ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY PISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILE TO THE NO. W.S. 1096

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,096

Witness

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Ard-na-Greina,
Francis Street,
Lurgan,
Identity. Armagh.

Lieut. Derrymacash Company Irish Vol's. Co. Armagh, 1919 - .

Battalion Adjutant, Lurgan Battalion, 1921.

Subject.

Lurgan Battalion, Co. Armagh, 1917-1924.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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

STATEMENT BY MR. J.J. MURRALNO. W.S.

Lurgan, Co. Armagh.

I was born at a place named Tullygall /y, a mile or so from the town of Lurgan, and I lived there in 1918.

I first became associated with the Irish Volunteers about the end of the year 1917 or early in 1918. then seventeen years of age. There was no actual Company in existence in my home district then.

A man named Seamus Garrett, a native of Wexford, came to work in Grew's of Portadown about 1917 and remained This man had been in Portadown up to about 1920 or 1921. out and took part in the 1916 Rising in Co. Wexford. Mr. Garrett in 1917 and 1918 organised a few Volunteer Companies in the North Armagh area, including one in Lurgan and another in Portadown.

My first connection with the Volunteers was of a rather loose order. I was not in the early stages connected with any particular Company, but I was detailed to the work of carrying dispatches. My work on dispatches was on the line from Lurgan to Dungannon through Armagh The depot for dispatches in Armagh was with Seamus City: Connolly who worked in McKee's publichouse in Ogle Street. The depot in Dungannon was either in McElvogue's, a shoemaker, of Irish Street, or McGuigan's of Shamble Lane. McGuigan was a motor driver who has since emigrated. A despatch line also existed between Lurgan and Banbridge; Dr. James McKee took charge in the Banbridge area. Another dispatch line existed between Lurgan and Lisburn. In Lisburn Willie Gilmore and his brother, Eddie, took

charge.

In addition to myself, the following men carried dispatches in Lurgan area: Harry Lavery and Seamus Devlin. Devlin dropped out about 1919 and Dan Corr of Magherlin replaced him.

When Companies were organised in Lurgan area, a man or two in each Company area took up the duties of dispatch carrying. Up to mid 1919 the only Companies in existence in what was subsequently the Lurgan Battalion area were Lurgan Company and a Company in Aughagallon, a place inside the County Antrim border. Derrymacash Company was formed about mid 1919. James McGeown was O/C. I was appointed 1st Lieutenant, Mick McCarron, 2nd Lieutenant, Harry McGuran, Adjutant, and J.P. Kearns, Quartermaster.

The Lurgan Battalion was formed about mid 1919.

Richard Duffy was appointed Battalion O/C. I can't now remember who the other Battalion officers were. I think that Mick Murney was the 1st Battalion Vice O/C.

A few months after his appointment, Richard Duffy left Lurgan to take up work in England. His departure caused some disorganisation. When this state of affairs became apparent, Mick Murney and I went to Armagh City and we discussed the situation in Lurgan with Sean O'Reilly who was then O/C of the Armagh City Battalion. O'Reilly put Mick Murney in touch with Paddy Rankin in Newry, then O/C of the Newry Brigade. Rankin carried out a reorganisation of the Lurgan Battalion and Mick Murney was appointed Battalion O/C. Bernard McCann was appointed Adjutant and Hugh McShane Quartermaster.

Some time in 1920 Derrytrasna Company was formed.

Dan Hendron was appointed Company O/C; Seamus McGeown

lst Lieutenant; and James McKavanagh 2nd Lieutenant.

During the 1920 period a Company was formed in Portadown.

Sean McMullen was appointed O/C and John McEnnaney, lst

Lieutenant. A Company was also organised at Maghery, of

which I have now little knowledge. I think Paddy

McAlinden was Company O/C. A short time before the Truce,

a Company was organised at Annaghmore, and a second Company

was organised in Lurgan town about the time of the Truce

(July 1921). A Company was formed at Milltown about the

same time. Several members of the newly-formed Milltown

Company had been members of neighbouring Companies before

Milltown was formed.

The average strength of the Companies in the Lurgan Battalion pre-Truce would be about 20 men. Taking the Battalion area as a whole, the population was on an average about 80 per cent. Unionist. In the town of Portadown and in its neighbouring district in the direction of Maghery, the Unionist population were actively hostile to anything national and were particularly aggressive to all Republicans. Even at the present day, the Unionist population in Portadown and Maghery are so hostile to their Nationalist neighbours that it would be extremely dangerous for a Nationalist to record his vote at an election, especially after dark. There have been several instances in recent elections where Nationalist workers at polling booths had to be rescued from the fury of Orange mobs by large forces of police to ensure their safety.

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In year of 1918 in Banfoot area a man, named McNiece, and a companion, named McGill, were returning from a Gaelic Athletic sports meeting in Lurgan and, when crossing the Banfoot ferry to Maghery side, rifle fire was opened on them by some Ulster Volunteers, armed with Ulster Volunteer

rifles. McNiece was killed and McGill was wounded. This shooting was wanton and without any provocation, and the unfortunate victims received no warning of this impending attack on them. No person was arrested or charged for this outrage.

Up to the year 1919, the Ancient Order of Hibernians as an organisation was well established and popular amongst the Nationalists in Eurgan area. During 1919 and in 1920 and 1921 many Hibernians lost interest in their organisation. The men who remained in the Hibernian organisation in 1920 and 1921, whilst not actually hostile as far as our knowledge went, were somewhat antagonistic, which weakened the solidarity of the small Nationalist population of our area.

From 1918 onwards the organisation of Sinn Féin was actively fostered all over the Lurgan Battalion area.

The older men and many of the I.R.A. were members of Sinn Féin Clubs. There was roughly a Sinn Féin Club in each I.R.A. Company area.

About 1918 an organisation was re-introduced locally known as the "Ancient Order of Hibernians American Alliance". Two or three divisions of this organisation were organised in Lurgan area by Harry Dobbyn of Belfast. Harry Dobbyn was an old man at this time. He visited Lurgan area on a few occasions. Apparently before this reorganisation there had been remnants of this organisation in existence in the Lurgan area for a long period of years. The Ancient Order of Hibernians Ammerican Alliance had an opposite policy to that of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. This American Alliance Organisation gradually fell away when its members;

who were all Republicans, became more actively associated with the Sinn Féin organisation and the Irish Volunteers.

In the year 1918 or 1919 most of the Volunteer work in our area was connected with training, with weekly parades; and some training was done with arms where arms were available. The arms, however, were few in number with us at the time. This great scarcity of arms in the Volunteer organisation was a serious embarrassment in the training of men.

In or about September 1920 we received orders to carry out a general raid for arms all over the battalion In Lurgan Company area the Volunteers raided mostly area. Unionists houses situated in Catholic districts. scarcity of arms at the time of this general raid for arms made us most circumspect in our selection of houses for We had to select houses where we were certain raiding. arms were available and where we felt we could get them without much difficulty. In a portion of Derrymacash area convenient to a predominantly Unionist area raids on about twelve houses were carried out on the Houses not raided on that night were appointed night. subsequently raided on various dates as the opportunity arose.

The results we got from those raids - a few revolvers and a few shotguns and one repeating Winchester rifle which was defective as the repeating mechanism was not working.

In the Lurgan Company area a number of Volunteers raiding the house of a "B" Special came under fire from the inmates of the house and a Volunteer received wounds during

the short exchange of fire.

In Derrytrasna area a few successful raids were carried out on Unionist houses in a hostile area. Volunteers had information of arms being in certain houses. They took a chance in raiding the houses and got soon In this area the w, getting several effective weapons. Company were raiding a few Unionists houses isolated in a nationalist district when fire was opened on them as they approached one of the doors of a house at about 5 p.m. on The inmates in this house must have a winter's evening. had previous knowledge of the raid and they were waiting prepared to give the raiders a hot reception. Volunteers were forced to take cover during the exchange of fire in which no one was wounded on either side. arms were got.

During the winter of 1920 Mick Murney, who was then Battalion O/C., and I attended lectures on engineering given by Frank Aiken in Armagh City. We subsequently lectured the local Battalion and Company officers. One of the subjects dealt with in thoselectures was on the mechanism and the use of the G.H.Q. hand-grenade. Another subject was the use of explosives for demolition purposes and for use against enemy occupied buildings. Later we got a few hand-grenades which we used for instructional purposes.

About the winter of 1920 we commenced a series of raids on mails in which all letters taken from postmen were censored and before being returned to the postal authorities were stamped "Censored by the I.R.A.".

About this time the Lurgan Company held up a train at Ballinamoney Crossing and seized the night mails.

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Belfast Boycott:

In connection with the campaign to prevent the sale of Belfast goods in the Lurgan Battalion area, plans were made to render it difficult for the sale of these goods to be carried on within the area. A canvas was made of shopkeepers who were known to stock Belfast goods. cases promises were extracted from those traders to stop stocking goods handled by firms on the Belfast Boycott Black Some traders refused to agree to boycott those firms. All traders refusing to carry out the boycott regulations were themselves included on the Black List of people who refused to obey the boycott. In different Company districts several bread carts selling Belfast bread In one case the bread server with a cart was were burned. armed with a Webley revolver, for the purpose presumably of repelling people attempting to interfere with him. When this man was held up his revolver was taken from him. He had boasted that he was armed and would use his arms, before the hold-up.

In another instance a bread-cart was burned and the bread-server went into Portadown to get equipped with another cart. I met this man on the road later and he said to me, "This is another cart you can burn to-morrow".

As a result of this burning campaign the R.I.C. put on a patrol of their men on various roads in the area on dates the Belfast bread-carts were servicing bread. There was never any clash with these patrols as the local Volunteers knew them very well.

The total strength of the Lurgan Battalion in the summer of 1920 was about 150 men. Some of the Companies

were very particular as to who were admitted to membership.

This attitude of careful selection tended to keep the number enrolled low.

On the 8th December, 1920, the evacuated barracks at Birches and an adjoining Courthouse were burned. * This operation was carried out by two Lurgan Battalion officers and Volunteers from Derrymacash and Derrytrasna Companies. Those buildings were situated in one of the most hostile The local papulation were districts in the country. predominantly Unionist and the young men were all enrolled in the "B" Special Constabulary. One party of the Volunteers crossed the River Bann at a place known as Robb's The others crossed further down the Bann at Derrytagh South and met the first party at Derryall hill. The operation was carried out successfully without any Maghery Volunteers had left some petrol interruptions. convenient to the spot the previous night. One of them, Seamus Robinson, was in the vicinity and had scouted the local area before the operation was attempted. up and treated him as an outsider along with some other people we found in the vicinity. We had some bottles of petrol with us and we commandeered paraffin oil from an adjoining Unionist's house. This provision of bottles of petrol proved providential as later we found that Robinson had not an opportunity of telling any person where the Maghery petrol was hidden before he was tied up with the Robinson was murdered at the Eskey in the townland of Derryinver about February 1922. His murder was believed to result from his association with the burning of Birches barracks.

After this operation was completed parties cycled

to a place on the River Bann about a mile from its mouth where it enters Lough Neagh. Here we commanded a boat and rowed up the Bann to Kill Quay. We then proceeded to our homes on our cycles. That evening a lot of houses of Volunteers were visited by R.I.C. and a search was made.

In February, 1921, Mick Murney, Battalion O/C, was arrested and in March 1921 Bernard McCann, Battalion Adjutant and Hugh McShane, Battalion Quartermaster, were arrested. The only reasonable explanation for the arrests of these Battalion officers was the report at the time that the offices of a G.H.Q. officer in Dublin had been raided and a list of officers' names captured.

After these arrests the following officers were promoted to fill the vacancies caused by the arrests: -

Battalion 0/C - Sean McConville

Vice. O/C ≃ Dan Hendron

Battalion Adjt. - (Myself) J.J. Murray

Battalion Q/M - J.P. Kearns.

During the spring of 1921 telephone and telegraph wires were cut on several occasions and further raids for mails were carried out. On one occasion a general order was received to cut all communications in the area. All the telephone and telegraph wires in the area were cut on this night, all the Companies being engaged.

I was in charge of an outpost about a half mile from Lurgan town boundary. The main party at the cutting of the telegraph poles when they had completed their work went home without any warning to us which meant that we remained on in our positions until nearly daylight, about 4 a.m. We heard several carts approaching. These were

driven by three men whom we knew to be members of the "B" Specials. We held these men up and searched them but we found that they were unarmed. All of these men had considerable sums of money with them. When the police subsequently interrogated them, they refused to give any descriptions of the men who had held them up as they said they were decent men who did not take their money.

I went home that morning and went to bed. I was not long in bed when the police arrived - a Head Constable and a Sergeant. The Head Constable was Anderson. The Sergeant's name was Canavan. The police searched the house which at this time was subjected to at least weekly searches. The Head Constable accused me of being leader of the Column carrying out operations in Lurgan district and threatened that if those operations did not stop the police would "do me in". I went on the run after this incident and slept away from home at nights.

At this time G.H.Q. had issued orders to us that in destroying communications we were to cut down the poles in addition to cutting telegraph wires.

In the spring of 1921 I took up the re-distribution of dispatches passing through our area which had been then reorganised and put on a new basis. This reorganisation was carried out so that we could use the crews of road transport lorries which were then becoming plentiful on the roads leading to the various towns surrounding Lurgan.

In this period also ambush positions were prepared on two occasions to attack lorry patrols of enemy forces. On both occasions the roads were deeply trenched at the ambush position and the banks on the side of the road loopholed. We manned these positions all night but no patrols came our way.

Shortly before the Truce we received a report that arms were being sent across Lough Neagh to arm Unionists.

A number of us lay out on several nights and scouted along the lough watching and waiting for the arrival of the arms.

These arms never came.

This carries my narrative up to the Truce on the 11th July, 1921. Before I leave the Tan War period I would like to state that in our area with a large Unionist and antagonistic population, the best that we could do with our small number and poor equipment was the constant little activities such as the cutting of communications, cutting of roads, Belfast boycott raids, raids on mails, These activities carried out in a raids for arms etc. Unionist area, where all the young Unionists were fully armed and sent out on the roads on regular nightly patrols, were a constant cause of irritation and annoyance to the police and military authorities and to a great extent were the cause of considerable demoralisation to the Unionists who looked upon most parts of our area as being The fact that such little Unionist strongholds. activities as we carried out were possible in such surroundings with all the elaborate organisation of the "B" and "C" Special Constabulary created a feeling amongst the Unionists that the squashing of republicanism was a These same Unionists who were our difficult proposition. protagonists of the use of force in the North were now considerably nonplussed by the small-scale successes of the use of force against them in their strongholds.

Truce Period:

On the night of 11th July, 1921, an Orange mob invaded Edward Street, Lurgan, a nationalist district, and fired some shots into the Convent of Mercy, Edward St.

On the following day a protest meeting was held in Lurgan attended by nationalists of all shades of opinion. Amongst those present at the meeting were several ex-British These men put forward a suggestion that the Army men. Volunteers in Lurgan should give them arms and that they would guard the Convent and any other nationalist areas in the town which required protection. The Volunteers But they mounted a Volunteer guard refused this offer. on the Convent and a few outlying nationalist districts where there was danger of attack from Orange mobs. guards on the Convent and the other areas were maintained On account of the strain on the up to sometime in 1922. Lurgan Companies of this guard duty, Volunteers from neighbouring country Companies took a hand at guarding on occasions and relieving the Lurgan Volunteers.

About August, 1921, a training camp for Battalion Officers was opened in Killeavey, South Armagh. This camp was attended by the Battalion Officers of the Lurgan Battalion. At this time the Lurgan Battalion was known as the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 4th Northern Division. This camp in Killeavey was also attended by Company officers from our battalion and by Company Engineers etc. at later periods.

A local camp was organised in Derrytagh South which was attended by Company officers from the Battalion and Section Leaders. The men in this local camp ', returned to sleep at their homes each night.

In addition to all those camps, training was carried out frequently in each Company area and regular inspections of the Companies on parade were held by Battalion officers. Courses were also given to the men engaged on special services in the Companies. These special services included signalling, engineering, First Aid. These classes for special services were held weekly.

During this period all the Companies in the Battalion manufactured a large number of shrapnel mines. These mines were intended for use against the British and Northern Government Forces if the Truce should break down and warfare be resumed.

Also about this time, the autumn and early winter of 1921, mines were placed in some of the public roads. Some of the mines inserted in the roads were made of concrete and others were made from the buffers of railway wagons. All the mines thus laid in the roads were fitted with electric detonators and the wires from the detonators were brought out to the side of the road in such a manner as to be quickly and easily available for use when the necessity arose.

During this period also dumps and dugouts were constructed in most of the Company areas. This work had been carried out in the most secretive manner by a small number of trusted Volunteers. The presence of many local "B" men in each Company area was a constant danger of the knowledge of the location of the dumps and dugouts leaking out.

At the time of the signing of the Treaty in London by the Irish Plenipotentiaries, most of the nationalist

areas in Eurgan decorated their streets with flags and bunting to celebrate the event. During the time that these decorations were exhibited the Linfield Soccer Football Team travelled from Belfast to Lurgan to play a Lurgan , This match took place on a Saturday and the town team. Linfield team were accommodated in a special train in which a very large number of their supporters travelled. It transpired before the arrival of this train in Lurgan that the passengers on the train had threatened to wreck the town of Lurgan on account of the decorations that were The Lurgan Volunteers were all mobilised and on display. strong parties were placed in strategic positions at the approaches to all the nationalist districts in the town. These precautions had the effect that no incidents occurred Towards evening after the in the centre of the town. match and when the Linfield supporters had passed towards the station, the Battalion O/C and myself accompanied by three other Volunteers went to Kilmaine Street which was a nationalist district and which the special train for Belfast would pass through on its journey home. train had to pass the end of Mary Street before arriving The reason that we went to at Kilmaine Street crossing. this place was that we received information that some of the passengers on the train were armed and there was a possibility they might open fire from the train when passing through nationalist districts. When the special train arrived at Mary Street, fire was opened into Mary Street from the train but little damage could be done as there was a high paling made of railway sleepers situated at the end of the street between the railway and the When the O/C heard the shooting from the train at Mary St. he gave orders to our party to open fire on it when it came into our view at Kilmaine Street. This we

did. And men who were leaning out through the windows firing revolvers from the train immediately disappeared from view.

When our party opened fire on the train, the driver, apparently, accelerated as the train immediately gathered great speed. We heard afterwards that several of the people in the train were injured and were removed from the train at Lisburn Station. We never could, however, ascertain the full facts as this incident was never reported in any newspaper.

About January, 1922, "B" Special patrols again appeared on the streets and roads of Lurgan and its vicinity. It became a common practice for the "B" men to again hold up nationalists whom they met on the roads at night and to search and question them, and very often beat them with the butts of rifles.

In February, 1922, a Maghery Volunteer named Seamus Robinson returned from Lurgan where he had been attending a Volunteer lecture and on his way home was murdered at The Eskey (Derryinver). No person was ever arrested or charged in connection with this affair. At the time he was shot Robinson was unarmed.

To get to Maghery to attend Robinson's funeral, our party had to go by boat on Lough Neagh as Maghery was entirely surrounded by a very hostile Unionist country and the only safe way we could arrive in the district for his funeral was by water.

As a reprisal for the shooting of Robinson a party of "B" Specials were ambushed at Derrytrasna crossroads and several of them were wounded. This ambush was carried out

by some members of the battalion staff and some of the Derrytrasna Company of Volunteers.

About April, 1922, a nationalist named Anthony McConville, who lived in a very hostile Unionist district, was taken from his bed and murdered during the night.

After the murder of McConville, it was decided to carry out a reprisal on the B. Special patrol of the district involved in the shooting. An ambush was planned and prepared after the most careful scouting of the area for some nights previous to the night selected. On the night selected for the operation the particular patrol it was intended to ambush passed through the selected ambush position as our men were moving in. Our party were too late to take any effective action on this occasion.

This ambush position was in the centre of a hostile district and it was impossible for our party to move into any position selected for ambush purposes until after the fall of darkness. As a result of careful inquiries, we found out that a patrol of Specials from this area were in the habit of meeting a patrol from Derryadd at a road junction where the Point road and Ballynary road met. A new ambush position was selected at this point and a battalion column was moved in there on a Saturday night. When in position, the column's flank was covered by Volunteers from Derrymacash Company on the Wooden Bridge road.

After we took up the ambush position, we heard noises some distance up the Point road, in the direction from which we expected the patrol to come. And shortly after hearing this noise, firing broke out on the

Wooden Bridge road, on our rere, where the Derrymacash men were situated. The Derryadd patrol of Specials had apparently arrived first on this road and got partly through the position that the Derrymacash Volunteers were holding, before fire was opened on them by the Derrymacash men. As a result of the patrol getting partly through the position, the fire of the Derrymacash Company was coming in our direction. And this fire compelled us to evacuate the positions we had take up. We were forced to get out on the road, to take advantage of the cover afforded by the road fence. Meantime, the noise of the patrol of Specials, approaching our position, on the Point road, had died away. They had apparently decamped when the fire had commenced at our rereaccount of the uncertainty of what had happened on the Wooden Bridge road, I moved towards the direction of the When I came to the junction of the roads, I looked across a fence where I heard someone moaning on the other side. As soon as I put my head around the corner of a bank, a Special on the road fired point blank at my head. The fire of the rifle actually singed the hair of my head. This firing at me drew a fresh outburst of fire from the Derrymacash positions. It appeared later that one of the Specials was lying severely wounded at the point where I looked across the fence and was fired on. This man was so severely wounded that he was unable to move and some of his comrades, who apparently included the person who fired at me, started to carry him back down the road, and they were able to take him right through the position occupied by the Derrymacash Company despite very heavy fire.

Three of the Specials were wounded, two very

seriously. The two seriously wounded emigrated after they recovered, and one of them died a short time later in Australia. None of the Volunteers engaged were injured.

Following this, there was widespread activity by police and Specials, but not much of it in the area from which the attacking party came.

In the spring of 1922 when returning from the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis at which the pact was arranged, I heard on the train of the round-up in the Six Counties. I stopped at Dundalk and reported at the military barracks. After spending some time there, I was detailed to go to Castleshane, Co. Monaghan, where our Brigade had set up a headquarters. After spending some time here, training and on propaganda work addressed to the Unionists of the Six Counties (during this period we had one skirmish on the border with Specials patrol), I again returned to Dundalk a few days before it was taken over by Free State forces.

The Adjutant of the 5th Northern, O'Donoghue, offered us our ranks in the regular Army, but practically all refused and, after being detained for about twenty-four hours, were released on Sunday evening. We had very little money and only the clothes we were wearing, but we managed to buy some loaves, and a Mr. Cox who, I understand, was a Unionist, gave us two cans of milk and two tarpaulins and we spent the night in the fields.

Next day we got as far as Carrickmacross on a train and 'phoned our headquarters at Castleshane, and they sent a truck to meet us, which it did outside Castleblaney.

After stopping a few days at Castleshane, I returned to my own district. I travelled as far as Armagh by train with the people going to Armagh market, and in Armagh borrowed a bicycle and cycled by back roads One day when cycling towards my own to Derrymacash. home, I saw a large patrol of police and Specials coming towards me. I cycled into the garden of a Unionist's house and, after exchanging a few words with the owner, I cycled back the way I had come and thus avoided the At this period B. Specials were stationed at nearly all crossroads from evening till next morning and it was almost impossible to move at night without meeting a patrol, while during the day large patrols of police and A. Specials made periodic patrols and raids in Nationalist districts.

After about a week, I returned to Castleshane and arranged with two companions, Henry McGurran and John McAneney, to return to our own area. We left Castleshane one morning about 6.30 a.m. and, a short distance from the Camp, we were arrested by Free State forces. We were brought back to the Camp where we discovered the remainder of our companions had also been rounded up. We were all taken to Dundalk Gaol and, after some days, to Newbridge Barracks where we were interned until December, 1923.

After my release in December, 1923, I returned to my own area again and was captured at McAlinden's (my mother's people) in Derrymacash a few days after the New Year (1924). I managed to escape and I remained on the run until December, 1924, when all internees in the Six Counties were released. During

this period I acted as an I.R.A. Inspection officer part-time in the Tyrone area.

I may mention that, for many years afterwards, I was often arrested and searched, my home regularly raided, and often awakened during the night by police to see if I was at home, and often visited during the day by police seeking to find out where I had been at some particular time.

(J.J. Murray)

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAINE MILEATA 1913-21