

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1633

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1633.

Witness

James Murphy,
c/o Driscoll's,
Main St.,
Macroom,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Macroom Battalion, Cork 1 Bgde., I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Macroom Battn., Cork 1 Bgde.,
I.R.A., & Brigade Flying Column,
1915 - 23.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2960.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.633

STATEMENT BY JAMES MURPHY,

c/o Driscoll's, Main St., Macroom, Co. Cork.

I was born at Mullinroe, Clondrohid, in February, 1890. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Mounfluigh National School until I was about 15 years of age, when I left to go to work on the farm at home.

A company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Clondrohid in April, 1915. Prior to this there was a company of National Volunteers in the area of Carriganima and Clondrohid. There were about one hundred men in this unit. They had almost fallen through when the Irish Volunteers were started by us, and they never held any parades afterwards. Two or three members of the National Volunteers joined us later.

The immediate circumstances which gave rise to the start of the company in Clondrohid was that a few men - Michael Kelleher, Jim Lehane and Tim Buckley - organised a collection to help in defraying the legal expenses of Seán O'Hegarty who had been arrested in February, 1915, and charged with the possession of documents and explosives. The result of the collection showed who were sympathetic to the Volunteer cause. A public meeting was held on a Sunday after Mass at Clondrohid. Terence MacSwiney spoke there. He was accompanied by either Seán or Seumas Murphy from Cork. We made a start then with between twelve and twenty men.

For the first couple of months Barney O'Leary was O/C. After that the following officers were elected and held office until after Easter, 1916: -

O/C - James Murphy (witness)
Lieut. - Tim Buckley
Secty. - Michael Kelleher
Treas. - Michael Murphy.

We had no ex-servicemen in the company. Some of the men from Cork City came frequently to our Sunday parades and drilled us. Amongst these instructors were: - Tadhg Sullivan, Seán Nolan, Seán O'Sullivan, Patk. Higgins, and Paddy Cotter. At the end of 1915 we had 22 men, and there was no change in the strength of the company up to Easter, 1916.

In September, 1915, twelve men from the company attended a parade which was held in conjunction with a feis at Millstreet at which Pádraig Pearse spoke. Other companies also paraded there that day. In October, 1915, we attended a parade at Bealnablath with the other local companies and companies from Cork City. In November, 1915, we had eighteen men at a Manchester Martyrs' parade in Cork.

In January, 1916, I attended a course for officers which was conducted by Capt. J.J. O'Connell at Sheare's St. Hall, Cork. We paraded to Ballyvourney where a recruiting meeting was held on the Sunday before St. Patrick's Day, 1916. This meeting was addressed by Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney. We got only two recruits there. We had twenty-one men in the St. Patrick's Day parade in Cork that year.

Everybody paid a subscription of 2d or 3d per week into a company fund for the purchase of equipment. Out of this fund we purchased caps, belts, haversacks and puttees.

For a month before Easter Week, 1916, we had two parades every week and a parade every Sunday. The orders for Easter Sunday, 1916, came to us from Macroom. They were to the effect that the company was to march to Carriganimma and be there at 10 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning. We were to bring all arms, equipment and rations for three days. We had no definite knowledge of the purpose of the

parade, but we knew from the preparations being made that it was something more than a normal mobilisation, and we did not expect to come back that night.

We mobilised at Clondrohid, The Kilnamartyra Company joined us there and we marched to Carriganimma. We were the first to arrive there. A little later the Macroom, Kilmurray and Ballinagree Companies arrived.

The following are the names of the eighteen men from Clondrohid Company who were at Carriganimma:

Jim Murphy (Capt.), Main St., Macroom.
 Tim Buckley (1st Lt.), Clondrohid P.O.
 Mick Murphy (Adjt.), U.S.A.
 John Buckley (Q/M), Assumption Road, Cork.
 Jack Murphy, U.S.A.
 Tom O'Connor, Kilroultragh, Clondrohid.
 James Lehane, Tipperary.
 Tom Bradley, Dromree, Macroom.
 John Murphy (Dillon).
 Paddy Burke, Australia.
 Mick Burke, Kilmurray.
 Dan Lehane, Kilnamartyra.
 Cornelius Riordan, Macroom.
 Dan Meaney (Decd.).
 John C. Riordan, (Decd.)
 Michael Kelleher, do.
 Tom Crowley, do.
 Wm. Creedon, New St., Macroom.

The arms we had were - one old type rifle and 10 rounds .303, one miniature rifle and 100 rounds, 16 double barrel shotguns with 20 rounds for each. We also had some slugs and some No. 4 cartridges and 10 lbs of gelignite. Some of the shotguns were the property of the members of the company and some were on loan from local farmers. None had been purchased.

Peadar O'Hourihan passed us at the priest's house on our way into Carriganimma on a motor cycle. He was going west. When we were in Carriganimma, Seán Nolan came along in uniform and told me that the exercises were off.

When all the companies had been assembled, exercises were carried out on a hill nearby, and it was late - after dark - when Micheál Lynch came on a motor-cycle with the official message that the parade was cancelled and that we were to return to our own areas. We marched back and dispersed at Clondrohid.

On Easter Monday an order came from Macroom to turn out and "stand to" and await orders. We were assembled on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and 'stood to' during the whole week. No further order of any kind came to us.

On the following Sunday, Dan Corkery, Jack Lynch and Jim Murphy (witness) went into Cork - cycling to Dooniskey station, taking the train from there, getting off at Dooniskey again coming home. We met Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney at the hall in Sheares' St. and discussed the situation with them. No definite instructions were given to us and no order issued about arms.

On our return home, all arms were put in places of safety and none were captured in the subsequent raids, or surrendered. No member of Clondrohid Company was arrested.

There were no Fianna or I.R.B. organisations in the area at Easter, 1916.

I think it was early in May, 1916, that Dan Corkery and Charlie Browne, Macroom, were arrested following Easter Week. They were removed to Cork and deported to Frongoch. They were released, I think, about Xmas, 1916.

After Easter Week the members of our company (Clondrohid) used to meet - usually on Sundays - to discuss the general position. In this way the organisation was kept intact, and when the reorganisation of the Volunteers was undertaken in the spring of 1917 our unit was able to take up where it had left off.

At this stage the only type of training carried on was ordinary close order foot drill. All instructions were carried out by our own officers. There was no change in the strength of the company. The membership was between 25 and 30 and there was no change in the officers, who now were: -

O/C - James Murphy (witness)
 1st Lt. - Tim Buckley
 2nd Lt.) - Cannot recollect names.
 Adjt.)

As well as taking part in Volunteer activities, nearly all members of the company (Clondrohid) were engaged in helping to organise Sinn Féin clubs in all districts. These clubs, which were the basis of the political side of the Republican movement, were at this stage composed mainly of Volunteers and the members of their families.

Beyond organising and training there was nothing unusual in the area during 1917.

Early in 1918 the area was organised on a battalion basis. At this time there were companies in Macroom, Clondrohid, Ballinagree, Rusheen, Canavee, Kilmurray, Crookstown, Toames, Coolderrihy. At a later stage there were two companies in Macroom, 'A' and 'B'. In addition, the Macroom Battalion area at this stage included Ballyvourney district which was later organised into a separate battalion. The first officers of the Macroom Battalion were:

O/C - Dan Corkery
 Vice O/C - John Lynch
 Adj. - Charlie Browne
 Q/M - I don't think this position was
 filled at this stage.

There was a big increase in the strength of my company (Clondrohid), and in that of most other units, in the spring of 1918 when the British threatened to enforce conscription. The strength now reached between 80 and 100. There was no change in officers. At this period we collected all shotguns and other arms in the area. All arms, without exception, were surrendered on request. All members were now engaged in making buckshot, home-made bombs from cocoa tins etc. filled with scrap and charged with gelnite, detonator and fuse. Training still continued and every effort was made to whip the new recruits into shape. When the conscription scare had passed, all the new recruits disappeared and we were left with the old reliables.

Early in July, 1918, a patrol of R.I.C. was attacked in Ballyvourney area by the men of the newly organised Ballyvourney (8th) Battalion. Arising out of this attack, martial law was proclaimed in Macroom district - this included Ballyvourney area for British military purposes. This proclamation compelled the Volunteer organisation in the area to adopt more secret tactics and it went more or less underground. Training, however, went on apace. As 1918 advanced, the military organisation was becoming more firmly established - selected men in each company were being trained as scouts, signallers, intelligence officers, engineers and dispatch riders.

Martial law continued in the area but did not prevent or interfere to any extent with the activities of the Volunteers, who were now becoming more military-minded. The men from Macroom attacked a military patrol

on its way from the railway station on January 9th 1919. Although the attackers were only armed with sticks and hurleys, they managed to capture three rifles.

Cork Brigade, of which Tomás MacCurtain was in charge, at this time embraced the whole county. It was now decided to divide it into three brigades representing the approximate areas as follows: - Cork City and Mid Cork (No. 1), North Cork (No. 2), West Cork (No. 3). Our battalion (Macroom) now became the 7th Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade. The other battalions in this brigade were: Cork City No.s 1 and 2, Whitechurch, Cobh, Ovens, Donoughmore, Ballyvourney.

The officers of Cork 1 Brigade were, I think: -

O/C - Tomás MacCurtain
 Vice O/C - I cannot recollect
 Adj. - Pat Higgins
 Q/M - Seán Murphy.

Normal training continued throughout 1919. Arms were becoming more plentiful and men were being trained in the care and use of the rifle as well as in musketry.

The members of Clondrohid Company, in common with the members of all other units, assisted in the organisation and collection of the first Dáil Éireann Loan during the summer of 1919.

The establishment of Dáil Éireann following the general election in December, 1918, led to a change in the organisation of the Irish Volunteers. Up to this time the Volunteers had been controlled by an executive elected at an annual convention at which all units were represented. On the establishment of the Republican Government by the Dáil, it was agreed to submit to the

authority of Dáil Éireann and the Volunteers now became subject to the Minister for Defence. We were henceforth officially known as the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.).

On the night of January 3rd 1920 I was in Toames Company area. I travelled from this area with the majority of the members of the local (Toames) company to the vicinity of Kilmurray R.I.C. barracks. There were two or three riflemen in the party and a few with home-made bombs, but the majority were armed with shotguns. At Kilmurray I met Dan Corkery (Battn. O/C) and the men from Macroom area. It was planned to attack the R.I.C. post here (Kilmurray).

This barrack was an isolated building - two storey - situated about 200 yards outside the village on the Kilmurray-Bandon road.

Outposts and roadblocks were set up on all roads leading to the village. The main attacking party - ^{about} consisting of/seven or eight men each - took up positions at the front and rear of the building. I was in charge of the party at the front. We were under cover of a low fence about ten yards from the building. Three of the party were armed with shotguns, three with rifles, and there were 3 men to throw home-made bombs. Some members of this party were: - Mick Lucey, Dan Sweeney, Hugh Delaney. I cannot recollect the names of the others. The party at the rear were similarly armed. All sections took up their positions about 9.30 p.m. When all were in position the order to open fire on the building was given. Fire was opened by the sections at front and rear. The bombs from my party at the front were hurled at the door. All exploded but did little damage. The attack

was continued for approximately one hour - the garrison replying vigorously to our fire. As there was no prospect of capturing the post, the order to cease fire and withdraw was signalled and we withdrew. All men now returned to their home areas. There were about sixty men engaged in this operation, either as scouts on outpost duty or in the main attacking party. The men who took part were drawn from Toames, Kilmurray and Macroom units. Dan Corkery (Battalion O/C) was in charge.

About this time I had left Clondrohid and was moving around the area. I was replaced as O/C Clondrohid Company by Tim Buckley. I was now appointed to organise the Republican Police force in the battalion area and to arrange for the protection and location of the Sinn Féin Courts.

When Carrigadroichod R.I.C. barracks was attacked on the night of June 9th 1920 the main attacking party took possession of the adjoining post office. They broke through the roof of this building and got on to the roof of the barrack. They now smashed a hole in the roof of the enemy post, through which they pumped paraffin oil, which was then set on fire. While the roof was being broken in, covering parties at the front of the barrack opened fire on the post, to which the garrison replied, at the same time sending up Verey lights. The fight, which had commenced about 11 p.m., continued until daybreak. Despite the fact that the upper portion of the barrack was now burning furiously, there was no offer to surrender. Approximately two hundred men were engaged on this occasion, as all roads leading especially from Macroom, had to be strongly held by ambush parties.

On this occasion I was in charge of a party of four men who took up a position at the rear of the enemy post in order to prevent the garrison breaking out and attacking the men on the roof. We were within about 12 to 14 yards of the building, under cover of a laurel hedge. Owing to enemy fire we were compelled to evacuate this position and seek other cover. The only other cover available was the trunk of a tree which had been felled some yards to our rear, so we took cover here until the attack was called off. All sections returned to their home areas at the end of this engagement. The men who were with me at the rear of the barrack were: Dan Warren, Ml. Leary, Michael Murphy, and one or two others including a local scout.

I was still moving round the area when on August 21st 1920 - it was Saturday - I took up a position with a strong party drawn from Crookstown and Kilmurray Companies on the Bandon-Macroon road at Lisarda - about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Macroon. The strength of the main attacking party was about thirty. In addition, about twenty men were engaged as scouts or on outpost duty. The main attacking party were armed - three with rifles and the remainder with shotguns. I was one of the riflemen.

We moved into position at daybreak on high ground overlooking the road. About twenty men were in position south of the road and the remaining ten were on the opposite side. The men on both sides were extended over a distance of about 100 yards. We remained in the position all day but the expected enemy convoy did not put in an appearance. We evacuated the spot about 8 p.m. and I arranged with the O/C Crookstown

(Wm. Powell) that we would return to the position on the following Tuesday morning.

Next day (Sunday, August 23rd 1920) a lorry of R.I.C. passed through from Bandon to Macroom in the early morning. The O/C Crookstown (Wm. Powell), to whom their passage was reported, decided on the spot to attack the lorry should it return by the same road. He mobilised all available men from Kilmurray and Crookstown Companies and re-occupied the position of the previous day. It was now about 11 a.m. I was some distance away in a neighbouring company area when I heard - about 12 noon - of what had occurred. I immediately made my way across country towards the position at Lisarda, but before I arrived there the attack on the lorry had ended and I found the ambush party withdrawing from the position. On this occasion some of the R.I.C. party were wounded. The I.R.A. casualties were: - one killed (Mick Galvin) and one wounded (Denis Long).

I was engaged on the organisation of the Republican police force and the protection of the Sinn Féin courts until nearing the end of the year 1920, when I was appointed Vice O/C Macroom Battalion to replace John Lynch who had been taken prisoner by the enemy. The duties of my new post necessitated continual travelling through the battalion area - inspecting companies, boosting morale and tightening up organisation. I was engaged on these duties when not engaged in organising or taking part in engagements with the enemy.

Towards the end of February, 1921, the Brigade Column was in Macroom Battalion area. It was reinforced by our own battalion (Macroom) column with an approximate

strength of 27/30. Dan Corkery (Battalion O/C) was in charge of our party. The Brigade Column was, I think, under the control of Dan Donovan ("Sandow"), who was now in charge of the combined force. The Brigade O/C (Seán O'Hegarty) was also there.

The combined columns took up a position at Poul nabro on the Macroom-Ballyvourney road about five miles from Macroom. Our column was divided into two sections - eight men north of the road with the Brigade Column, and the remainder, under Dan Corkery (Battn. O/C) south of the road. The section of our column (Macroom Battn.) north of the road was under Tim Buckley (O/C Clondrohid). We took up this position at Poul nabro on three successive days but no enemy appeared. We left the area for a day or two and then returned again to the same position. We again moved in on each of three successive days, and on the third morning, about 8.30 a.m., the expected enemy convoy of Auxiliaries made its appearance. The leading lorry in the enemy convoy halted just as it reached the eastern end of our position. The following lorries also halted. The officer i/c of the leading lorry left his transport and walked up the road swinging his revolver. He was shot dead by the opening volley. Fire was now opened on all enemy personnel to be seen, and was replied to by them with rifle and machine-gun. After a fight lasting about 1½ hours, the engagement was broken off and our parties north and south of the road withdrew. The enemy casualties were, I think, four killed and 5 or 6 wounded. We had no casualties. The total force engaged in this operation on our side numbered between 80 and 100.

At this period I was continually on the move through the battalion - visiting the companies to ensure that enemy lines of communication were cut at every possible point. This work of trenching roads, demolishing bridges and smashing railway lines engaged the full time attention of most companies at this period. Trenches and roadblocks established one day were very often cleared by forced labour parties collected by the enemy during the next day.

Arrangements made for a general attack on the enemy forces occupying Macroom on May 14th 1921 were called off by the Brigade O/C (Seán O'Hegarty) after all sections had taken up positions on the roads leading to the town. It was proposed to burn the house of a loyalist (Barnard) in the area in order to induce the enemy Auxiliary force to leave their barracks. Ambush parties held all roads in anticipation of their arrival. On this occasion I was in charge of a party of a dozen men - drawn from Macroom Battalion Column - who were in position south of Macroom Castle on the road to Inchigeela. When the operation was called off we withdrew to Toames Company area where we billeted.

Early in June, 1921, a strong enemy force - some 3,000 strong - carried out a big round-up in the Macroom-Ballyvourney area. The brigade and battalion columns were in the area at the time, but they managed to evade the encircling forces. The total result of the enemy activity on this occasion was the death of one Volunteer (- Buckley) in Toames area, who was fired on at his own doorstep.

During the period to the Truce a number of ambush positions were occupied in the battalion area by various units, but the expected enemy convoys did not turn up.

My rank at the Truce - Vice O/C Macroom Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade, I.R.A. The strength of the battalion was about 800.

Following the cessation of hostilities, training camps were set up in each battalion area. These camps were attended by some officers from each company in the respective battalions. Two camps were held in Macroom Battalion area - one at Coolderrihy (I was i/c) and another at Canavee (Charlie Browne, Battn. Adjnt. i/c). Each camp was carried on for about ten days and the men in attendance were given an intensive course in all aspects of military training. On their return to their own units, the men who had been trained at the camps set up company camps and trained the members of their companies on the same lines as those followed at the camp. Camps were also established for the training of the men in the Special Services, especially engineering and signalling. In addition to the battalion training camps, a brigade camp was set up at Gougane Barra in September, 1921. I attended this camp. Seán O'Hegarty (Bde. O/C) was in charge. The Training Officer was Seán Murray.

As the year 1921 advanced and the possibility of a renewal of hostilities appeared likely, roads in suitable ambush positions were mined and bridges bored so that explosives could be set at short notice. A foundry for the manufacture of bombs was erected and stores of bombs were built up.

When the Treaty was signed on December 6th 1922, everybody appeared to be pleased. However, when the terms of the agreement were examined it was found that the Republic which we had been fighting for had been abandoned and the country partitioned. Practically every man in the battalion (Macroom) who had taken part in the fight opposed the acceptance of the Treaty. The Treaty was, however, accepted by Dáil Éireann on a vote of 64 for, 57 against.

A Provisional Government to operate the Treaty was now set up and took over from the British. On the evacuation of all R.I.C. and military posts in Macroom area, they (the posts) were taken over by units of the I.R.A. in the area and maintenance parties were installed.

Three British army officers, accompanied by a driver, arrived in Macroom one day early in April, 1922. Two of these officers (- Hendy and Dore) were members of the British intelligence who had tortured and shot unarmed prisoners during the fight. They were wanted men and were taken prisoners by our forces on The Square, Macroom. They were lodged in the barracks, which had been evacuated by the R.I.C. and was now occupied by the Republican Police. A messenger was dispatched to Brigade H.Q. in Cork to seek instructions as to what should be done with the prisoners. Instructions were received to execute all four, and these orders were carried out that night.

Next morning a strong enemy force entered Macroom area in search of the missing officers. They called again in greater strength on two other occasions, but being unable to get any information they finally desisted.

When the news of the attack on the Four Courts by Free State forces came to hand on June 28th 1922, the Battalion Column, to the number of about 50, was mobilised. The members of the column, in conjunction with other units from the brigade, saw service in the period June to August, 1922, in the counties of Limerick, Waterford, Donegal and Tipperary, as well as in the home area. Two members of the column (Tadhg Leary and another) were killed in these engagements.

On or about July 1st 1922, a column of 25/30 men from Macroom Battalion, under Charlie Browne (Battn. Adj.) took part in an attack on the garrison of Free State forces in Skibbereen. This operation was carried out in conjunction with the columns from Cork 111 and V Brigades. After a scrap lasting a couple of days, the garrison surrendered. Our men's share of the booty on this occasion was fifteen rifles.

When the Free State forces landed at Passage West on or about August 10th 1922, I was in charge of a column of 25/30 men which travelled to Passage to resist the enemy landing. Desultory fighting went on for some days, during the course of which I was taken prisoner with five or six of my men in a house in Douglas. I was detained in Cork Gaol for about 5 weeks. At the end of this period I escaped with a number of other prisoners through a tunnel. I returned to Macroom Battalion area, where I rejoined the column and took part in several engagements against Free State forces throughout the area until the cease fire. When the Battalion O/C (Dan Corkery) was taken prisoner in November, 1922, I was appointed to replace him. I was Battalion O/C Macroom Battalion, Cork 1 Brigade, at the cease fire.

I do not think that this statement would be complete if I did not pay a tribute to the civilian population of the area for the co-operation and assistance they extended to the men "in the field" at all times. A special word of praise is due to the householders and small farmers in the mountainous districts who fed and housed the columns without regard to their own personal safety or comfort.

As far as I can recollect, the officers of Macroom Battalion in the period 1918-1923 were: -

1918

O/C - Dan Corkery
 Vice O/C - John Lynch, arrested Dec. 1920.
 Adjt. - Charlie Browne
 Q/M - Christy Hartnett.

December, 1920.

O/C - Dan Corkery
 Vice O/C - James Murphy (witness)
 Adjt. - Charlie Browne
 Q/M - Christy Hartnett.

May, 1921.

O/C - Dan Corkery
 Vice O/C - James Murphy (witness)
 Adjt. - Charlie Browne
 Q/M - Dick Browne.

November, 1922.

O/C - James Murphy
 Vice O/C - Charlie Browne
 Adjt. - Michael Murphy
 Q/M - Dick Browne.

Signed: James Murphy

Date: 14th June 1954

Witness:

P. Lonnell
 (Investigator).

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