

W.S. 517

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 517

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 517.....

Witness

Maurice Crowe,  
Ballymoresough,  
Rathkea,  
Tipperary.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. Tipperary, 1913 - ;  
Member of Irish Volunteers Tipperary, 1913 - .  
Adjutant 4th Battalion, 3rd Tipperary  
Brigade, 1918 - .  
Subject.

- (a) National activities 1913 - January 1922;
- (b) Arrest of Sean Treacy in 1917 and again  
I.R.A. in 1918;
- (c) Arrest of/leaders following the engagement  
at Soloheadbeg on 21/1/1919.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1777.....

Form B.S.M. 2

MAURICE CROWE'S STATEMENT

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STATEMENT OF MAURICE CROWE,  
Ballymoresough, Rathkea,  
Co. Tipperary.

I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Tipperary town early in 1913. Willie Benn was at that time Centre of Tipperary town I.R.B. Circle. Denis Lacey was also a member of the I.R.B., and it was in company with him that I joined the Volunteers at the formation of that organisation in Tipperary.

At that time, 1913-1914, I attended Irish language classes which were held at the Technical School, Tipperary, where we were taught Irish by the late Tadhg O'Kelly, national teacher. It was at these classes that I first met Seán Treacy, and we became fast friends.

When the split in the Volunteers occurred about the autumn of 1914, in Tipperary town, as in most other places, the majority supported the Redmondite faction at first. There were, at the time, about fifty Martini rifles and some Italian rifles, without any ammunition, held by the Tipperary Company; and, following the split, all these arms were retained in the possession of the Redmondite section. The minority, numbering about twenty or twenty-five, under Seán Duffy, supported the Irish Volunteer standpoint, and continued to organise and train separately from the National Volunteers, as they called themselves, (the Redmondite section). We had no arms then except a few revolvers, but we succeeded in getting back the arms held by the Redmondite Volunteers before the Tan war started.

Easter Week, 1916:

Orders came to Tipperary during Holy Week, 1916; but the orders were countermanded on Easter Sunday morning by Pierce McCann. However, the Tipperary Volunteers mobilised, as previously arranged, at Galbally, but no action took place.

About the end of 1916 or early in 1917, the Volunteers were reorganised in Tipperary. Two Companies were formed in Tipperary town, designated as "A" and "B" Companies; and Seán Treacy, who was now busy organising, formed Companies at Donohill, Donaskeagh, Solohead and Mountbuis. Ben O'Hickey of Lisgibbon also formed a Company at Bansha about this time. The I.R.B. and Volunteer meetings were held at Jack McCarthy's of O'Brien Street, Tipperary, who was himself an old I.R.B. member. A Branch of the Gaelic League was formed in Tipperary in 1917, and a hall for the use of the Volunteers was procured at Eaton's Cottages, Tipperary.

About September, 1917, an aeriocht was held in the sportsfield at Tipperary, at which Eamon de Valera and Frank Fahy spoke. Seán Treacy was in charge of de Valera's bodyguard of Volunteers that day and, as a result of this, he was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Whilst Treacy was serving this sentence, there was a hunger-strike of the political prisoners in Mountjoy prison, in the course of which forcible feeding was resorted to by the prison authorities and resulted in the death of Tom Ashe. Following Ashe's death and the general public outcry which arose from it, the remaining prisoners, now all in rather ill health, were temporarily released. Seán Treacy was now looked upon as the local leader in Tipperary and, as he

expected to be re-arrested at any time, he, at an I.R.B. meeting, appointed Seán Duffy, Denis Lacey and myself to carry on the work in that eventuality.

Seán was arrested again in February, 1918, and was in Dundalk Jail when the hunger-strike took place there. Protest meetings, in connection with the treatment of the prisoners, were held at that time at Tipperary and Solohead, at which P. J. Moloney presided, and at a meeting of the I.R.B. it was decided to capture the Sergeant of the R.I.C. who had arrested Seán and to hold him prisoner, as a kind of hostage. This Sergeant and a Constable patrolled a certain railway line, but fortunately for themselves, they did not turn up on the occasion we had arranged for. Immediately following this Dan Breen and I went to Dundalk to take part in a proposed rescue of Seán Treacy and other prisoners from the jail. This rescue was planned and arranged for by Frank Thornton and the Dundalk Volunteers but, on arrival in Dundalk, we found that the hunger-strike had been declared off as the prisoners had gained the terms they sought.

In January, 1918, six Lee Enfield service rifles were got out of Tipperary Military Barracks. I had custody of these, with other arms and ammunition, in D'Arcy's store, Tipperary.

An important centre in Tipperary town from 1916 onwards was No. 8 Church Street, owned by the Misses A. and K. Ryan, both of whom were members of Cumann na mBan. Alice Ryan was the local President. It was also a despatch centre and meeting-place for Volunteer officers as well as

/prominent

prominent I.R.B. members.

In April, 1918, the conscription crisis came, and I got an order from Seán Treacy, who was then in Dundalk Jail, to leave my employment and give my whole time to the Volunteer organisation, which I did, in company with Denis Lacey. About the same time, Alice Ryan had got a letter from Seán, referring to the same thing, in which he said Dinny (that is, Dinny Lacey) and I were to "go to work on our mother's farm". This was his cryptic way of phrasing the order so as it would pass the British censor, meaning that we were now to go to work for Ireland. Others now joined us, including Dan Breen and Con Moloney, and we formed a headquarters at Barlow's of Shrough. From there, we organised the 4th Battalion as part of the (South) 3rd Tipperary Brigade, and I was appointed Adjutant, 4th Battalion. Later, in October of that year, when the Brigade was formed, I was appointed Brigade Adjutant.

In October, 1918, I was ill at headquarters and was removed to Tipperary District Hospital with septic pneumonia. I was discharged from hospital just before the general election of 1918, and was in charge of the Volunteers who did police duty that day in Tipperary town.

Next came Soloheadbeg. (For an account of this, see Desmond Ryan's book, "Seán Treacy And The 3rd Tipperary Brigade".)

After Soloheadbeg, I again came in contact with Seán Treacy, Dan Breen and Seán Hogan near Galbally. We proceeded from there to Lackelly and Doon, where we again

met the Brigade Commanding Officer, Seumas Robinson, and from there we went to Croughmorka. I was then sent back to get the R.I.C. men's rifles, which were hidden near the scene of the Soloheadbeg ambush. I did this, in company with Tadhg Crowe of Solohead, and brought these arms to my home at Glenbane. They were in the custody of my brother, Edmond, until they were handed over some months later to Dinny Lacey of the 4th Battalion (for an account of which, see statement of Edmond Crowe).

A Brigade meeting was held at Donnelly's, Nodstown, Cashel, on the Sunday after the removal of the rifles. Robinson, Treacy, Breen and Hogan went to Reiska, Kilcommon. I followed the evening afterwards with Andy Donnelly. When we got to Doherty's, they had gone on to Kennedy's of Glengroe, at the foot of the Keeper Hill. We proceeded there but, when we got to Kennedy's at 3 a.m. in the morning, they had gone to Hewitt's of Ballinahinch. We stayed at Kennedy's until the following evening, and at last located the others at Hewitt's where we stayed until the next evening and proceeded, mostly on foot, to Castleconnell where we met Seán Carroll, afterwards famous column leader. We went from there that night by the Falls of Doonass to a watchman's hut at the Turbines. Here we stayed a couple of days until a message came, as a result of which Robinson and Treacy went to Dublin, and Breen and Hogan to West Limerick. I returned to Tipperary.

On March 7th, 1919, I was arrested with Pat Moloney and William Hartnett at Kilross. We were taken to the military barracks, Tipperary, and, after a few days there, removed to Cork prison, from where we were released after a fortnight without being charged.

On April 22nd, 1919, I was again arrested with Pat Moloney and kept in the military barracks, Tipperary, for ten days, from where I was sent to Cork and, after trial by district court-martial, sentenced to twelve months' hard labour under the Defence of the Realm Act.

At this time a number of Republican prisoners were on strike in Cork Prison and in solitary confinement in No. 10 Wing. Tomás O'Donoghue was Officer Commanding the prisoners there. On my arrival, I joined the strike and was elected leader of the prisoners. We were held in solitary confinement except when we were allowed to go to Mass on Sundays until the end of September, when we went on hunger strike. Gearóid O'Sullivan, later Adjutant-General, was a prisoner with us at the time.

From Cork Prison we were removed to Mountjoy Prison where we went off the hunger-strike in order to get in touch or be associated with the other Republican prisoners who were already in the prison. A general smash-up and hunger-strike of the prisoners was agreed on, and began on October 6th at mid-night. The prisoners wrecked their cells, tore or burned their bedding, smashed the windows, and so on. We were then attacked by the warders with fire-hoses, streams of water being directed at the prisoners, ostensibly to put out the fires of the burning bedding in the cells, but, in fact, to subdue the prisoners by drenching them with water. This incident, having begun about midnight, finished about 3 a.m. All the prisoners were put in handcuffs for some six days after this, when we then went on hunger strike. After four days, we were released temporarily, and I was sent to St. Vincent's Hospital with some others.



I was re-arrested on March 8th, 1920, to finish my sentence and taken to Mountjoy Prison. On arrival there, I was appointed by the then Adjutant-General (Gearóid O'Sullivan) as Officer Commanding all sentenced prisoners. Another strike was arranged and, on Holy Thursday night, the sentenced men in "A" Wing wrecked their cells and bored through the walls from cell to cell, as had been done in the former strike. We were handcuffed and removed to "C" Wing, which we also smashed up. We were again handcuffed, this time with hands behind back, day and night, until Easter Monday when the famous 1920 hunger-strike started. There were fifty-four sentenced prisoners under my charge in "C" Wing, and about fifty untried men under Peadar Clancy and Tom Hunter in "A" Wing. The untried men did not take part in the smash-up strikes but did take part in the hunger-strike. The hunger strike lasted for ten days. The Irish labour movement, taking a hand in the matter at this stage, called a general one-day stoppage of work. Following this, all the prisoners were released. I was sent to the Mater Hospital. I still have a medical chart which I brought with me from the hospital. Entries on this chart show: "Temperature, 103. Condition, Very Weak". After a fortnight in the Mater Hospital, I was discharged.

On May 27th, 1920, Kilmallock Barracks was attacked. I was in charge that night of a party of men, from Tipperary and Galbally, who tore up the railway line and cut communications at Ballyhoolihan Bridge on the night of the attack. Seán Duffy, Matt Barlow and Tadhg Ryan of Shrough were also there that night, as was Eddie Burke of Coolboy, Emly. Denis Lacey and William Hartnett were in the actual attack.

I was once more arrested at Kilross on June 11th, 1920, and taken to Tipperary military barracks, where I was identified by two soldiers as being one of the party in the Emly ambush the day before. Transferred to Cork, I was once more appointed leader of the untried prisoners. I met an old friend there who had spent three months in the cell next to me during my previous term of imprisonment, namely, Mick Fitzgerald, who died later on hunger-strike, having fasted for ninety days.

A raid was made on the City Hall, Cork, by the British forces, in which Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, Liam Lynch, Seán Hegarty and others were arrested. These prisoners arrived in Cork Prison when the hunger-strike, already referred to, was in progress, having begun on August 11th, 1920. Tadhg Manley of Middleton was in charge of the sentenced prisoners, and Mick Fitzgerald in complete charge of all the prisoners.

The strike had begun as a demand for unconditional release. One night, when it had been on for about fourteen days, Con Neenan of Cork, Tom Crawford of Ballylanders and I were transferred on stretchers to a hospital in the Victoria Barracks, Cork, where we were to be forcibly fed. However, as the press next day came out very strongly about this, the forcible feeding did not take place.

Two nights later, during curfew, we were thrown into a military lorry. Orders were clearly given by the officer in charge to this effect: should the prisoners attempt to escape, or should there be any attempt at rescue, they would be shot. We were then taken to a boat, the "Heather". Other prisoners on hunger-strike arrived from

Cork Prison - about thirty in all. The prisoners were given mattresses but no covering, and were put into a corner of the boat. We were not given even a drink of water during the voyage to England. Arriving at Pembroke at 6 p.m. the following evening - eighteen hours after we had started - there was a special train waiting for us. Some struggled on to the train from the ship, helping others, but some were too weak and were taken on stretchers to the train. We left Pembroke by train at about seven o'clock that evening, with a strong military escort. The train was shoved into a siding at Reading for about three hours. We arrived at Winchester about ten o'clock the next morning. After a week here, they made an attempt at forcible feeding. We were still on hunger-strike, and an order was received to go off hunger-strike. We were brought back to Cork a month later.

I was tried by general court-martial and sentenced to three years' penal servitude. Later, I was transferred to Wormwood Scrubbs and thence to Parkhurst Convict Prison in the Isle of Wight. In Parkhurst, there were in all about forty Irish Republican prisoners, some of whom were sentenced for operating in England, as well as a few of the Connaught Rangers who were serving sentences in connection with the Indian Mutiny. Once more, I was appointed Officer Commanding the prisoners. Fr. Dominic, chaplain to the Lord Mayor of Cork, who had been sentenced to three years and who had just arrived, was appointed Vice Officer Commanding. We were all put into prison garb and transferred

into different working parties. Here also was Tadhg Spillane of Kerry who was in a strait-jacket. He had torn every convict suit put on him in Maryborough Jail, before being transferred to Parkhurst. He refused to wear even the prison shirt. Tadhg Manley, who was in the canvas dress, also refused to wear prison garb. After a few days we established communications and arranged a strike.

One morning while out at exercise, all the Irish prisoners, at a given signal, walked together out of the exercise ring, shouted, etc., causing an uproar, and refused to associate with criminals. We were set upon and batoned by warders. As we refused to walk, we were dragged by the warders into the cells where we tore off the prison garb. We were then put into what is known as the canvas dress, and handcuffed to a strap of leather around the waist. The pandemonium continued day and night, upsetting the whole prison. (There were about eight hundred prisoners of all kinds in Parkhurst. The punishment cells, known to us as the "chokey", were full. We refused to submit to the prison crop but were knocked down and the hair forcibly clipped or torn off. We refused to exercise unless left together, but we were dragged out - refusing to walk - and dragged in again. They soon got tired of this and, after a week or so, we were all put into one wing, apart from the convicts. We exercised together, and brought over our own food from the cookhouse. The food baskets and boxes were numbered for the different wings, and our basket had the letters, "S.F.", painted on it, meaning Sinn Féin prisoners.

As we refused to work, all privileges, such as, letters, visitors, etc., were cut off. We were kept in solitary confinement here, except for a half-hour each day, for twelve months. Then we got an extra half-hour in the evening. Fr. Dominic, who was sent to the prison hospital, was not allowed to say Mass for some months until Bishop Cotter of Portsmouth visited the prisoners. He was then allowed to say Mass privately. He was also compelled to wear the prison garb and exercise with criminals.

As a result of this treatment, some of the prisoners were in very bad health. One had to be released, and others were mentally affected. One man was removed to Broadmoor Asylum. We were released on the 14th January, 1922.

Fr. Albert, who visited us almost daily during the strikes in Mountjoy Prison, was refused admission there on April 13th, 1919, and he sent me in a note, which I still hold. At that time, he also brought me in messages from Mick Collins.

I have in my possession a copy of an Illuminated Address to the Bishop of Portsmouth from the Irish prisoners, on the occasion of their release from Parkhurst, and a telegram sent by Fr. Dominic and myself, in Fr. Dominic's handwriting, to President Arthur Griffith, asking for intervention for the release of the Connaught Rangers who took part in the Indian Mutiny.

Both Fr. Albert and Fr. Dominic were afterwards sent on the American mission to Oregon, and died in exile there.

In all, I took part in seven hunger-strikes.

SIGNED:

Maurice Brown

DATE:

23<sup>rd</sup> May 1951

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No. W.S. 517

WITNESS:

J. Hawker C.D.