

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,665

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1665

Witness

Edward (Ned) Neville
Rusheen, Aghine, Co. Cork

Identity.

O/C. Rusheen Coy. Macroom Battalion,
Cork 1 Bde. I.R.A.
Member of Macroom Battalion Column.

Subject.

Rusheen Coy. Macroom Battalion, Cork I
Bde. I.R.A. and Macroom
Battalion Column, 1917-23

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY NED NEVILLE,

Rusheen, Aghina, Co. Cork.

I was born in the year 1891. I went to the national school at Rusheen, and later to Macroom. When I left school, I went to serve my time as an apprentice carpenter.

I took a very keen interest in the history of my country from my early years. My home was the meeting place for all those neighbours interested in the freedom of Ireland and in the Land League. It was often I listened to stories of the Famine and the Fenians being told in fireside chats when the neighbours gathered there on a winter's night. The stories of the treatment meted out by the British to our ancestors made a deep impression on me, and my greatest ambition was that, some day, I could do some little thing to avenge their sufferings.

Early in 1917, as the Irish Volunteers were being reorganised after Easter Week, I called a meeting of a few others who felt like myself, and we decided to form a company of the Volunteers in Rusheen. The prime movers with me in this step were Con Bohane, William Neville, Dan Buckley, James Walsh and Tim Neville. The response to our efforts was fairly good, and we started off with twenty members. In a short time, we had increased our strength to about seventy. I was elected Captain of the Company (Rusheen). The officers were:-

O/C - Ned Neville.
1st Lieutenant - Dan Twomey, Ballyvongare.
2nd Lieutenant - James Walsh, now of Crookstown.
Quartermaster - William Neville, Laharn.

We trained at close order foot-drill twice a week, and on Sundays we held public parades to attract everybody worth while. I had some experience of fire arms, so I taught the members all I knew.

We continued training throughout 1917, and when the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918, the company (Rusheen) was fairly well trained. We now collected all the arms we could lay hands on - mainly shotguns. In the majority of cases, the arms were surrendered voluntarily by the owners, but, in a few cases, we had to take them by force. At this stage, we had about two dozen shotguns, two .22 rifles and a couple of revolvers. We had a small supply of ammunition for each.

During the conscription period, we helped to organise the general public and collect for the anti conscription fund, as well as carry on our usual training programme. At this period, we engaged in the manufacture of canister bombs, buckshot, pikeheads and improvised weapons of all kinds in anticipation of a fight with our old enemy.

When the threat of conscription had passed, training continued as usual, and the strength of the company remained at about seventy. I should have stated previously that our company (Rusheen) was a unit of the Macroom Battalion, Cork Brigade. Early in 1919, the Brigade was divided into three brigades,

and our battalion (Macroom) was now in Cork No. 1 Brigade. There were eight other battalions in this brigade which extended over the areas of Cork city, mid and east Cork - from Ballyvourney area to Youghal.

Training and parades continued through 1919. The exercises were now becoming more advanced. Battalion manoeuvres under the battalion officers were being held occasionally at week-ends. Selected men were being trained as scouts, signallers and engineers. In addition, arms were becoming more plentiful, and all members were being trained in the use of the rifle, having odd bouts of target practice with miniature rifles (.22) as ammunition became available.

We continued on with this intensive training, and, early in 1920, I was in charge of about fifty men from Rusheen Company when we burned down Oakgrove House, as it was feared that it would be occupied by British forces. We cleared out the caretaker and cattle from a farm belonging to the Bowen-Colthurst family ^who owned this house (Oakgrove), as they were being boycotted at the time, due to the fact that a member of the family had shot Mr. Sheehy Skeffington in Dublin during Easter Week, 1916.

When Carrigadrohid R.I.C. post was attacked on the night of June 9th, 1920, every available member of my company (Rusheen) was engaged in blocking all roads on the northern side of the River Lee. Sentries were placed at strategic positions, to fire warning shots at the approach of the enemy. I think that, about this time, all bridges in the area, were demolished, in order to impede the movements of enemy

forces.

Early in November, 1920, about ten men from my company (Rusheen) and ten men from Ballinagree were mobilised on the instructions of the Battalion O/C (Dan Corkery). We took up positions behind the roadside fence in the vicinity of Carrigadrohid at about 9 p.m. We were awaiting a party of Black and Tans, but, after remaining in the position for about an hour, we got instructions to withdraw.

The Battalion Column was formed about this time for really wholetime active service. I was one of the first members, and others from my company (Rusheen) were: Dan. Buckley, William Neville and James Walsh. We were armed with rifles. The strength of the Column, on which all companies in the battalion, were represented, was about thirty. Dan Corkery (Battalion O/C) was in charge.

About this time, we laid a trap for a suspected spy in the area, in conjunction with some men from Ballinagree company. The unfortunate fellow fell for it, so he did not spy any more. Our spy was visited by two men from Donoughmore area, disguised as British officers. He was asked if he had seen any of "the boys" - meaning I.R.A. men - lately. He gave his questioners all the informatio he had, while, with some other men from Rusheen company, I waited outside the door. He was taken prisoner on the spot, and was held prisoner for about a fortnight, during which time he was tried by the Brigade Staff, and sentenced to death. He was executed after a fair trial in Kilcorney area, Millstreet Battalion, Cork II Brigade.

His name was Dan Lucey. Two British intelligence officers, who entered the district about this time, November, 1920, were also captured, tried and executed in the Rusheen company area.

As Christmas, 1920, was approaching, the column was disbanded, and all the members returned to their homes. About the middle of January, 1921, we again assembled in Clondrohid area where we held a training camp. After this camp, we moved around the area throughout the early days of February until we made contact with the Brigade column and the column from Ballyvourney battalion. The combined strength of the three columns was about sixty. The majority were armed with rifles, and we also had two Lewis guns which were operated by members of the brigade column. The strength of our (Macroom) column at this time was twenty-one - all riflemen. Seán O'Hegarty, Brigade O/C, was in charge of the combined force, while Sando Donovan was second in command.

About mid-February, the combined force took up positions on the Ballyvourney-Macroom road at Poul nabro, about seven miles from Macroom. We occupied this position throughout three days, withdrawing each evening to billets. We then withdrew from the area, and returned at the beginning of the following week when we took up the same position for two days, but we again withdrew as there was no sign of the enemy. We returned again to the same position early on the morning of February 24th, 1921, and remained all day, without result. However, on the morning of 25th, we again moved into our old positions.

The brigade and Ballyvourney columns were north of the road, and were extended over a distance of about four hundred yards. In addition, a party of four or five men from our column were at the western end of the position at that side (north) of the road. The remainder of our column (Macroom) under Dan Corkery was south of the road. All were under cover of rocks and walls of loose stones.

We had hardly been in our positions more than ten minutes - it was approaching 8 a.m. - when the approach of the enemy convoy was signalled from the east. I was in charge of a section of five men at the Macroom (eastern) end, and south of the road. Two members of my party were Michael Murphy, Clondrohid, and Con Murphy, Kilmurray, but I cannot remember the names of the others.

The enemy convoy of auxiliaries consisted of a touring car and seven lorries. As they approached our position, they were driving very slowly and it seemed as if they were looking for something or someone. The Auxies were standing up in the lorries, and appeared to be ready to jump out at a moment's notice. However, they approached slowly, the touring car in the lead. Eventually, they reached the position occupied by my section. The touring car drove slowly on, and the leading lorry in the convoy halted directly in front of us. Had they continued on for another two hundred yards, they would have been in the centre of the ambush position, and I think that we would have taken the whole lot. However, as they were now halted directly in front of us and appeared to be about to leave the lorry, we had no option but to

open fire at about fifty yards range. Our first volley killed Major Seafield Grant who was in charge of the enemy party.

All sections north of the road now opened fire on the enemy, including the Lewis gunner (Eugene O'Sullivan) with the brigade column. After a hot exchange of fire, lasting about an hour, the Auxiliaries were forced to withdraw to the cover of two labourers' cottages on our side, south of the road. While doing so, a section of the enemy tried to surround my party by creeping away to the east and trying to come on my position from the south. However, I saw the move in good time, and, having allowed them to get within about 150 yards of us, I took a snap shot at the leader of this party, and killed him. The remainder of this party crept away to the cover of the fences surrounding the cottages.

The fighting went on for about three hours or more, and we had practically forced all the enemy party to take cover in the two cottages, when the approach of reinforcements from Macroom was signalled by our scouts to the east. It was now close on noon, and the order to withdraw was given. We had, by this time, killed or wounded the majority of the Auxies. I should have mentioned that the driver of one of the lorries at the end of the convoy had succeeded in reversing his vehicle out of the position, and had returned to Macroom about an hour after the scrap had started.

The enemy casualties in this engagement were, as far as I could see, extremely heavy, but I don't think the official list was ever published. Our

party had no casualties, although Con Murphy, who was beside me in my position on a hillock on the eastern flank, had his steel helmet shot off his head. Fortunately, he escaped injury.

The bulk of the men in the action now withdrew before we did, to Coomaguire where we made contact with them, later. As we approached their billets, we ran into two lorries of Tans from Killarney. We opened fire on them, and wounded some. By attacking this party, we saved the rest of the column who were having tea in farmhouses in the valley. They were warned by our fire of the presence of the enemy in the area.

After the engagement at Poul nabro, the Tans and Auxies refused to travel out, except in great strength, and then only on very odd occasions, so our column surrounded Macroom on Whit Saturday night, 1921. Ambush positions were occupied on all roads leading from the town, and, in order to induce the enemy forces to come out, it was proposed to set fire to the house of a British loyalist (Barnard) who was known to be in sympathy with the enemy.

On this occasion, I was responsible for leading a column from the 6th Battalion (Donoughmore) under their O/C, Jackie O'Leary, to the position allotted to them by the Brigade O/C, Seán O'Hegarty, who was in charge on this occasion. I was to remain with them, and lead them back again when the operation had been completed. We were to set fire to the house selected, but, just as we had everything ready, the operation was called off. I can truthfully say that I never saw such disappointment as was shown by these men,

some of whom had marched up to twenty miles across country.

Beyond moving round the area and ensuring that all roads were blocked and lines of communication cut, there was very little activity up to the Truce. However, at this period, enemy posts were regularly sniped. A few shots fired by one of our men kept the garrisons of most posts shooting all night.

My rank at the Truce was -

O/C, Rusheen Company,

Macroon Battalion, Cork I Brigade.

I was also a member of the
Battalion Column.

The strength of the company was about seventy, and that of the Column about twenty-five or thirty.

After the Truce on July 11th, 1921, training camps were held in each company area throughout the battalion (Macroon). Every man was trained to handle a rifle while men were trained as engineers, bombers, signallers. In Rusheen company area, I started a factory for making hand grenades where I worked with selected men for the greater portion of the period, up to the outbreak of the Civil War. We cast the casings in the rough, and they were then taken to Brigade headquarters to be finished. One of these grenades can be seen in the Museum in Cork.

I took the Republican side in the Civil War. About August, 1922, a party of about thirty men,

drawn from the Macroom Battalion, and in charge of Jim Murphy (Battalion Vice O/C) left Macroom to engage the Free State Army which had landed at Passage West. I was second in charge of this column. We travelled by lorry to Cork, and on towards Douglas. The road was supposed to have been scouted by Volunteers from the city (Cork), but I'm afraid it was not very well done, as at Douglas Cross we were surrounded and fired on. A few of our party were wounded. We took cover in some houses, and returned the fire. Jim Murphy and three or four others were taken prisoners by the Free State troops, but I mobilised the remainder, and we fought our way out. We now withdrew to Macroom area.

Eventually, the Free State Army arrived in Macroom, and on the following morning the house I was staying in was surrounded. Before I knew anything, I was looking into the muzzles of two .45 revolvers. I was taken to the Free State post in Macroom, with another prisoner - Pierce Owens - and lodged in custody. As soon as we were landed inside, there was only one thought in my mind, and that was, "How can I get out?" Well, after very careful planning, both of us found ourselves outside the walls of the enemy post in about ten days.

About a week later, a large scale attack was carried out on the Free State forces in Macroom, so once more I found myself looking down on the place where I had so recently been held prisoner, but this time I had a rifle in my hand.

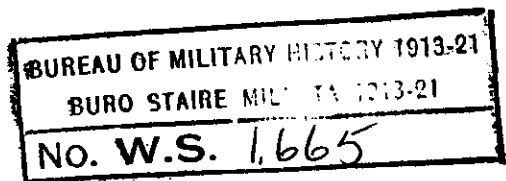
Several attacks were carried out on the Free State garrisons in the area for a few months, but as things dragged on, I found that the people were not with us, as of old. I am sure that they were tired of the whole business, and it was surely hard to blame them.

I was again taken prisoner in January, 1923, and was detained in Cork jail and Newbridge camp for ten months.

When I came home, the whole business was all over. Some people looked on us as heroes, but I'm afraid that some others had a different view, as at that time the country was split in two, owing to the unfortunate civil war.

SIGNED Gen. J. J. O'Connell

DATE 30th August 1954



WITNESS P. J. O'Connell