

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S. 376**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**...376.....

**Witness**

Padraig O Ceallaigh,  
20 Searfield Road,  
Clontarf, Dublin.

**Identity**

Member of 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion,  
Dublin Brigade I.V's. 1916.

**Subject**

- (a) Howth Gun-Running 1914;
- (b) Jacob's Factory, Easter Week 1916;
- (c) Raid on Liberty Hall, November 1920.

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

Nil

File No. **S.1463**.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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No. W.S. 376

STATEMENT BY MR. P. Ó CEALLAIGH,

20, SEAFIELD ROAD, CLONTARF, DUBLIN.

I should like to make it clear that I was only a rank and file Irish Volunteer in the 1916 Rising and that I am giving this statement at the request of the Bureau of Military History.

In the decade before 1914-1918 World War there was in Dublin (to which I had come from my native Laoighis) a kind of natural graduation, which led to participation in the Rising, for lads of the more advanced national views. One usually began by playing Gaelic Football or Hurling; from that the next step was to the Gaelic League; from that again to the Sinn Féin movement and later to the Irish Volunteer Movement. For relaxation we attended céilithe and the Abbey Theatre. We bought nothing but the Irish-made goods and scorned those who bought English. With that background it was rather a natural progression to participation in the Rising.

I was a member of B. Company, 2nd Battalion of the Irish Volunteers. We took part in the Howth Gun Running in July, 1914 - our first piece of active service work and, I think, the first Irish clash in arms (small though it was) with British Forces for many years.

The outbreak of the World War in August 1914 gave rise to much contention amongst the rank and file of the Volunteers as to the line we should take. There was talk about "defending the shores of Ireland" and we were anxious to do so, so far as our limited resources allowed,

but we did not know the proper line and we awaited a lead. That was given by Arthur Griffith in 'Nationality', I think- and in the various anti-British articles that James Connolly had been publishing in 'The Irish Worker' and other Labour papers.

In our Company, as no doubt in others, a vote was taken between the Irish and the Redmondite sections. The majority - and the best and most advanced members in 'B' Coy.-voted for the Irish Volunteers: We continued drilling. We did some miniature rifle practice and had occasional route marches: Most of us had guns - those landed at Howth, and Martinis.

On Good Friday, 1916, a Savage Automatic Repeating Rifle made in U.S.A. was left at my house by, I was told, Dr. Hayes of Swords from whom I was to get subsequent instructions. I did not get them, however. Possibly the rifle was left to me for sniping; I was a fairly good shot.

The Easter Sunday mobilisation was called off by Eoin MacNeill and no new mobilisation order having been received by me, I went to Fairyhouse Races on Easter Monday and there heard of "trouble" in Dublin.

In the railway carriage on the way back there was a good deal of violent criticism of the Volunteers for provoking a hopeless conflict and endangering the lives and property of citizens. The criticism, came from the "outside ring" racecourse crowd but could, I think, be taken as a fair cross-section of feeling among the big majority of the populace. On Easter Monday night, I

brought my two guns to the G.P.O. There was only sporadic firing in the city at the time. Inside the Post Office I met P.H. Pearse who told me the 2nd Battalion was somewhere around Jacob's Factory. He asked me to leave one of the two guns. At his request I left the Savage Automatic - very reluctantly.

I walked across the city to Jacob's Factory. There was much confusion in the streets, people standing around and wondering what was going to happen. There were still occasional bursts of firing. I attracted attention at the Factory and was pulled in through one of the windows with the help of the late Richard Cotter. Shortly afterwards a woman, who seemed drunk, threw paraffin oil on one of the Factory gates and tried to burn it. A shot was fired over her head and she decamped. However, the action of this inebriated lady could not be regarded as an indication of popular feeling. Still, in my experience, the Rising was not popular amongst Dublin citizens generally during the actual course of the fighting.

The rank and file of the Volunteers in Jacobs were practically all of the middle and working-class - clerks, shop-assistants, tradesmen, labourers - "the great common people of Ireland". In Jacobs I met many G.A.A. players whom I knew. The G.A.A. played a big part in the Rising and in the subsequent Black-and-Tan war.

There was little military activity in Jacobs - just occasional sniping by the British and ourselves. There were a few sorties in one of which Volunteer O'Grady was killed. When our chiefs announced the surrender on Low

Sunday I saw a few Volunteers hurling their guns away in disappointed rage. For some others there was, I think, a feeling of relief that the strain of the week was over; the strain on us was probably more intense because of our comparative inactivity. There was also the uncertainty. Despatch riders had kept the Volunteer leaders in touch with the position in other parts of the city but we, <sup>of the</sup> rank and file had only a dim idea as to what was happening elsewhere in Dublin and none at all of the position outside it. There were all kinds of wild rumours - German landings in Ireland, Irish-American forces on the way, and so on. That the Rising was a gallant but hopeless venture which could not end but in early defeat seemed the <sup>feeling</sup> general amongst the Jacob's garrison. Indeed, that was probably the view of most of them before they entered Jacobs. History has, of course, shown that it was the clear view of the leaders.

We walked about a half mile before we met the British troops to whom we surrendered our guns and ammunition and who took our names and addresses. All the time a solitary sniper continued firing. We afterwards learned he was one of our own men - apparently located in some high position in Jacob's Factory - who had not heard of the surrender.

Before we reached the British, some of the boys just walked out into the crowd which almost lined the way to the point of surrender, and escaped. The leaders who included Thomas MacDonagh, Major MacBride and Michael O'Hanrahan could as easily have escaped. However, they presumably thought they were in honour bound by their agreement to surrender, and "the hit and run" technique of the Black-and-Tan days had not been developed. But, it

was the gallant hopelessness of the fight, the executions and the subsequent gaolings and repressions that brought about a revulsion of feeling in favour of the Volunteers and indeed largely led to the more successful fight of 1919 to 1921.

We were brought to Richmond, now Keogh, Barracks, and kept there for a few days before being deported to England. Amongst the rank and file the tension of the previous week had ended and while none of us knew his subsequent fate there was in Richmond Barracks generally, in my experience, an air of devil-may-careness and good humour. The leaders were picked out by "G" men (detectives) Before he was taken away from the rest of us, I one day passed Major MacBride who was jingling a few shillings in his hand: I remarked jocosely "I suppose that's some of the German gold". He smiled by way of reply. At the time there was a British propaganda to the effect that the Volunteers were being financed by German gold.

On our way to North Wall, we saw O'Connell Street still smouldering - our first evidence of the vast destruction in the city. I noticed some women and girls crying as we passed by - the first sign perhaps of the change-over in feeling in our favour.

We were deported to Knutsford gaol near Manchester which had been used as a British military detention camp. We were rather badly treated: We had to sleep on plank beds and were fed on 'skilly' and other slops. For the four weeks I spent in Knutsford it was genuine solitary confinement. We were in the cells for 23½ hours of the 24 and silence was strictly enforced during the half-hour

exercise in the Prison yard. After about a month I was released - as I found out afterwards - in mistake for a Redmondite Volunteer who had the same name and who had been arrested in error and who was not released until July, 1916. An order came to the gaol for the release of "Patrick Kelly" and I mistakenly got the advantage.

Shortly after I came home I read a reply from Mr. Tennant, the then Home Secretary, to an Irish M.P. in the British House of Commons. Mr. Tennant denied that the Volunteers had been harshly treated in the British gaols and stated they had got "prisoner-of-war" treatment all along!

I lost my Civil Service job as a result of the Rising. From August 1918 to October 1923 I worked in the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, Liberty Hall.

Shortly after "Bloody Sunday" in November 1920, Liberty Hall was raided by British Auxiliaries. They had a long cable with them and were looking for a non-existent tunnel under the Liffey which they supposed was being used by "the Rebels". A couple of revolvers were found by the "Auxies" on the premises. The Union Staff - nearly all "Rebels" were searched and put in lorries outside the Hall. Large numbers of the Union paper, "The Watchword of Labour" were burned by the Auxiliaries in Beresford Place. We were brought to Dublin Castle to a room where I was told Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy and Conor Clune (R.I.P.) had been murdered by Auxiliaries a few days before. The British alleged the men were trying to escape at the time - an excuse they often pleaded in other cases of shooting. The windows of the room were heavily barred and there were armed guards outside the doors and windows. A mouse, or a

midge, could not have escaped from that room. We were released the same night and left without regret.

Signed;

P. O'Leary

Date;

12 u. Dubson, 1950.

Witness;

J. Kearns Comdr.

