

W.S. 1. 197

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
DURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1197

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,197

Witness

Dr. Philip Murphy,
8 Castle Street,
Carrick-on-Suir,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers,
Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Waterford, 1914 - .

Subject.

National events, Carrick-on-Suir,
Co. Tipperary, 1900-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2505

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1938-71 97
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
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STATEMENT BY DR. PHILIP MURPHY,

8 Castle Street, Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary.

In the year of 1898 I qualified as a medical doctor in the College of Surgeons, Dublin, and, shortly afterwards, I returned to my native Carrick-on-Suir and established a practice at 83 Main Street where I still have my surgery and medical hall.

About the year of 1900 a branch of the Gaelic League was started in Carrick-on-Suir. I joined this branch as an ordinary member at the time of its inception. Subsequently, I was elected President of the Branch. From a small beginning, we made good progress. Irish language classes were held once or twice weekly. From time to time we had different teachers. The principal one whom I can now recall was the late Seán Ó Floinn who was a native of Carrick-on-Suir.

Later on, we organised an annual Feis with which was associated a procession through the town and a display of Irish industrial goods. On one occasion, the late Patrick H. Pearse, who was executed after the 1916 Rising, came to Carrick-on-Suir to open the Feis. He was my guest during his stay here. I cannot say exactly what year it was, but it was before the formation of the Volunteers, and our conversations were mainly about the Gaelic League and the revival of Irish as a spoken language. Before returning to Dublin, Pearse gave a lecture to the members on these subjects.

About March of 1914, a meeting was held in the Town Hall, Carrick-on-Suir, at which a unit of the Irish

Volunteers was started. There was a big attendance and most of those present handed in their names to become members. Soon we had four Companies in the unit, and drill instructors were found from amongst those members who had seen service in the British Army. A Committee, of which the late Michael Power of Main Street was Chairman and of which I was a member, was formed to administer the affairs of the unit. Each member paid a small weekly subscription of, I think, twopence, and, after a time, we were able to purchase twenty-four rifles, twelve Long Lee Enfields and twelve Mauser carbines. I cannot now remember where they were purchased, but there is an idea at the back of my head that they were obtained through Messrs. Clery & Co. in Dublin.

After the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the members were more or less advised or encouraged by some members of the Committee to join the British Army and many of them did so. This policy was repugnant to me and to some others. The late Maurice Hickey, myself and six or eight other members dissociated ourselves from it and withdrew from the organisation. Similar happenings were taking place all over the country and this was what was known as the "split" in the Volunteer movement.

While those of us in Carrick-on-Suir who withdrew from the Redmondite Volunteers, as they had then come to be known, did not at that particular time start an Irish Volunteer Company, we kept in close touch and we often talked about the twenty-four rifles, which I have already mentioned, and wondered where they were kept. We were anxious to get our hands on them as we felt it was a shame to leave them to the Redmondites.

Although we differed on Volunteer policy, Michael Power (the Chairman of the Volunteer Committee), whose residence and place of business was next door to my medical hall and surgery in Main Street, and myself remained good friends. Early in 1915, during his last illness, I was called in to attend him. One day, when coming down the stairs from the sick room, I glanced in through a door which was ajar and there, in a small room, I saw the twenty-four rifles. I decided I was going to get them. That night, I again visited the patient and, this time, I arranged for Power's hall-door to be left open and for my wife to put on her loose fitting coat and to come into Power's after me. After I had attended to the patient, my wife and I managed to remove eight of the rifles (four of each type) into my medical hall that night. These I put in a secure hiding place over the window of the medical hall. That same night, Michael Power died, and the chance of getting any more of the rifles was gone.

When the eight rifles were eventually missed, the Redmondite Volunteers reported the matter to the R.I.C. who instituted inquiries. The matter was then the talk of the town. One day, an R.I.C. man called in to the medical hall and told my assistant that their inquiries would probably lead them here. I overheard the conversation and, taking it for a straight tip, I removed the rifles out to the country that night. I cannot now remember who I passed them on to, but they went into the right hands. They were probably the first rifles ever secured by the Irish Volunteers in South Tipperary.

Later on but still in the year of 1915, The O'Rahilly, who was killed in the Rising of 1916, came on

a visit to Carrick-on-Suir. I knew him intimately as we had been to school together in Clongowes Wood, and he and I had been students of the National University in the years after we left Clongowes Wood. The O'Rahilly addressed a meeting in the Town Hall at which a Company of Irish Volunteers was formed. I forget now who was appointed O/C. of the Company. We had about twenty-five members and this was more or less the strength of the Company until Easter of 1916. We had parades and drill but we had no arms.

Coming to Easter Week of 1916, I cannot recall having heard of any special instructions or arrangements for Easter Sunday of that year. We seemed to sense that something was happening or about to happen, but the first real intimation we had that anything special was on, was when a messenger arrived on Easter Sunday morning with a message or a despatch to say that all arrangements for that day were cancelled.

As in many other places in Ireland, the reaction of the majority of the people of Carrick-on-Suir to the Rising of 1916 was unfavourable. This was particularly so amongst the hundreds of relatives of men then serving in the British Army and whose wives and dependents were then drawing "separation" money from the British Government. Right up to the time of the evacuation of the British forces from this country, these people were a thorn in the side of the Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements in Carrick-on-Suir and, no matter how aggressive or disorderly their actions were, they were condoned by the R.I.C. and by those in authority. After the executions of the leaders of the Rising, the counter-reaction of nationally minded decent people was favourable and, amongst them, a new Irish-Ireland spirit became noticeable.

During the summer-time of 1917, the Irish Volunteer Company in the town was reorganised and, in or about the same time, a Sinn Féin Club was formed. Young men like John O'Keefe of New Street and Willie O'Meara of Mill Street took over the organising and training of the Volunteer Company.

Early in 1918, I received a visit from the late Denis Lacy - afterwards Brigade Vice Commandant of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade. I knew him well at the time. He was then employed in the firm of Louis D'Alton & Co. in Tipperary town. He was seeking information about places where he could lay his hands on quantities of explosives and ammunition. It happened that I was able to give him full details of where a large quantity of explosives were then stored on the premises of Messrs. Hearne & Co., Hardware and General Merchants, Carrick-on-Suir. Shortly afterwards, Volunteers from Tipperary town, assisted by Volunteers from the Carrick-on-Suir Company, raided Hearne's stores and took away the explosives. This raid took place on or about St. Patrick's Day of 1918.

Sometime prior to the raid on Messrs. Hearne's stores - it was possibly shortly after her release from prison in 1917 - the Countess Markievicz came to Carrick-on-Suir to give a lecture on her experiences during the Rising of 1916. She was the guest of my wife and myself during her visit. She received a tremendous welcome from those inside the Town Hall where the lecture was given. So densely was the hall packed that, although I had accompanied her from my house to the hall, I could not obtain even standing room and I had to remain in a downstairs portion of the Town Hall while the lecture was on. When the lecture was over, a large number of those

dependents of British soldiers, to whom I have already referred, were assembled in the street outside. So violent was their attitude to her that it was necessary for us to arrange for an escort of Volunteers to accompany her back to my home.

I regret that I cannot now recall all the various instances or the names of the many people with whom I came in contact during the years of 1919, 1920 and 1921. A few which come to mind may be of interest.

On or about the 8th September, 1919, I received a message to go to the house of Mrs. Kirwan at Graigueavalla at the foot of the Comeragh mountains. When I got to Kirwan's, I met the late Liam Lynch there. It was my first time to meet him. He had been wounded the previous day during an attack on a party of British troops in Fermoy and he was in need of medical attention. The wound was not very serious. It was a puncture wound at the top of his shoulder. During his stay at Kirwan's, I visited him on three occasions to dress the wound. This house of Kirwan's was a very secure hiding place, situated as it was at the foot of the mountains and at least a mile away from the nearest road. It was frequently used by men on the run, and Eamon de Valera stayed there for a period during the Civil War.

During the time when Irish railway men refused to handle consignments of munitions belonging to the British forces or to work trains carrying members of the British Army or police forces and were dismissed by the railway companies for their action, a Committee was formed in Carrick-on-Suir to collect subscriptions for the dismissed railway men. I acted as treasurer of this

Committee. We collected something in the neighbourhood of £2,000. As the money was brought in by the collectors, I lodged it in a deposit account in my own name in the Provincial Bank in Carrick-on-Suir. When the collection was completed, the Committee received an instruction to send the full amount to Mr. Thomas Johnson - afterwards T.D. and leader of the Irish Labour Party in the Dáil. I then got a bank draft from the bank and sent it on to Mr. Johnson, from whom I received a receipt.

I recall an occasion when I was entertaining Denis Lacy and Michael Sheehan at my house at 83 Main Street. Both men were at the time much sought for by the British forces. I had arranged a route of escape for them out the back, in the event of a raid. We were chatting for some time when we heard a loud rat-tat at the door. Giving the others as much time as possible to get out the back, I answered the door. There was a fairly large party of British troops and police outside. A Police Sergeant asked me if I had any foreigners in the house. I replied, "No, no foreigners here". To my surprise, they then took their departure and made no effort to force their way in, or to raid the house.

During the latter part of 1920 and the first six or seven months of 1921, I kept in constant touch with the two Flying Columns which operated in the South Tipperary Brigade area. Whenever they came within anything like a reasonable distance of Carrick-on-Suir, I visited them in their billets and gave them any necessary medical attention. Generally speaking, the men were always in the pink of condition but, due to the continuous and prolonged marching, their feet frequently needed some attention. Another cause of worry and discomfort was the itch,

generally referred to amongst the men themselves as the "Republican itch". This disease was often picked up by the men when they slept out-of-doors, or in beds whose previous occupants were affected by it. Again, it might be caused by the lack of a regular change of underwear. My cure for it was to wash the affected parts and to rub in plenty of sulphur ointment.

I remember one occasion on which I visited Denis Lacy's column when they were in billets near Lake Countinaun. The column at the time was about forty strong and every man of them had the itch. It was in the month of March, 1921, but, as the weather was fine, I got the men to swim in the lake and, after the swim, to rub in the ointment. As so much ointment was required, I had taken it out in tins which carried the name of my medical hall. After the treatment, I left the tins, with whatever ointment was in them, with the men for future use. Shortly afterwards, the column was in action near Cloheen and some of the men lost the tins which were subsequently found by the British forces. As a result, a policeman called to the medical hall and mentioned that tins, bearing our labels, had been found at the scene of the ambush. The assistant who interviewed him took him quite coolly, saying that tins with our labels went all over the country and that we could have no responsibility for where they might be found. I heard no more about it.

Of the officers of the I.R.A. with whom I came into contact, I think I knew Denis Lacy best. He was a fearless soldier and a man of honest, straightforward and upright character. He seemed to control the column by his personality and, while a strict disciplinarian, the

men all respected him and would do almost anything for him. I deeply regretted his death during the Civil War.

SIGNED: Philip Murphy.
(Philip Murphy)

DATE: June 23rd 1955.

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WITNESS: J. Grace
(J. Grace)