

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 243

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.243.....

Witness

Mr. James Foran,
6 St. Agnes Terrace,
Crumlin,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers 'A' Company
4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade
from 1915.

Subject

- (a) South Dublin Union, Easter Week 1916.
- (b) His imprisonment and release;
- (c) Engaged on bomb and hand-grenade making
in Crown-Alley from 1919 up to the Truce.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ... S. 1342 ...

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY JAMES FORAN

6 St. Agnes Terrace, Crumlin, Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers in 1915. I went up to Larkfield and saw MacDonagh and Seamus Murphy, and I asked them did they intend to fight. They told me that they did intend to fight and that they probably would. I said in that case I wanted to join. I said that I did not want to attend parades, that I had a big family, but that I would come up an odd time.

I was in "A" Company of the 4th Battalion, and I kept going to an odd parade. I think Seamus Murphy was over us at that time. Seamus Murphy and Harry Murray were the only officers in it.

I had a shop and business down in Charlemont Street. I was after shifting from Aungier Street. I had five or six fellows working for me in the painting line. I was living in a big house at the corner of Rutland Avenue, which was convenient to Larkfield. There was a big shed in the yard.

One morning during the week before Easter Week I was in bed and it started to rain. I think it was Monday morning of Holy Week, 1916. One of the children - they were all young at the time - ran up the stairs and said to me, "Daddy, the soldiers are in the yard. The yard is full of them". I said, "They are coming very quickly. I'll get up". I thought they were coming to arrest me, because there were rumours at that time that we were going to be arrested and all that kind of thing. I got up out of bed and went down to the yard. The shed was full of

soldiers. I went over to the officer and said, "What's all the trouble over?". "Oh", said he, "We're just standing in out of the rain. It's raining outside. I hope we're not disturbing you". "Not at all", said I, "You're quite welcome. I hope you are going to put a stop to those fellows playing with their guns". "Yes", said he, "We're coming to take a sketch of the place, and Larkfield and other places as well". "Well", said I, "You needn't worry over those fellows. When they hear shots they will run". I kept running down the Volunteers and everything went off all right.

That night I went up and saw Ceannt and told him about my conversation with the British officer.

We had orders to parade on Easter Sunday. The only arrangement that was made was that we were to parade at four o'clock and bring three days' rations and our arms and equipment and all that. Most of us had our own guns and ammunition, which we had purchased at our own expense.

I knew I was going out to a Rising because I got a good idea from questions I asked. I was never told definitely until Monday morning, but I guessed before that.

All that Sunday we heard the usual talk and rumours and I did not know anything definite, but on Monday morning I brought my brother-in-law, whose name was Donnelly, up along Rutland Avenue to show him where the Liverpool fellows had their place. They had a forge there for making pike-heads. When we got up there everything was cleared out, forge and everything else was gone. That was about half-past ten in the morning. I did not know what was up, and I said, "They are all gone". Just then up came Cathal Brugha on a bicycle. I said to him, "What is the trouble?"

They are all gone away". He said, "They are all gone". "Is the fight on now?" said I. "Yes", said he. "Right", I said. Then he said, "What way are you going?". "I am going back to the Barn", said I. "Do you know where Ceannt lives?" said he. "I do", said I. "Will you take a note to him. Take my bicycle and be as quick as you can". I said to the brother-in-law, "Goodbye, and if anything happens to me will you look after the wife and kids?" "Right", said he.

I got up on the bicycle and away I went as straight as a die to Ceannt's house. There were two or three others in Ceannt's house. Ceannt was there himself. Seamus Murphy was with him and I cannot remember who else. That was about eleven o'clock in the morning because I was at ten o'clock Mass. I handed the note to Ceannt, who then said to me, "Where are you going?" "I don't know", said I. "Were you not warned this morning?" said he. "No", said I. "Where is your Company?" said he. "I don't know", said I, "They are all gone". He said, "Go and get your things and meet me at Emerald Square". "Right", said I.

I do not know what was in the note that I brought from Cathal Brugha, but I know I left his bicycle outside and I heard afterwards that it was standing outside Ceannt's door for three days.

I went home and got ready and I let on I had to go on a parade. I took my brother-in-law's bicycle, he was after paying ten shillings for it. All the kids were there and asked me, "Where are you going?". "I am going off to the war", I said. I went over to the Square and there was a crowd in the Square, and I put the bicycle against the wall and went up to Ceannt, who said, "You had better come with me", and I said, "Yes, I will".

We marched from Emerald Square along by the Back of the Pipes. Ceannt was in charge of the parade. We arrived at the back entrance of the Union, and the gate-keeper would not let us in and we had to force our way in. We got inside and as soon as we got inside Ceannt said, "Take down a few men with you and take charge of the front gate of the Union. Let Tommy McCarthy in when he comes down with ammunition, and stop there". "Right", said I. I got instructions not to let anyone else in. He told me that we were to attack the British soldiers if they arrived, and that we were to erect a barricade behind the front gate in case the British soldiers would come along there. We would be ready for them if they came along there, but I knew the military too well, I knew they would not attack.

I had to get some of the patients to fill sand-bags, and we pulled an old cab that was there and turned it over and used it as a barricade. When McCarthy came we opened the gate and let him in and took the ammunition from him. He then marched away with his men over to Jameson's Distillery and we shut the gate again.

At about two o'clock or so on Monday, Cathal Brugha came down and said that the soldiers were getting in over the wall and he wanted a couple of men. I said, "I'll go, because there is nothing doing here. I will get a shot up there". I was going when some of the fellows upstairs shouted down that Ceannt sent me there and that I was not to be taken away. Two other men went up, and they were not very long up there when the two of them were shot dead. One man was Billy McDowell, and I do not know the name of the other man, he was a painter. That settled that for the day. I tried to get in touch with McCarthy that night but I could not manage it.

I did not sleep for the week. I was not sleepy, and I used to walk along the corridors where I had the fellows posted here and there as sentries.

Next day some of our men called me and told me that there was an ambulance coming down and they wanted to know would they fire at it. I told them that they were not to fire under any circumstances. That was all right. The next thing that happened was that evening or the next day, I am not sure which, there was another ambulance coming and one of our men said, "Here is another ambulance. Will I fire?" I said, "Yes, hit him if you can". I am not sure but he got some portion of the car, and the car turned at the corner of Mount Brown. I do not know who drove it. We only saw the flap open. It got away too quickly. I did not see it myself, but one of the men who saw it said, "There is a gun in the back of the car". That was Tuesday.

On Tuesday morning I had all my men up at daylight. There were windows on both sides of the building in which we were. Right behind at the back of the Union there was another building with windows facing our direction; it was a bit higher than the building we occupied. I got the Volunteers to barricade the windows with books, ledgers, etc. I said, "If those fellows attack, they generally attack about daylight or dawn". Anyway, we got the windows barricaded, and then I got the fellows down underneath the windows. The next thing that happened was that there was a shower of bullets coming in. They kept that up for twenty minutes anyway. They were coming in and crossing over to the other place and some of them were hitting the ground before they went out and some of them went out into the street. Our men were crouched along under the

windows and I was lying down; others were down along the corridor. There was a fellow right beside me, and he wanted to return the fire. I said, "No, let them waste their ammunition". There was a man called Martin O'Flaherty and he said he would like to have a shot at them, so I said to him, "Very well, but before you have a shot at them put your hat on top of the gun and push it up easy", and while he was doing that two bullets went through it. "Now", said I, "If your head had been in the hat what would have happened to you?". He still has that hat.

We did not fire at all. They stopped and they must have thought there was nobody there. They did not come out in the open and we were not troubled any more. We were not troubled on Wednesday either. On Wednesday we got an easy day.

On Thursday I decided we would have to get through to Headquarters. Headquarters was up in the Nurses' Home, and we were down at the front over the gate. We had to get through a couple of buildings to get to where they were. We started to burrow from room to room. Eventually we came into a room in which there was a whole row of doors and presses all along, and we tried two or three of them but they were all presses. I said, "You had better start over here". We started to break a hole at the corner and we were half-way through when some fellow went over and turned a handle and there was a door there all the time, after us breaking through the wall. When we came to the end of the building there was a small little house and we had to get a ladder to get down, and when we got down I took off my coat. I had a grey shirt on me and my boots, and I climbed up a spout to see where we were, and there underneath was the whole crowd of our own

lads. I did not know before that where we could locate them.

Sean McGlynn was with that crowd. I knew him for a long time before that. After we had a chat, just the usual, I left him and went back into the building.

I was sitting down having a smoke, and I heard the clatter on the concrete. "What is McGlynn doing now?" I said. I heard more sounds and I knew it was something important. I opened the door and walked out with the pipe in my mouth and there were about thirty British soldiers outside. I acted without knowing, brought up the gun and fired. It was a .45 revolver, and I did not take time to look to see whether I hit a man or not. I went back and shouted to my men. They were coming running down to see what was up. I said that there was a crowd of British soldiers outside at the back of the bake-house. It was getting dark at this time.

They were attacking very heavily. There was a stairs going down to where we had to go to get over to Headquarters and eventually we started. We got down the stairs and the bullets were coming in over us. The next place I found myself was in the kitchen, and outside the kitchen was a crowd of Volunteers. "What is the trouble?" I asked. "The only way we can get out is by this way", said they. "Are you going to get out?" said I. "Yes", replied one of them. I said, "That won't do. Where is Ceannt?" "He is inside", said he. I had a young chap called Joe Horan, a carpenter, and I said to Joe, "Go in and ask Ceannt is this a surrender or is it a fight to a finish?" He came out and said, "Yes, it's a fight to a finish". "Come on", said I, "Where is he?". He was behind the curtain. Cathal Brugha had been wounded and he was lying

on a sofa. I think Joe Doolan was attending to him. I went through the Volunteers and went up to Ceannt. Said he, "Is there anyone here who could go up and have a few shots and let them know we are here?". I said, "Yes, I'll go". The hand-grenades were coming in, but not to where the crowd were. I made for the stairs and was half-way up the stairs when I was pulled back. "My God, I am shot", said young Evans. I was nearly able to lift him and brought him up. The first ward I came to there was a bed in it and I threw him on the bed. I opened the window, pulled out the gun and fired through the window, but I did not put my head out the window. The fighting stopped suddenly. Whatever happened, the British were fired on from behind by their own men. I believe they thought they were surrounded by the Volunteers and got out as quickly as they could. That was that. The fight was over then. That was the last fight and the only scrap we had then.

I had no commission or anything then. I would not take it. I could have got it but I did not want it. I only wanted to do a man's part, and thank God I lived to do it.

The surrender took place on Sunday. Willie Cosgrave and I went down on the Sunday and we opened the side gate and went out. MacDonagh, Father Albert and Father Aloysius from Church Street were there. Word was sent up that the priests were there. The civilians rushed over and I turned around and went over to the fellow on guard. I took the gun out of his hand and said to them, "Get back. You wouldn't come to our assistance. Now you are rushing up".

The priests did not come into the building. The terms were brought up to Ceannt and Ceannt called us and

told us the position. Half of the men were not inclined to give way and the other half were. Other fellows broke their guns. Ceannt did not go down to see the priests, it was Cosgrave saw the priests.

By the way, I put up the flag on the Monday. I took off my boots and we had to get a ladder for me to get up into the rafters through the ceiling. I broke a hole through the roof and put up the flag. There were snipers in the Old Men's House and they were firing but none of them came through the slates, they were just hopping off them. I nailed the flag to the mast.

We fell in that Sunday evening in the Union yard. The English Major was walking up and down, and said, "Mr. Ceannt, when will all your men be out?" Ceannt answered and said to him, "These are all the men I have". There were only 32 men to the best of my knowledge, there might have been a couple more or less, but we had only 38 altogether when we entered the Union on Monday.

We marched to Marrowbone Lane, where we were halted. I was going to go home then, but it was a good job I did not go home because there were 30 soldiers occupying the house. We marched up to Bride Street buildings, beside Patrick's Park, and we gave up our guns there. We were marched from there to Richmond Barracks and we were there two days when we left for Knutsford. Nothing happened in Knutsford. We were transferred from Knutsford to Frongoch.

After a while we were brought to London and were interviewed by the Sankey Commission. They did not ask me anything about the fighting. We were returned to Frongoch. I was released about August 1916.

When I came home after being released I had to start

looking for a job. All my customers were gone, none of them would touch me. They were nearly all Quakers. A couple of years before that, I took over Dunne's, plumbers, and I lost all my customers.

I think it was in 1917 that McGlynn and I took over about 50 or 60 men and we formed No. 4 Company, Engineers. Commandant Liam O'Doherty did not come until afterwards, but Commandant O'Kelly was Commandant of the 4th Battalion at that time. We used to parade out around the mountains and we also had parades in Camden Street. When we were shifted out of that we went to York Street.

We had a raid in York Street. I was not present when the raid took place because I was going home one night and I saw an English Secret Service man outside our place in York Street. I knew him because he had been on the boat with us when we were released from Frongoch and he used to be around the railings of the boat when there would be four or five of us standing talking. He would come up near us and stand listening to us. I remember too when I was attending an officers lecture in Parnell Square and he was standing at the corner of the Square. When I saw him in York Street I told the Volunteers that there was a spy outside, and I said, "You had better keep away from this place for a while". Of course, as usual, they did not, and two nights afterwards they were raided. There was only one of them arrested in the raid. The remainder got out through the back, but there was nothing got.

I was an officer in the Engineers at that time. McGlynn was Captain, and Paddy McGrath, Lord rest him, was Lieutenant. McGrath and myself used go out to the mountains testing explosives. I got an idea about how to set fire to an armoured car with petrol. The idea was

to get some rags and make them into a ball and soak it in paraffin oil. When the armoured car appeared the rag ball was to be lighted and thrown at it. Another man, at the same time, would throw a bottle of petrol at it. The moment it would get a hold, up would go the whole car. I put that to Liam Archer in Rathmines - we were shifted up to Harp Hall in Rathmines at the time - and he told me he would let me know in a week. I wanted to take some men out to blow the car and try it. Next week Archer came back and said he had put it in front of the Executive and they would not hear of it, that it would blow up half the city. I said, "Let them blow it all up. What about it".

About 1919 I became ill and was removed to Cork Street Hospital to undergo an operation. I was in hospital between two and three months.

When I got well again I reported and Liam Archer told me to take a rest for a while. Shortly afterwards Frank Gaskins told me I was to go and inspect some fireplaces and chimneys in the Crown Alley Iron Works. I went down to Crown Alley and I saw that the chimneys were no good and that it would take too much time to do anything with them, so I advised a gas and air furnace. Gaskins told me all about them. I already knew that Headquarters had this place in Crown Alley for making bombs and hand-grenades.

I built two new furnaces. I had to excavate the ground and go down six feet and put in two squares and build up the furnaces with bricks.

This place was beside the Telephone Exchange in Crown Alley. The British were in occupation of the Telephone Exchange. They had sentries marching up and down on the

roof of their building as we were going in and out, and we were never caught.

I got paid while I was in Crown Alley. It was a full-time job and we were there for a couple of months. I was paid £1 a week, or maybe it was £1 a day. I think it was £1 a day. I was there for two or three months and finished up at the Truce.

I never noticed how many grenades we turned out. They used to come twice a week and take three or four sacks of them in the car - not full bags.

Sean Russell was in charge of us. He came in occasionally because he was in charge of the whole lot. Frank Gaskins and Danny Holmes and two more men were there, I do not know their names, one was a North of Ireland chap.

It was marvellous the way we got away with it, we were very lucky. We were never raided. All the other fellows working there in the usual way at the usual foundry work never gave us away.

We carried on with that until the Truce, and I did not bother my head going near them after that.

I tried to pick up business again then, and went out on my own until the boys started to get going, and they are in the position now that they are able to carry on with a good way of living and a good business.

SIGNED

James Loran

DATE

3/5/49

WITNESS

Sean Brennan. Comdt.

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