

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO. STAIRÉ MILITÁIR 1913-21
No. W.S. 174

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 174.

Witness

James Kenny, St. Kevin's Hospital,
James's Street, Dublin.

Identity

Lieutenant 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade 1916.

Subject

- (a) I. R. B. Dublin 1903.
- (b) Howth and Kilcool Gun-running.
- (c) South Dublin Union, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. S. 1262.

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF JAMES KENNY, HOSPITAL 6,
ST. KEVIN'S HOSPITAL, JAMES STREET,
DUBLIN.

As well as I can remember, it was in 1903 that I joined the I.R.B. The name of the Branch I enrolled in was known as The Lord Edward Branch. There was no fixed address for any of the I.R.B. branches at that time, the reason being to keep the authorities "in the dark" regarding the meeting-places and the activities of our organisation. Other members of the Lord Edward Branch when I first enrolled were - Thomas Brady, Padraic O'Loughlin, Frank Gaskin, James Higgins and Bill Brophy. Bill was a '67 man and shot an informer in Skipper's Alley. It was Padraic O'Loughlin who swore me in as he was the Head Centre at that time.

A meeting was held in Dungannon of the Cumann na Gaedheal representatives from Dublin and representatives from Dungannon Clubs. These groups met the representatives of the Sinn Fein League. The outcome of this meeting was that the Cumann na Gaedheal and the Dungannon Clubs' representatives agreed to be known in future as the Sinn Fein Organisation. I am unable to give the date of this meeting or even to give the approximate date of it. I was a steward at the first public meeting to form the Volunteers, held in the Rotunda.

Immediately afterwards, Companies were formed. The Company formed in the south side met in Camden Street. Later on I was attached to D/Coy. which met and paraded at Harolds Cross. Officers were elected on the formation of this Coy. Our officers were - Captain O'Donnell, O/C. Company; 1st Lieut. George Walsh and 2/Lt. Cathal Brugha.

The first action of this Company was the Howth gun-running on Sunday 26th July 1914. On the mobilisation of the Coy. for this event the O/C. did not turn up for parade. 1st Lieut. Walsh paraded and marched at the head of the Coy. and 2nd Lieut. C. Brugha marched at the rere. When we were stopped in Clontarf by the military on

the way home we were carrying our rifles on our shoulders. Some of the Volunteers went back towards Howth and Lieut. George Walsh went with them. As soon as this happened, 2/Lieut. C. Brugha ran up to the front of the remaining element of the Company that stood their ground and took over command. We got orders to line across the road, two deep, and we obeyed. Dan McCarthy and myself were in the front line, side by side. The military at this point were right up against us with fixed bayonets. This barricade that we drew up prevented the military from advancing and gave the Volunteers at the rear an opportunity for getting their arms into safety. This opportunity was availed of to the fullest extent.

Eamon Ceannt was with A/Coy. at the head of the battalion. A tall man dressed in civilian attire, whom I got to know later as a police officer named Harrell, came along and got into conversation with Ceannt. I did not hear what they said to each other. Harrell then gave an order to the police to disarm us. Only one policeman made an effort to obey the order and attempted to take the rifle from a small-sized Volunteer out in front, but he failed. He did not, as far as I could see, make a very serious effort to succeed.

At the same time as Harrell gave the order to the police to disarm us, the officer in charge of the military was standing near him and when he (the military officer) saw that the police were making no effort to carry out Harrell's order, he asked Harrell if he would open fire. Harrell yelled out at the top of his voice "No, No". No shooting actually took place there, but in the excitement the Volunteers in front passed their rifles back to safety in case they might be taken from them by force.

The I.R.B. was mobilised for the landing of rifles at Kilcool on 1st August 1914. Our party got into a big lorry somewhere near the city centre, the actual place I cannot call to mind. Other members of this party were - Dan McCarthy and Frank Gaskin. We proceeded to Kilcool by the direct route and waited under trees in

a demesne near the Glen-o-the-Downs. When we got there a contingent of Volunteers from Etchingham's Battalion in Wexford were there before us. With them were two R.I.C. men whom they had arrested. Our orders were to wait there until word reached us that the boat with the arms had reached shore. Dan McCarthy and myself were deputed to mind the two "bobbies" and when the rifles came in I was told by C. Brugha to cut open the bundles and give a rifle to every Wexford Volunteer present, which I did. The Wexford men were mostly on bicycles, but I was again detailed with Dan McCarthy to continue guard over the two R.I.C. men until one hour had elapsed after the departure of the lorry for Dublin. The plan was to give ample time for the lorry to reach Dublin and have the arms and ammunition put into safety before the police had an opportunity of reporting the affair to their authorities. The lorry, however, broke down under the weight of the arms and ammunition; it had to be unloaded and the journey completed by private motor cars to Dublin. I am unable to give details as to where this lorry actually broke down or the number of Volunteers who travelled with the arms from Kilcool. The rifles were German mausers. After this we were marching home under Frank Fahy; three of us - McCarthy, Gaskin and myself - were carrying rifles. Tom Hunter, a Volunteer from the north side, took my rifle as he saw that I was tiring. Peadar Clancy was also there. When we marched about two miles of the road towards Dublin the lorry that had previously gone with the arms, or one very similar to it, returned, picked us up and conveyed us to Dublin. No subsequent arrests were made by the police after this incident.

Frank Fahy was i/c. of the Dublin Volunteers, and Etchingham was i/c. of the Wexford contingent for this operation.

The Split.

When the split between the Redmondites and the Irish Vols. took place, the majority of the 4th Battn. took their stand with the Irish Volunteers. This also applied to each individual Coy. In my Coy. which was still D/Coy. we had 55 who voted for the Irish Vols. and something over 40 voted Redmondite. Later that year a number of rifles were seized by the Irish Volunteers from the Redmondites at Dolphins Barn, and these same rifles were carried by the Volunteers at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa. The men who took part in this operation were Ted Kelly (later Dr. Kelly), Joe and Paddy McGrath, Frank Gaskin, Sean Murphy and myself. The captured rifles were deposited temporarily in Eamon Ceannt's house in Herberton Lane, near where the seizure took place. The following day they were transferred to the Citizen Army Headquarters in Croydon Park. Joe McGrath was working there at the time.

In 1915 or 1916 Eamon Ceannt transferred his home from Herberton Lane to S.C.R. Dolphins Barn. We were mobilised in Emerald Square for the Rising. Ceannt, Colbert and Cathal Brugha were present, but I am unable to recall the actual number of Volunteers that paraded, I can recollect, however, that it was a poor turnout so far as numbers went, taking into account the strength of the Battalion at the time. Ceannt was i/c of the parade and gave orders for the manning of the various posts that were to be occupied in this locality. Colbert was detailed to occupy Watkin's Brewery with about 20 men. Seamus Murphy was to go to Marrowbone Lane; the number of men who went with him I am not able to say. The rest of the Battalion came with Ceannt and occupied the South Dublin Union. These were the only Posts occupied by our Battalion on Easter Monday 1916. The time we marched in was 9 a.m. It might be a little after that time, I cannot remember rightly. We all entered by the Main Gate (James's St.) and we were placed in the actual positions we were to hold by Cathal Brugha. His first job was to place the men at the Rialto and to cover the S.C.Road, and another party at a

place called The Orchard (now named Ceannt's Fort) to cover James's St. My party, which included Dan McCarthy, was posted in No. 2 Hospital with instructions to cover the retreat of the party posted at the Orchard by engaging any military that might approach them from the lower end of James's St. About 10 a.m. a party of military was observed approaching the S.D.U. by the Volunteers posted in the Orchard. Fire was opened by the Vols. on this party and the attack by the military on this post began and lasted until dark, when the military withdrew. During the attack a party of military actually entered the Post - I believe they entered from the Rialto end - and had actually reached the passage outside the room that Dan McCarthy and myself were posted in at about 10.30 a.m. We fought them and Dan was badly wounded in the scrap. I threw myself flat on the ground when I saw Dan fall and faced four soldiers on my own. When they saw me take aim with my rifle from my prone position they cleared round the corner. The soldiers in question belonged to the Royal Irish Rifles and were just back from France. I might as well say that I was "windy" and excited at this stage as I had never been in such a predicament before. I fixed my bayonet and charged along the passage after the Tommies until I reached the corner around which they disappeared, but when I reached it I found they had retreated in the general direction of No. 2 Hospital. In about 1½ hours the attack was renewed by the military from No. 2 Hospital; this time they were reinforced, but the approximate number that attacked I am unable to say. Jack Doherty and myself opened fire on them and they retreated without a fight and without any firing. One soldier fell after we fired, but I am not sure whether he was hit or whether his sharp about-turn caused him to lose his balance. I did not wait to see him rise, but had to take up a new and better position hastily in the Nurses' Quarters. Immediately on entering our new post we started at once to erect a barricade inside the front entrance door. This barricade was not hard against the door, but about 2 or 3 yards from it. One of the military tried to force the door but was shot by Ceannt. The shot man wore a khaki pants, but the rest of his uniform, including his

peak cap, was of the R.I.C. pattern. He was a tall man, as tall as Ceannt, and that was six feet anyway. By this time it was found that the military had bored a hole through the wall from Larry Tanham's house. This hole was bored by one of the military and when completed the soldier put his head through it into the house that we occupied. He was observed by Jack Doherty, who was posted over our position by Cathal Brugha, and shot dead. He fell in the passage in the Nurses' Quarters. The next morning Tanham shouted through the hole and called out that a soldier was dead near the hole. He (Tanham) handed me the soldier's rifle across the barrier and, later on, his ammunition.

A bomb was thrown by the military on this (Thursday) evening, I would say it would be about 5 or 6 o'clock p.m., and badly wounded Cathal Brugha, and lodged a splinter in French-Mullen's knee. Brugha was sent out the following morning in a delirious condition. After the bomb explosion we all retreated to a new position in an adjacent building beside the bakehouse. The name of this building I am unable to give.

Thursday's hard fighting finished at dark and was not resumed. We remained on guard at our posts until Sunday morning. Dan McCarthy was brought to the hospital in Dublin Castle, but Cathal Brugha was left in the S.D.U. hospital.

At about 10 o'clock on Sunday morning Father Albert in company with Thomas McDonagh came to Ceannt and informed him that Pearse had decided to surrender, in order to save the citizens of Dublin further suffering. When Ceannt got this information he called us all together and said "Comdt. Pearse has given orders for the surrender. You have all behaved as soldiers for the week, and I hope that you will surrender as soldiers. The leaders might be shot, but the rest of you will live to fight again. We have made our protest". We then marched out of the building with arms and equipment and "fell in" in the open and numbered off. We marched under Ceannt to Marrowbone Lane Distillery, waited there until the garrison came out and joined us. We then marched, still under

Ceannt, to Ross Road, and on our arrival there we found the garrison from Jacob's before us. We then got the order to "ground arms" and take two paces forward. We obeyed. We were then marched under escort to Richmond Barracks. We were treated better there than we were across the water after deportation. During our stay at Richmond Bks. certain leaders were picked out for trial on Monday by about 5 or 6 detectives. McBride was picked first, then in succession were Ceannt, McDonagh, Willie Cosgrave. On Tuesday all Volunteers under 18 years of age were picked out and kept behind, and we were marched, under military escort, from Richmond Bks. to the North Wall. We boarded a cattle boat and were treated like cattle, too. We went first to Knutsford Jail and I was kept there for two months when I was transferred with a batch to Frongoch. I was two or three months there when I was released, about September or October, after I appeared before the Commission set up by the British Government to deal with us individually. About two weeks after release I was again engaged in Volunteer activities in the way of reorganising and taking delivery of arms and ammunition that began to come from England on Tedcastle's coal boats. Then we reformed the companies. Joe McGrath was made Captain of D/Coy. 4th Battalion, but I do not remember who were his lieutenants. We started to re-train and re-arm as before.

Signed:

James Kenny

Date:

25th January, 1949.

Witness:

Pack. John Nally Captain.