

West Cork

Stories of the

Revolution

1916- 1923

Cathal O' Leary

Lisavaird N.S.

This article was written by my great grandfather James Hurley known as Sonny, on the 23rd February, 1956. It was written for the Bureau of Military History 1913-1921.

This organisation (BMH) was established by the Fianna Fáil government in 1947 in order to record the recollection of War of Independence veterans.

Statement by James Hurley, Kilkerinmore, Clonakilty, Co. Cork

I was born at Kilkerrinmore, Clonakilty, on December 4th, 1895. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Lisavaird N.S. until I reached the age of 12 years, when I left school to work on my parents farm.

My father was a prominent member of the Land League in the district and devoted a lot of time to the organisation of the League. He was a regular speaker at meetings in the area.

Late in 1913 or early 1914 I joined the I.R.B. I was sworn in by Patrick O'Keeffe, who was Head Centre for the area. As far as I can recollect, the other members of the group were: Joe Flynn, Seán Collins (brother of Michael Collins), Paddy O'Keeffe, John (Flyer) Nyhan, Dan Kingston, Felix O'Neill, James Walsh, Michael O'Donovan and Tim Crowley. The group met once a fortnight at different venues.

I joined the Kilkerrin section of Lyre Company of the Irish Volunteers in April 1915. The company was a unit of Cork Brigade. The strength of our section (Kilkerrin) was about 16 and the strength of the full company was about 30. Pioneer members of our section were: Eugene O'Keeffe, Patrick Sullivan, Dan O'Regan, James White, Patrick White, Mick Crowley, Jerh. O'Sullivan, Patrick Regan, Dan Regan, Jno. L. Sullivan, Tim Hurley, Jas Hurley (witness). The officers of Lyre Company were:

O/C – James Walsh
1st Lt. Seán O'Donovan
2nd Lt. John Crowley.

Training at this time consisted of close order foot drill and arms drill with wooden guns. Parades were held on two nights each week in fields in the area. All parades were attended by the O/C (James Walsh), who carried out drill instruction. Normal parades and training continued up to February 1916, when the O/C James Walsh invited the Ballinadee Company to come to Clonakilty to meet Lyre Company.

The Ballinadee Company travelled to Clonakilty by train on a Sunday evening in February. They were in full uniform and carried arms. Tom Hales was in charge of the unit. Our company (Lyre) was mobilised at Scannell's Cross - about 1½ miles from Clonakilty on the Ballineen road and marched into Clonakilty to meet the men from Ballinadee. About two thirds of our unit (Lyre) was armed with shotguns. The combined force then marched to Ardfield, where we engaged in manoeuvres under the direction of Tom Hales.

I well remember the day of this parade because only one civilian followed the parade to Ardfield. He was a man of about 50 years of age at the time – James O'Shea – a tailor by trade. When the manoeuvres were over the joint companies marched back to Clonakilty railway station, where the Ballinadee company entrained for home. Our company, Lyre, then marched back through Clonakilty and the parade was dismissed outside the town boundary. I

should have mentioned that the parade and manoeuvres were watched by a part of R.I.C. from Clonakilty throughout the evening.

Early in 1916 two dumps were constructed in the company area. One was made in a field on the side of a hill by digging a hole 7' x 4' x 4' and burying a waterproofed box 6' x 4' x 2' in same. The box was covered by clay to a depth of 2' and the sods were then replaced.

The second dump was made in a stone vault in Kilkerrin graveyard. As the walls and floor of this vault were damp a wooden floor was put in and suitable boxes fixed within the vault. This work was apparently done in anticipation of the land of arms from the boat on which Casement was later to travel from Germany.



Kilkerrin graveyard.

Training and organising continued until Holy Week, 1916. In the meantime, we had collected a few more shotguns from sympathisers. We now had about 30 shotguns and a supply of ammunition in the company. The strength was not about 45. We also had 2 revolvers. There was no change in the officers of the unit.

As a member of the I.R.B. I was aware for some time that there was likely to be some action at Easter 1916. We of the I.R.B. had planned, as our part in these activities, to attack the R.I.C. barracks at Milltown about 6 miles from Clonakilty. As Easter drew near we were awaiting instruction, and at the parade held before Holy Week the company (Lyre) was ordered to assemble for manoeuvres at Con's Cross – on Clonakilty-Milltown road – on Easter Sunday at 11am.

When the company had assembled at Con's Cross on Easter Sunday, Seán O'Donovan (1st Lieut.) arrived and informed us that the proposed manoeuvres were cancelled. Before dismissing the parade, the company was drilled for some time by Seán O'Donovan. We were then informed that we were to go home quietly and to hold ourselves in readiness for mobilisation at short notice. The parade was then dismissed and we returned to our homes.

The company next paraded on the Tuesday of Easter Week 1916. The O/C, James Walsh was in charge of the parade. He informed us of the Rising in Dublin. Normal training was carried out that night and all men on parade were ordered to be ready at a moment's notice. A further parade was held on the following Friday night and everybody was then aware of the happenings in Dublin. As far as I can recollect, we were ordered by the O/C James Walsh on this occasion to dump all arms, ammunition and literature.

There was no exceptional activity for about a week or ten days beyond the usual parades (Tuesday and Friday). At this stage the R.I.C., accompanied by military, carried out wholesale raids for arms in the area. They did not get any guns but they arrested Jim Walsh, O/C, Seán O'Donovan, 1st Lt.; Eugene O'Keeffe, 2nd Lt.; Tim Crowley, John Crowley, Peter Donovan and Ed. Sullivan. They also raided later for several other volunteers in the area but they were not at home. The arrested men were removed under strong military escort to Cork gaol and later to England, being finally interned in Frongoch (I think). Following the enemy raids I did not sleep at home during the remainder of 1916.

Owing to the arrest of the officers and the general disorganisation following enemy activities, the strength of the company became depleted. As far as I can recollect, there were only six active volunteers in the area following Easter Week, viz, Dan Regan, Jerh. Sullivan, Mick Crowley, Denis Sullivan, Tim Hurley and James Hurley (witness).

I was the only I.R.B. man amongst the crowd. The members of the I.R.B. who were still free continued to meet at regular intervals, and it was through these meetings that the organisation in the area was kept alive. We were all the time discussing the situation with possible new recruits, so that when the Irish Volunteers were being reorganised in the late summer or early autumn of 1917 we knew all the likely men in the area who could be depended on.

When the O/C, James Walsh was released from Frongoch he called to see me on his return to the area. I reported on the position in Kilkerrin area, stating there were still six of the 'old reliables' and also a number of others who would be likely to make good recruits. On the

instructions of the O/C I compiled a list of the possible new recruits and found that there were 30. Within a month we formed a new company (Kilkerrinmore) in our own district. The strength of the company was about 30. In addition to the six men pre 1916 already mentioned, the following were some of the new recruits: Dan Harte, Pat Sullivan, Jim Harte, Denis Duggan, Pat Sullivan, Jas. White, John White, Tim Regan, John White, Dan Sullivan, Dan Harte, Paddy Barry. The first officers of the new company (Kilkerrinmore) who were elected were:

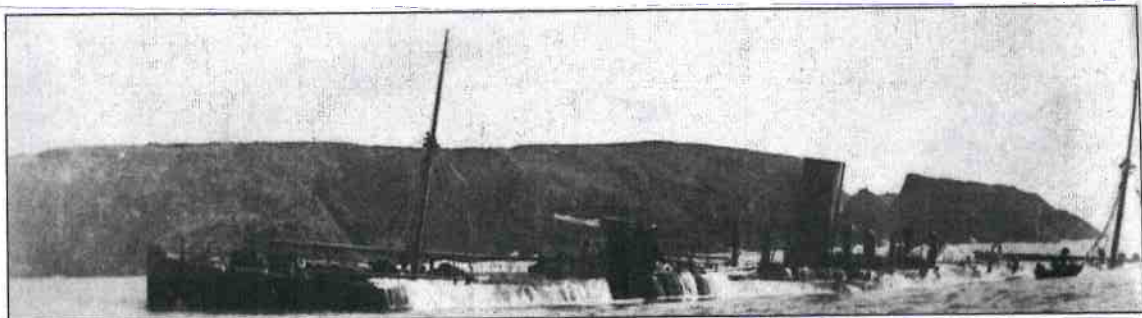
O/C Patrick O'Sullivan
1st Lt. Tim Hurley
2nd Lt. Dan Sullivan
Q/M James Hurley (witness).

Training in close order foot drill and arms drill with wooden guns was carried out at weekly parades which were held in the fields in the area. At this time the arms held by the company consisted of 2 revolvers and about 6 shotguns.

I think that early in 1918 the district was organised on a battalion basis. At this stage there were companies in Clonakilty, Lyre, Ardfield, Shannonvale, Rosscarbery, Kilkerrinmore, Ring, Reenascreena and Rosscarbery. These companies formed the Clonakilty Battalion, Cork Brigade. The officers of the battalion were, I think:

O/C Dan Harte
Vice O/C Tim O'Donoghue
Ad jt. Batt. Murphy
Q/M Paddy O'Keeffe

On 13th March 1917 a ship – “The Norwegian” was torpedoed off Dirk Bay. The ship did not sink but was breached by the crew who were taken off. At low water the boat was about ½ miles from the shore. As there was a chance that there were some arms on board, it was decided to carry out a raid on the derelict ship, which, of course, was being watched by the coastguards and R.I.C. A rowing boat was procured at night and six men -Tim Hurley, Denis Sullivan, Dan Regan, Pat Sullivan, Dan Sullivan and Pat O'Keeffe – Battalion Q/M rowed out to the ship and searched it for arms, but nothing of any value was obtained. With three others Jim White, Mick Crowley and Jerh. Sullivan I was on guard duty on the shore while the raid was being carried out. There were also a number of men engaged on scouting duty but I cannot remember their names.



The Norwegian, grounded and awash off Red Strand.

Normal training continued at this time and, in addition, selected men were being trained as scouts and signallers. All men were also being trained in the use of cover and, occasionally, there was target practice with .22 rifle.

I should have mentioned that all Volunteers were active in organising Sinn Féin – the political wing of the movement – in 1917 and 1918. This organisation was mainly composed of volunteers and members of their families. There was, however, no special activity in the district in connection with the general election in December, 1918, as the Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed.

In the spring of 1919 Cork Brigade was divided into three brigades. Clonakilty Battalion, to which my company Kilkerrinmore was attached and became a unit of the new Cork III Brigade (West Cork). The first officers of the new brigade were, I think:

O/C	Tom Hales
Vice O/C	Ted O'Sullivan
Ad jt.	Liam Deasy
Q/M	Pat Harte

During 1919 there was no exceptional activity. All units were mainly engaged in strengthening their organisation. All volunteers were also engaged during the latter part of the year in organising and collecting the first Dáil Éireann Loan. Arising out of my activities in connection with this aspect of the work, a force of R.I.C. from Milltown raided my home in my absence. They discovered some documents in connection with the Dáil Loan and informed my mother that I was a member of an illegal organisation. I then went 'on the run' and, as the R.I.C. continued to raid regularly for me, I moved into Barryroe area (Bandon Battalion). I was in this area when Timoleague R.I.C. barracks was attacked in February 1920. I took part in this operation, being engaged in scouting duty on the Timoleague-Clonakilty road about ½ mile from Timoleague.

Early in 1920 there was a change in the officers of Clonakilty Battalion as the O/C Dan Harte had to retire owing to ill health. He was replaced by Jim Hurley. The officers of the battalion from this time until the truce were:

O/C	Jim Hurley
Vice O/C	Tim O'Donoghue
Ad. Jt.	Batt. Murphy
Q/M	Paddy O'Keeffe

During the summer of 1920 several raids were carried out on the local mails throughout the area but, as far as I know, no information of importance was obtained.

The Brigade O/C Tom Hales and Brigade Q/M Pat were in Kilkerrinmore Company area early in July 1920. They were attending a Brigade Council meeting which was held at Sam's Cross. On their way back to Bandon Battalion area they were taken prisoners by a party of military (Essex Regiment). This led to a change in the officers of the brigade. The new brigade staff were:

O/C	Charlie Hurley
Vice O/C	Ted O'Sullivan
Ad. Jt.	Liam Deasy
Q/M	Dick Barrett

I had returned to Clonakilty Battalion area about April 1920, and was moving round the district until August 26th, when I was arrested at my home by a party of military and R.I.C. I was taken to Clonakilty and later to Bandon, where I was tried by a military court and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment, which I served in Cork and Kilkenny prisons. While a prisoner in Cork I was one of a party who removed Terence MacSwiney and Mick Fitzgerald, who were on hunger strike, from their cells to the prison hospital.

I was released from Kilkenny gaol in November 1920 and returned to the Clonakilty area but did not come home. From this date until the Truce I was 'on the run'. I took part in all activities in the battalion area but was mainly engaged in dumps, transferring arms to the Brigade Column, arranging transport for the column and looking after supplies.

Early in 1921 I was appointed Battalion O/C Transport and Supplies. My duties entailed the arrangement of transport at various points through the area – ensuring that a number of bicycles in good running order were available at all times in each company area; also saddle, horses, horses and traps; boats with all necessary equipment where bays or rivers had to be crossed. This work necessitated constant visits to the company areas to ensure that the required transport was always available at short notice.

In addition I had to arrange for the supply of food to the column when operating or in billets in the area. This latter responsibility necessitated the seizure of sheep for slaughter and transmission across the country to wherever the column was billeted. Supplies of clothing and such necessities were usually obtained by raiding the shops or hostile traders. These activities were continuous and were necessary whenever the column or a section of it were in the battalion area.

The seizure of four farms in the area from loyalists – some of whom had been shot as spies, threw a lot of responsibility on my shoulders. I was responsible for removing the stock, implements and household goods from these farms to the lands of friendly farmers in the district. An inventory of all stock and goods had to be furnished to the brigade Q/M with details of where the stock and goods were being kept; also particulars of sales of stock or goods as they occurred. These activities kept me fully occupied.

Rank at the Truce - O/C Transport and Supplies, Clonakilty Battalion, Cork III Brigade.
Strength of the battalion at the Truce – about 600.

Here is a picture of my great grandfather. He passed away to his eternal rest on the 29th February 1968. Ar deis dé go raibh a ainm delis.

I never had the opportunity to meet this wonderful man, who sacrificed his life for his country, like him and many other men and women.



James Hurley (Kilberranmore 196)

This poem was written by Danny O'Connor, who was born in 1912 and hailed from Ardfield, Co. Cork. He was widely loved and respected all around West Cork. He was a great entertainer and delighted people of all age groups at local concerts.

He was a great poet and seanchaioi, his compositions were in the true tradition of the old balladeer and his stories were of real life as he and his friends experienced them. Danny died in January 1986.

Fifty Years Ago

Old Larry Murphy settled back upon his ancient seat,
As by a pile of flowing turf he stretched his weary feet,
He smoked the clay of other days its age we'll never know
But I'm sure he must have purchased it some fifty years ago

But as the talking ceased a bit, old Larry Murphy spoke;
As with his hand he pushed aside a bulky cloud of smoke,
Look here he says me pretty gent ye needn't brag nor blow,
For you could not whack the strapping man of fifty years ago.

When I was young, like Mickey here, I worked for Jackey Fay,
Brown bread and milk for eighteen pence a day,
The grub was plain and decent and the wages very low,
But we had not pick and choice of things some fifty years ago.

Ah, work was work when I was young, but damn it nowadays.
They seem to look for nothing else but merriment and care,
The dances and the pictures have been always on the go,
But the crossroad dance was all we had some fifty years ago.

The lads that used to gather there, some they were jolly boys,
Coat of green, old caubeen and shining cordoroys,
They would not jazz or shuffle round, they's use their heel and toe,
And they'd show you how to step it out some fifty years ago.

Another thing that feese me up is that wireless set affair,
When they talk to scuttled cruisers and their battles in the air,
It can't be right I'll tell you and I'm sure that I should know,
For we managed well without these things some fifty years ago.

Television too has come into view, I'd know is it right or not,
It shows football matches, steeple chasing and how rugby fired the shot,
With all this modernisation, they set the people all aglow,
But there was little heard of television some fifty years ago.

The cigarettes are gone to blazes now, tobacco's just as bad,
Forty pence for twenty, t'would make anybody mad,
The pint is twenty-three and we drink it very slow,
You'd get the same old pint for tuppence some fifty years ago.

Invention is the devil now, it surpasses everything.
The incubator takes the place of the useful clocking hen,
The eggs are turned daily, and the lamps are burning low,
But t'was the clocking hen, did all this work some fifty years ago

We're in the Common Market now, we are lucky to get in,
We got our opportunity it may never occur again.
Whether it is for good or bad, in time we all will know,
But there was little about this market some fifty years ago.

The red School House is latered now, the walls are newly faced,
The same old path leads to the door and the benches are replaced,
Twas there we had our class to do some fifty years ago

The inseminator comes around, his car is shining bright.
He could call at any hour from morning until night,
In he pops into the stall, what he does I do not know,
But you should take the cow up to the bull some fifty years ago.

The girls today are shocking bold, though I am not a saint,
I do not like their miniskirts, their powder and their paint.
I suppose they think they're lovely, but they look a holy show,
But you would not catch them out at night some fifty years ago.

So that's the way, the world is mad, it's going from bad to worse,
With all those crazy notions, they's make anybody curse.
The times are gone to blazes boys and tiss very well you know
So God rest those chaps who ran this world some fifty years ago.