

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 24



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Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,  
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.  
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 24.

Statement by

Cornelius Murphy,  
Clontymon,  
Boreenmanagh Road,  
Cork.

Dated 21 August, 1947.

On Formation of I.V., Cork, 1913,  
Cork City I.V., Easter 1916.

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STATEMENT OF CORNELIUS MURPHY, "CLONTYMON",  
BOREENMANNA ROAD, CORK.

Period: 1913 to Easter, 1916.

Unit: 'B' Coy., Cork City, I.V.

The whole movement for National revival in Cork between 1900 and the organisation of the Volunteers started with, and depended upon, the activities of from twelve to twenty families. Even after the start of the Volunteers that organisation depended mainly upon the same people for leadership, policy and morale. They went into everything that looked like being national - the Gaelic League, the G.A.A., the Fianna, the Celtic Literary Society, the Industrial Development Association and the A.O.H. American Alliance.

The members of these bodies were not, generally speaking, revolutionaries. 90% of the G.A.A. was just G.A.A., the other 10% was good. I belonged to two G.A.A. Clubs when the Volunteers started, and I was the only member of either of the two Clubs who joined the Volunteers. With the exception of the O'Growney Branch the Gaelic League Branches in Cork were interested in the revival of the language and nothing more. A number of us went into the A.O.H. American Alliance. That body was not revolutionary, but when the Volunteers were started we had sufficient members in the Alliance to outvote the remainder. The organisation had £90: 0: 0: which we voted and spent on the purchase of arms. That broke up the organisation in Cork.

The start of the Volunteers in Cork was spontaneous after the Rotunda Meeting in Dublin. The situation was ripe for it. There was an able and active group of Nationalists who had been working together in various organisations for years. They knew their own minds and they knew one another. It was perfectly natural that they should take the initiative and that the organisation and leadership of the movement should fall to them. They acted quickly. The I.R.B. ordered its members into the Movement.

Much of the initial work was done by men who were then employed at Messrs. Suttons, Ltd. Tomas MacCurtain and my brother Sean worked there at the time; Tadgh O'Leary was there and Tom Nash who became a member of the Committee. The first Drill Instructor the Volunteers had, Goodwin, an Ex-British Army man, also worked there. Tomas MacCurtain and Sean Murphy picked their men. The first Volunteer Committee were mainly their nominees, and even though there was an election of a Committee later the nominations were arranged. The I.R.B. had effective control and exercised it in all appointments to Volunteer positions. Later, in 1919, both Tomas and Sean had to choose between Suttons and the Volunteers, and they both left; Tomas to start a business of his own in Blackpool, and Sean to come into business with me.

No member of my family attended the first meeting in

the City Hall as we were all out of town that day, but my three brothers - Sean, Seamus, Padgh and myself joined immediately.

The City was divided into four Company Areas soon after the start. We were in 'B' Company. My brother Sean was appointed Quartermaster for the City Companies when they were formed into a Battalion, and soon afterwards Brigade Quartermaster for Cork City and County. He had always very close contact with Tomas MacCurtain: all of us were in the I.R.B. and we were as well informed as anybody in the City of all Volunteer developments, and better informed than most.

The first rifles that came to Cork in bulk were purchased from D.T. O'Sullivan, Cook St., in 1915. I think that lot was fifty Lee Enfield Rifles and they cost £5: 0: 0: each. They were the last free imports; the prohibition against the importation of arms came into force just after they arrived. I am not quite sure of the date but it was after the Howth Gun running. Before that a Mauser rifle which Liam de Roiste had was the only one in Cork.

When we re-organised after the split numbers were small but continued to increase in spite of intense opposition and ridicule by the majority of the population. We were ostracised by our neighbours, by our bosses and by our priests. We were jeered at in public and spat upon. Men's employment was jeopardised by membership of the Volunteers and some lost their jobs when they would not give up membership. There were incidents where people spat into our collection boxes. There was one solitary Volunteer in Douglas; he was almost a pariah and dare not wear his equipment leaving home. It required great moral courage to continue in the face of this opposition.

There was no change of Officers in 'B' Company from the start up to Easter 1916. The Officers were :-

Captain Donal Barrett.  
1st Lieut. Paddy Trahey.  
2nd Lieut. Donal Og O'Callaghan.  
Adjutant Pat Harris.  
Quartermaster Cornelius Murphy.

Trahey was in charge of the Company in Limerick at the Whit Sunday Parade in 1915 when we were attacked and he made the men keep their ranks under the most severe provocation.

I think it was 23 men from the Company paraded on Easter Sunday 1916. All did not turn out. I know the following nine men were out in my Section :-

Seán Murphy.  
Cornelius Murphy.  
Seamus Murphy.  
Tadgh Murphy.  
Patrick Trahey.  
Denis or Patrick Murphy.  
Patrick Harris.  
Tom Harris.  
- Harris.

All the rifles were collected and every man who paraded in 'B' Company had a rifle. There was a considerable quantity of .303 ammunition. I know I carried nearly a hundred-weight on my back that day - including a spare pair of heavy boots.

On Holy Thursday we knew that something more than an ordinary parade was on - at least the I.R.B. men knew. We were told to go to Confession. Our family had no doubt but that we were going into something from which none of us may return. We made our arrangements accordingly. We held a discussion as to whether we would take Tadgh or not. He was very young. We decided finally, thinking of the aftermath of previous Risings, that he had a better chance armed with us than unarmed at home.

The Countermanding Order from McNeill brought by Jim Ryan came when the parade was moving off from the Hall in Sheare's Street on Easter Sunday morning. The Brigade Officers took the decision to let the parade go on. I do not remember who told me but I knew, and I think all the Officers knew, before we went into the train at Capwell Station that we were returning to Cork again that night. The I.R.B. men knew anyway and that included practically all the Officers. The Ballinadee men did not, however, know of the cancellation until we met them at Crookstown.

The plan of action for the Cork Brigade as far as I knew it was that we were to occupy the high ground along the line of the Boggera and Derrynasaggart Mountains, and hold all lines of communication between Cork and Kerry. We were to take Macroom R.I.C. Barracks, and possibly other Barracks, but were to fall back again to this line. We were to prevent any re-inforcements from Cork getting into Kerry; and the Kerry men after the landing of Arms was completed were to fall back on us. The arms were to come up to us in our positions along this line. The Limerick men were to concentrate as an extension of our line to the north. They were a part of the cover for the arms landing in Kerry. The impression I have is that, apart from the taking of certain police barracks, the intention was not to take aggressive action against large enemy posts, at least in the early stages of the fight, but to concentrate our own forces in open country and wait for the British to move out against us. Most of the County Companies were badly armed, shot guns and pikes being the main weapons, and I think we were all more or less influenced by the tactics of the Wexford men in '98.

When we returned to Cork on Monday night we were wet, sore and sorry. The men took their arms home in the usual way. On Easter Monday morning we were in bed about 9.30 a.m. when a girl came to the door with a message. I think she had come from Sean Jennings, but I do not know if she had come from Dublin or was a local girl. We had no consultation with her. The message was in pencil on a small slip of paper - "We start here at noon to-day - Monday". I do not remember how it was signed.

We got up immediately and collected the City Battalion O/C. Sean O'Sullivan and the Officers of 'B' Bompany and mobilised the Company at the Hall. Neither Tomas Mac Curtain nor Terence MacSwiney were in the City, and my brother

Sean, as the Senior Brigade Officer available, took charge and at once made efforts to get in touch with the Brigade Commandant and Vice Commandant. Captain Sean Scanlan was put in charge of a Guard on the Hall, and Headquarters was set up at Harry Varian's house at Crosses Green. My brother, Sean, Sean O'Sullivan, the Battalion O/C., and the Captains of the four City Companies were there. No one knew where MacCurtain and MacSwiney were, and men were sent off on bicycles to try and locate them. The Riordans started to send up decoded copies of telegrams to the Military from the Post Office, and then we knew the Rising had started in Dublin. Late that night MacCurtain and MacSwiney came back to the City and came to the Hall.

On Tuesday or Wednesday night there was a decision to move out of the City and fight. The Companies were ordered to bring their arms to certain points on the outskirts of the City. 'B' Company's arms were assembled at Dave Riordan's; Lower Friar's Walk. We were to march at midnight, but before midnight the order was cancelled. I do not know why. That was the last night on which the men could have been taken out. The men would have fought then, After that there was confusion and uncertainty, and reports began to come in that things were going badly in Dublin.

On the Monday after Easter Monday the meeting was held in the Hall in connection with the proposal to surrender the Arms to the Bishop. The Bishop and the Lord Mayor addressed the men. The fight was over in Dublin, the leaders were being executed, and their advice carried weight with the Volunteers. We were all young and inexperienced. It was no longer a case of being arrested - it was a case of being shot. The decision was that two-thirds of the meeting or more voted in favour of surrender. In fact not more than a quarter of the serviceable rifles were given up. One Volunteer who took in a dummy rifle came back with a revolver. The revolver was the property of T.C. Butterfield, the Lord Mayor, and a considerable row was made afterwards about the taking of it.

In the second week after Easter 2,000 men of the Manchester Regiment were brought into Cork by boat and marched through Macroom to Millstreet. They took two and a half days on the journey, and were then brought back by train to Cork. It was thought that this march may have been the result of an order given during Easter Week to these troops to move against the positions the Cork and Kerry Volunteers would have occupied.

Signed: *C. J. O'Sullivan*

Witness: *Flannice O'Donoghue*

Date: 21/5/47