

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 208

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.208.....

Witness

Mr. Seamus Kavanagh,
4 Coolevin Road,
Long Lane, Clanbrassil St., Dublin.

Identity

- (a) Member of I.Vs, Dublin 1913.
- (b) O/C 3rd Battn. Cyclists 1918-21.
- (c) Captain 'C' Coy. 3rd Battn.
March 1921.

Subject

- (a) I.V. activities from 1913.
- (b) Howth Gun-Running 26th July 1914.
- (c) Easter Week Rising 1916 -
Mount St. Bridge and Bolands Bakery.
- (d) Assisted at burial of Peadar Macken.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. ...S. 570.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY SEUMAS KAVANAGH

4 Coolevin Road, Long Lane, Clanbrassil Street, Dublin.

One Sunday in November 1913, when coming out of Whitefriars Street Church after attending Mass, I was handed a handbill announcing a meeting to be held at the Rotunda Rink on the 25 November for the purpose of starting the Irish Volunteers. This announcement created a great deal of interest among the young men. It was quite obvious that the meeting would be a very large one. I went to the Rotunda early enough to make sure to be inside at the meeting. Eoin McNeill was Chairman. Eamon Ceannt, L. J. Kettle and Dr. Davitt also addressed the meeting.

During the course of the meeting young men handed out enrolment forms and I afterwards learned that those young men were members of the I.R.B. I filled in the form and so became a member of the Irish Volunteers. I was subsequently notified to attend at 41 York Street, taking part in the first drill of an Irish Volunteer Force since 1782. Eoin McNeill was present when I reported at 41 York Street. I was then 17½ years of age.

This was "A" Company, 3rd Battalion, and after a short time it became so strong that it was found necessary to make two Companies of it. I was allotted to "C" Company. Shortly after the formation of "C" Company an election of officers took place, and the following were elected:-

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| Captain | Neary Cahill |
| Lieutenant | Eddie Byrne |
| Lieutenant | Simon Donnelly |

On the advent of Mr. Redmond's nominees on the Executive Committee early in 1914 we became known as the Irish National

Volunteers and continued to organise and train with wooden rifles, being instructed by ex-British Army men, most of whom were British Army Reservists.

The first incident of note occurred on 26 July, 1914, when we were mobilised for a long march and manoeuvres which turned out to be a march to Howth. The 3rd and 4th Battalions paraded at Camden Row and marched to Croydon Park, where we linked up with the 1st and 2nd Battalions. We continued our march to Howth and when we arrived there we were drawn up almost the length of the pier, and almost as soon as we were in position a small yacht was seen coming into the harbour around the end of the pier with a lady at the helm. I heard afterwards the lady was Mrs. Spring Rice. The yacht drew up at the pier near the head of our column and at once proceeded to pass out rifles which were handed from man to man down the line until every man had a rifle. We were very excited but discipline was splendid.

We then reformed in fours and marched back towards the city and at the junction of the road, about a mile and a half from Raheny, where the old tram line met the main road, we were met by two tram loads of police who dismounted but did not interfere with us. They followed us into the city on foot. At the junction of Howth Road and Malahide Road we were met by a party of military of the Scottish Borders who were under an Assistant Police Commissioner.

We were stopped and the police officer demanded that we give up the rifles. There was a short struggle between the men in front and the police, and the remainder of us were ordered into the Marino Estate, the walls of which adjoined the road at that time. Some shots rang out and a soldier fell near me. Stones were also thrown from behind a wall. In the

field of the Marino Estate word was passed round that we were to get away if possible across country and I proceeded in what I thought was the direction of the city. On my way I picked up two rifles that had been discarded by other men and I eventually found myself behind a hedge bordering a road with three rifles in my possession where I remained for nearly an hour when I decided to ask a passing car or motorist for a lift.

With this intention I got out on the road and the first car to come along had a man on the running board. It stopped at my signal. I then realised that it was a car hired by our people to collect rifles such as mine, and having handed over the guns they informed me that I was on the Swords road and directed me the way to Whitehall where I would get a tram to the city. I arrived home without further incident but very tired. The rifles taken by the police were returned to us soon afterwards and were stored by us at 41 York Street. They numbered about 25.

The drilling and organising continued with an addition that an Arms Fund was set up which was known as the G.P. (General Purpose) Fund, into which we paid our sixpences and shillings every week, and when we had paid ten shillings we got a Howth rifle. Those of us who were at Howth got a Howth gun free. We continued to pay into the G.P. Fund and when I had paid fifteen shillings I received a Martini Enfield rifle in exchange for the Howth gun for which I was allowed ten shillings, the price of the Martini being twenty-five shillings. In this way I also got a .38 revolver for twenty-five shillings.

In September, 1914, the split occurred with the Redmondites. We paraded in 41 York Street in the first instance. We were addressed by Vice-Commandant Seán Fitzgibbon who explained the position to us and asked those who were following the old Executive to stand fast and those who were following

John Redmond to fall out. Only about 25 fell out.

The strength of the Company before the split was about 150. At the split the Company Captain went with the Redmondites. Eddie Byrne was then made Captain, Simon Donnelly 1st Lieutenant, and Michael Malone 2nd Lieutenant. We continued to parade at 41 York Street, but the number on parade never exceeded 100.

Apart from route marches and manoeuvres the only incident of note before the Rising happened at Easter 1915. The Redmondite or National Volunteers were having a conference in Dublin, so our leaders ordered the manoeuvres for Swords and also organised the first Flying Column to march to Rathdrum, County Wicklow, over the Mountains. This column was made up by asking each Company of the Dublin Brigade to send five men, and I with four others volunteered from our Company. We met at Rathfarnham and found ourselves under the command of Eiam Clarke. We had about 120 men altogether. Con Colbert was second in command. We set out at 5.30 p.m. on Easter Saturday, 1915. We marched up the Featherbed Mountain to Glencree Reformatory where we had tea in the Gym. The good Brothers warned us to be quiet for fear of distracting the boys. We left the school at about 10.30 p.m. and proceeded via Kippure to the Sally Gap and arrived at a small wood three miles from Rathdrum at 5 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning.

We bivouaced in this wood until 9 a.m. and we had a wash up and breakfast and proceeded to Rathdrum for Mass. After Mass we were given the remainder of the day off and found a field where we could relax, sleep, cook or anything we had a fancy to do. We fell in at 7 p.m. and marched to Kilcoole where we again bivouaced, i.e. what was left of us as some had gone home by train from Rathdrum.

Early next morning before breakfast we moved on to the Glen of the Downes where we breakfasted and rested before setting out on the final stage of our journey to the city which we reached about 6 o'clock on Easter Monday evening. As far as I know the column as such never met again.

The following twelve months was marked by an all-day manoeuvre at Stepside, County Dublin. Early in 1916 the 3rd Battalion had a parade to Pine Forest and we spent the day in carrying out small exercises. This was to give the Quartermasters and cooks experience of catering for the Battalion under active service conditions.

Towards the end of 1915 four men from each Company were selected to undergo a signalling course. I was appointed in charge of the signals of my Company. We attended classes held by the Battalion at Camden Row, and later we attended classes at No. 2 Dawson Street.

Mr. Kinahan, Aungler Street, had a miniature rifle range at the rear of his premises. We were encouraged by our Company officers to go there and get as much practice as possible. We went there very often, and we paid for the ammunition out of our own pockets. On one occasion I was allowed to fire two rounds of .303 ammunition at Camden Row. I succeeded in hitting the target with both shots. That was the only occasion I fired ball ammunition until the Rising.

At a Volunteer meeting which I attended late in 1915 or early in 1916, we were addressed by Commandant Thomas McDonagh, and he told us that the best plan ever made to capture Dublin was that made by Robert Emmet, and that that plan would be found in Myles Byrne's book entitled "Notes of an Irish Exile of 1798". McDonagh advised us to get and study the book, a copy of which is still in my possession. Emmet's plan will be found on page 276.

In some of the lectures we received before the Rising the need of conserving the water supply was stressed, and on occupying the various positions we invariably filled every available vessel with water, but we left the vessels uncovered and when the fighting commenced the water was soon muddied by dust and plaster.

Shortly before the Rising I met Tomás McDonagh one day in Bishop Street and he was surveying Jacob's Factory closely. Last year at an Old I.R.A. function I heard Mr. De Valera say that he surveyed the position of Bolands area very closely before the Rising.

A Company parade was held on Holy Thursday, 1916, at York Street. The Company Captain, Eddie Byrne, issued instructions for a full parade for Easter Sunday. We were to parade at Camden Row at 12 noon with rifle equipment, all ammunition and 24 hours' rations.

On Holy Saturday afternoon I met Simon Donnelly and in the course of conversation he asked me to meet him at No. 2 Dawson Street that night. He told me to go to Confession, and from this I took it that the "day" we all had been looking forward to had arrived. I went that night to No. 2 Dawson Street and assisted Commandant De Valera and Lieutenant Simon Donnelly to parcel up some books and documents. These were given to other men who were present to take away. I don't know to where they brought them.

On Easter Sunday morning I went to Camden Row about 12 o'clock. When I arrived there I saw a typewritten notice on one of the huts to the effect that the manoeuvres were off, and that we were to keep in touch and keep ourselves in readiness for a possible immediate mobilisation. I with my comrades were disappointed and dejected and we walked the city all day,

calling back occasionally to Headquarters as we had been ordered to keep in touch.

I was one of the official mobilisers of the Company. We were not given much to do, seven or eight men to mobilise. On Easter Monday morning J. H. Doyle (since deceased) arrived at my house at 10.15 with instructions to mobilise my section for Earlsfort Terrace at 10 o'clock. I was in bed when Mr. Doyle arrived. I pointed out to him that it was now 10.15. He was rather excited and said: "That is the order I got". I got ready as quickly as possible and set out to mobilise my men. I mobilised a man named Paddy McEvoy who lived in Redmond's Hill, and then proceeded to James Byrne in Aungier Street who was Battalion Quartermaster. He informed me he was going to Fairyhouse Races. I said to him: "What will the Battalion do, they are depending on you?" He said they would have to get a horse and car and get provisions, etc. I proceeded down Aungier Street to mobilise other members, Willie Ronan and Michael Nugent, and continued to 53 South Great George's Street and mobilised Pat O'Byrne. The mobilisation was for Earlsfort Terrace at 10 o'clock.

After mobilising the section I returned home and got my rifle, equipment, etc. and proceeded direct to Earlsfort Terrace and arrived there about 11.45. The Company was about 90 strong, only about one-third turned out. The Battalion Quartermaster, James Byrne, failed to turn out. The Company Captain, Eddie Byrne, also did not turn out, and Lieutenant Simon Donnelly took charge of the Company. Lieutenant Michael Malone was also present. "A" Company under Captain Joe O'Connor also mobilised at Earlsfort Terrace. The two Companies, "A" and "C" moved off about 12 o'clock and on arrival at Mount Street Bridge were detached from the main body and placed under the command of Lieutenant Michael Malone of my own Company.

He divided us into three groups of five men each and a small group comprised of himself, a section commander and two Volunteers. He disposed the groups as follows:- One under section leader George Reynolds to Clanwilliam House overlooking the bridge and Northumberland Road; the second group of which I was a member, under section leader O'Donoghue to the Schools, Northumberland Road, situated a few yards down from the canal bridge on the left side. The third group under a squad leader Pádraig Ó Dubhghaill (now Superintendent Garda Síochána) to the Parochial Hall on the right side of Northumberland Road and nearly opposite the Schools. He brought the last group down to 25 Northumberland Road situated on the corner of Haddington Road and made it his Headquarters.

When we occupied the Schools we barricaded all doors and windows and filled every available vessel with water and made sandbags of coal, slack and everything we could lay our hands on, but it soon became apparent that the post had no military value as it was too far in from the road and was enclosed by high hedges. There was a very limited view from it.

Later that evening, I think about 4 o'clock, we heard firing and it seemed to come from the direction of Lieutenant Malone's post but we did not know what he was firing at. During the night Lieutenant Malone visited our post and told us that he had an encounter that evening with G.Rs. We informed him that we heard the firing but could not see anything, and pointed out that the continued occupation of the school-house was useless, as a result of which he instructed us to report back to the Bakery. We evacuated the Schools between 4 and 5 o'clock a.m. on Tuesday and we did not remove the sandbags or barricades before leaving. The Schools were not re-occupied by our men during the rest of the week.

On arrival at the Bakery I was detailed by Captain

Simon Donnelly to take charge of a party of men and take up position behind Bolands boundary wall overlooking Grand Canal Street. The wall had previously been loopholed. Later in the day I was called to the railway bridge overlooking Clarence Street (now Peadar Macken Street) to assist at the removal of the body of Peadar Macken who had just been fatally wounded, and brought the remains to the Dispensary in Grand Canal Street. The remains were buried temporarily in the Dispensary yard.

We were visited during the week by Father McMahon of Westland Row (I think Tuesday). He heard Confessions and remained for a few hours. Some of the men complained to Captain Simon Donnelly that the priest was advising them to give up and go home, but on Captain Donnelly speaking to him and threatening to withdraw permission for him to enter the position, he (the priest) refrained from making any more remarks to the men. There was not a priest present at the surrender.

On Wednesday morning Captain Simon Donnelly detailed section leader O'Donoghue, Seumas Doyle, Bob Cooper and myself to occupy Messrs. Roberts' Builders yard which was overlooking Clanwilliam Place. This position had been occupied since Monday and the garrison was changed each morning. Section leader O'Donoghue, Seumas Doyle and I took up positions behind a wall overlooking the canal, and Bob Cooper was allotted a position overlooking Grand Canal Street bridge. From our position we had a good view of Percy Place, Mount Street Bridge, portion of Northumberland Road, and an avenue (Estate Cottages) opposite, running between two rows of cottages. I was armed with a Martini Enfield rifle and 250 rounds of ammunition.

The firing was first heard in the direction of Ballsbridge at about 11 a.m. and Lieutenant Malone was in action

at approximately 11.30, and except for occasional shots the garrison of Clanwilliam House was not in general action until about midday. Up to this we had not seen any of the enemy.

There were first three charges at intervals taken to re-group, and as the British came into sight between the hoarding and the schools they were engaged by us at about 12.30 p.m. The enemy suffered such heavy casualties in the early charges that none of them reached the bridge and those who were not wounded or killed sought cover behind the doorsteps and hedges. Things were very quiet for about an hour and a half except for spasmodic shooting when the British made a determined onslaught on the bridge. Nobody succeeded in crossing the bridge although some went down Percy Place and others turned right along the canal bank. Some of those who went down Percy Place succeeded in getting into some of the houses and some were shot. Those who turned to the right came under our fire from Roberts yard and they were wiped out before they were able to take cover.

After an interval of about half an hour or twenty minutes a second and more determined attack was launched on the bridge. Some succeeded in barely crossing the bridge when they were wiped out. In the course of one of these attacks nurses wearing red crosses and men with white coats appeared on the scene and the firing ceased on both sides while they were removing the dead and wounded. On one occasion the British attempted to advance while this was in progress and we were compelled to fire on them. They did not attempt to repeat this.

Later on a still more determined onslaught than the previous one was made to gain the bridge. This time the enemy succeeded in crossing the bridge and having done so they did not seem to know what their objective was or where they were going. Some turned left towards Warrington Place and others turned right coming down towards Clanwilliam Place. Those who

came in our direction were completely wiped out. The bridge and Northumberland Road was strewn with dead and wounded.

According to the British list published in the "Irish Times Handbook" the enemy suffered - 4 officers killed, 14 wounded, 216 other ranks killed and wounded. According to British official returns more than half the casualties suffered by the British during the Rising were inflicted at the Mount Street Bridge area.

Fighting continued all the afternoon with an occasional lull and a couple of intervals during which the wounded were removed.

The frontal attack on the bridge ceased about 7 o'clock but spasmodic firing continued. During this period I heard the explosions of hand-grenades and later noticed that Clanwilliam House was on fire. The flames from Clanwilliam House lit up the bridge. About 8.30 Clanwilliam House was completely in flames. About this time I suggested to section commander O'Donoghue that he should get in touch with Headquarters to find out what we should do. He instructed Cooper to get in touch with Headquarters and we got back word that we were to return to the Bakery and not to interfere with the barricades at the gate and cottage which we had erected earlier in the day. We retired over the hospital wall into the grounds of Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital and reported back to Captain Donnelly at Bolands Bakery. I gave Captain Donnelly a rough account of what happened during the day. I then had a wash and some food, the first I had since morning.

Commandant De Valera arrived on the scene and wanted twenty men to carry out a bayonet charge (I am not sure where he intended to have this charge). We were excused on account of being in Roberts Yard all day, and, therefore, very tired, but we offered our rifles and bayonets. Our rifles were not taken as the charge was cancelled as there were not sufficient men to

take part in it. I had a sleep that night in the Bakery.

The following morning Captain Donnelly brought Seumas Doyle, Bob Cooper and I to Commandant De Valera who instructed us to report back to Roberts yard to the position we had occupied the previous day. I think it was Captain Donnelly who pointed out to the Commandant that to get into the yard we had to cross a 12 foot wall as we had not removed the barricade on the gate and cottage. He then cancelled the instruction. I heard afterwards that the yard was actually occupied by British troops at that time.

On Thursday we did very little except rest in the Bakery. During the day the British had an artillery piece on Percy Place and it was shelling the Distillery on which a green flag with a harp had been flying since earlier in the week. The British gun-boat "The Helga" also shelled the Distillery and during the day one of the shells dropped on the Bakery and struck a bread van on the top of which was a large number of our own grenades, but luckily no damage was done and the grenades did not explode.

That night we evacuated the Bakery and went to the railway line. One of our men who had been in the Distillery was suffering from shell shock and with Captain Donnelly's permission I brought him back to the Bakery, made him comfortable and remained with him all night. His name was Cullen. I cannot recall his christian name.

Friday and Saturday we spent relieving members of "B" Company on sentry duty and outposts on the railway.

On Sunday morning we were told to assemble in the Bakery. We were addressed by Vice-Commandant Joe O'Connor who informed us that the Commandant was already in enemy hands and that it had been decided to surrender, and that we were to march out

under a white flag. This announcement met with general disapproval but as soldiers we felt obliged to comply with the instruction. We left by the Grand Canal Street gate and marched left into Grattan Street where we halted. While in Grattan Street we attempted to render our rifles unserviceable. We were halted here for about 15 minutes, then the British arrived and we were marched off to Lower Mount Street where we were halted. The Commandant was ahead of us with a strong guard. One of the British soldiers pointing to the Commandant, asked me, "Is he your Colonel?". I replied, "Yes, but we do not call him Colonel - we call him Commandant". He then asked me his name. I told him it was De Valera, and he said, "He was a Devilero alright".

We were marched off to the R. D. S. Grounds, Ballsbridge. We were placed in horse stalls, 10 men in each stall, which normally housed one horse. We remained there until 3rd May. During our stay in Ballsbridge we were given bully beef, hard biscuits and water, three times daily. On one occasion an officer of the Royal Irish Rifles purchased tea for us at his own expense.

On Wednesday morning we were paraded and arranged in columns of fours and transferred to Richmond Barracks. A British officer addressed us and told us that if any of our friends attempted to rescue us there would be 150 dead rebels on the road. We were then marched off to Richmond Barracks. We were placed in ordinary barrack rooms, 20 men in each room. During our time there "G" men visited the rooms and scrutinised the prisoners.

During our stay in Richmond Barracks we heard volleys each morning from Kilmainham Prison. We knew then that some more of our leaders had paid the supreme penalty. Later in the day members of the firing party told us the names of these

who had been executed. On one occasion a soldier who was a member of the firing party, told me that Major MacBride refused the blind-fold, stating that he was not afraid as he had been looking down the barrels of rifles all his life.

During the time I was in Richmond Barracks I was anxious to let my mother know I was safe and that I expected to be transferred to England. I put a note in a little leather purse and on the way to the North Wall I threw it on to the side path with instructions for the finder to deliver it to my mother. She eventually received this note.

We remained in Richmond Barracks until 6th May when we were marched off to the North Wall and put on board a cattle boat for England. We arrived in Wakefield about 12 o'clock next day and were put in solitary confinement for about a fortnight. After another couple of weeks we were transferred to Frongoch. After a short time in Frongoch we were brought to London and appeared before the Sankey Commission at Wormwood Scrubbs Prison.

Prior to going before the Commission a solicitor whose name I believe was O'Donnell, and who had been engaged to advise us, spoke to us and told us that we would not be asked any questions to which we had objection to answer. Beyond asking me my name and address I was only asked what reason I had to put forward why I should be released. I replied that I was the sole support of a widowed mother. We returned to Frongoch and I was released on 15th July, 1916.

SIGNED

Seamus Kavanagh

DATE

19th March 1949

WITNESS

Sean Brennan Lemdt.

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