

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
I.C. W.E. 772

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 772

Witness

Jeremiah Murphy,
Main Street,
Macroom,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Macroom, 1914 - ;

Lieutenant of Engineers, 7th (Macroom)
Battalion, Cork I Brigade, 1920 - .

Subject.

(a) National activities, Macroom, Co. Cork,
1913-1921;

Military operations Macroom (Co. Cork) area
1920 and 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.2059.....

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STATEMENT

BY

JEREMIAH MURPHY,MAIN STREET, MACROOM, CO. CORK.1ST LIEUTENANT, ENGINEERS, 7TH BATTALION,CORK I BRIGADE.

The Young Irelands, a society which was a forerunner of Sinn Féin, was in existence in Macroom at the beginning of the century. As small boys our sympathies were with them, rather than with the rival political parties, the O'Brienites and the Molly Maguires. In a sense, the Young Irelands were a kind of secret society. Anyway, they were extreme and so was Sinn Féin when it was formed as compared with the other two parties.

When the Volunteers were formed in 1913 I joined, as did all the other young fellows of about my own age, which was then 19. The usual training went on and when the split in September, 1914, came, I sided with the Irish Volunteers as distinct from the Redmondite branch. First we had one Company, then two, and then we had our own hall. Before Easter, 1916, there was a Battalion formed in the Macroom district, directly under the Cork Executive Body. Terence MacSwiney organised the Volunteers in Macroom leading up to 1916.

The only arms we had were a few shotguns and some pikes, the heads for which were manufactured by the local blacksmith, Steve O'Connor, a friend of Terry MacSwiney.

The Battalion consisted of five Companies of a total strength of 106 men. We were mobilised on Easter Sunday, 1916 and, armed with our shot-guns and pikes, we marched to Carriganimma. Twenty-six men of the Macroom Company marched to Carriganimma, while other Companies of the Battalion which sent men there were Ballinagree, Clondrohid, Rusheen, Kilnamartyra and Ballyvourney.

Before the Cork and Bandon contingents of the Volunteers arrived in Macroom on Easter Sunday we were already at Carriganimma where we expected to receive arms from the German Gun runner supposed to land them on the Kerry coast at Fenit. We from Macroom were twenty^{six} strong and the Battalion Staff, consisting of Dan Corkery, O/C; John Lynch, Vice O/C; Charles Brown, Adjutant, and a few other Officers from other Company areas besides the town.

On receipt of countermanding orders the Companies returned to their areas. Later instructions were received to hold men in readiness for immediate action and Companies were again mobilised and were standing to under arms.

During the week, on account of the orders and counter orders being received at our Headquarters the Sinn Féin rooms in Macroom, I, being an Officer, was sent off to Cork to find out what the position was. Actually, I was a Section Leader at that time but was made Lieutenant of Engineers later. I cycled to the city on Tuesday night and reported to Headquarters in Grattan Street, where I saw Terry MacSwiney, Tomás MacCurtain and, I think, a man called O'Sullivan.

I asked for orders for the Macroom Battalion and they told

me they had nothing further to add to the order to stand to. I cycled back through the rain and arrived at Macroom at 2 o'clock in the morning, to find no one standing to. The next morning I gave my report.

The following night and the night after the R.I.C. arrested Dan Corkery, John Lynch, Steve O'Connor, Paddy O'Connor (brothers) and Charles Browne. They were in Frongoch subsequently. The police raided for me also and for Tim Healy of New Street, but I had made a point of not being at home, while Healy defied the police. They did not take him.

The clergy and important townsmen were anxious to avoid trouble and asked that the arms be given up. At a meeting in the old schoolhouse, I agreed to this, and the arms were duly placed in the Sinn Féin room for collection by the R.I.C. John Mullane, Denis Murphy, Dan Cronin and myself, after consultation, decided we should take away the arms before the police could get them. And so we did. There were half a dozen shot-guns and ammunition and we got them safely stored for future use.

In explanation of my change of attitude I should say that when first asked to go to the meeting I refused. Then two Volunteers told me that the parties who called the meeting were to collect the guns and take them to the R.I.C. Barracks. I then attended the meeting and with the help of the three Volunteers mentioned above arranged that the guns should be handed in to the Sinn Féin room and not brought direct to the Barracks. The R.I.C. were to call for them at 12 p.m. but we got there half an hour before them.

The R.I.C. became aware of my responsibility in outwitting

them as regards the arms and thereafter for years they were down on me. They never managed to lay hands on me, however, and I never saw the inside of a prison.

1916-17-18: During this period Battalion activities consisted of organising and training, the strength being increased over the period to twelve Companies and about 500 men. Drilling and organising work were carried out secretly owing to enemy watchfulness. This was until about the end of March, 1917, or a little later.

From the Summer of 1917 on to Spring-time in 1918 in addition to organising, open drilling and parades were carried out in accordance with the G.H.Q. order of August, 1917. Manufacture of munitions was commenced and was carried out during this period. There were raids for arms on private houses and collection of arms from friendly disposed persons also took place.

When we commenced the manufacture of bombs, the articles we turned out were rather crude, generally a short length of pipe with a couple of bolts through it, gelignite inside and a hole for the detonator. Later we succeeded in turning out bombs something on the style of the Mills grenade. They were made on the Q.T. by the Macroom Engineering Company, and in due course proved very effective. They were loaded with Irish Cheddar.

In 1919 I attended a School or Engineering Class at Carrignavar. Representatives of all Battalions of the 1st Cork Brigade, i.e., two men from each Company, attended and we got practical instruction in manufacturing mines and grenades. There was a bombing range there and I think, maybe, I was the first man

to set off the first mine. The instructor's name was O'Neill, Brigade Engineer, and there was another instructor from Dublin, I think. The Camp was held in an old country house and was run on proper military lines with Reveille at 6.30 a.m. and a programme of training laid down. The Camp Commandant was O'Gorman, and Sandow Donovan was there too. Local Volunteers formed security patrols and sentries.

When I got back to Macroom I selected eight men from each of the ten Companies of the Battalion and gave them a course in engineering. We had a Camp at Toames on the same lines as the Brigade one. We tested a mine we made in the Camp Grounds, and Dan Corkery, O/C. Battalion, was there to see it. It was successful and was made the centre piece of a mock ambush. Later, we demonstrated in Macroom Castle grounds and this was equally successful, making quite a crater.

The town of Macroom was so infested with police and military (in Mount Massey) and subsequently with Tans in the R.I.C. Barracks and Auxiliaries in the Castle and Dennehy's Hotel that we, active Volunteers, could not show ourselves in the streets by day, only coming in occasionally for a change of clothes.

About this time, as a reprisal for the shooting in 1916 of Sheehy-Skeffington by Bowen Colthurst, I organised the burning of the latter's house at Oak Grove, Carrigadrohid. It was a big house and we drenched the vital places, such as the hot press, with petrol and then set fire to it. Some of the furniture was taken out first by the Volunteers. I actually put the match to

the house to start the fire. Only half a mile away at Carrigadrohid there were R.I.C. and Tans but they came along too late.

The attack and burning of Carrigadrohid Barracks took place on 9th June, 1920. Actually, only twelve men took part in the attack; two were riflemen and the rest engineers, who acted as bombers too. I was in charge of the engineers, while security measures for miles around were under Brigade control in charge and Dan Corkery, O/C. Battalion, was there also. Sandow Donovan took part in the attack. Roads were blocked by trees in a big circle around and strong points manned to prevent enemy reinforcements coming.

Preparations for attack: Cask of oil brought on ladders to P.O. beside Barracks. I entered P.O. and had occupants - old Conroy, his son Mossie and Miss Ryan, sister of Jackie Ryan the footballer - removed. Hole made in ceiling upstairs and paraffin oil got through, also a pump to spray it. Hole through roof just behind chimney shaft. Gap of 4 feet between P.O. and Barracks. Charge of guncotton pushed forward to blow hole in gable end of Barracks. First one dropped between houses and I recovered it next day, together with the police boxes with personal possessions and their bicycles, half burned. A hole was knocked in the Barrack roof eventually with coping stones handed from one to another. Blanket drenched in paraffin pushed through and a flaming torch after it which set off the fire. Home made bombs were thrown in also, together with a 3-gallon tin of petrol, which nearly did for me when it went off. Heavy fire was directed on us from the Barracks but they would not surrender when the demand was twice made. With daylight the attacking party had to withdraw. The Barracks was furiously burning. By

the next day it was just a ruin and Charlie Browne and myself came to inspect it and found that the garrison of about 12 R.I.C.

and Tans had apparently burrowed their way out unharmed. Actually, while the attack was on, we could hear nothing above the roaring of the flames and the explosion of bombs and rifle and machine gun fire but Tans cursing us. It was alleged afterwards, however, that an R.I.C. man played the violin during the fight to keep their spirits up.

I remember in 1918 Charlie Browne, Steve O'Connor and myself hoisted the tri-colour at midnight over Macroom Town Hall. The police burned it the next day, so we hoisted it again and secured it with wire so that it couldn't be hauled down. It stayed there and it was interesting to see it being saluted by American Officers over on leave and on their way to Killarney.

Some time after the Kilmichael ambush in November, 1920 - actually it was on 25th February, 1921 - I was with Cork I Brigade Column at Poulmabrow between Ballyvourney and Macroom and we were in positions when a convoy of military and Auxiliaries came along. Fire was opened on them and two enemy were killed, a local R.I.C. man and Captain Ball, O/C. the Auxiliaries. They retired at once but came out later and burned two cottages at the scene of the ambush. We had no casualties. The Column was at least 150 strong, every man armed with a rifle and there were also three Lewis machine guns. Seán O'Hegarty was in command.

It was said that there were 80 of the enemy in this engagement and that they actually had 14 killed and a number wounded. The Column was waiting for up to a week before this

force appeared and then the fight went on all day until enemy reinforcements in great numbers appeared. There were 27 of the 7th Battalion with the Column in this fight, and we had been in position for six days.

The enemy came to within a quarter mile of where the ambush was to be. Then there was exchange of fire between a section of Volunteers and the first lorry of the enemy. As for the fourteen killed I don't know, but as well as their O.C. and the R.I.C. man there was a Cadet Sody killed. As a matter of fact, Sody was buried at Macroom, so, too, was the local R.I.C. man. The Column were in position for six days.

As Battalion Engineer Officer I was responsible for the construction of arms dumps in all the Company areas. Generally, we selected what we called a T-fence and dug into it and slid the box containing the arms in and covered it up to look like an undisturbed fence. None of our dumps was ever discovered by the enemy.

I was with Charlie Browne and Dan Corkery and also Seán O'Hegarty, O.C. Brigade, when the Brigade Column was near Toames. I went off with a despatch to a young Volunteer named Buckley who was a despatch rider. He was to bring it on to Kilmichael to Neilus Kelleher, O.C. of the local Company. I called at a friend's house and was having a cup of tea, having left my bicycle outside. It was being used by Charlie Browne and the real owner eventually got £10 compensation for its loss. A small child came in and said there were soldiers outside looking at the bicycle. Bicycles were illegal at that time. I made a spring for it and got out through the only door in the cottage and succeeded in getting a good distance before the pursuit. In jumping a ferny

fence I fell and twisted my ankle, which was a good job for me, for I had to lie in the middle of the ferns and could hear the military all round searching for me. They gave up the search but before going they shot all the hens in the yard and then sighting young Buckley afterwards where he was working in a field, they shot him dead. Later that day they captured Charlie Browne and another Volunteer with him. Dan Corkery and some others escaped. Charlie Browne and his fellow prisoner were brought to Kinsale and subsequently released as being innocent, having, of course, given false names. The bicycle was kept.

On 7th July we burned Coolcower House, which was about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles East of Macroom. I was in charge of this job to supervise the destruction and had the Toames and the Macroom Companies to do the work and furnish security. Louis Drowmey was O.C. Toames Company and brought the materials, oil, etc., Mick Murphy was there as O.C. Macroom Company.

The house was much frequented by the Auxiliaries and we were determined to deprive them of this home from home. We thought we would get some of them there that night but there was none. The owner, Richard Williams, was a great loyalist. He owned a hotel in Macroom, much patronised by the Auxiliaries. His wife was a semi-invalid and we treated her gently. Williams had a prize herd of cattle and his one anxiety before the house was destroyed with all it contained was to get the herd book. We allowed him this before setting fire to the house.

I have no more to add.

SIGNED: Jeremiah Murphy
(Jeremiah Murphy)

WITNESSED: C. Saurin LT.-COLONEL.
(C. Saurin)

DATE: 18 - 12 - 52

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