

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,651

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1651.

Witness

Daniel J. McSweeney,
63, Barrett's Place,
Macroon,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Battn. O/C, Signals, Macroon Battn.,
Cork 1 Bgde., I.R.A.

Subject.

Macroon Coy., Irish Volunteers, Co. Cork,
1916-23.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY DANIEL J. McSWEENEY,
63, Barrett's Place, Macroom, Co. Cork.

I was born in Macroom on 1st May, 1899. I was educated at Macroom National School until I reached the age of 16 years. After leaving school I was unemployed.

Early in 1916 I joined Macroom Company of the Irish Volunteers. At the time the strength of the Company was about sixty. The O/C. was John Lynch, but I cannot recollect the names of the other officers.

The only training carried out was close order foot drill under the officers of the Company. We also went on route marches to neighbouring areas - usually on Sunday evenings.

Although the Company (Macroom) marched to Carriganima on Easter Sunday 1916, I was not advised of the parade, being considered too young and having been in training for only a short time. Two or three other members of the unit - one of whom was Tom Collins - were also omitted from the call up for similar reasons.

Early in May, 1916, Dan Corkery, John Lynch, Charley Browne, Paddy and Steve Connors and John Cronin - all members or officers of the Company - were arrested. They were all removed to Cork and later to Frongoch Internment Camp, Wales, where they were held until about Christmas 1916, when they were released. Following the arrest of these men there was very little activity in the area in the period between Easter Week and the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers in the spring of 1917.

When the prisoners returned home they immediately undertook the reorganisation of the Volunteers in the area. Prime movers in this work were :- Dan Corkery, Charley Browne, Dick Browne, Steve and Paddy Connors. I think that John Lynch was still O/C. of the Company (Macroon). The strength of the unit was now about fifty. In the early stages training, which consisted mainly of close order foot drill, was carried out in the fields in the neighbourhood of the town. When the order to hold public parades was received from G.H.Q. in August, 1917, we paraded in public from that time.

Towards the end of 1917 we engaged for the first time in the manufacture of munitions. We made black powder, canister bombs and loaded cartridges with buckshot. The bombs were made by filling cocoa-tins, or similar containers, with concrete and scrap metal - leaving a space in the centre into which a stick of gelnite, to which a detonator and fuse was affixed, could be placed. The fuse would protrude through a hole in the cover of the tin. The cover was usually held in position by two bolts embedded in the concrete which filled the tin.

The Volunteer organisation had gone ahead by leaps and bounds in the area during 1917 and by the end of the year Companies had been organised in Macroon, Clondrohid, Ballinagree, Rusheen, Canovee, Crookstown, Kilmurray, Toames, Kilmichael. These Companies were now organised on a battalion basis and became Macroon battalion, Cork Brigade, Irish Volunteers. The first officers of this Battalion were, as far as I can recollect :-

O/C. Dan Corkery,
 Vice O/C. John Lynch,
 Adjutant Charlie Browne,
 Quartermaster- I cannot remember.

When the threat of Conscription appeared on the horizon in the spring of 1918 there was a big increase in the membership of all units. The strength of our Company (Macroon) was now about 100. The officers now were :-

O/C. Steve Connors,
 1st.Lieutenant Dan Mullane,
 2nd.Lieutenant Dan Cronin,
 Quartermaster Dick Collins.

At this period several raids for arms were carried out and all available arms in the area were collected. At one time or another all members of the Company took part in these raids in which about fifteen shotguns and a few revolvers were taken. The total amount of arms held by the Macroon Company at this period was about twenty shotguns, four or five revolvers and one rifle. The manufacture of munitions - mainly canister bombs - continued throughout this period and there was a substantial stock in hands when the Conscription scare passed off. The vast majority of the men who joined up during the Conscription period continued to serve in the Volunteers when the crisis had passed.

Normal training continued at this period, but the enforcement of Martial Law in the area by the British drove us underground to a certain extent about the beginning of July 1918. Martial Law was imposed in the area because a patrol of R.I.C. was attacked in Ballyvourney area by the men of that Battalion. Although we did not now parade in public we were training harder than ever. Manoeuvres were being held at night and men were being trained as scouts, signallers, despatch riders and engineers.

On 23rd November, 1918, four members of the Company (Macroon) one of whom was, I think, Dick Browne - held up a soldier in Castle Street, Macroon, and seized his rifle. He was the last

man in a cycle patrol on its way back to Mount Massey where they were billeted.

About this time I underwent a course of training as a signaller under Seán McKiernan, Cork City. I was trained to signal in Morse on board and with lamps. In addition to attending to the normal training I now devoted a lot of time to perfecting myself in the use of signalling equipment as well as training other members of the Company in signalling.

The next operation of note carried out by the members of Macroom Company took place on 9th January, 1919, when nine or ten men from the unit attacked a military patrol on its way from the Railway Station to its base at Mount Massey and seized three rifles. Our men, on this occasion, were armed with sticks and hurleys. The operation was carried out about 7.30 p.m. I cannot recollect who took part.

Normal training continued throughout 1919 and as the year advanced so did the type of training. Arms were now becoming more plentiful and men were being trained in the use of the rifle. Target practice with .22 rifles was a regular feature of parades during the summer when the scouts, signallers and despatch riders found plenty of practical work to do during Company and Battalion manoeuvres.

I did not take part in the organisation and collection of the first Dáil Éireann Loan which was taken up about this time.

The Volunteers now became subject to Dáil Éireann, which was elected and established a Government, following the General Election in December 1918. Up to this stage the Volunteers had been

controlled by an Executive elected by delegates from the various units at an annual convention. We now became the Army of the Government of the Irish Republic - for short the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army).

On 7th September, 1919, the majority of the men in Macroom Company took up ambush positions at various points in the town in anticipation of reprisals by enemy forces following an attack on them in the Ballyvourney area. On this occasion I was responsible for the distribution of the arms (shotguns) which were dumped in a loft behind the water tanks in the premises of Macroom Electric Light Company. This was a regular dump for our Company for a considerable period. I lived next door to the premises and was constantly rambling in and out, so no notice was taken of my movements when I arranged the dump there.

When Kilmurray R.I.C. barracks was attacked on the night of 2nd/3rd January, 1920, I was engaged in scouting duty between Macroom and an ambush party, which was in position on the Macroom-Kilmurray road, to intercept any enemy forces which might attempt to go to the relief of the garrison at Kilmurray. The enemy did not leave their posts at Macroom during the course of the attack on Kilmurray, so when the engagement was over I withdrew to Macroom with the other members of the ambush party.

The next operation of importance took place on 15th March, 1920, when Dick Browne and three others captured four rifles from a party of military at the gate of Mount Massey. These rifles came by rail to Macroom and were collected by a party of military with a mule cart. Before the party left the railway station word was sent to Dick Browne. He had mobilised three other men in the vicinity of Mount Massey by

the time the enemy party arrived there. The rifles seized on this occasion were found, on examination, to be bayonet-fighting rifles used only for bayonet-practice. Following this raid I was one of a number arrested as a suspect. I was detained for about four hours and was then released. Dick Browne, who was also arrested, was identified as one of the raiders. He was charged, tried and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

About this time the strength of Macroon Company was such that it was decided to divide it into two Companies - "A" and "B". The Company east of Sullane River was "A" and that to the west was "B". The officers of these Companies were :-

<u>"A" Company</u>	<u>"B" Company</u>	
O/C. John Crowley	O/C. Dan Mullane	
1st Lieutenant Mick Murphy	1st Lieutenant "Neilus" Healy)	These positions may have been reversed).
2nd Lieutenant Joe Turner	2nd Lieut. Denis O'Brien)	
Quartermaster Dick Collins.		

When Carrigadrohid R.I.C. barracks was attacked on the night of 9th June, 1920, a strong party from Macroon Company took up an ambush position at Caum on the Macroon-Carrigadrohid road about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Macroon. Another section from the Company took part in the actual attack on the barracks. The party at Caum, having trenched the road and erected a barbed wire barrier, took up positions on high ground on both sides of the road. About forty men from Macroon, together with a number of men from Ballinagree, were in this position. The majority were armed with shotguns - the remainder having bombs. On this occasion I was in position on Huntsman's Rock - a high point to the rear of the position - from which I could communicate by signal lamp with a man

in a similar position at Carrigadrohid and also with a fellow signaller in position on Dane's Rock on the outskirts of Macroom. The road was trenched about 9 p.m. and the attack on the barrack began about 11 p.m. Although the attack continued to daybreak - about 4 a.m. - the military garrison in Macroom did not go to the help of their colleagues. When the attack at Carrigadrohid was called off I returned to Macroom area with the other members of the Company (Macroom) who took part in the operation. I cannot recollect the names of the vast majority of those who were with me on this occasion.

Six members of Macroom ("A" Company) carried out a raid for mails at Dooniskey railway station on 20th July, 1920. We left Macroom about 5 a.m. and cycled to Dooniskey station where we held up the train from Cork about 6.15 a.m. We seized four bags of mails and removed them to Sleaveen in the vicinity of Macroom. The mails were censored here by members of the Battalion staff. They were re-posted in local Post Offices after censorship. As far as I know, no information of military value was obtained. The men who carried out this raid were Denis O'Brien, Michael Mullane, Mick Murphy, William Powell, Dan McSweeney (witness) and another whose name I cannot recollect.

When three men from "B" Company (Macroom) attacked a soldier at Massey Town and seized his rifle on 5th September, 1920, reprisals by the enemy were anticipated. The members of both Macroom Companies ("A" and "B") were now mobilised under arms and took up positions guarding the approaches to the town (Macroom) from the two enemy posts in the area - Massey Town and the R.I.C. barracks. These positions were occupied by about sixty men each night in the period 7th September to 12th September, 1920. No action developed as the enemy forces were confined to barracks fearing disturbances.

On this occasion I handed out the arms from the dump in the premises of Macroom Electricity Supply Company referred to previously. While engaged on this job Mick Murphy - 1st Lieutenant of "A" Company - entered the building although I had advised him not to do so as I knew the lay out of the building. When he came in he stepped into a tray of oil and his footsteps could be traced all over the premises. Next morning I was called by the foreman in the Electricity undertaking (Jack Buttiner) who took me in and showed me the footprints leading to the dump. He asked me to have all the arms removed that night and as it was no longer a safe hiding place an alternative dump had to be found in a hayshed next night. This accidental happening finished the possibility of using the Electricity Company's dump at any future date.

In the period to the end of 1920 several raids for military stores were carried out at Macroom Railway Station in which I took part with other members of "A" Company. Beyond seizing supplies of rations for enemy canteens, no other goods of military value were got. Other activities at this time included the collection of the Arms Fund Levy in the area. When engaged on this job we usually worked in units of three - two to enter the house and the third to act as scout.

Early in February, 1921, it was planned to attack an enemy garrison which had occupied the C.Y.M.S. rooms on the ground floor of the Town Hall in Macroom. A number of men armed with revolvers were allocated to positions in the streets leading to the Town Hall. Two men - Denis Kelleher and Jim Murphy - armed with bombs were detailed to throw the bombs into the Billiard room

in C.Y.M.S. premises. I accompanied the latter pair to a house in William's Lane near the Town Hall. They took cover in a house there while I went to the C.Y.M.S. rooms to ascertain if there were any civilians in the Billiard Room there. I walked boldly to the door of the C.Y.M.S. premises and asked if Mr. O'Shea - a draper and member of C.Y.M.S. - was in the premises. I was informed by a member of the garrison that there were no civilians there so I returned immediately to my comrades in William's Lane. The three of us now advanced on the C.Y.M.S. rooms and my comrades (Kelleher and Murphy) threw their bombs through the window of the Billiard Room. We then dashed away to cover. It was later reported that a number of members of the enemy garrison were wounded. None of them left the building following the bombing so all our covering parties withdrew. Following this incident I left the town and joined Macroom Battalion Column in the neighbourhood of Toames.

I now underwent a fortnight's training with the Column at a Camp in Liscarrigane, Clondrohid. At the end of this period - about the third week in February 1921 - I moved with the Column to a position at Poul nabro on the Macroom-Ballyvourney road about six miles from Macroom. Here we joined up with the Brigade Column from Ballyvourney battalion. The strength of our Column (Macroom) was about twenty-seven. I was armed with a rifle. The Column was armed with twenty-one rifles and twenty-three rounds for each, and the remaining members of the party had shotguns. The strength of the Brigade Column was about thirty and, as well as being armed with rifles, they had a machine gun. The Ballyvourney Column was about the same strength as our own (Macroom) - twentyfive to thirty. Some members of this Macroom

Column were :-

Dan Corkery (Battalion O/C), Charley Browne, Dick Browne,
 Dan McCarthy, Jim Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mick Shine, Pat Cunningham,
 Tim Crowley (Sonny), Dan McSweeney (witness), Tim Buckley,
 Ned Neville, Paddy Sullivan, Denis Long, Jerh. Cotter,
 Matt Kelliher, Dan Sweeny, Dave Burke (Emly), Dave Healy,
 William Powell.

The combined force of which ~~was~~ the Brigade O/C. (Seán Hegarty) was in charge was divided into a number of sections. The Columns from Ballyvourney and the Brigade with about eight members of our Column (Macroon) took up positions north of the road. They were extended over a distance of about 400 yards and were under cover of rocks or walls of stones and sods close to the roadway. The remainder of the Macroon Column - to the number of about twenty - were in position south of the road under the same kind of cover. I was a member of the Macroon party north of the road.

All sections remained in position throughout the day and as the enemy had not put in an appearance we withdrew to billets at dusk. The same positions were occupied next day with like result. The whole force now withdrew from the area and I was sent to Macroon to arrange for the collection of a supply of boots and puttees. I cycled to the vicinity of the town (Macroon) and, having made the necessary contacts, obtained the goods. I then set off by bike for the billets of the Column. On my way I ran into a broken bridge and injured my knee with the result that when I struggled back to the Column I was unfit for active service and had to surrender my rifle to a fit man.

The combined Columns again moved into the positions at Poul nabro early in the following week. They again remained in position for two days without any sign of the enemy force.

On the third day they had only taken up their positions when the enemy convoy made its appearance from the east. At this stage I was on outpost duty at Ardeen rock to the rear of the position occupied by the Macroom Column south of the road. When the engagement was terminated after about two hours the Macroom Column withdrew with the other sections. I went into Toames Company area.

I was now appointed Battalion O/C. Signals and was detailed to reorganise and train signalling units throughout the Battalion (Macroom). I was mainly engaged on this duty up to the Truce - visiting the various Companies, ensuring that signallers were efficient and that suitable points from which signals could be sent were selected at a number of points in each Company area.

When an enemy raiding party descended on Toames Company area on 5th March, 1921, I was actually engaged in training the Signals section of the Company when the raid took place. With about twenty others I was taken prisoner and removed to Macroom Castle where I was detained for two or three days before being sent to Ballincollig Barracks. I was released from Ballincollig after about a week and I then returned to Macroom area to continue my work as O/C. Signals.

When plans were made for the general "shoot up" of enemy forces on 15th May, 1921 as a reprisal for the execution of I.R.A. prisoners I was instructed to obtain a supply of paraffin oil to be used in setting fire to the home of a loyalist (Barnard) in Cooleyhane close to Macroom. The house was to be set on fire in the hope that the enemy garrisons in Macroom would come out to investigate. All roads leading from Macroom were held by strong

ambush parties drawn from the Brigade and Battalion (Macroon) Columns. When all sections were in position the operation was called off by the Brigade O/C. (Seán Hegarty).

The last operation in which I took part prior to the Truce was the burning of Coolcower House to prevent its occupation by enemy forces. This operation was carried out by men - to the number of about thirty - drawn from Macroon "A" and Toames Companies.

My rank at the Truce was Battalion O/C., Signals, Macroon Battalion, Cork I. Brigade. The strength of the Battalion was about 700.

During the Truce I organised three camps in the battalion area at which signallers from all Companies were trained. Each Camp was carried on for a fortnight. The camps were held at Crookstown, Kilmurray and Canovee. During this period I attended a Brigade Training Camp for signallers at Carrignavar. This Camp was attended by Signalling Officers from all battalions in the Brigade. The Training Officer at this Camp was named, I think, Murphy. He was an ex-British Army man. At this camp we were taught map reading, compass setting and cypher breaking. All Companies were visited at regular intervals up to the outbreak of the Civil War.

All units in the area were being thoroughly trained so that in the event of a renewal of hostilities we would be in a position to give a good account of ourselves. About October, 1921, when it seemed that the negotiations with the British would break down several roads and bridges in the area were mined. However, the crisis passed for the time being and eventually the Treaty was signed on 6th December, 1921. There was great rejoicing at first, but when we came to examine the conditions of the Treaty we found that we had been fighting in vain as the Republic had been abandoned and poor Ireland partitioned. The question of accepting the Treaty split

the I.R.A. in some places: but in Macroom practically every man in the Battalion opposed the acceptance of the Agreement. The Treaty was, however, accepted by Dáil Éireann by a vote of 64 to 57.

The British forces now began to evacuate the posts held by them. In Macroom area these posts were taken over by the I.R.A. and maintenance parties were placed in them. These posts were held in this area until the Republican forces were forced by Free State troops to evacuate them, after the outbreak of the Civil War.

Towards the end of June, 1922, I was instructed to report to Collins Barracks, Cork (then Victoria Barracks). When I had been there about a week I was transferred with a number of other "Signals" officers and some Engineers to Clonmel Military barracks. With Tadg Forbes and another I was instructed to set up a signal post with an I.R.A. Column at Nine-Mile-House on the Clonmel-Callan road. This Column was in charge of Pierry Tobin. After serving with this unit for some days I was allocated to a number of other units in Tipperary area where I served up to the end of August 1922. I then returned to Macroom area where I took part in a number of engagements against Free State forces up to the end of October 1922. At this stage I was withdrawn from the Active Service Unit and attached to Battalion Headquarters where I dealt with dispatches, the supply of stores and equipment and such like. I was engaged on this work until I was arrested in Kilmurray on 23rd January 1923. I was interned in Cork Jail and Tintown II. Internment Camp, Curragh, from which I was released, after fourteen days hunger strike, on 31st October, 1923.

My rank on 1st July, 1922, was the same as that held by me on 11th July, 1921, viz. - Battalion O/C. Signals, Macroom Battalion, Cork I., Brigade, I.R.A.

Before concluding I would like to pay tribute to the people who co-operated so whole-heartedly with the fighting units - supplying them with food, clothing and often leaving their own beds to take up guard duty while the men of the Column rested. A special word of praise is due to the girls and women of Cumann na mBan who braved all kinds of dangers to convey messages, arms and food to the men 'on the run'.

SIGNED: *D. J. McSweeney*

DATE: *19 July 1957*

WITNESS: *B. Lonnell*

