

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.654

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1654.

Witness

Cornelius Kelleher,
Cushduye,
Kilmichael,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Kilmichael Coy., Macroom Battn.,
Cork 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Kilmichael Coy., Macroom Battn., Cork 1 Brigade,
I.R.A., 1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2974.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY CORNELIUS KELLEHER,
Cushduve, Kilmichael, Co. Cork.

I was born at Cushduve on October 28th, 1885. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Droumleigh national school until I reached the age of fourteen when I left to work on the farm at home.

When the Irish Volunteers were first organised in the area in September, 1917, I joined the local company (Kilmichael). The pioneers in the organisation of the Volunteers in the district were John Kelleher (my brother), Denis Riordan, Jeremiah Kelleher, John Lehane and Cornelius Kelleher (witness). We were the only members in the early stages but we gradually recruited new members until, by the early spring of 1918, the strength of the unit was about 110. I was now elected O/C of the company, and my appointment was confirmed by Macroom Battalion Staff. The officers of the company now were:-

O/C - Cornelius Kelleher (witness).
1st Lieutenant- Denis Healy.
2nd Lieutenant- Jeremiah Kelleher.

The Section Commanders of the company (Kilmichael) were:-
Tim O'Leary, Tim Lordan, Mick Buckley and Tim Hurley.

Our training in the early stages consisted of close order foot drill under our own officers.

The company (Kilmichael) was attached to Macroom Battalion, Cork Brigade. The other companies in the

battalion were, as far as I can recollect: Macroom, Clondrohid, Toames, Rusheen, Kilmurray, Canovee.

The officers of the battalion (Macroom) were:-

O/C - Dan Corkery.
Vice O/C - Jack Lynch.
Adjutant - Charlie Browne.
Quartermaster - (I cannot recollect.)

When the British threatened to enforce conscription early in 1918, every man of military age in the area joined the Volunteers. The strength of the company (Kilmichael) now exceeded two hundred. During this period, all available arms - mainly shotguns - were collected by us in the district. We got a few small revolvers. All arms were surrendered voluntarily by the owners. As a matter of fact, some owners of arms handed in their guns to us without being asked to do so. We now had about thirty shotguns, three revolvers and about five hundred cartridges. In addition, selected men were engaged on the manufacture of buckshot, bombs and weapons of various kinds. The bombs were made by filling canisters and cocoa tins - usually one-pound size - with concrete and scrap metal, leaving a hole in the centre of the filling into which we put a stick of gelignite, to which a detonator and fuse were affixed. The fuse protruded through a hole in the cover of the tin. The cover was held in position by bolts inserted in the concrete.

One of the first incidents I can recollect concerning this period was a visit to the area by Tomás MacCurtain (Brigade O/C) and Pat Higgins (Brigade Adjutant) on April 1st, 1918. Acting on instructions

from Battalion Headquarters (Macroon), I picked up these Brigade officers at Bealnablath, and escorted them to Ballingearry. They billeted in our area (Kilmichael) on the night of April 1st, 1918. Several members of the company were engaged on guard and sentry duty during their stay. They were escorted to their destination (Ballingearry) next day. About this time, my home was being raided regularly by members of the R.I.C.

When the threat of conscription had passed, the majority of the new recruits fell away gradually, and, before the end of 1918, the strength of Kilmichael Company had fallen to about 120. It remained constant at this figure up to the Truce on July 11th, 1921.

After the conscription period, normal training continued. Occasionally at week-ends, the company took part in manoeuvres with neighbouring units. These operations helped to train us in the use of cover, the selection of fire positions, as well as giving the men in the companies, who were being trained in scouting and signalling, a chance to put their training to the test. Training was now becoming more advanced, and occasionally a miniature (.22) rifle was made available by the battalion staff to enable the men to have some target practice.

There was no activity in the area in connection with the general election in December, 1918, as the Sinn Féin candidate - Dan corkery - was returned unopposed.

Beyond normal training, there was little activity in the year, 1919. Early in January of this year, Cork county was divided into three brigades,

as follows: No. 1, Cork City and mid-Cork; No. 2, North Cork; No. 3, West Cork. Our battalion (Macroom) was now attached to Cork I Brigade. The other battalions in the brigade were: Cork City (two battalions), Ovens, Whitechurch, Donoughmore, Passage West, Cobh, Ballyvourney. The officers of the Brigade (Cork I) were, I think:-

O/C	- Tomás MacCurtain.
Vice O/C	- Terry MacSwiney.
Adjutant	- Pat Higgins.
Quartermaster	- - -

About this time, a military patrol on its way from the railway station to its barracks was attacked at Tinkers Hill, Macroom, by a party of men, armed with sticks and hurleys. Three rifles were captured. This operation was carried out by the men of Macroom company.

Beyond normal training which was becoming more advanced as men were being trained as scouts, signallers, engineers, there was little to report during the greater portion of the year 1919. Men were still engaged in manufacturing bombs, loading cartridges with buckshot, and suchlike activities. In addition, the men of the company (Kilmichael) organised and assisted in the collection of the first Dáil Éireann loan. Approximately, £250 was subscribed in the company area.

Towards the end of 1919, we were preparing for an attack on Kilmurray R.I.C. barracks. This attack took place on January 3rd, 1920. The preparations included the manufacture of bombs and the loading of

cartridges. On the evening of the attack, I took twenty members of Kilmichael company - armed with shotguns and carrying home-made bombs - to Kilmurray. We marched across country to the neighbourhood of Kilmurray where we met the Battalion O/C (Dan Corkery), with a number of men drawn from the other companies in the battalion. The combined force numbered about sixty. I should have mentioned that, while our party from Kilmichael were moving across country, we sent along a horse and car by road, in case transport would be required for any wounded men. We reached Kilmurray area about 9.30 p.m. The attack opened about 11 p.m. The main attacking party - to the number of about twenty-five - took up positions all round the building. The remainder of the force were engaged on outpost duty on the roads leading from Macroom.

The barracks was standing on its own, about two hundred yards outside the village of Kilmurray, on the road to Bandon. The attacking party took up positions behind fences all round the building. The attack opened about 11 p.m. I was in charge of a party of eight men from my own company (Kilmichael). We were detailed to make a breach in the gable wall of the barrack, at the western side, in which there was no window. While the attack was being carried out, we worked at the gable wall, using bars and hammers. We made a certain amount of progress, and succeeded in removing several stones from the wall, but, before we had broken through, the attack was called off, after about one hour. The men who took part with me in the attempt to breach the wall of the barrack were: Denis Riordan, Tim Lordan, Jeremiah Kelleher, Denis Corcoran,

Mick Buckley, John Riordan, Michael Murphy and Denis Healy. The remainder of the men from Kilmichael company were engaged on outpost and road-blocking duties. When the attack was called off, I returned with the other members of my unit to our home area where we dumped our arms.

The next operation in the area took place at Easter 1920, when about twenty members of the company (Kilmichael) took part in the destruction of Tarelton evacuated R.I.C. post. This building was set on fire, and the walls were later demolished with pickaxes and bars. I was in charge of this operation. Some of those who took part were: Denis Healy (1st Lieutenant), Jeremiah Kelleher (2nd Lieutenant), Tim Lordan, Tim O'Leary, Mick Buckley, Tim Hurley. The building was burned one night, and demolished a few nights later.

Training and drilling continued throughout 1920. When Carrigadrohid R.I.C. barracks was attacked on the night of June 9th, 1920, a party of about twenty men from Kilmichael marched under my command to Carrigadrohid, a distance of about sixteen miles. We arrived there about 9 p.m. and were instructed to take up an ambush position on the Dooniskey-Carrigadrohid road, about one mile from the latter village, and to ensure that the road was blocked. We blocked the road by felling trees, removing gates, farm carts and machinery from farm yards, and using them to make barricades. We then took up positions on high ground behind the roadside fences, on both sides of the road. We remained in position until the attack was called off at daybreak; but there was no appearance of any enemy force. We then marched back to our own area,

and dumped our arms. Some of those who took part in this operation were: Tim Lordan, Jeremiah Kelleher, Denis Healy, Denis Corcoran, John Lordan, John Lehane, Denis Riordan, Michael Buckley, Tim Buckley, John Kelleher, Michael Murphy, Tim Riordan, John Riordan and Cornelius Kelleher (witness).

During the summer of 1920, Dáil Éireann courts were established throughout the country. Courts were set up in each parish, and there were also district courts which dealt with cases referred to them by the parish courts or with the more serious cases. The members of Kilmichael parish court were: Eugene Riordan, Coolderrihy, James McCarthy, Deshure, and Cornelius Kelleher, Cushduve, (witness). We dealt with all minor cases in the parish, such as, bog disputes, boundary disputes, assaults, larceny and suchlike. All decisions reached by us were accepted by the litigants. Fines, where imposed, were collected by the Republican police force which was established about this time.

When the Local Government elections were held in June 1920, I was elected a member of Dunmanway Rural District Council. Another member of this Council who ^{WAS a} ~~were~~ members of the I.R.A. ^{WAS} ~~were~~ John Lordan from Kilmichael area. All the other members of this Council were from Cork III Brigade area, and the vast majority of them were members of the I.R.A.

When the Brigade Column was formed towards the end of 1920, Kilmichael company was represented on it by Tim Lordan. I volunteered for service with the Column, but was not accepted. I was instructed to remain in the home area (Kilmichael), and to ensure

that scouts, outposts and despatch riders were available all round the clock. This was most essential as my company (Kilmichael) was on the boundary of the Dunmanway battalion of Cork III brigade. It was later used regularly as a rest area for the columns from both brigades.

In accordance with my instructions, I concentrated on the organisation of the lines of communication and the establishment of outposts positions throughout the company area. The principal despatch routes, with distances, from company headquarters were:-

Headquarters to Macroom	- 9 miles
" " Ballyvourney	- 12 "
" " Ballingeary	- 13 "
" " Dunmanway	- 9 "
" " Kilmurray	- 10 "
" " Ballineen	- 12 "

During the period to the Truce on July 11th, 1921, six men were engaged full-time on despatch work on these routes. The men who carried out this work were: Denis Riordan, John Kelleher, Denis Corcoran, John Riordan, Tim Lordan, Michael Healy.

Towards the end of November, 1920, plans were being made by the Brigade Staff of Cork I Brigade for an attack on the Auxiliary force stationed in Macroom Castle. In connection with the planning of this operation, I was invited to a meeting at Toames, at which the Brigade O/C (Seán Hegarty) was present, on November 28th, 1920. I had been at Manch in Cork III

brigade area on the previous evening (Saturday, 27th November), and had met a number of men from Cork III brigade column. They had mentioned that they were about to undertake an operation in the area, but they did not know what it was. They thought, however, that it was likely to take place inside the borders of Cork I brigade area. Amongst the Cork III men I met at Manch were Seán Murphy (Aultagh) and Jerome Mahoney (Coppeen). On the morning of November 28th, I was on my way to Mass when I met Michael McCarthy and Jim Sullivan of Cork III brigade column. They told me that they were going into position at Kilmichael to await an Auxiliary convoy from Macroom. As the ambush position was within half a mile from my home, I invited them to have a cup of tea, but they were unable to avail of the offer.

When I got to the meeting place at Toames, I informed the Brigade O/C (Seán Hegarty) of what I had learned regarding the activities of the column from Cork III Brigade. It was decided on the spot to take no further action re the attack on Macroom Castle until the result of the operation by the men from Cork III was known. At this stage, I was handed a despatch to deliver without delay to Tom Barry (O/C, Cork III Brigade Column), who was in charge at Kilmichael. I left immediately, and, travelling by bicycle had reached Coolderrihy, North - about two miles from the Kilmichael ambush position - when I was warned by a man who was on high ground south of the road that a convoy of enemy lorries was coming along behind me.

I turned off the road into a laneway, and hid my despatch. I had only just got out of sight when the

convoy passed, on their way into the ambush position. I then made my way across country to my home, which I reached just as the opening shots were fired. I should mention that the enemy force halted on the roadway directly opposite my home. They extended along the road under cover of the fences, and remained so for about half an hour before re-entering their lorries and proceeding through the ambush position towards Dunmanway. It was because of this delay that I was able to reach home on foot before the attack opened.

As night approached and I had not seen anybody pass back towards Macroom, I decided to investigate the position. I made contact with Denis Healy (1st Lieutenant, Kilmichael Company), and we both moved off towards the scene of the ambush where we could still see the flames from the burning lorries. Before we reached the spot, we were met by a scout (John Kelly) who was looking for me. He had a message, asking me to get a priest for Pat Deasy who had been wounded in the fight at Kilmichael earlier. With Denis Healy, I went to the priest's (Fr. Charles Gould) house, and we escorted him to the house of "Neilus" Buttimer, Gortroe, where Pat Deasy was being attended to. When we reached the house, the wounded man was still alive. The last rites of the Church were administered to him by Fr. Gould, and he died while we were still in the house. There were now three dead I.R.A. men in the house, including Mick McCarthy and Jim Sullivan, who had been killed outright in the fight. There was now a certain amount of confusion, and the Buttimer family were anxious to have the bodies removed as they expected that their home would be burned out as a reprisal before morning.

As the bodies were now in my company area (Kilmichael), I decided to have some rough coffins made, and to bury the bodies as quickly as possible. By this time, seven or eight members of the company (Kilmichael) had gathered at Buttimer's. We immediately set about making rough coffins from floor boards, taken from a vacant cottage nearby. When the coffins were made, we placed the bodies in them and buried them in a bog, from which they were removed about three days later. They were now accorded a proper burial at Castletown-Kinneigh. The burial took place at night, and was carried out by men from Cork III Brigade.

During the spring of 1921, instructions were issued to cut all lines of communication. Every member of the company (Kilmichael) was engaged at this period on the cutting of trenches, demolition of bridges and the blocking of roads by every available means. This work was more or less continuous, as roads blocking one night were often opened next day by forced labour parties of civilians, rounded up by the enemy. This necessitated the opening of a fresh trench or the erection of a new road-block that night. Amongst the other activities at this time were regular raids on the mails - both local and district - in the area. The mails were usually censored by a member of the Battalion Staff, and were then despatched to the addresses through the local post offices. As far as I can recollect, no information of military value was obtained in these raids except on one occasion. The exception was a case in which a publican in my area notified a British agent in Macroom that the roads in the area were cut. The letter was sent to Battalion Headquarters where it was decided that the writer of the letter should be charged and tried. He

was arrested, and charged with transmitting information to an enemy agent. He was fined £50.

My home was now in the centre of an area which was completely cut off from Macroom and Dunmanway. All roads, both major and minor, in the area were blocked. We thought that the area was cut off completely, and that no enemy transport could get into the district.

On the evening of May 5th, 1921, the Battalion Adjutant (Charlie Browne) and the Battalion Vice O/C (Jim Murphy), as well as his brother, Mick Murphy, called to my home where they billeted that night. Next morning being the First Friday of the month, we all went to Mass and Holy Communion at Coolderrihy church. We returned home after Mass, and had breakfast. The battalion officers and their companion (Mick Murphy) then left for Coppeen, while I took a pony and saddle, and headed north to Droumcarra, about three miles from my home. I had only arrived at the forge there when I heard a sound and, going to the door of the forge, I saw a big enemy convoy approaching. They had come through the Gearra, a wooded area, cut by channels of water running into the river Lee, and through which, without expert local knowledge, it would have been impossible to drive a lorry. Apparently, the local R.I.C. knew their way through.

The leading car halted at the forge. It was occupied by three Black and Tans and a driver, who was a member of the R.I.C. The Tans left the car, and questioned me regarding the demolition of Droumcarra bridge which was about twenty yards from where we stood. Evidently satisfied with my explanation for

being in the area - I was supposed to be at the forge with the pony - they left me, and, heading a convoy of thirteen lorries and cars, they drove off.

They had only gone on their way when I remembered the battalion officers who had gone to Coppeen. I immediately set out for Coppeen. On my way, I met Tim Jordan, who was rushing to inform me that all in that village (Coppeen) had been arrested. It now appeared that we were in the centre of a big round-up, so we moved on to Deshure hill, from which we had a good view of the surrounding country. We had only arrived there, when we observed a column of smoke rising from my home. We remained at Deshure hill until we saw the enemy force returning to Macroom. I then returned home, to find that a crowd of neighbours had collected to try and save something from the fire. The Catholic curate (Fr. Cronin) was also there. Everything in the house and in the farmyard was burned except the bedclothes from one bed which were left to my mother and sister.

The occupants of the house at the time of the raid were my mother, sister and brother. My brother dashed away at the approach of the raiders, and, through his knowledge of the country, managed to evade the enemy force which pursued him.

The enemy force which destroyed my home returned to Macroom where they blew up the home of Dan Corkery (Battalion O/C). The destruction of my home and that of Dan Corkery were official reprisals authorised by the British military authorities for the shooting of two members of their forces in Coachford area.

During the period, April 1921 to the Truce, the Kilmichael area was used regularly as a rest area for the columns. The presence of the columns in the district necessitated the provision of guards, scouts and extra despatch riders. Scouting at this period was most important. There were five observation posts in the area, at each of which we had two men posted, night and day. These men were supplied with signalling equipment, to enable them to communicate with each other, or with similar posts in neighbouring company areas at any hour of the day or night.

My rank at the Truce was -

O/C, Kilmichael Company,
Macroom Battalion, Cork I Brigade,
I.R.A.

The strength of the Kilmichael Company at the Truce was about 120.

SIGNED Cornelius Kelleher

DATE 19th July 1954

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WITNESS P. Lonnell