

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STATE MILITARY
No. W.S. 412

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 412.....

Witness

Mr. Joseph Murray,
4 Zion Road,
Rathgar, Dublin.

Identity

O/C. 'D' Company 2nd Battalion Belfast
Brigade 1921;
O/C. 3rd Battalion Belfast Brigade 1921.

Subject

- (a) National activities Belfast 1910-1922;
- (b) Anti-Conscription Campaign Belfast;
- (c) Shooting of R.I.C. in Roddy's Hotel
January 1921.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013-21
BURO STAIKE MILC-TA 1013-21
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Statement by Joseph Murray,
4 Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin.

I joined the Fianna Éireann organisation when a student at St. Patrick's Christian Brothers School, Belfast, in 1910. Seán Houston, then a teacher in Belfast and a native of County Donegal, took me into the Fianna. Training and route marches on Saturday evenings and Sundays were the usual activities up to about 1914. In 1914 the Fianna, to all practical purposes, became disorganised when the split took place in the Volunteers and there were practically no activities from 1914 onwards until immediately after the Rising in Easter Week, 1916. I associate myself then with the reorganisation of the Fianna which started about July, 1916.

I remained in the Fianna up to the summer of 1917 when I became aware of a reorganisation of the Volunteers. "C" Company, Belfast, was then formed and was recruited from the members of the Seán MacDermott Branch of the Sinn Féin organisation.

The only activities of that period were, drilling and lectures on military subjects, studying the use of arms and tactics, defence, etc., until the conscription scare of 1918 when the ranks of the Volunteers were swollen to such an extent that "C" Company reached the strength of approximately 300 men.

The form that the anti-conscription movement in Belfast took was the holding of parish plebiscites where

all who were opposed to taking part in Britain's war signed a plebiscite promising to resist conscription with every means in their power. The signing of the plebiscite was so enthusiastically taken up that all the young able-bodied men joined up in the Volunteer organisation, and the organisation which up to then had been conducted in a secret manner, became quite open. Drills, route marches and training were carried out at week-ends on the mountains. This state of affairs lasted for only a short time.

The conscription scare blew over in a short time - it only lasted for a period of two or three months - when the danger passed. This easing of the tension had a great effect on the enthusiasm of the new men who joined during the scare and those new members eventually dropped away from taking part in the routine work of the Volunteers until the numbers were reduced to practically what they stood at when the recruits started to pour in.

The police became active at this period and the Volunteer Officers had to fall back on their pre anti-conscription precautions as to activities and movements. It was necessary from 1918 onwards to be most careful about our meeting places and our activities as the police were becoming very much interested.

From the conscription period onwards there were continuous raids and arrests. The arrests were mostly confined to the men who had been active pre 1916. Denis McCullough and men of his stamp were receiving a lot of police attention and were being arrested periodically.

From mid 1918 up to the end of 1919 the Volunteers in Belfast were holding night classes on military subjects. They were training and parading in the country districts outside Belfast and were also studying the city and making reconnaissance of enemy positions and organising intelligence in connection with enemy personnel and strengths in the city area. On account of the hostility of the majority of the population we were forced to carry out our activities in a very careful manner. The authorities were very much on the alert to find out who was in control as the men who were arrested were the men who were prominent pre 1916 and were not of any great importance in 1918 or 1919. The authorities were unaware of who the real officers in the Volunteers were. In justice to those pre 1916 officers it is necessary for me to state that they were displaced purely for the one and only reason that they were receiving so much police attention that it would be impossible for them to safely be connected with the reorganised Volunteers.

On Easter week-end, 1920, we carried out a series of raids on British Income-Tax and Revenue Offices. I was engaged on the Oxford Street Offices which are situated next door to the Central Police Barracks. We succeeded in burning the entire contents of these offices and the building was just barely saved from destruction by the Fire Brigade. The raids on the other offices were equally successful. Another Income-Tax Office on Donegall Square was burned about a week after Easter.

Large scale reconnaissance of Police Barracks were carried out in the Belfast city area with the view

of carrying out a few lightning raids to secure much badly needed arms and ammunition. Certain officers of the Brigade Staff were in opposition to this proposed action on the grounds that it would mean shooting and probably bloodshed. This led to much discontent amongst the younger officers and men. When the Brigade Staff received this information they threatened to take stern action against any Company officer or man guilty of any breach of discipline. This caused a more or less open breach between the Company officers and Brigade. At this time a threat of unofficial operations was made by certain members of "C" Company. I, together with some other members of the Company, were advised by the Brigade O/C. that a pogrom had been organised by the Orange leaders and were being backed by the British Government and that it was the wishes of our leaders in Dublin and the Bishop of Down & Connor that no provocation be offered by the nationalists in Belfast.

Except for occasional raids for arms and special reconnaissance, things were quiet until the 12th July when all works, shops and factories closed for summer holidays and to celebrate the ~~crossing~~^{CROSSING} of the river Boyne by King William. This day's celebration was the signal for the attack on nationalists in Belfast and on nationalist areas in other parts of Down and Derry.

As a result of the new situation I now found myself on whole-time I.R.A. work, chiefly organising defensive measures in nationalist areas. This created a serious problem on account of the small numerical strength of the I.R.A., together with the serious

shortage of arms and ammunition. Pickets had to be provided to defend nationalist districts by day and night, particularly at night when the whole strength of the Orange order were being armed and trained as so-called "Special" Police. These Special Police were divided into three categories, i.e. "A" Class, "B" Class and "C" Class. The "A" Class were on whole-time service; the "B" Class were on part-time service, i.e. on duty each evening and at the week-ends. The "C" Class were in the main, old men and business men, who wished to be associated with the Special Police movement and who were to be called for duty only on urgent emergency. All of this really meant that the "B" Class Specials were issued with arms and ammunition, which they could and did use indiscriminately against the nationalist areas, and when an exchange of fire took place, there was then a state of emergency and the "C" Class proceeded to the local Police Centre ("A" Class Specials) and were issued with arms and ammunition which were then given to the rabble to use any way they wished, usually by raiding the catholic streets adjoining, shooting anyone on sight, and burning whole streets of houses.

Our greatest problem then was the defence of nationalist areas, with safety to our arms and men, the cause of extensive fire by the Special Constabulary and the I.R.A. defending nationalist areas; sniping positions had to be taken up around the outer edge of the nationalist areas. When these activities continued for some hours the police authorities usually then called on the military for assistance to suppress the I.R.A. activities in the nationalist areas. The usual action adopted by the military was to raid the

areas with large numbers of armoured cars, cordon off the areas and carry out a house to house search. With the exception of trenching roadways and streets, we were not able to prevent the entry of military forces into our areas to carry out searches for arms and men.

One of our greatest problems was the provision of safe dumps in our areas where fighting was likely to take place and to safely dump our arms and equipment. This matter occupied a lot of our thoughts and planning. I had given over a considerable amount of my time to the planning and building of these dumps. These dumps were essential to have in almost every district and be ready at hand for the quick disposal of arms and equipment immediately after use.

During this time it was necessary to provide a passage from house to house for whole lengths of streets by knocking holes in the partition walls of the areas adjoining these houses. These precautions were necessary for the escape and quick movement of the pickets guarding each area. Some considerable time had to be given by the officers and men of the I.R.A. in organising the civilian population for to respond to our enforced discipline.

After some few weeks there seemed to be complete co-ordination between the nationalist population and the I.R.A. and for the autumn and winter of 1920 and 1921 we seemed to have settled down to semi-war conditions within the boundary of the city area. The boundary of the nationalist areas resembled frontier posts where precautions had to be taken on entering and leaving these areas which were under the constant watch of the Specials and military.

Early in the month of October, 1920, we carried out a raid on the G.P.O. (Sorting Office) in Belfast. Our object was to procure the mails destined for Dublin Castle, but this raid proved unsuccessful because of the absence of the mails.

During the same month a raid was organised by the Battalion on a large garage situated at the rear of the Belfast City Hall, known as Spense & Johnson's Garage. The buildings of this garage covered a very large area, something like five acres of ground. This firm had just taken a delivery of 150 cars and trucks for special delivery to the special Constabulary and the R. I. C. We succeeded in burning part of the buildings and approximately twenty-five per cent of the stock of cars, but owing to a misunderstanding between Company leaders and the pre-ignition of one of the fires of one of the buildings, we failed to burn out the largest building which contained seventy-five new cars.

At the end of October we carried out a raid on the mail van in Smithfield Square, Belfast. The object was to capture police and military correspondence travelling between Belfast British forces and Dublin Castle. Unfortunately this raid was a failure because of the hold-up of the wrong van out of a number of others on the way to the Great Northern terminus.

During the month of November a party of members of "C" Company left Belfast before curfew hours and cycled to a castle called ^{LANGFORD} Lankford Lodge situated on the shores of Lough Neagh. Our object was to secure a dump of Ulster Volunteer force arms and ammunition. The first night we failed to contact our agent at Lough

Neagh and we again cycled to the place the following night. Having successfully contacted our agent there, we spent the night until dawn reconnoitring the grounds of the estate and discovering the location of an ice house in which the arms had been originally dumped. We failed to make an entrance and this necessitated a visit to the estate on the third night. Having succeeded in forcing an entrance we were disappointed to find the building entirely empty but there was evidence of rifles, military equipment and ammunition having been stored there.

During this month the Battalion had organised for a general hold-up and disarming of R.I.C. in the various districts of the city. The Companies taking part were "B", "C" and "D" Companies. Extraordinary precautions were being taken by the R.I.C. at this period when the patrols were doubled and sometimes trebbled, and they had then adopted the extended formation for patrol work, i.e. walking in two's and three's some distance from each other and on both sides of the street, sometimes in the middle of the roadway.

The only hold-ups attempted that night were at Millstreet by members of "C" Company and at Broadway by members of "B" Company. At Broadway an exchange of shots took place. Two R.I.C. men were wounded and one of our I.R.A. men (Andrew O'Hare) was wounded fairly seriously.

About November, 1920, I was instructed by Roger McCorley that I was nominated by him to do special reconnaissance work for the Brigade staff. This work included the survey of the Electric Power Station situated on the river Lagan on the quayside of Belfast, with the view of destroying this station and the ultimate paralysis of the lighting and power services in Belfast. The reason for this proposed destruction may not be obvious to outsiders of Ulster. Therefore, may I explain that eighty per cent of the nationalist population were now unemployed, and as the result of the militant action of the "special police" and unemployment, a large number of nationalists were leaving Belfast in the guise of refugees and the remainder were living on relief rendered by the White Cross Society. Therefore, the idea behind this plan of destruction was to bring unemployment and similar forms of hardship to the homes of the anti-nationalists.

Within a few days of receiving this order I made the acquaintance of an employee of the Power Station, and from this individual I gained a lot of useful information as to the hours of work, when the "shift" workers started and stopped. I was brought to the Pumping Station inside the electric power system and there I was enabled to draw a plan of the layout and vital machinery contained therein. Plans were being made for this operation when I was informed that this operation was deferred until a much more elaborate plan, including the burning of the city centre, was completed.

About this time two officer appointments were made: one on the Brigade staff and one on the Battalion staff. These appointments caused a considerable amount of alarm and annoyance to the Company Officers and men, particularly the more active members of "B" and "C" Companies, for the reason that these two newly appointed officers had political affiliations, were well known to the police, and neither of them had had any recent military activities to their credit and were not sufficiently acquainted with the military situation. These appointments were cancelled and officers were promoted from the Companies. This gave great satisfaction to the rank and file and was considered a sign of military activity in the near future.

Shortly after this as the result of closer collaboration between the officers of "B" and "C" Companies and the Battalion Staff, it was decided to carry out aggressive operations against the enemy and particularly against certain detective personnel. I was then instructed to contact a member of "C" Company, employed in "Roddy's" Hotel. This man was personally acquainted with two or three members of the Royal Irish Constabulary stationed in Musgrave Barracks. The side entrance of Roddy's Hotel was beside the rear entrance to Musgrave Barracks; therefore the bar of this hotel was a very popular rendezvous for members of the police.

Our agent was a barman named Waters. He was in receipt of information as to the coming and going of R. I. C. personnel, convoys, etc. Waters passed

information to me to the effect that recruits for the Black & Tans passed through Belfast and that they were usually "lodged" for the night at this hotel.

I passed the information to the O/C. of "C" Company (Roger McCorley). It was decided by officers of "B" Company (Woods and McKenna) and officers of "C" Company (McCorley and myself) that we would form the nucleus of an Active Service Unit and keep a watch on "Roddy's".

About the middle of January, 1921, we were informed that three strange men had been "booked-in" to Roddy's Hotel by the local Head Constable and no names were given and that they would stay a few days. Our barman made contact with the friendly police in Musgrave Barracks, and each of them informed him that nothing was known of the three men except that they were on a secret mission and that they did not talk to any other members of the Force in Barracks, but that they were in close conversations with the Crown Prosecution Officers and the local D. I., together with the military Intelligence Officers.

On receipt of this information I visited the hotel and on arriving in the bar I was informed that the three hush-hush men were in the snug at the end of the shop and our barman had found out that one of the three men was a Sergeant of the R. I. C. and the other two were Constables on escort duty with the Sergeant, and that they spent their spare time drinking in this particular snug.

I went off to mobilise the other members of the I. R. A. with the view of raiding the hotel bar and

executing the three men in question. But having contacted two other members (Woods and McCorley) we were unable to contact the Battalion O/C. that night in order to get official sanction for this operation.

The following day we got sanction from the Battalion and Brigade staff to carry out the raid on Roddy's Hotel and if possible to execute these three R.I.C. men. That night, Woods, McCorley, McKenna and myself went to Roddy's Hotel and on arriving there we found that Joe McKelvey was in position outside the building with a small party of four men to cover our retreat. I went into the hotel bar which was more or less crowded with cattle dealers and drovers from the cattle market situated across the street. I went to the counter and was informed by the barman to go to the snug at the end of the counter. I told him of the others waiting outside and he said, "get them quick and make for the snug". This gave me the impression that the R.I.C. men were already in the snug and I went to the outside door and gave the signal to the others. They moved in quickly and as we entered the bar we drew our guns and hurried through the crowd to the snug, pulled open the door and found the snug empty. This caused a little confusion and, thinking we had blundered, were about to leave when the barman told us to remain in the snug and he went along the bar calling to his colleague to bring drinks to the snug. I immediately left the snug and moved amongst the customers to observe their reaction to our hurried entry and found that we had not been noticed. The barman confirmed this and informed us that some friends of his were at the counter at the other end of the shop and that they were R.I.C. men from the Barracks next door. As it was

near to closing time we decided to wait until the public left the bar. I then left the hotel and contacted the cover party outside and informed them of the situation and asked if they had seen anybody leaving since we had entered. I was assured that all was well and if any sign of activity occurred they would contact us inside. When the bar was cleared of the customers the barman informed us that the three men we were looking for were in the smoke-room on the first floor and he led the way upstairs. When we reached the smoke-room the R. I. C. men were not there, and the barman said "they must be gone to their room - follow me quickly". He then led us to the third floor and pointed out the bedroom.

We entered this room and found it in darkness. We found the light switch, switched on the light and opened fire. We made good our escape and on the following morning we read in the local Press that two of the R. I. C. men were killed and the Sergeant seriously wounded. The following day we were informed that the Sergeant's name was Gilmartin and that he was the principal witness against an I. R. A. man who was on a capital charge of shooting D. I. Hunt in Tipperary. About six weeks afterwards the I. R. A. man in question was discharged as Sergeant Gilmartin had admitted at the summary that his former evidence was perjured and false. Sometime after this event Gilmartin was invalided out of the service.

Following the shooting in Roddy's the two barmen were placed under arrest and were brought to the Victoria Military Barracks. Their names were, V. Waters and B. Murdock. Waters was a member of "C".

Company and Murdock had been proposed for membership and was accepted but had not been sworn in. The old game of placing these men in separate cells was practised and a whispering campaign carried on by the warders that each of the prisoners had given the game away on the other. This type of third degree went on for about a month and then the military Intelligence people gave it up and handed the prisoners over to the R. I. C. After a series of brutal treatment Waters was crippled by the infamous Detective Sergeant Christy Clarke and poor Murdock surrendered. He gave what little knowledge he had, to the effect that he knew Waters was in the I. R. A. and that one of the men on the shooting party in Roddy's Hotel was named Murray and another was Rogers? By the time the British Intelligence got this information I was "on the run".

After this operation of Roddy's Hotel, we, the younger members of "B" and "C" Companies, decided that now that we had made a start on military activities we would force matters on the Brigade Staff either to give us their blessing to form an Active Service Unit or we would "push them out". From this period the activities of the R. I. C. and Specials were intensified and for the next few weeks we found we had really started something which kept us fully occupied both by day and by night. Defensive measures on a well organised scale had to be carried out in every district to guard against reprisals and wholesale burning attacks on nationalist areas. Those measures consisted of forming armed guards in every nationalist area from late each evening until after curfew hours in the mornings. This caused us to be up on duty all night for three or four nights per week. Very often we spent the night period on guard and working

on the making of new dumps, cleaning and overhauling equipment, etc. For the first few weeks of this night duty we were kept busy keeping raiding parties of R.I.C. and Specials from freely entering any area. When an entry was forced or an entry was attempted, the pickets would move from part of an area to another to reinforce other pickets. These conditions continued up to some considerable time after the Truce of July, 1921.

After the operation on Roddy's Hotel the newly-formed Active Service Unit did not get an opportunity to engage the British forces during the remaining days of the month of January, principally on grounds that we were on night work, organising defences and pickets in the various area. Early in February we again planned operations and carried out an attack on the Reform Club.

The Reform Club was an exclusive residential club situated in the very centre of Belfast, in what is known as "The Castle Junction". This was the only club of its type in Belfast and it was the residence of the Officer Commanding the military district of Belfast and high civilian officials of the British Government. Indeed it may be well described as a "Little Dublin Castle". Because of curfew it was impossible to approach to city centre at night time and because of the situation of the Club it was not practical to raid it during daylight on account of the volume of pedestrian traffic and the fact that an armed guard was placed, both inside and outside the building. The outside guard consisted of two military policemen and an R.I.C. man or Special. The rear of the Club which is approached

from Rosemary Street, was guarded by a British soldier inside the sandbagged gateway and a Sergeant and three other Privates were inside a guardroom looking out on the gateway and the sentry. Therefore, it was decided that the only means of attack was by hand-grenades. We approached the rear of the Club about 9 o'clock in the morning when it was deemed that the residents would be at breakfast and a man named Finn and myself took up a covering position whilst McCorley and McKenna approached the gateway entrance to the Club and, having entered the gateway they threw two bombs of the Mills type. These bombs were charged with home-made war-flour and only one bomb exploded, slightly wounding one of the guard. This attack caused a certain amount of nervous tension on military and police guards and our Intelligence Service reported the general strengthening of such guards around the city area. The number of enemy patrols were increased and usually accompanied by an armoured car.

At this time the Detective Division got very active and aggressive. Their tactics were to raid homes of known Volunteers or sympathisers during daytime and only within a short radius of their Barracks. When they operated at night it was always in force and accompanied by an armoured vehicle. We gave a considerable amount of our time to special reconnaissance of the movements of these police and Detectives with the view of carrying out a general attack on this particular body. Their movements were watched, timed and checked, and very often when on this work some of our men were known to stand or watch at one spot from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 or 9 o'clock at night without food or relief and at the same time be on the alert in order to make a safe retreat in the event of the spotter being spotted.

A very considerable amount of time was spent by the Active Service Unit in waiting and watching for a few particular individuals, such as D. I. Ferris, Detectives Ferguson and Sergeant Glover. The more active members of the Battalion in Belfast were unknown to the enemy and from this fact we gained strength of morale and confidence in each other and we knew when any one of us would become known to the enemy that it would lead to the discovery and capture or annihilation of the remainder of the Active Service Unit and some of the Battalion officers. We, therefore, decided to take every precaution against discovery and we kept our individual movement as private as was possible and made ourselves very exclusive. We carried out patrols of the city centre at night, always on the look out for Black & Tans or Auxiliaries who may be passing through Belfast. One night during the month of February, 1921, a party of four members of the Active Service Unit saw three members of the Black & Tans outside the Empire Theatre. Our men attacked and killed the three Tans and made good their retreat although they had to keep up a running fight for a distance of quarter of a mile. On this night there were two brothers named Duffin, who were members of the I.R.A., killed by a reprisal party. From intelligence received, the reprisal party were under D. I. Ferris. We decided to make a special effort to execute Ferris and organised small squads of I.R.A. to wait and watch with the view of shooting him on sight. But Ferris seldom appeared and he was very irregular in his movements and was always very well escorted. It was not until a couple of more months had passed before he was finally tracked down and shot. Ferris was not killed but he was seriously wounded and permanently disabled.

On a Saturday morning in the month of March, 1921, a party of Auxiliaries arrived in Belfast. They were very conspicuous around the city centre from 10 o'clock in the morning until noon. We, the I.R.A., were taken by surprise at this^{intelligence/} and we quickly mobilised a squad of Active Service Unit and went into the city centre but we did not find the Auxiliaries. From information received we gathered that there was at least a full company of them and that they moved about very quickly on foot and in parties of about sixteen to twenty in number. As it was near lunch time we guessed that they would not appear in the streets again until after 2 o'clock. The Squad was then dismissed to re-assemble again at 2.30 p.m. and the officers held conference to discuss the new situation. We concluded that this company of Auxiliaries had come to the city to clean up and wipe out the I.R.A. and that the morale of the rank and file, together with the morale of the nationalist population was in danger. We then mobilised a party of about twelve men armed with hand-grenades and revolvers.

We assembled at The O'Donovan Rossa Football Club in Berry Street in the city centre. The Battalion O.C. (R. McCorley) outlined the scheme of attack on the Auxiliaries should they appear that afternoon, and he stressed the importance of getting in the first blow and that we must carry the fight to the enemy at the very first opportunity even at the risk of our lives. We left the Club shortly after this and patrolled the city centre for a radius of about a mile in each direction. The fact of this being a Saturday evening in an industrial city where the streets were crowded with pedestrians, made the going very difficult and tedious. Our eyes and wits were strained with being on the look out for the enemy and at the same time keeping within range of each other and

watching for signals. We had spotters on the look out at various points and we patrolled for a couple of hours but no sign of the enemy. A few of the Squad complained of fatigue and I, feeling much the same, brought this to the notice of the O.C. who then decided to abandon the hunt. Woods, McCorley and myself were returning home along Donegall Place. - I crossed over to the opposite side - when I saw two Auxiliaries about a hundred yards in front travelling in the same direction. I made an effort to cross the street to join Woods and McCorley when a tram came between us, and stopped. I ran around the tram and as I ^{DID} ~~did~~ so I heard four or five shots. When I passed the end of the tram I saw the two Auxiliaries lying on the ground and saw McCorley disappear around the corner of Castle Lane. In the confusion caused by the pedestrians rushing here and there I ran in the opposite direction to McCorley and Woods. We all succeeded in making good our escape. The names of the two Auxiliaries killed were Captain Boland and Captain ^{BOWLES} ~~Bowler~~. A reprisal was carried out that night during curfew. A barman who worked in a public house in the city was taken out and killed by unknown R. I. C. This happened in the Ardoyne district. This man had no connection with the I. R. A.

On the following day the Auxiliaries left Belfast and it was some days afterwards that we found out that the reason for their appearance in Belfast was to collect a convoy of new transport vehicles, but I had information from a local member of the R. I. C. that this particular company of Auxiliaries were after having a very hectic time in Dublin and they were shipped out to Belfast for a rest. However, I believe the former reason given was the proper one.

About the end of March, 1921, the Brigade received instructions from G.H.Q. to the effect that it was desirable that Belfast city centre should be burned as a reprisal for the burning of Cork city. Roger McCorley as Battalion O.C. was entrusted with the planning of this operation. To the best of my recollection the only persons entrusted with this information outside of Battalion and Brigade Staffs were the Captain of "B" Company, the officer in charge Engineering Company, and myself. My share of the task was the reconnaissance and planning of the area of the city centre that was to be burned by "C" Company. As Roger McCorley and myself were closely associated, he joined with me in this work of planning for the burning in the "C" Company area, which took in one half of the entire city centre, including Royal Avenue, North Street, High Street, Ann Street, the Corn Market and Castle Junction. I had been employed in business in the city centre for a number of years and was very familiar with the wholesale chemists and oil stores. Therefore, we were able to locate two or three of these business premises in every large block of buildings. On the completion of the reconnaissance and having our plans made, McCorley checked over the work of the other units and having requisitioned grappling irons, bolt-cutters, ropes, etc., we were all set. The officers and N.C.Os. of the Companies were not to be detailed until the day of the operation. This reconnaissance took up a very considerable amount of my time for a few weeks during business hours. I took part in the usual night patrols around the city and took charge of night guards once or twice a week in various areas of the city.

Having waited for about ten days after the completion of "Plan for Burning", the Battalion O.C.

informed me that that particular operation was called off and he was very upset on receipt of these orders and expressed the opinion that some so and so on the Brigade Staff should be shot. Some time after we were informed that the Bishop of Down & Connor had been informed of the plan to burn the city and that the Bishop rushed to Dublin and made contact with H.H.Q. Staff. He pointed out the serious consequences and the probability of the entire nationalist population being exterminated. Hence, the greatest of all of our plans was cancelled.

During the month of April, 1921, I spent some time in making new arms dumps in the city centre area. It had been decided that these dumps were very essential in order to service the Active Service Unit and prevent the danger of transporting arms over from one section of the city to another. The remainder of my time was with the Active Service Unit in combing the city looking for D.I. Ferris. During this period we just missed him by a matter of minutes on four or five occasions. However, we kept on trying and he was shot some time during May or June, 1921. (I was absent from the city at that time).

On the 2nd May, 1921, I got permission to go to Glasgow for a period of one week. Whilst in Glasgow the local I.R.A. with some help from home carried out an attack on a prison van and rescued a couple of I.R.A. prisoners. As a general check up was being made on the Irish residents I felt very unhappy and I was just about to return to Belfast when a courier arrived from Belfast and informed me that I was not to return to Belfast as my identity in connection with the I.R.A. was known to

the R. I. C. and British Intelligence Service. I was to choose between remaining in Glasgow or go to Dublin where I may be sent to a Flying Column or to the martial law area. I choose the latter course because I would feel safer being armed and amongst friends than being unarmed and lonely in Glasgow. I made my way to Dublin and was there for three weeks before I succeeded in making contact with the I. R. A. Charles McCallister (now Lt. Colonel in the Western Command) picked me up at the house in which I was staying at Ballsbridge and brought me to the D. O. (the late Eoin O'Duffy). His office was at Barry's Hotel in Gardiner's Row. Here I remained attached to the Director of Organisation, for a few days, and then Eoin O'Duffy informed me that he would not send me down the country as negotiations were going on which would probably end up in a truce. In a few days the news became public and I remained attached to the D. O. until the day of the truce when I got the first train out of Dublin to Belfast. I reported to Roger McCorley on the same day in Tommy Flynn's house in Raglan Street.

On my arrival back in Belfast I found a great change had taken place in the I. R. A. organisation. Roger McCorley was now Brigade O. C.; Tommy Flynn was Battalion O. C.. When I paid my first post truce visit to my old Company, "C" Company, I found the entire personnel had changed. New officers had been appointed and the Company strength was made up of men who were strangers to me. When I asked where was the "C" Company that I had known, I was informed that a new Battalion had been organised and officers and N. C. Os. of the 1st Battalion had gone over to officer the new Battalion. I was then appointed O. C. "D" Company of the 2nd Battalion and later became Battalion O. C. and section leader of the newly organised "City Guard".

Although we had a truce with the British the war with the Specials was intensified and sniping activities continued between the two parties. The British military had ceased to operate except for patrolling the border areas in the city. The I.R.A. set up headquarters in St. Mary's Hall and General Eoin O'Duffy took up duty in Belfast as liaison officer for Ulster. Training camps were set up in Counties Down and Antrim. The Belfast Training Camp was located at Ballycastle in County Antrim and the officers of the Battalions and Companies of the Belfast Brigade went through an intensive course of training. Recruiting for the I.R.A. was opened up and this necessitated the forming of a third Battalion in Belfast. For the first two or three months after the Truce we were very busy training the new members of the I.R.A. and organising the new areas. During this period sniping and burning were still being carried on by the Specials and the Orange mob. Defence pickets and counter sniping by the I.R.A. continued. During this period negotiations were going on between General O'Duffy and the R.I.C. and British military. The British were bringing pressure on the I.R.A. to cease activities in the city area. The I.R.A. put forward counter demands for the protection of the nationalists and demanded the disarming of the Specials. This state of affairs continued up to the signing of the Treaty in December, 1921.

During the first six months of the Truce the I.R.A. operated quite openly as we felt that we were protected by the Truce and our organisation was thrown wide open for the entry of recruits. But we took certain precautions against enemy agents getting in too deep. Very seldom was a post-Truce member of the I.R.A. given any position of trust and all important information was

withheld. The various headquarters were unknown to this new I.R.A. and more important still the movements of all officers were kept secret.

Now that a Treaty had been made between the British and the Irish Provisional Government, we in the North found ourselves "a lost legion". The British administration had come to a more or less standstill and the British military were quite passive. However, very early in 1922, we, the I.R.A. had gone "underground" and the war was again intensified. The I.R.A. had taken the initiative and the R.I.C. made a determined effort to come back to the fore as "the Police Force". By now a new force was being organised to become the Royal Ulster Constabulary. This new force was built up of the remnants of all old R.I.C. and the more select of the Class A "Specials". From January up to May, 1922, the I.R.A. disarmed R.U.C. and "Specials" from time to time. On many occasions shots were exchanged and casualties inflicted on both sides. By now there had been a City Guard formed of members of the Belfast Brigade. This Guard consisted of one section to each Battalion (there were four Battalions in the Belfast Brigade by this time). Each section was under the command of the Battalion O.C. who himself was a member of the Guard (Active Service or full-time Unit). When this new unit was trained, plans were drawn up for an "all out" attack on the R.U.C. and "Specials" and plans were again made for the systematic burning of Belfast. The aim was to try and prove the failure of a Six County Government in Ulster.

Plans were made by all the divisions in the six partitioned Counties for a general attack on the new

British administration. The I.R.A. along the border areas were to co-operate and thereby ease the pressure on our partitioned areas particularly the 3rd Northern Division which covered Antrim, Belfast and Down. The general action was to commence on the 20th or 22nd May, 1922. A party of 3rd Northern Division I.R.A. were trained in the Free State area. This training consisted of driving armoured cars and lancia cars, as we contemplated capturing four armoured and eight lancia cars in Musgrave Barracks in Belfast. On the night before the general action, a party of 22 officers and men took up position before curfew in a building just outside the Musgrave Barracks. (Curfew commenced at 8 o'clock p.m.). There the party waited, armed with revolvers and grenades, until one hour after midnight. This party of I.R.A. succeeded in gaining entry into the Barracks and split up into three parties. One squad captured the arms room which was situated on the top floor of a three-storeyed building. The second squad went to the car park and succeeded in breaking the locks on the armoured cars and lancias. The third squad entered the main guard room, and on calling on the guard to surrender, the guard offered resistance. A hand to hand fight took place and one of the guards was knocked out and collapsed at the guard room door. As he was considered to be out of the fight the squad overlooked him for a minute or so, when he jumped out of the doorway and raised the alarm.

Before this guard escaped from the guard room, another Constable who was on guard outside the wicket door of the Barracks, had commenced to hammer on the wicket gate and at the same time kept calling on the guard inside "what's all the row about?". He then commenced to fire his rifle, first through the gate and then in the air.

The machine gunners on the roof then opened fire. The signal "to retire" was given and as the I.R.A. were making their way out an exchange of shots took place. One of the R.I.C. was killed and another was wounded. All the I.R.A. made good their escape but were held within the cordoned area until the following day. Some of the I.R.A. did not get clear of the area until the following evening.

From this time onwards a long series of attacks and bombing were carried out in Belfast principally on R.I.C. Stations and posts. The programme of burning the city was carried out by the city guard. Fires were started in warehouses, factories, mills, business premises, Corporation buildings and stores, tramway depots, distilleries, railway goods yards, etc. etc. and anywhere and anytime that an opportunity offered itself. When Orange mobs collected to carry out attacks on isolated nationalist quarters, reprisals were carried out by the nationalists, very often carrying the fight into the Orange quarters. These reprisals were generally unofficial; there was a tendency on the part of some of our members to take strong action against the unionists and against official orders. For instance, a party of nationalists as a reprisal for the sniping of a catholic woman in York Street, Belfast, carried out a raid on the unionists quarters and entering a copperage they lined up the five employees and shot them. Four of the victims of this attack died.

About the end of June or the early days of July, 1922, another unofficial operation was carried out, i.e. a Mr. Twadell, a Unionist M.P., was shot dead in Royal Avenue, Belfast, opposite the General Post Office at 9 o'clock in the morning on his way to business.

The officers of the I.R.A. were now beginning to find some difficulty in maintaining control of the rank and file. This only applied to the post Truce element of our membership.

During this period (July 1922) the business community of Belfast saw that things were becoming too serious for business interests and they organised and raised a cry to the Northern Government and the leaders of public opinion to take effective steps to bring peace, not only peace for one but peace for "all", as they published in their manifesto. Now the I.R.A. met a certain amount of opposition from the more conservative element of the nationalist party. The remnants of the old Irish Parliamentary Party led by Mr. Joseph Devlin, tried to bring a peace parley with the Six Counties Parliament. Their aim was to work up nationalist public opinion with the backing of the clergy against the I.R.A. and the republican organisation. They tried to bring about a re-organisation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary with a view of recruiting a percentage of catholic or nationalist members to join this force. As the result of I.R.A. activity this move to recruit for the new force was a complete failure. However, the result of the co-operation of protestant and catholic clergy, together with unionist and nationalist M.Ps., was the disbandment of the "Specials" and the taking over of police duties by newly-formed R.U.C. The action of big business interest and the Corporation was responsible for this control of the "Specials" and the enforcement of discipline in that body. A special committee of clergy, both catholic and protestant, members of Parliament and police officers organised with the view of re-establishing the nationalists of the working and business classes back in

the industries of Belfast and small towns outside Belfast.

After about a month of activity this committee succeeded in winning over all the employers and managements to insist that nationalists must be permitted to work in the various mills, factories, foundries and shipyards, etc. etc. Thus peace came to Belfast; the "Specials" and military were withdrawn from the streets and the regular police took up duty on a peace-time basis. Strong action was taken by the police against mobs or corner boys who were liable to create a breach of the peace. The police on patrol were very slow at first in penetrating into the nationalists areas. They moved in a little further every day and at the same time making friends of the people they met by calling on shopkeepers, etc. and telling everybody that their mission was a peaceful one and that they hoped the people would have confidence in them (the police) as they were now back on normal duty and they wanted peace above everything else.

The I.R.A. during this period were just marking time, waiting and watching. By now the civil war had broken out in Southern Ireland and had been going on for some time. It did not affect the movement in Belfast to a very great extent. A few officers and other ranks had left Belfast and gone to the South to participate in the war. The 3rd Northern Division asked G.H.Q. of the Free State Army to refuse to take any recruits from the North unless they had official transfers from their officers in the North.

However, about the end of July or August, 1922,

arrangements were made for a percentage of officers and men to go to the Curragh Camp for a few weeks rest and training. The arrangement was at first intended only for officers and men who were harassed by the enemy and were in need of rest. But as time went on and Belfast remained peaceful, the numbers who left for the Curragh increased and by the time September came there were very few of us left in Belfast. Although the greater number had gone South, the I.R.A. maintained its existence and organisation and maintained communications with G.H.Q.

During the month of October, 1922, I received instructions from the Brigade to close up our Headquarters and offices and to find a permanent dump for arms and equipment and to consider that the war was postponed until we would see what would come out of the Treaty. I remained in Belfast until the last day of October, 1922, having supervised the dumping of all of the arms and equipment of the 3rd Battalion of which I was O.C.

SIGNED

Joseph Murray

DATE

20th July 1950

WITNESS

John McEvoy
20/7/50

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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NO. W.S. H-12