

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1813-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1813-21
No. W.S. 497

ROINN  COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 497.....

Witness

Eamonn Bulfin,
Derrinlough House,
Birr, Offaly.

Identity

Member of I.R.B. 1912 - ;
Lieut. Rathfarnham Company Irish Vol's. 1916.

Subject

- (a) Making of munitions 1915-1916;
- (b) G.P.O. Dublin, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT OF EAMON BULFIN,Birr, Offaly.

I was the second boy to enter the school at St. Enda's in September, 1908. Maurice Fraher from Waterford was the first pupil. The school was then on Oakley Road, Ranelagh. I remained in St. Enda's until I entered the University in 1911 or 1912. While doing a three-year course for a degree in Science, I continued to reside in St. Enda's.

In the summer of 1912, on Wolfe Tone's grave in Bodenstown Churchyard, I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Art O'Connor of Elmhall, Celbridge. I was introduced to the Fianna Circle by Con Colbert, who was Centre, and Liam Mellows. In the Fianna Circle, I met Barney Mellows, Eamon Martin, Garry Holohan, Paddy Holohan, Liam Ryan and Michael Lonergan. I introduced to this Circle Frank Burke, Fintan Murphy, Joe Sweeney, Conor and Eunan McGinley, Desmond Ryan and others. We used to drill in 41 Parnell Square - the Foresters' Hall - using dummy rifles and small arms, before the foundation of the Volunteers. We were frequently visited by Dublin Centres, such as, Bulmer Hobson, George Irvine and Seán McDermott.

At a meeting of the Fianna Circle in 1912, I proposed the admission of P.H. Pearse to the I.R.B. This proposal was received with some diffidence, as Pearse had appeared on a Home Rule platform in favour of the Council's Bill. I was aware that Pearse favoured the educational proposals contained in that Bill. Pearse, I am aware, was a great admirer of the Fianna, and he believed that every man should know how to use a rifle. In his talks to his students, he always stressed the fact that every generation of Irishmen should have a rising in arms. He stressed it in such a way that you felt impelled to believe that he did actually

believe that there should be some attempt, especially when the Volunteers were formed. He said that Carson was a good Irishman although opposed ostensibly to the separation from England, but that he was a good Irishman in so far as he had brought arms into the country.

When the Volunteers started, ^{(MOST OF) OLDER} ~~all~~ the ^Astudents in St. Enda's joined. Most of the older students joined the Rathfarnham Company, especially those who had been sworn into the I.R.B.* I joined Rathfarnham Company.

In 1915 I was engaged in organising the Volunteers in parts of Counties Dublin and Meath, Blanchardstown, Dunboyne, Clondalkin and other places out in that direction.

It must have been late in 1915 when we started making munitions in St. Enda's under the direction of Peadar Slattery. We made shotgun ammunition and hand grenades. The shotgun ammunition was reloaded with shot about the size of a small pea, made from lead melted down and run into plaster of Paris moulds. These moulds were made by Willie Pearse. I, personally, reloaded most of this ammunition. I was present at tests of the hand grenades. We only made the fuse type. The tests were carried out down at the Lake. The tests were designed simply to see whether the grenades would explode effectively, and to time the fuses. The fuses were more or less uncertain because they were of different calibres. For the making of the hand grenades, we used potassium chlorate and some phosphorus. The amount of the charge would represent the capacity of one "Friendly" match box. The fuse was brought up to the top of the canister, and that was bolted down. The fuse was just showing outside the top of the canister. We had to light it then with a match. The result of the test was pretty satisfactory. It scattered the stuff alright. As a matter of fact, they were effective

afterwards when we used them during the Rising. When we were getting into the G.P.O., one of those grenades exploded - why, I don't know; I suppose it was manhandled - and injured Liam Clarke. I continued at the making of munitions up to, and during Holy Week, 1916.

On either Holy Thursday or Good Friday, the munitions were shifted down to Liberty Hall in Dr. Kathleen Lynn's motor car. She drove and I was with her. I don't know whether Pearse was actually in St. Enda's at the time or not. I think he actually introduced me to Dr. Lynn.

I could not tell you how I became aware that the rising was fixed. We were told that there were big manoeuvres taking place, timed for Easter Week. There was never any actual specific mention of a rising. You got the feeling that this thing was in the air and by putting two and two together, but there was never any mention of any date. Sometime in March or early April I was engaged by Pearse in sending secret orders to O/C's. of the Units in the country. I did not see the contents of these.

I was Second Lieutenant in Rathfarnham Company. Liam Clarke was First Lieutenant. Michael Boland was O/C. Pearse, of course, was the original O/C. Eamonn Ceannt was Commandant of the 4th Battalion. I was promoted to Headquarters Staff as Lieutenant just before the rising.

I do not remember having much contact with Pearse during Holy Week, as I was engaged on munition work. There was so much traffic, that I did not pay much attention as to who was coming and going at St. Enda's. Our preparations for Easter Sunday were: we were to carry three days' rations; we were to have ~~amp~~ of the city - at least, the officers - a bicycle, I think, and any arms and ammunition we had. We were to report to Liberty Hall; further than that, we did

not know what our role was to be. We were informed afterwards that we were intended for the attack on the Castle.

On Easter Sunday morning we went to first Mass at Rathfarnham. We were all going to Holy Communion that morning. We were to assemble at about ten o'clock outside the chapel, where we usually paraded before starting off on marches, etc. However, before we went into first Mass, we got a copy of the "Sunday Independent", in which we read McNeill's countermanding order. We immediately inferred that the proposed manoeuvres, which we interpreted as the beginning of the Rising, had been called off. While standing outside the chapel after Mass, Mr. McNeill and Seán Fitzgibbon approached me and asked me to carry a despatch. I immediately came to the conclusion that this despatch was a part of the calling off of the manoeuvres, and I refused to take it. Mr. McNeill then called over Frank Connolly, who was a student in his class in the University and who was also staying with us in St. Enda's, and he asked him to take the despatch for him. As far as I know, Frank Connolly did take the despatch for him, because he did not turn out with us on Easter Monday.

We returned to St. Enda's and had breakfast. We were waiting then - on tenterhooks - for some word. We did not get any. Eventually, having discussed it among ourselves, I decided I would go into Liberty Hall to see what was happening. It was about 1 p.m. when I arrived at Liberty Hall. I remember there was a military council meeting on at the time. There was a great deal of coming and going. I can't remember exactly who were there, or what word I did get. I am not sure whether I was speaking to Willie Pearse there that day in Liberty Hall. As far as I remember, I think we were told to go back to St. Enda's and stand - to more or less in readiness for further orders. We stayed in St. Enda's all

day that Sunday. I remember Michael Hayes came to St. Enda's - he had apparently been sent by Commandant de Valera - to enquire from Pearse what was happening, and of course we could give him no information at all. We did not know actually where Mr. Pearse was at the time.

On Easter Monday morning I received a fresh mobilisation order, signed by P.H. Pearse. This document is now in the Museum in Kildare Street, Dublin. I think the time was mentioned on it. It was written in blue pencil. I was instructed to mobilise the Rathfarnham Company and proceed to Liberty Hall. Then I got a further mobilisation order from Willie Pearse. It was the original order I got for Easter Sunday, but was amended by Willie Pearse in his own handwriting. Seán T. O'Kelly's brother brought it out. He was an ex-pupil of St. Enda's. This was about 8.30 or 9 a.m. I remember we were in bed at the time.

THE DESPATCH RIDERS

I started to get the Company together. We succeeded in getting together as many as ^{they} ~~we~~ could reach. We mobilised and paraded outside the Church at Rathfarnham. The full strength of the Company was about thirty-five. About twenty men paraded outside the Church. These included the three officers, Mick Boland, Liam Clarke and myself. The following men were also present: the two McGinleys, the two Sweeneys, Frank Burke, Fintan Murphy, Joyce, Slattery, Kilgannon and Kiely. There were some others, but I cannot recall their names. We boarded a tram at Rathfarnham. When we arrived at the corner of Dame Street and George's Street, the tram stopped and did not go any further. There was terrible excitement in the city and a great deal of rushing and scurrying about. We heard shots; I think they came from the Castle. As far as I can recollect, it was about mid-day on Easter Monday. The tram driver and conductor simply abandoned ship and fled. Our party marched down to Liberty

Hall. We went into Liberty Hall and found no one there. We began to unload our stuff. Just then we got an order to proceed over to the Post Office immediately; either that, or somebody, who had come over to Liberty Hall from the G.P.O. to bring over stuff which had been left behind, told us that our forces were in the Post Office; but we did not get any written orders or instructions. Having got a handcart, we loaded up our stuff again and left Liberty Hall.

We proceeded via Abbey Street across O'Connell Street, and we had reached the entrance to Prince's Street when the Lancers came down O'Connell Street. There was a bit of confusion, naturally. The Company was formed up across the entrance to Prince's Street. We did not actually fire at the Lancers but, at that moment, firing took place from the Post Office and from positions across from the Post Office - the Imperial Hotel. At the time, of course, we did not know exactly where the shots were coming from. In the confusion and noise, nobody seemed to give us any attention at all, and the position was looking critical. About ten yards down Prince's Street, there was a small window, about four feet from the ground, on the side of the Post Office. I broke the window with my rifle, and incidentally broke my rifle. Any chaps that were near me, I called them out by name and "hooched" them up the window. Jack Kiely was actually on his hands and knees on the window-sill, when he was hit by a bullet. I don't know where it came from, although Desmond Ryan says it was from his own rifle, but I don't believe it was; I don't believe it was from any of our own chaps because they were mostly all in front of him. Possibly it may have been from the Metropole direction. We brought the wounded man into the Post Office. We got into the sorting room, but there was no one there and the door leading into the main hall was locked. I went over to the door - I had an automatic pistol - and I blew the lock on the door and went into the

main hall. It was just about this time that Clarke was wounded by the explosion of one of the grenades, and I think Slattery was wounded a bit on the knee, so that we lost three men before we got into action at all.

We reported to Commandant Pearse, and we were ordered to take up a position on the roof of the Post Office. We moved all our bag and baggage, including the grenades, up to the roof of the Post Office. We held that position all the time until Wednesday evening. A Franciscan or Dominican, or ^a ~~some~~ priest ^{of some Order,} gave us conditional absolution on the roof on Monday morning. I did not see him afterwards.

There were two flags on the Post Office. One was given to me. It was the ordinary Irish flag, green with the harp, and in white letters (inscribed) across the middle were the words "Irish Republic". I can't recollect who gave it to me, but I think it was Willie Pearse. The thing I remember most clearly about its hoisting is that I had some kind of a hazy idea that the flag should be rolled up in some kind of a ball, so that when it would be hauled up, it would break out. As a matter of fact, I did it that way because it did open out in the proper manner when hoisted. That flag was floating on the Prince's Street corner of the G.P.O. I think Willie Pearse was there when it was being hoisted. Whatever number of men we had - twenty or twenty-five - were all actually present. It was in the corner of the Post Office, behind the balustrade. I think both flags were put up about the same time. I have no recollection as to who put up the other flag, but I think it was a chap whom we afterwards knew as Redmond. He was one of the Liverpool-Irish in the Kimmage Garrison, and I think his real name was Joe Gleeson. I don't remember Gearóid O'Sullivan being there, but I did not know him at the time and he may have been there.

From our position on the G.P.O. on Monday, we observed looting being carried out in the street below us. I should have mentioned that, before the actual rising began, batons for police duty were made, as apparently rioting was anticipated. Of course, when the rising began, we could not afford men for police duty. As far as I remember, a party was sent out from the G.P.O. to try and deal with these rioters but it was an impossible task, as there were hundreds of people running about. Crowds of people were on the streets, going back and forth. They cleared off, of course, when the shots were fired at the Lancers. They began to dribble back on Monday evening. We got no sleep on Monday night.

On Tuesday, we were still in our position on the roof. Everything was intensified. I don't know actually when the firing began. I remember we were still on the roof when Lawrence's went on fire. It was a sports shop, and all the kids brought out a lot of fireworks, made a huge pile of them in the middle of O'Connell Street, and set fire to them. That is one thing that will stick in my mind forever. We had our bombs on top of the Post Office, and these fireworks were shooting up in the sky. We were very nervous. There were catherine wheels going up O'Connell Street and catherine wheels coming down O'Connell Street. The Fire Brigade attended that fire at Lawrence's, but I think they were fired on. We got no sleep on Tuesday night.

Sometime early on Wednesday morning, I think Connolly came up to inspect us; and we were relieved then on Wednesday evening. We occupied positions in Prince's Street in the front of the Post Office, but before that the British began to infiltrate in the O'Connell Bridge sector. They had established a machine gun post in Purcell's shop at the

corner of Westmoreland Street and D'Olier Street. We could see them breaking in there. We got up a couple of the sharpshooters. Joe Sweeney was one of them. That machine gun began to cut communications across the street. The Imperial Hotel then went on fire and the men had to evacuate. The method they adopted was that they wrapped themselves round with big mattresses and ran across the street.

An incident occurred on Wednesday morning that I would like to mention. There was a tram upturned at Earl Street and in the middle of all this shooting, scurrying and general tumult, we heard a voice shout: "I'm a bloody Dublin Fusilier. I don't give a damn about anyone". He staggered out to the middle of O'Connell Street where he was riddled with machine gun fire. One of our men, with a white flag, went over to where he lay, knelt down, said a prayer over his body, and dragged him in to the side. I don't know who that Volunteer was. I have never heard that incident referred to.

When we were relieved on Wednesday, we were brought down to the bottom floor and put in front. We proceeded to strengthen the barricade at the front - breaking the windows - because we were expecting a frontal attack. For the barricade we used sacks of coal up from the cellars and a lot of great big books, as far as I remember. I don't think that any of our Company were called on for duty outside the premises of the Post Office until the evacuation.

The first gun fire was either Thursday night or Friday. I think there was one gun hidden up beyond the Post Office, at the Y.M.C.A. I remember distinctly the Post Office being hit by shells. We were informed that the floor above us was made of ferro concrete and that there was absolutely no danger of the floor coming down. I think it must have been

Friday. One of the pictures that stands out in my mind is seeing Kilgannon running round (on the roof) trying to stop fires. At first, the hoses were working perfectly but, after a while, apparently the water was cut off or the mains failed. There was no water at all.

I cannot remember the gist of any conversation I had with Pearse during the week. We were so used to speaking with him that I wouldn't remember, unless he had some specific pronouncement - beyond saying we were doing well. I don't remember hearing him read the Proclamation.

It was duskish on Friday night when we were all ordered into the main hall. When we had assembled there, we were addressed by Pearse. I don't remember his exact words. We were ordered to take as much food and ammunition as possible with us, and to try and get in - as far as I remember now - to Williams and Woods factory. I did not know where it was at the time. We got an order to unload weapons, and a chap standing beside me was wounded in the foot when his shotgun went off, while in the process of being unloaded.

We left the G.P.O. and crossed Henry Street, under fire, into Henry Place. At the junction of Henry Place and Moore Lane, there was a house which we called the "White House". It was a small one-storeyed slated house, as far as I remember, and was being hit by machine gun fire and rifle fire from the top of Moore Lane. We thought that fire was actually coming from the White House. Volunteers, with bayonets, were called on to charge this house and occupy it. It was very duskish, and we could not see very well. There was no cohesion. Nobody seemed to be in charge once we left the Post Office; it was every man for himself. After waiting for a couple of minutes, the general consensus was that there was no one in the house. We crossed at the end

of Moore Lane and, having proceeded down Henry Place, we found that junction also under fire. We broke into a store, which was quite convenient to the entrance of Moore Lane, and brought out a vehicle - I think it was an old float - on which we piled all kinds of stuff. We moved the dray across the street to block the fire and, having formed some kind of an obstruction there, we crossed the line safely. There were no casualties there, as far as I remember. We got down to the corner house at Moore Street and Moore Lane. A section having broken a hole in the end wall into the house, we entered the house by this means. They did not actually go into the street, as that was under fire too. We were there in that house for a while and, as the crowd began to swell, we decided to break through the houses along the street, on the second floor. Myself, Desmond Ryan, Kilgannon and all the St. Enda's boys proceeded to break the divisions between the houses for about half the length of the street. The walls were quite thin, and there was no bother breaking them. We reached as far as Price's, or O'Hanlon's which was a fish shop. I remember the smells there. We spent Friday night barricading all the houses that we occupied by throwing down all the furniture from the rooms - clearing all the rooms - down the stairways into the bottom halls, blocking up the doorways. One shell hit a house which we had evacuated, down at the lower part of Moore Street, and flattened it out absolutely. It went down like a house of cards. We had to evacuate the civilians from the houses, of course - under great pressure too. Some were actually trying to get across the street. We did not get as far as the junction at Sackville Place. We got up quite near the barricade.

Early on Saturday morning, I would not call it an order exactly, but the opinion seemed to have been formed that the

barricade at the Parnell Street end of Moore Street should be attacked and that George Plunkett, who was a Staff Captain, should take command; but it never materialised. I don't know why - possibly because the surrender came, although that was not until late on Saturday evening, I think. We got within about forty or fifty yards of that barricade eventually. We could have attacked the barricade with grenades, but we were afraid that some of the houses up above, on the west side of the street had been occupied. I did not come across any of O'Rahilly men, as far as I remember. Nothing happened on Saturday until we heard rumours of surrender.

We were ordered to dump as much stuff as we could in the houses. It must have been in Moore Street we were paraded, because we did not pass the barricade at the top of Moore Street. As far as I remember, Seán McLoughlin paraded us, formed us into ordinary two lines, and told us that we were going home. I think Willie Pearse was there too, but he did not take charge of the parade. Actually, we proceeded practically the way we had come - around by the Post Office in to O'Connell Street. We laid down arms between the Gresham and the Parnell Monument. I don't remember any white flag. We were herded in to the Rotunda Gardens - in a patch of grass in front. We were lying on top of one another. I was quite near Collins and Joe Plunkett. I remember a British officer threatening to shoot the whole lot of us, and Collins saying to this officer, "This is a very sick man; will you leave him alone" - or words to that effect. He was, of course, referring to Joe Plunkett.

Next morning - Sunday - we were marched down to Richmond Barracks. We were all searched, and our names

and addresses taken. Finally, I was transferred to Stafford Jail, and thence to Frongoch.

SIGNED

Samson Dufrenoy

DATE

29th March 1951.

WITNESS

Michael Flynn Court

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