

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 314.....

Witness

Mr. Liam O'Carroll,
29 Annamoe Road,
Cabra,
Dublin.

Identity

Lieutenant 'A' Company
1st Battalion Dublin Brigade
Irish Volunteers, 1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1913-1916;
- (b) Erection of barricades North King St.
and events in Four Courts Area
Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ... S. 539.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT OF MR. LIAM O'CARROLL,
29, Annamoe Road, Cabra, Dublin.

(Captain, "A" Company, 1st Battalion,
Irish Volunteers - 1916.)

My father and his father were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Through my father, I became associated with the Nationalist Movement.

I joined the Columcille Branch of the Gaelic League about 1913. The Branch met at 5, Blackhall Street.

I was at the inaugural meeting of the Volunteers in the Rotunda in November, 1913; and it would be some weeks after that, that I joined. As far as I recollect, I signed a form. Some weeks later, I attended at Blackhall Street. On the formation of the Companies, I was posted to "A" Company. Monteith and O'Donnell drilled us at the start. Monteith was elected first Captain; and then we had two officers who went away to the British Army; McGarry was one of them; and I cannot recollect the name of the other. McCormack became 1st Lieutenant; and I think I was 2nd Lieutenant then - I won't swear to that. Subsequently, Monteith was deported to Limerick. When Monteith was deported, McCormack became Captain; I was 1st Lieutenant; and Dinny Callaghan was 2nd Lieutenant.

That was the position approaching 1916. There

were examinations - "You are elected, but you will be permanently appointed when you pass the Officers' Course". The Officers' Courses were, in fact, very 'hit and miss' affairs. For instance, I have a recollection of being brought down to Father Matthew Park, which was subsequently Croydon Park. I remember being brought down there; and I was handed over the whole Battalion, and drilled it. All the other officers were there at the time; but I was the only one was told to do that; and I was told it was part of the Course.

Lectures were held at 2, Dawson Street. I cannot clearly recollect that these were part of the Course. Pearse lectured; Tomás MacDonagh lectured; James Connolly lectured, and various other people. Eamonn Ceannt was there. I don't think Eamonn Ceannt gave lectures. De Valera was there at these. Connolly lectured on city fighting - house-to-house fighting. MacDonagh lectured on what I might call open-air guerilla fighting, although it never actually reached the stage as being guerilla fighting. We worked more or less on the lines of normal British Army training - extended lines and that - and we did use all the British Army books. It never became guerilla fighting, as such; actually it became that, owing to the small numbers. There was a good deal of concentration on signalling. The reason was that we

had a number of Fianna Boys; and they were adept at that. It was to make use of whatever material we had.

I have a recollection of manoeuvres carried out just above Finglas Bridge. We had exercises too in the direction of Swords, when the whole Battalion would be brought out. Exercises were in the nature of one Company going ahead and holding a position against other Companies, and sending out scouts, and things of that nature. In all of these exercises, signalling played a big part. There was also a rather extensive exercise about that time held at Skerries. The Fingal Battalion held it against our attack. Then, of course, there was the type of exercise for developing physical stamina by longish route marches in small numbers. An instance of that was when I was in a Flying Column which went across the mountains to Rathdrum on Easter Saturday, 1915, I think, and returned on Easter Monday. On the Company meeting night, we used the Phoenix Park. Practically every Monday night, unless it was raining, we used the Park for exercises.

In 1916, we had 120-130 men on the rolls. McCormack was more interested in caps and uniforms than in arms. That was the one thing outstanding against him, even by Ned Daly. Every penny we had, he was always purchasing caps and badges. I was uniformed at the time. We had not many uniforms, but

every man had a haversack, bandolier, belt, water bottle. It was just about that time that special equipment was made for the Volunteers. It was specially designed by a saddler. He was a Corporation Councillor named Donncadh Healy. He manufactured the special equipment. I have one small piece of it left. We kept to the leather bandolier, until that equipment came along; but, with only Healy making it, there was very little equipment made.

As regards arms, we had a number of Howth guns. It would be impossible to remember how many. We had a fair number of Lee Enfields. We were buying them at that time from British Army men. As a matter of fact, my father bought quite a quantity. He had a shop in Manor Street. These fellows, when they wanted a few drinks, would take anything out of the Barracks. The usual thing was that they would bring a parcel around; and he would give them five shillings in any case; it might be a pair of old boots; it might be two .45's. On one occasion, there was delivered to him a lorry load of petrol in two-gallon tins. We had a number of shotguns too. We had some Martini Henry's and Martini Enfield's. We had a very nondescript collection of small arms. We did not go by the make of ammunition; so long as it went into the breech, it was alright.

We had a number of tradesmen in our Company;

we also had Post Office workers, labourers, a painter, a butcher; we had clerical workers and students - Geraghty was a medical student. That is a fair cross-section of them.

Lectures were given in Dawson Street. There was a lecture delivered by Pearse on the Saturday or Saturday week before Easter, 1916. It was entitled, "Be Prepared". I put the title in the minute book, because it was definitely "be prepared" all the time. The lectures were usually given on a Saturday at No. 2 Dawson Street. I think there were only the Battalion Officers and Captains of Companies attending. Although I was not a Company Captain, I was there; and I was Secretary to the Lectures. There was a very continued attendance of the "higher-ups" - Tom MacDonagh, De Valera - Connolly was a fairly constant attender - Ceannt, Ted Sheehan, Bulmer Hobson and others I cannot recall.

Every Saturday night the lectures were held. The last one was held on the Saturday before Holy Week. Pearse delivered a lecture either on that Saturday, or the previous Saturday; but I am inclined to think it was the Saturday before Holy Week; and the lecture was on the subject of "Be Prepared"; and in that lecture he emphasised not alone being prepared militarily, but spiritually and religiously; those were the points he emphasised.

Long before Holy Week, we were aware of the

manoeuvres that were to be proposed for Easter Sunday. Early in Holy Week, a lorry load of stuff was delivered to my house in Manor Street, consisting of a large amount of medical supplies and a considerable quantity of ammunition, with a small quantity of Mills bombs and home-made hand-grenades. The greater portion of this was brought down by members of the family and friends to the Father Mathew Hall during Easter Week.

Early in Holy Week, I received instructions to meet Commandant Daly on Thursday night at the corner of Red Cow Lane and North King Street. I met him there at, as far as I can recollect, eight o'clock. He was accompanied by - again from recollection - Eamonn Morkan, Eamonn Duggan and either Sullivan or Fionán Lynch; I rather think it was Jim Sullivan. Commandant Daly informed me that this was the concluding test for me in the Officers' Course. We proceeded into North Brunswick Street, through Red Cow Lane, to the vicinity of the Richmond Hospital. He there asked me how many men I had in "A" Company; and I said: "Approximately 120". "Well, now", he said, "the problem you have here is: You have a Company; and I want you to dispose the Company here; and tell me exactly what preparations you would make for the purpose of defending the position against an attack by the military, approaching from Stoneybatter". I went round and examined the area in the immediate vicinity; and I selected the spot immediately east of

of the old Richmond Hospital as the most suitable point to defend; I also found to the west of this point a carrier's yard - Cullen's, I think - in which there was an amount of timber and heavy lorries; I decided that this would be very suitable material for the erection of a barricade; I pointed out four or five houses on each side of the street, and opposite to one another, and explained the loop-holing I would do, and the breaking-in from one house to another, and the provision of rear exits. Commandant Daly informed me then that he was very satisfied with the plan; and he then said: "You may be called on very shortly to carry out that plan". I reminded him that I was not the O/C of the Company, and that I thought it would be more satisfactory that the O/C should be informed by him. He said that he would inform Captain McCormack that he should take instructions from me in this particular matter. I demurred at this, and pointed out that Mr. McCormack was hardly likely to be the man who would take instructions of any sort from an officer junior to himself. However, he passed it off, and said everything would be all right; and I left the matter at that. I had formed a definite opinion that the insurrection was not far off, prior to this date; and this incident finally convinced me that we were very close to the actual event.

The mobilisation, as far as "A" Company was

date
15/11/1916

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concerned, was that we were going out on very extensive exercises. I don't know exactly the time on Sunday that we were demobilised, with the usual instructions. On Sunday morning, there was general confusion, because the position was that we had orders to mobilise. We got the contradictory orders in the "Sunday Independent"; and nobody knew what to obey. I went here, there and yonder, to try and get some definite information; and was twice in Liberty Hall for this purpose; I cannot recollect whom I saw; but eventually I got an order - and I am sure it was there - to tell the men to stand to arms for further orders; that was the last thing we got; I would say that order was somewhere around three o'clock.

I don't know how, or when I got these orders on Easter Monday morning but I have a hazy recollection of being called out of bed between 8 and 9 a.m. to receive orders from a messenger, and I paraded in Columcille Hall in Blackhall Street before twelve o'clock, with full equipment and iron rations. I remember that anyway. "A", "C", "D", "F" and "G" Companies paraded in the hall. I think these were the only Companies that paraded there. We were all in the hall; and we were addressed by Commandant Daly who announced that, "as from twelve o'clock to-day, the Irish Republic is proclaimed". He then read out a document, which I believe to have been a copy of the

Proclamation; but he did not read the portion in Irish. He said each officer had his position, and he was now ordering the Companies to proceed to the appointed posts. We marched out in double file from the hall. I had twenty-eight men in my Company. O'Callaghan, the Second Lieutenant of the Company, turned up with me. The O/C, Captain McCormack did not turn up.

We turned left up Queen Street, along North King Street, along Red Cow Lane, to the front of the old Richmond Hospital. I halted the men. The first thing we did was to blow the lock off the gate of Cullen's yard. We hauled out four-wheeled lorries, timber and any general heavy material we could find in the yard; and we erected a double barricade across the street, one on each side of Red Cow Lane, in North Brunswick Street, opposite the old Richmond Hospital. Men were put temporarily on the barricades. Only a few men could be spared for that, because we then had to use men to get the houses cleared. About three or four men were left holding the barricades, while the remainder of the men proceeded to evacuate approximately five houses on each side of the street, and to the east of the barricades. When these houses were eventually evacuated, the walls between were knocked through. We knocked the houses, one into another, built up bags of material in the windows to provide fire cover, and all the men were withdrawn

into the houses. At about this time, we were joined by, as far as I recollect, Garry Houlihan, Paddy Houlihan, Eamonn Martin and, I think, another man who had been engaged in an action on the Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park. They remained with us only a short time, retiring then to the Battalion Headquarters at the Convent. It was now very late in the evening. We had our rations sufficient for the day. We used the fires in the houses, and were able to make tea along with the iron rations. I remember I got bread in a shop in one of the houses; and we paid for it by leaving the money on the shelf, from which we took the bread. We had no trouble at our post. Once we got into the houses, we arranged hours of duty and sleep, turn about sleeping and on duty - four hours on and four hours off for every man posted in the windows. In fact, they did not get sleep. Monday night passed without any activity of any kind.

On Tuesday I was sent for by Commandant Daly, who informed me that he had been inspecting the barricades in the area and felt that the only reasonable barricades were the ones that had been erected by my Company; and he instructed me to proceed to inspect all the other barricades and to do whatever was necessary to improve and strengthen them. I asked him for assistance on this, and he said I would have to find assistance myself, that he had no man to spare.

The first thing that came to my notice, on

proceeding on the inspection, was a mob of some hundreds of people attempting to force their way into Monks Bakery Shop, North King Street, for the purpose of getting bread. I obtained two Volunteers with rifles, whom I placed inside the door of the shop and, in the hearing of the mob, gave them orders to shoot any person attempting to enter. I then told the mob that any able-bodied men amongst them, who would come and assist me by carrying some materials for me, would receive bread. A considerable number came to assist me. These people were used for the purpose of carrying building materials from the site of houses being built in Church Street, opposite the Father Mathew Hall. All this material was used to strengthen the barricades in the vicinity. There was a barricade opposite Murphy's chemist shop in North King Street. There was one across the end of North Brunswick Street, where it joins Church Street. There was one across the bottom of Coleraine Street, where it contacts New Lisburn Street. There was one across Lisburn Street, on the east side of Coleraine Street. Then there was one across North King Street, between Langan's publichouse and Dunne's butcher shop.

While I was building the barricades at Coleraine Street, a party under, I think, Dinny O'Callaghan - Seán Duffy was in the party - were engaged in effecting an entrance to the Linenhall Barracks at Coleraine Street - New Lisburn Street corner. This

was eventually set on fire.

As far as I recollect, it was about mid-day on Wednesday when I had completed my work on the barricades. I then reported back to Commandant Daly at the Father Mathew Hall; and I remember there he said: "You are in a collapsed condition, and you had better go down to the Four Courts and have a sleep". I had not had a sleep up to that. We had a large room in the centre of the Four Courts building as a hospital; and I slept there for a couple of hours.

I was with Frank Fahy at his post - the offices of the Incorporated Law Society. He had just received some report from the Four Courts Post Office; and he instructed me to proceed there. On arrival, I found a small number of men in the upper room, lying flat at the windows and covering the premises of the Medical Mission, on the opposite side of the street. They informed me that there was something suspicious going on opposite; and what should they do. I questioned them. It appeared to me that some attack was developing by the soldiers, who had been trapped in Charles Street, which is at the rear of the Medical Mission. Just then, we saw an arm swinging, with the upper portion of a body in uniform. I gathered the impression that a hand-grenade was being thrown. I ordered the men to fire. They did so. The body collapsed out of sight, and the hand-grenade dropped in the middle of the roadway, between the two posts.

At about this time, I received instructions to go to the west corner of the Four Courts, facing the Quays. I found a couple of men in the room here, at the windows. They pointed out to me an ambulance stationed across Exchange Street, where it joins Essex Quay. They informed me that they were very suspicious of this ambulance. We could hear, at the same time, a noise which we identified as crow-bars lifting paving stones. We eventually came to the conclusion that a field gun was being fixed on the roadway, under cover of the ambulance. We decided to fire on the ambulance; and immediately on this being done, the ambulance was driven away in the direction of Capel Street, exposing a field gun in position behind where it had been. Immediately a round was fired at the Four Courts, and crashed the wall of the room, in which we were; and we were compelled to retire. I remember, while I was there, the rifle in the hands of one of the men being struck by a bullet and completely splitting the woodwork of the rifle.

On Thursday, I escorted Fathers Albert and Augustine, who interviewed every member of the garrison and attended to their spiritual wants.

I have no clear recollection as to the events of Friday or Saturday, until the surrender. I was present at "C" Company's post. There were also present: Commandant Daly, Eamonn Morkan, Eamonn Duggan and Frank Fahy. I understood that negotiations

were taking place for a surrender, but apparently everybody was waiting for something. Eventually, the order arrived to Commandant Daly to surrender. I know he was very reluctant to do this, but eventually decided that it was his duty to accept and obey the order.

I was thereupon sent round to call in all men from their posts and to parade them in the courtyard for surrender. As far as I recollect, there were only something over twenty men; but I am aware that a number of men escaped through Hammond Lane. The British Major, who was in charge, queried the number of men; and I assured him that that was the total garrison and, if he was not satisfied, that he could send his man with me and I would conduct him to all the posts. I remember him saying: "If I had known that this was the extent of the garrison here, you would have been out of this by half-past-twelve on Monday morning last". The men then were ordered to hand their arms out through the railings to soldiers who placed them in a lorry. They then re-assembled and were taken away. It was decided by the British Major that I, with another man, whose name I cannot now recollect, should remain overnight in the Four Courts with the members of Cumann na mBan who were attending to some wounded at that time in the temporary hospital. The wounded were removed the following morning in ambulances; and at the same time I was

removed to Richmond Barracks.

While the men were paraded for the surrender, the British officer called out the name of Diarmuid O'Hegarty, and insisted on him being searched for. I felt that Diarmuid O'Hegarty was one of those who had escaped; but naturally I was not prepared to admit that there had been any escapes. I, therefore, told him that Diarmuid O'Hegarty had been shot the day before; and that his body was lying over a barricade in Church Street; and that we had been unable to bring in the body, owing to the activities of snipers. As a matter of fact, at the time, Diarmuid O'Hegarty was asleep from exhaustion, because on the Sunday morning, while we were carrying out the wounded to the ambulance, Diarmuid and another Volunteer, whose name I don't recall, arrived in the courtyard and were apparently amazed at the position. I took the opportunity of telling him as quickly as I could that he was being specially searched for, and that he would take whatever precautions he considered were necessary. I then had to leave.

I was taken on Sunday morning, along with the other Volunteers, to Richmond Barracks. We were brought into a large room - probably the gymnasium - where the Metropolitan G-men were spotting round and picking out the more prominent Volunteers. I was closely questioned by one of the detectives present, known as "Tiny". I did not see anybody actually being picked out. Subsequently, we were removed to

small Barrack rooms in batches; and here a number of younger Volunteers were picked out and sent home, for the reason that they were too young. Either that night or Monday night I was removed to Knutsford Jail.

(Signed)

Walter Campbell
19/9/49

Witness -

R. J. Leely, Comdt.

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