacCurtain to the Company Captains.

I paraded with 'D' Company. At the Hall in Sheares Street it was found that 3 rifles held by the brothers O'Shea of Clarence Street were not on parade, and Rabette, Adjutant of 'D' Company, was sent to collect them. When he got back to the Hall he found that the parade had moved off and he did not go to Macroom at all. I remember a man arriving at the Hall before we moved off to Capwell Station. We heard he had brought a message from Headquarters but we did not know what it was. I did not see either MacCurtain or MacSweeney at Capwell Station before we entrained. We had reserved carriages, which I think had been arranged for previously.

Most of 'D' Company had rifles, some Mausers, some Italian. A few men were armed with revolvers. The result of collecting the arms of the men who did not parade was that almost everyone had arms of some kind. I had about 100 rounds of .303.

We detrained at Crookstown Station and marched to Kilmurray, via Bealnablath. The West Cork men were waiting there and we moved off to Macroom. We were dismissed on the Square and some of us went into the Town Hall as the day was very wet. We were told the parade was cancelled and we were to return to Cork by train. We got no other information. We returned to Cork and the men took their arms home in the usual way.

A guard had been maintained on the Hall in Sheares Street for a week before Easter Sunday. MacCurtain and MacSwiney were sleeping there. The only arms in the hall then or in the week after Easter were the arms of the Guard. The Guard was maintained during Easter week.

I was in the Hall most of the day Easter Monday. I do not remember any messenger coming to the Hall with a message from Dublin. The first news I got of the Rising in Dublin was at O'Mahony's in Washington Street where I had gone for a paper. Later that was confirmed by news which we got, I think, from the "Examiner" Office. There was considerable excitement in the Hall but in the absence of the Brigade Commandant and Vice Commandant no action or decision could be taken. They returned to the Hall between 8 and 9 o'clock on Monday night. A hostile mob collected outside. They were noisy and aggressive. One man who persisted in peering through a slit in the shuttering of a basement window was plastered across the eyes with a wet paste brush by Bill Horan from inside the window and ran away yelling that he had been blinded. When the crowd became very aggressive, Denny Murphy of Cove Street opened the door and knocked out one of the ringleaders with a single blow. The crowd shouted that the man was dead, some Volunteers rushed out and the crowd scattered.

I was in the Hall again on Tuesday. Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney were there and rumours were about that the military intended to attack the Hall. MacCurtain sent me with some Fianna boys to the vicinity of the Barracks to see if we could observe any movements or get any information. We were unable to see anything unusual. One of the Fianna boys, Bill Cross, got into conversation with a P.O. telegraph messenger near the top of Patrick's Hill. The messenger

was taking a telegram to the Barracks. Cross induced the boy to let him look at the telegram, saw that the envelope was only slightly fastened, opened it and made a copy of the message, which was in code. I brought the copy to MacCurtain who sent me with it to Seán Barry in the Post Office to get it deciphered. I brought back a message from Barry to MacCurtain but I don't know if he succeeded in deciphering the message or what the message was.

On Tuesday night a Reserve man named Pat Duggan, who was home on leave and had been called up to the Military Barracks, came to my house and informed me that 24 Platoons were standing to in Barracks waiting for orders to attack the Volunteer Hall.

Captain Dickie came to the Hall in uniform on Friday night. He was held up by Martin Donovan. Terence MacSwiney received him and Dickie inquired if he was quite safe. MacSwiney was indignant and said he had given his word.

I did not attend the meeting called to discuss the question of the surrender of arms. I had heard what was to be proposed and refused to attend. Three or four other members of 'D' Company - Paddy O'Sullivan was one - took similar action. We hid our rifles and ammunition. Michael Barrett went down to the Lord Mayor's house with a dummy rifle wrapped in canvas and came back with a .45 revolver which he had picked up there when he put down the rifle.

SIGNED:

Liam Murphy

DATE:

August 22nd 1947

WITNESS:

Florence Donohue

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