

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE, MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 204

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. .... 204 .....

**Witness**

Mr. Sean Murphy,  
Resident Caretaker,  
Dublin Castle.

**Identity**

- (a) Member of I.R.B. Dublin.
- (b) Member of 'A' Coy. 3rd Battn.  
Irish Volunteers, Dublin.

**Subject**

- (a) I.R.B. activities from 1901.
- (b) Preparations for Rising 1916.
- (c) Jacob's Factory, Easter Week 1916.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil.

File No. ... S.105. ....

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STATEMENT BY

SEAN MURPHY, RESIDENT CARETAKER, DUBLIN CASTLE.

My first introduction to national affairs was the Commemoration of '98 when I was present at the laying of the foundation stone in St. Stephen's Green to Wolfe Tone.

About 1900 or 1901 I was approached by a brother-in-law of my own, William Brennan (since deceased) to know if I would be willing to become a member of the I.R.B. He explained its objects to me and I was a willing applicant for admission.

The club to which I was introduced was named the Thomas Clarke Looby '98 Club. The then Centre was James O'Connor. He was a representative for all Ireland of the O'Meara Bacon Company. The Secretary was John J. O'Brien, an Auditor, whom I afterwards found out was employed in J. J. Reynold's Auditing Establishment in Westmoreland Street. The Treasurer was John Morrissey, a Dairy Proprietor in Marrowbone Lane. Those were the three officials of the Club at that time. Meetings were held in the Foresters' Hall, 41 Farnell Square.

I was only two or two and a half years a member when I was myself elected Centre of the Club at the request of those three officers, and held office from that time as Centre.

After the celebrations of 1898 a great resurgence was amongst the younger element in the country, and my first job was to reorganise the Club and introduce younger men into it. As the personnel of the Clubs at that time were all elderly an advantage was taken of the several Irish Ireland Clubs which were operating in Dublin at that time. Among other activities a grill hall was opened in Strand Street under cover of a

Gymnasium, but owing to the attentions of the "G" Division, the then Detective Branch, it had to be abandoned. Amongst the active clubs in Dublin were The Michael Dwyer Club, The Red Hand, The Oliver Bond, Napper Tandy Clubs, and The McHale Branch of the Gaelic League where was first started Inghinidhe na hÉireann who were the forerunners of Cumann na mBan.

The activities of those Dublin clubs extended all over Leinster, Munster, and partly into the West. Open air concerts, aeridheacht, concerts in general, céilidhthe, etc., Irish Ireland songs, dancing, etc. were carried out to revive the spirit of the men of '98, and to bring it forward into our day for our own movements. In this way the G.A.A. and Gaelic League were utilised by our members as organising ground for our recruiting campaign.

My first break with the organisation was in 1916 when I had to surrender after the Rising. I came back the following year and was re-elected to my position as Centre which I held until the organisation broke up after the Civil War.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913 at their inception. I knew of the formation of the Volunteers before the meeting was called in the Rink because the matter had been spoken of amongst members of the Centres Board.

I knew definitely in the month of January, 1916, that a rising was to take place. At that time a member of the Supreme Council, Seán Tobin, confided to me that the rising was definitely going to take place. There were four tentative dates arranged for the actual rising. The first was St. Patrick's Day, 1916, on which day a full armed parade of the Dublin Brigade was first held in Dublin. He told me that the arrangements would be in the event of the arms landing from Germany, the rising would take place on St. Patrick's Day,

failing which it was to be postponed until Easter Sunday, again failing which it was to be postponed to Whit Sunday. If we had been again disappointed, final and definite arrangements were in hands for the insurrection to take place without fail, with or without German arms, on the August Sunday.

The arms did not arrive before St. Patrick's Day. Seán Tobin informed me that they were to be landed on the Good Friday, 1916, and it was definitely arranged that the insurrection would take place on Easter Sunday. Having this information and with a lot of work to do in connection with my Volunteer Company and I. R. B. Circle, I ceased work on Spy Wednesday without the permission of my employer.

On the Wednesday I got a call to a special meeting of the Dublin Centres Board at No. 2 Dawson Street. The meeting was called by the Chairman, Mr. Bulmer Hobson, who at that time, while not being exactly under a cloud, the knowledge of the insurrection had been kept from him because he had ideas of his own that an insurrection at that time was wrong.

When the order to attend this meeting on Holy Thursday was received by the members of the Board, those of us who had details were rather perturbed as to what the meeting was to be about. When we arrived on the Holy Thursday the meeting was to take place at 12 noon. Hobson refused to give the meeting any idea as to why it had been called, stating, since the convening of this meeting circumstances have arisen which render the meeting unnecessary. Several of the members asked for further information on the matter and wanted to know what was the nature of the subject they had been called there to hear or discuss, but he would not give any information to the meeting.

Amongst others present at the meeting were, George Irvine,

Secretary, Dublin Centres Board; P. J. Farrell;  
 Peadar Kearney; Frank Gaskins; Christy Byrne (Lord Edward  
 Circle); George Lyons (Emerald Circle).

On that day I had a mission to carry out at No.2 Dawson Street, which was to introduce to Thomas MacDonagh, Commandant Éamon De Valera, I previously having been asked by Seán Tobin if I had any idea if De Valera was a member of the I.R.B. I said as far as I knew he was not.

On the Tuesday Seán Tobin asked me could I speak to De Valera and ask him to attend at No.2 Dawson Street with me on the Holy Thursday, which he did. I had mentioned to De Valera the matter of his becoming a member of the I.R.B. at the parade ground, Camden Row. We met at No.2 Dawson Street on Holy Thursday. I think it was as a potential member of the I.R.B. that I introduced him to Thomas MacDonagh, and they went into a private room. The result of the interview or of what happened thereat I know not. I personally came to the conclusion that it was with the intention of having him a sworn member of the I.R.B. in order that he could be and would be a trusted leader at some post in the Dublin area. At that time I myself did not know to what post we would be attached. The unfortunate publication of the Proclamation over the signature of Eoin MacNeill who was undoubtedly inspired by Hobson, called off and upset all the arrangements for the Sunday morning mobilisation.

Being worried about my own responsibilities, first to my own Circle and its members, secondly, to my own Company, "A" 3rd Battalion, I went that evening (Sunday) looking for information as to what was going to happen, knowing that there would be serious repercussions particularly amongst the I.R.B. members.

I called to the home of Seán Tobin, I think it was at No.14 Hardwicke Street, in the afternoon. He informed me that the Military Council were holding a meeting that night in his house and that if I came back he possibly might be able to give me some information. Late at night I went back. There were some members of the Council then present, not all of them, at the time I was there. The only one whom I interviewed and from whom I sought information, was Diarmuid Lynch. I understand he was the southern representative on the Supreme Council at that time. He told me the full Council had not arrived but they would be discussing the whole situation and that information would definitely be sent to my house at No.1 Lower Clanbrassil Street, before the morning.

I did not see Tobin on my second visit to his house. I saw Tom Clarke and also a man named Gregg Murphy. He was a member of the Dublin Centres Board and was looked upon as a very trusted messenger, who was always useful to have on hand if anything important was required to be sent out. No information came to my house. If I had been continuing on in my employment I was due to go to Bray that morning in the course of my employment. Believing, on account of not having received any information that everything was called off for the time being, I decided to try and recover my position by anticipating the Manager's orders, if there were any, and intending to leave Harold's Cross at 5 o'clock for Bray to carry out my day's work. I had connections to the Centre in Bray whom I looked up during that day - Mr. P. J. Farrell. I decided I would call to him to find out if any information had come to him from the officers of the Centres Board or the Volunteer Organisation. I failed to contact Farrell or any of his men, and came to the conclusion that they must be out on some job. I decided to cut my day's work short and drive back to Dublin.

I arrived at Harold's Cross at about 1.30 and on entering the yard one of the drivers gave me the information that the

insurrection had started and that the Volunteers were out all over the city. I asked him to hand in my cash and returns, which he refused to do, saying "This would be serious afterwards as the Manager could impute anything to you. Come in and get your receipt and then you can go home".

When I returned home there were two members of my own Company, John Watson Lake and Martin Mullen, who had not been mobilised, waiting at my house for me in order to direct them. In the meantime while I was changing into uniform one man, Denis McDonnell, arrived. He had been an ex member of my own Circle, who pleaded with me to allow him to take part in whatever was going to happen. I agreed to let him do so.

I enquired from my wife as to whether any information had been left for me by either Captain O'Connor or Seán Guilfoyle. She said, "No, but a sister of Seán Guilfoyle's had left word with her to say that they were definitely going out and to let me know they were mobilising at Earlsfort Terrace". Assuming that this would be the nearest point of mobilisation I sent over McDonnell to Harcourt Street Railway Station to enquire for either Captain O'Connor or Seán Guilfoyle, to tell them or one of them that I was home and that immediately I changed I would be over.

He came back and told me there was no knowledge of either one or the other at Harcourt Street Railway Station, that the Citizen Army were in occupation, he had enquired if they knew of the whereabouts of "A" Company, 3rd Battalion. They said: "No, possibly they might be in Stephen's Green". When I got this information my wife told me that Barmarks Mill, off New Street, was occupied by Volunteers. I said, "Right, Mac, go down and find out who is in charge at Barmarks. Tell them I sent you". He came back with the information that Thomas Hunter, a fellow member of the Dublin Centres Board, was in command.



On account of the hostile element round the house, my wife was nervous of remaining there as previous to my return home part of the mob outside was trying to burn her out and threatening to direct the military to the house as soon as they came down from Wellington Barracks. For this reason she asked me to transfer some of the foodstuffs I had collected for her use and the children during the insurrection, to the home of her mother in one of the side streets off Clanbrassil Street - Daniel Street. Martin Mullen, John Blake and McDonnell remained waiting for me, willingly helping me to transfer the foodstuffs. After I locked up and barricaded the door I brought my three men down and reported to Thomas Hunter. It was then between 3.30 and 4 o'clock. Hunter informed me that he was after having trouble at the junction of New Street/ Kevin Street/Patrick Street, that some civilians had been very aggressive towards our men and that they had attacked one of the Volunteers and in order to save his life they had to shoot one of the civilians. He asked me to take my three men down and hold the junction of the streets until he got further instructions from his Commandant in Jacob's Factory.

Later that evening I sent one of the men to report to Captain Hunter that reinforcements were going from Back Lane into Ship Street Barracks in very large numbers and what was I to do about it, was I to open fire, we had not enough men to tackle a large body like that. By the time he returned the military had all passed into the Barracks. That night MacDonagh instructed Captain Hunter to evacuate our positions and fall back into Jacob's Factory. We did so, and I was given a position on the top of the building on the Peter Street side. A series of windows overlooked the Adelaide Hospital and were in view of the Tower in the Castle from where we were under fire on the Wednesday night by machine guns. No casualties occurred among the men under my charge.

I then heard that a friend of mine, Patrick Nolan, 2nd



Battalion, who was a member of my I.R.B. Club, had been shot by Captain Colthurst. He had been taken by surprise by the military at Delahunta Grocery Establishment and was brought down on to the footway and shot out of hand. This young man had the pleasure of having recovered and was afterwards nursed back to health in the Castle Hospital.

On the Wednesday there was a cycle party dispatched to attack the troops surrounding Clanwilliam House, which I understand was successful, but unfortunately on its return one of the party, O'Grady by name, was shot by a sniper from Sibley's at the top of Grafton Street. He died that night in the Adelaide Hospital. That was the only casualty that occurred amongst the members of Jacob's garrison. We remained in our position at the top of the building on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, being sniped at occasionally from the Castle.

We received orders on the Sunday morning that we were to surrender. I was a witness that morning from my post on the top storey of seeing the motor car coming up to the back entrance at Jacob's opposite the hospital entrance from which MacDonagh and one of the Franciscan Fathers came back with Pearse's instructions. After some time an order came up that we were to attend on the ground floor of the Factory, that Commandant MacDonagh and John MacBride wished to address the Volunteers.

We were late down at this parade and MacDonagh had almost finished his address to the assembled Volunteers and I only heard his last few words, which were: "Soldiers, you have heard what I have to say to you. You will, I know, obey the instructions of your Commander-in-Chief and surrender according to his orders with the dignity befitting the cause that you have been here today to uphold".

MacBride addressed the assembled Volunteers then.

I cannot remember all he said, but he mentioned the fact that he himself had had the privilege of two days against the tyranny of the British Government, one in South Africa, and, thanks be to God, today one in Ireland. He afterwards went on to give advice and he said: "I know my day is over, but some among you may get another opportunity some day as I have had a second opportunity. Never be caught in the cities again and never get within walls. Those amongst you who get the opportunity, if and when you may, take to the open country where you will have a chance to fight".

Later on we got the order to assemble and march out to Bride Street where our surrender was to be taken by the British Forces. General Lowe was in charge of the troops and took our surrender. The reason I remember his name is that he took an automatic pistol out of my holster and I asked one of the men behind me, saying, "I wonder who that officer is?". He said, "I know him well, he is General Lowe".

In the meantime while we were handing over our equipment the members of the Marrowbone Lane Distillery contingent were drawn up in Ross Road after their surrender. We were marched via Christchurch Place, High Street, to Richmond Barracks, Inchicore, all places through which we passed we were met with a very hostile reception from a section of the citizens. We were landed in Richmond Barracks; that was on the Sunday evening. On Monday we were all paraded into what I afterwards found out was the Gymnasium in the Barracks. Two of the Dublin Detective Force went through the whole room, accompanied by military officers, picking out men whom they thought or assumed or recognised as leaders. Afterwards we were filed out, our names and addresses taken and marched back to our dormitories.

The following day, Tuesday, twelve of us left the yard to go to the Wash House and Seán McDermott who accompanied me across was leaning on me, having being relieved by the military of a stick he carried on account of his infirmity. I said: "We will walk together, Seán". On the way over by way of conversation, I said: "Well, that's all, Seán. I wonder what's next?"; and in reply he said to me: "Seán, the cause is lost if some of us are not shot". Those words seemed to have burned themselves on my mind and I seemed never to have forgotten them and never will. "Surely to God you do not mean that, Seán. Aren't things bad enough?", I replied. "They are", he said, "so bad that if what I say does not come true they will be very much worse". I did not realise at the time his exact meaning. I lived afterwards to realise what he actually meant.

The following morning, Wednesday, we were paraded very early in the yard. Cocoa was issued to all the men assembled and we were also issued with two biscuits and a small tin of what was then known as bully beef (cooked tin beef). We did not know what the meaning of this was but one of the soldiers informed us that we were about to be sent away to England.

In the parade in a rank behind me Seán McDermott was standing and I said to the Volunteer behind me: "Please change places. Seán is an old friend of mine. I would like to walk down along with him because he can lean on my shoulder". The Volunteer behind changed places. While standing waiting for the march-off, two Detective Officers, John Barton and Hoey, who were marching up by the side of the column, stepped forward and took McDermott out of the ranks. On taking McDermott out of the rank Barton said, "Sorry, Seán, but you can't get away that easy. There will be six for you in the morning, I think". I took from this remark that Seán would be facing the firing squad the following morning. I never saw McDermott in life again.

We were marched down to the North Wall, put on a cattle boat and landed in England. We were all huddled together in the hold. We landed that night in some part of England. The next place I found myself was in an unknown destination which we afterwards discovered was Knutsford Jail outside Manchester. We were hurriedly rushed inside the building and put into separate cells. We were there for some three months. We had 15 minutes' exercise per day in the parade ring, marching three yards apart. Nobody was allowed to speak, nor were you allowed to have any speech with any other prisoner. We were not allowed beds or bedding; there were three planks in each cell on which we were lying. After some time one of the warders, Reardon by name, ill-treated Seán MacDonagh with the reminder that "your brother was shot and you should be shot too".

After some months we were marshalled to go to London to appear before the Sankey Commission. The batch in which I was, were housed in Wormwood Scrubs Prison in London and several days passed in the examination of all the prisoners in the detachment that had come from Frongoch. One of the Commissioners, a Mr. Pim, happened to know me and I knew him. Justice Sankey was the Chairman. Pim was trying to make it easy for me I'm sure. Your name and address were verified. You were asked were you a Volunteer. I happened to be in uniform. He said: "I see you are a member of the Volunteers also. You were mobilised on Sunday morning". I said, "Yes". "Of course, the usual routine for an ordinary mobilisation, and you went out as in the ordinary course to take part in the usual Volunteer parade". I said, "Yes". "Of course, you did not know that you were about to take part in an armed insurrection". My reply was: "Sorry to disagree with you, but I did know, and I went out with the full knowledge that I was going to take part in an armed insurrection".

Martin Mullen and I agreed that this was the right thing to do, to admit it, otherwise we would be letting down our leaders. Word was passed along to us as we were going in not to mention that we knew anything at all about an armed insurrection, that it was simply a Volunteer parade. The Chairman said: "Well, I think, that will be all, Mr. Murphy, thanks very much".

We were brought back to Frongoch. Some time after that there was a sorting out of prisoners. Some got release and others continued internment. I have a note at home sent to my wife by Patrick Hayden, M.P., in which he stated that a request had been sent to the Home Secretary by three members of the British Parliament at that time, Alfie Byrne, Hayden and Larry Ginnell, for my release. The Home Secretary referred: "He regrets very much that Mr. Murphy must be kept in continuous internment".

The ordinary prison life went on in the camp. There were several incidents happening from time to time; one, the meeting of members of the I.R.B. from various parts of Ireland. This meeting was held in the Y.M.C.A. Hut. I was not at the first meeting as I had not been summoned. William O'Neill who was a member of my circle objected to the meeting being held in my absence. The meeting adjourned till the following day and I was summoned to attend. General Mulcahy was Chairman. With him at the head of the table was Michael Collins who acted as Secretary, also Michael Staines, Gearóid O'Sullivan, Stephen Jordan (Athenry).

I questioned the authority for calling the meeting and I asked for information regarding the bona fides of the members present. General Mulcahy replied that every member could be vouched for. I suggested that we renew our Oath of Allegiance and General Mulcahy agreed but said that unfortunately he did

not know the formula. I said I could do it as I had done it before, and all those present renewed their oath.

The object of calling them together was set out by Michael Collins and that was to obtain their names and addresses so that they could be used as lines of communication in further activities if and when we were released.

Another and principal item to which I would like to refer is the "No Name and No Number Strike". That was a strike we had in the camp in which we denied our identity.

After the release of the first portion of prisoners of which I mentioned earlier, I held the position of Quartermaster on our own staff in the camp. In that position I was in continuous contact with the British Staff Officers of the Camp getting and receiving supplies for the men. In this connection when changes of underclothing were necessary I sent the prisoners up to the Quartermaster's stores for the change of underclothing. Three prisoners were missing one night at roll call. They were three brothers named King. The following day when going up to the British stores I asked Captain Burns who acted as British Quartermaster what had become of the three brothers King. "I should not tell you", he said, "I'm not supposed to, but they are gone to London. An order was sent down here to get seven of your prisoners sent to London for interrogation".

I came back and reported to Michael Collins, Michael Staines, Barney O'Driscoll and Dick Mulcahy who were members of our Camp Council. On considering the matter we came to the conclusion that the British were trying to recognise some of our men who had been resident in Britain prior to the insurrection so as to conscript them into the British Army. In order to protect these men it was decided to start a "No Name and No Number Strike".

There was consternation in the Camp the following day when the British Authorities came in to take the usual check up on the list of prisoners, call out the post and check over generally. Nobody would apply for letters waiting for them. My number was 731 John Murphy, and although I was well known amongst the officers I refused to answer, and Captain Burns came over to me and said, "What's the matter with you, Seán?". "There is some important post waiting for you here". The following day the same thing went on. None of the prisoners would answer to his name or number for any post or packages waiting for them.

After some time we were all marshalled out on the Square by the British Commandant, the Camp having been surrounded by a detachment of military with machine guns. He told us that he considered our conduct mutinous and that he was not going to stand for mutiny. I amongst others, told him that we were not going to stand for any of our comrades being taken from amongst us to be forced into the British uniform, because these men had risked their lives in the fight for freedom in Ireland and certainly would not submit to be forced into the British Army even at the risk of their own lives, and that we were standing by, everyone of us, for their protection. The troops were withdrawn and we were allowed to go back into our dormitories. A hunger strike originated after that which lasted for three days. Father Stafford, a Chaplain, came in at the end of that period and remonstrated with us and tried to induce us to give up the hunger strike.

The late Gearóid O'Sullivan who was amongst us, addressed Father Stafford, and he pointed out the reason why we were on hunger strike and why we were opposing the commands of the British Commandant. Father Stafford had said that by continuing the hunger strike we were risking our lives, particularly the lives of very many amongst us who might be in



inferior health, and in his remarks the late Gearóid O'Sullivan quoted Father Stafford's own words, and in replying said that we were carrying out what had been one great Man's dictum "Greater love than this no man hath than he lay down his life for a friend". Father Stafford retired.

The following day a British Sergeant-Major came in to tell us that everything was alright, that no more attempts would be made to take anybody away, and "For God's sake, come and eat something". The strike was then called off and we were left alone from that until our final release just before Christmas Eve, 1916.

SIGNED

Sean Murphy

DATE

9<sup>th</sup> March 1949

WITNESS

Sean Brennan. Comdt.

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