

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 199

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 199.

**Witness**

Mr. Joseph Doolan,  
147 Harolds Cross Road,  
Dublin.

**Identity**

Member of Irish Volunteers  
'A' Coy. 4th Battalion.

**Subject**

- (a) Howth Gun-running 26th July 1914.
- (b) Easter Week 1916 - South Dublin Union.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil.

File No. S.1244.

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JOSEPH DOOLAN, 147 HAROLD'S CROSS ROAD, DUBLIN.

I was reared in a good Irish home atmosphere. My father was a Parnellite. My maternal grand-uncle was a poor scholar and a hedge schoolmaster.

I was a member of the local hurling club in Offaly where I was born, and on coming to Dublin I continued my hurling activities with one of the Dublin hurling teams (Faughs).

In 1914 when the Volunteers were formed in Larkfield I joined immediately. I was in "A" Company, 4th Battalion, of which Éamon Ceannt was Captain. Seamus Ó Murchadha became Captain some time later on Éamon Ceannt's promotion to Commandant; Harry Nicholls, 1st Lieutenant; Tim O'Brien, 2nd Lieutenant.

The most important event that took place before the Insurrection was the Howth Gun-running on 26 July, 1914. Our Company, which was the last of the column, marched from Fairview Park, the drill ground of the 1st Battalion, to Howth. When we arrived at the Railway Station, Howth, we were halted, and saw a little white yacht moving into the harbour. Immediately the yacht went in, we got the order to "double-quick march". The leading Companies went up the pier at the double. When we reached the pier Éamon Ceannt halted us and gave the command - "Allow no person either to enter or leave this pier". After about four minutes a Police Sergeant and two Constables came along to the pier and were refused admission. They then demanded admittance in the King's name, but Éamon Ceannt laughed at them, saying :- "In the name of the Republic you will not be admitted until this little operation is over". Then they went away and the next thing we saw was rocket signals from the Police Barracks. The colour of one of

the rockets was blue.

After this a Company of Volunteers with rifles, came down the pier to relieve us. We moved up to get over rifles from the yacht. After receiving them we loaded a hand-cart with ammunition which boy scouts took charge of. The moment the boat was cleared of its valuable cargo the column was lined up and marched into the city, "A" Company being still at the rear. When we came to Fairview the military and police held the road against us. Ceannt immediately gave the order "Column about turn", marching us up a side road which took us to the Malahide Road but still continuing our journey to the city. The military and police also got the order "About turn" and they switched on to the Malahide Road, thus meeting us face to face again.

The next thing we heard was a police officer giving the order to the police to disarm us. The police were not armed. About four or five of them refused to obey the order. They told the police officer that they would not disarm us and refused to stir from where they stood. The police then retired and the military came forward (Scottish Border Regiment).

There were many orders and counter orders on both sides at this particular time which led to a general state of confusion. Whilst our Company faced the military the officers at the rear advised the rest of the column to disperse quietly through the grounds of the O'Brien Institute. Now the Commandant came forward and told the officers in charge of the military that if there was any more opposition he would order his men to load their rifles. At the same time he drew his own 'Peter the Painter' revolver. A shot was fired but I do not know who actually fired the shot, nor do I know if it had any effect. The military and police were then ordered to return to Barracks. We followed the rest of the column into the grounds of the O'Brien Institute and made our way home safely without further interference.

Shortly after the Howth Gun-running I joined the I. R. B.

being sworn in by Commandant Eamon Ceannt at Larkfield drill ground. I do not recollect the name of the circle but Bulmer Hobson was Secretary of it. Others included Eamon Ceannt, Pat Byrne, Seumas Ó Murchadha and Seumas Foran. About this time I was appointed Sergeant, No. 1 Section, "A" Company.

In 1915 the Volunteer Executive organised a First Aid Section for the Brigade consisting of three men from each Company. Into this section I with two others of my Company were drafted. We went through a course of nine lectures, after which an examination by a doctor was held in Whitefriar Street Schools. Seán Byrne of the 3rd Battalion took first place, and I think I came second.

Larry Gannon of St. John's Ambulance Brigade was appointed Battalion Officer of First Aid, and I was appointed Sergeant, which necessitated my giving up my rifle.

In November, 1915, Commandant Ceannt ordered a route march to the Pine Forest, each man to carry one day's ration. He put us through military exercises and when all was over he lined up the whole Battalion and gave them a short talk in which he said, "On coming up the road I heard you singing -

'Some have come from a land beyond the sea'

Well, the time is not far distant when they will have to shame that boast or prove it true." He then stressed that we were to obey every mobilisation order promptly as from this day on. "Any such order may be the serious one. I myself do not know when that order may come, but I do know it cannot be far distant. We have organised a fund in America to look after the wives and dependents of those who will go down, and each man is to hand in the name of his dependents to his Company Captain immediately. Prepare yourselves for the day and put your souls in order".

There was a general order mobilising all Volunteers for Easter Sunday, 1916. The instruction we got was to obey orders, we were told nothing else. After seeing the cancellation in the

"Sunday Independent" we were upset and did not know what to do. We got in touch with Captain Seumas Ó Murchadha who told us to hold ourselves in readiness, that the order was only postponed.

About 9 o'clock on Monday morning I got my mobilisation order for Larkfield, Kimmage, to parade at 10 o'clock, ~~am~~ I went to Larkfield in uniform and on arrival there I was sent out to mobilise recruits who had joined up the previous week - eight in all - with instructions to be back at Larkfield at 11.30 o'clock a.m. at the latest. I did the full mobilisation and could not get back on time as I was delayed by almost everyone I met stopping me and asking "was there anything serious afoot?". Of course, my answer was "I don't know". When I got back to Larkfield my Company had moved off; however, I was told to follow on to Emerald Square, Dolphin's Barn. At Emerald Square all had moved off except a small contingent. I fell in with them and marched to South Dublin Union, front gate James's Street. My own Company had at this time taken up its position which was the Distillery, Marrowbone Lane. Eamon Ceannt had gone on ahead with "B" Company and entered the South Dublin Union by the Rialto Gate.

When we arrived at the gate there was a lorry standing outside laden with hand grenades of a very crude type (made up in cocoa tins with the fuse a couple of inches out over the lid), barbed wire and all types of tools and implements. Eamon Ceannt opened the gate, the lorry passed in and was examined, then the horse was taken from under it and brought away.

The Angelus Bell rang out on the air at that moment. Ceannt turned to us and said: "We should hear an explosion any minute" (we were afterwards told that the Volunteers were to blow up the Magazine Fort, Phoenix Park, at 12 noon); but no explosion occurred. We heard the military band playing in Richmond Barracks and Ceannt observed - "they know nothing about us yet". Suddenly the music ceased; then all the entrances were strongly barricaded.

At about 12.25 p.m. a column of British soldiers from Richmond Barracks advanced on the city. Cathal Brugha had already given the order "that the Volunteers were not to fire until the whole column came in view". The advance guard passed on to the main gate of the Union, halted, and fired some shots at the windows of the Board Room which were not replied to. As soon as the whole column came in view the Volunteers fired on them. They broke and ran helter-skelter in every direction for shelter, firing at random as they fled. After some time we heard an officer trying to muster his men. Some sniping occurred causing our first casualty, Seán Owens being killed in the field where the Corporation houses now stand at Mount Brown. Some further fighting took place before the British withdrew.

When Commandant Ceannt entered by the Rialto Gate he placed Captain George Irvine and about twelve men in position to defend that entrance. The British now attacked the men at this entrance and occupied the Rialto Flats for that purpose, whilst others crossed the boundary wall of the South Dublin Union. Fighting was very severe at this point, practically all the men at this point being either killed or wounded when the officer in charge decided to surrender.

Towards evening I was sent to Seumas Kenny, who had received a severe injury to his knee. He was lying on the ground, on guard at an avenue leading from the Hospital and Convent to the front entrance. As I came along a Company of about twenty soldiers in charge of an officer came down the avenue at the double. Seumas took steady aim and fired; they broke and fled. With the exception of sniping that finished the fighting for Monday. Each night of the week Ceannt and Brugha called all the men together, gave a short account of what had happened during the day, rosary was recited and prayers said, and all retired for the night.

About 5.30 on Tuesday morning we were attacked by heavy rifle fire, which lasted about half an hour. Frank Burke was killed in this attack, which I think, came from the Inmates'

Dining Hall in front of the Night Nursing Home. With the exception of heavy sniping there was very little fighting on Tuesday. This lull was utilised by the Commandant to put the Night Nursing Home into a proper state of defence, barbed wire entanglements and barricades being erected at every point of danger. In the passage way at the rear of the Night Nursing Home and leading to the paint shop, the Commandant painted the warning "Bí 'do thost". Towards evening Eamon Ceannt's despatch rider, Nellie Doherty (later Mrs. Cowman) arrived with a message from G.P.O. Headquarters.

With the exception of spasmodic shooting nothing occurred on Wednesday. Thursday morning opened very quietly, all was still until about 2 o'clock, <sup>P.M.</sup> The enemy now launched a fierce attack in an effort to dislodge us. I would here refer you to the enclosure "Story of South Dublin Union" written by me a considerable number of years ago, which describes the fight on that day. After the fight on Thursday it was observed that a picture of the Crucifixion hanging on the wall opposite the windows was left untouched although the wall all round was torn with bullet marks. Captain Douglas, French-Mullen and squad-leader Bob Evans were wounded during this fighting.

Nellie Doherty arrived with a despatch from Headquarters on Wednesday and again late on Thursday evening.

All was quiet on Friday but we could hear the heavy guns firing on O'Connell Street; and during Thursday night and Friday we could see the fires that burned down the centre of the city. During the day we observed the inmates and patients being removed to a distant portion of the building. About 3 o'clock I had occasion to see Commandant Ceannt and found him in a room at the head of the stairs. I knocked, opened the door and saw him kneeling in the room, his rosary beads in his hand, and the tears running down his cheeks. Without disturbing him I retired.

With the exception of very slight sniping Saturday was quiet.



Nothing happened on Sunday until after midday when Commandant Tom McDonagh accompanied by one of the Fathers from the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, Church Street, carrying a white flag, approached the building and was admitted. They remained for some time in conversation with Commandant Ceannt. On their departure the Commandant called us together, told us of the unconditional surrender of Headquarters in order to save the lives of the citizens; of his discussion with McDonagh and their decision to agree to an unconditional surrender. Several questions were asked as to what that meant, which he answered. He then said, "if you decide against it, we can continue the fight, and get away to the mountains, but I recommend the surrender as we have won what we fought for. You may not see it now but you will see it later". On his recommendation the surrender was agreed to. He then said, "You men will get a double journey, but we, the leaders, will get a single journey". He then told us to collect all our guns and belongings and line up in front of the Nursing Home within half an hour. We lined up as instructed by Commandant Ceannt, were numbered off by him, 42 of us, and awaited the arrival of the British military.

After a short period a single senior British Officer walked in, approached Ceannt and said: "I see you are getting your men together". Ceannt answered, "No, I have them together". Certainly the British Officer looked surprised at the small number. Ceannt gave us the order and moved off in front of us, accompanied by the British Officer to Marrowbone Lane. Ceannt and the British Officer went into the Distillery and after some time led out that section of the Volunteers and members of Gumann na mBan, who fell in on our rere, and we continued our march to Bride Road. There we got the order from the British military, "Leave down all your equipment on the ground", and were marched to the opposite side of the road. A British car came along collecting all arms. We were surrounded by British soldiers and marched to Richmond Barracks.



The next morning, Monday, at about 11 o'clock we were all brought to the Gymnasium Hall and ordered to sit on the floor. Members of the "G" Division, D.M.P., and other detectives came in on several occasions and had a good look at each man. At about 2.30 p.m. a number of senior British Officers accompanied by the above "G" men and detectives came in and picked out our leaders who were then taken away. We were marched back to our rooms and at about 6 o'clock were brought out for deportation.

We were marched to the North Wall, put aboard a cattle boat and off to England. On arrival at Liverpool we were sent in batches to the different jails, I being sent to Knutsford Jail, Cheshire, where I felt the pangs of hunger for the first time. I remained there until early in June when I was sent to Frongoch Camp.

On July 2nd I was sent before the Advisory Committee in London. On arriving there I was imprisoned in Wormswood Scrubbs Jail for two nights and then brought before the Advisory Committee. My interview was short. On July 5th I was sent back to Frongoch Camp where I was detained until my release on July 15th, 1916.

Signed

Seoimín Ó Dubháin

Date

6<sup>th</sup> Februaire 1949

Witness

Pack. J. Mc Nally Captain

STORY OF SOUTH DUBLIN UNION  
BY  
JOSEPH DOOLAN, 147 HAROLDS CROSS ROAD, DUBLIN.

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In the glorious roll-call of Easter Week few names stand out so prominently as that of Cathal Brugha. So unassuming and gentle, yet so daring, his part in the fight during that memorable week singles him out as one of the noblest heroes of our own time, and an equal to any of Ireland's long list of heroes, not excluding the Signatories of the Proclamation of the Republic.

He was Vice-Commandant of the 4th Battalion (Dublin), Irish Volunteers, from its inception, with Eamon Ceannt as Commandant.

He took his place at the head of his men leading them into action in the South Dublin Union on Monday, 24th April 1916. From Monday to Thursday he was at every point of danger, ever warning his men to be cautious, though heedless of his own personal safety. He seemed indeed to be possessed of a charmed life, bullets almost touching him, yet leaving him unscathed. Night and day he was on the alert, often startling one of the sentries in the dead of night, by his unexpected noiseless approach. When the sentry as noiselessly covered him with his revolver before challenging, Cathal, perceiving the movement, would whisper "Ta san go maith" and answering the challenge, would inquire if all were well, and pause a moment to allay the sentry's fears. The first to detect any new movement by the enemy, watching bullet marks and taking note of their direction, cautioning his men of their danger in exposing themselves to any new position of the enemy or enemy snipers. He was a first rate sniper himself. His sniping always had the effect of silencing the enemy's guns. Yet he was always ready to listen to the words of the last man to join. By his bravery in action he encouraged the most timid, and, with his leader, Eamon Ceannt, never forgot to call down God's blessing by having prayers said in the morning and the rosary said before retiring each night, at which every man except those actually on

sentry duty was instructed to attend. During prayers his attitude was most devout and recollected of all and, with Ceannt, he carefully looked after the spiritual interests of his men by having a priest in attendance almost daily, himself seeing that each man got an opportunity of seeing the priest, if he so desired.

As one enters the South Dublin Union by the main entrance in James's St. there is a block of houses running parallel with the road and facing inwards. To the right of the entrance is the South Dublin Rural District Council's office, immediately over it being the Board Room. The remainder of the block is laid out in wards.

At the end of the row is the paint shop, running at right angles is the Night Nursing Home, continuing from which are some small houses. Opposite the main entrance is a Protestant Church. Slightly to the right and at the rear of this is the Inmates' Dining Hall.

The insurgents in the South Dublin Union were divided into two parties - one in the Night Nursing Home under the command of Ceannt and Brugha, and the other in the Board Room under the command of a Lieutenant (Ger. Murray). Some four or five men under command of a Captain were sent to protect and defend the rear entrance but were taken prisoners on the 24th. The enemy occupied all the remainder of the buildings, more particularly the Dining Hall, and 'twas said by some of the insurgents the church already mentioned was also occupied.

There was no connection between the two insurgent forces from Monday until Thursday. On Thursday, about one o'clock, Ceannt decided to break his way through and unite the force. He was about an hour away from the Nursing Home when the British launched an attack, the most intense so far, using machine guns, rifles and hand grenades. The signal for the attack was, apparently, the blowing in of the gable end of the Nursing Home on the ground floor from the adjoining houses with some high explosive. Having succeeded in thus making an opening, the enemy found the room into

which they were rushing completely cut off with barbed wire entanglements and directly under the guns of the insurgents. The attack seemed to increase in intensity with each moment and at about 3.30 Brugha was severely wounded by a hand grenade. His next in command - William Cosgrave - took control. His first act was to evacuate the Nursing Home, leaving Cathal Brugha behind, and order his men to retreat in the direction of the paint shop and from thence to link up forces with the men in the Board Room. On forcing their way, the insurgents found the British occupying some of the wards, thus driving a wedge between the insurgent forces. The officer now in charge decided to defend the ward next the paint shop. During the earlier part of this defence the British were observed rushing to the attack on the Nursing Home with hand grenades under the cover of their guns. During the whole of this attack Brugha's voice could be heard shouting above the din "Come on, you cowards, till I get one shot before I die. I am only a wounded man. Eamon, Eamon, come here and sing God Save Ireland before I die". This position was defended for about an hour when Ceannt with one man broke his way back and was surprised to find his men in this new position. He inquired why they were there, how they got there, and who was the man shouting. On receiving the answer "Brugha" his feelings can better be imagined than described. He asked for three Volunteers to accompany him to bring back Brugha. Several volunteered. He then asked further questions and as a result decided to lead back his men and again occupy the Nursing Home as he believed the British were not in possession. He gave as his reason for so thinking that Brugha would not be using those taunts were he actually a prisoner. On arriving in the yard of the Nursing Home, he found Brugha sitting in the yard, his back resting against the outer wall, his 'Peter the Painter' revolver to his shoulder, and watching for the first move of the enemy to enter the building. Truly it was the greatest, bravest and most inspiring incident of that glorious week. A wounded man, alone practically, holding the forces of England at bay for over an hour, taunting them with cowardice and proclaiming to them that he was only a weak and wounded man.

When Ceannt and Brugha met, a scene the most touching was enacted. The soldiers' spirit broke. Both men dropped their revolvers. Ceannt went on one knee and put his arm around Brugha. Their conversation was in Irish. What was said, only God knows. After about a minute Ceannt arose, a tear in his eye. But again the soldier's spirit took control. But what a scene, human and touching enough to be associated with the most tender maidenhood; yet so manly as to be impossible save the bravest and best. As was suspect by Ceannt, the British had not taken possession of the building. He ordered that Brugha should be carried into the back room, placed his men in position, and the fight was continued until the enemy was beaten off about 7 o 8 o'clock. The fight was so intense that it was impossible to dress Brugha's wounds; it was only possible to staunch the blood and keep moving him from place to place to avoid the bursting hand grenades. About this hour - 7 o'clock - Ceannt came downstairs to see Brugha and make sure his wounds were attended to. The dressing of his wounds was so tedious that it lasted well into the night. His clothes were embedded into the flesh in some of his more serious wounds and had to be torn away. In fact, none of his clothes were taken off; rather were they cut away. During the whole operation he was perfectly conscious, but apparently sinking fast, yet not a murmur escaped his lips. Only on a few occasions his lips twitched. At last his wounds were dressed, thirst from loss of blood set in, and he continually asked for a drink of cold water. He was given hot coffee in small sips. In the early morning he became delirious and remained so until his removal to the Union Hospital during the forenoon of Friday, 28th April. The First Aid man who dressed his wounds officially reported to Ceannt on the following morning that there were 25 wounds on his body, i.e., 5 dangerous, 9 serious and 11 slight, and that one of the dangerous wounds had an artery cut. His left foot, hip and leg were practically one mass of wounds. His removal to hospital was carried out by a devoted Carmelite priest - Father Gerhard - with the aid of a Union official under the Red Cross flag. The sagart told

Ceannt that if any of the insurgents exposed themselves in carrying the wounded man they were likely to be fired on by the British. The protection of the Red Cross was pleaded; still his answer was "If any of your men expose themselves they are likely to be shot". Thus was Cathal Brugha borne away from his comrades. And so ended his fight in Easter Week.

After the surrender he was removed to Dublin Castle Hospital where he remained until released after about a couple of months. His wounds healed slowly, but he never recovered full use of the injured limb. It was specially observable when cycling, more particularly when cycling against a hill. He was always forced to dismount and walk to the top of the hill.

Such is the story of Cathal Brugha's fight during Easter Week. His sufferings during that memorable time only increased, if that were possible, his love of Ireland. All the world knows how eventually that love for the Ireland of his dreams led him to a soldier's grave. "May the sod lie lightly o'er his ashes" is the prayer of "One of them".

Signed:

*Seamus O'Donovan*

Date:

*6<sup>th</sup> Februa 1949*

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