

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21

No. W.S. 422

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 422.....

Witness

Sean Byrne,
70 Lismore Road,
Kimmage,
Dublin.
Identity

Member of 'C' Company, 3rd Battalion, Dublin
Brigade, I V's.

First Aid Worker 1916.

Subject

Occupation of Dispensary, Grand Canal St.,
Dublin, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1565.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN BYRNE,

70 Lismore Road, Kimmage, Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers in March, 1915. I waited for the split to be well over before I decided to join, and then I joined "C" Company, 3rd Battalion. We used to meet in York Street on Thursday nights, and afterwards we drilled in Camden Row on Thursday nights.

The Company officers were Eddie Byrne, Captain; Jimmy Byrne, his brother, 1st Lieutenant; and Simon Donnelly, 2nd Lieutenant.

Sometime before the Rising, 1st Lieutenant Jimmy Byrne was transferred to the Engineers. 2nd Lieutenant Simon Donnelly was promoted 1st Lieutenant, and Michael Malone who was killed during Easter Week in No. 25 Northumberland Road, was promoted 2nd Lieutenant.

As an ordinary Volunteer I remember taking part in exercises along the canal. I remember being with Captain O'Connell, afterwards a Colonel in the Army, and Commandant De Valera up around the canal. I was near Dartmouth Road as a sentry and I was badly disqualified because I let a man come too near me.

I remember about Easter Sunday, 1915, the Redmondite Volunteers gave a big show in Dublin, and the Irish Volunteers went on manoeuvres the same night in North County Dublin. Our Battalion took part in

the manoeuvres. As well as I remember, the Dublin Brigade were launching an attack on the Fingal Brigade.

Some time after I had joined the Volunteers as an ordinary Volunteer there was a call for men for the first aid classes. Most of the Volunteers did not seem to like the idea of going to these classes, they seemed to think that they would not be good soldiers if they attended them. It was pointed out from time to time that a medical man was just as important as anybody else. Following these appeals I decided I would give in my name to the Captain to go to the first aid classes. I attended some lectures given to our own Company. These lectures were given in No. 41 York Street by a man named Flanagan - I do not know his christian name. Mr. Flanagan, who is still alive, gave lectures in No. 2 Dawson Street afterwards.

As the ambulance unit of the Brigade got bigger it was decided by somebody to divide the classes, and we then had classes on Monday nights and Wednesday nights. The classes on Monday nights were taken by Captain J. J. Doyle, and the classes on Wednesday nights were taken by a man named Glemon. I was detailed to attend the Wednesday classes.

After the classes were going on for some time there was an examination held for the whole Brigade. The results of the examination were sent to the various Companies, and certificates were to be issued by the late Commandant MacDonagh, but they were not issued and we never got them.

It was as a result of this examination that I came to be acting as Ambulance Officer for the Battalion. I used to deputise on the Battalion Staff for Mr. Flanagan, and attended some meetings of the Battalion Staff.

The results of the examination appeared afterwards in "The Irish Volunteer" about January, 1916. The names of all who passed, including my name, are in it. Copies of this paper are on the files in the National Library.

Some time after this examination our Battalion went on manoeuvres to the Dublin Mountains, up by the Pine Forest. We mobilised for this at 4 o'clock in the morning. We had breakfast on the Dodder near Dartry, and attended an early Mass in Rathfarnham Church. I was acting in charge of the ambulance unit of the 3rd Battalion on that day. We were visited by Brigade Captain J. J. Doyle, who was in charge of the Brigade ambulance unit.

I remember attending Mass on St. Patrick's Day, 1916, in SS. Michael and John's Church, Lower Exchange Street, after which the Volunteers marched to College Green, where the salute was taken by Mr. Eoin MacNeill. I marched with the Battalion Staff on that occasion. I remember being at the Mass, but I do not remember much about it.

After passing the examination I became unattached from my own Company as I had to visit the various Companies of the Battalion each week. I remember

visiting "E" Company in Oakley Road, Ranelagh - I think it was Cullenwood House. Sometimes I would give lectures and sometimes I would just have a chat with the ambulance men attached to the Companies. I remember attending "B" Company at 144 Pearse Street, "D" Company at Thorncastle Street, Ringsend, and my own Company at 41 York Street. I believe "A" Company were at 41 York Street on Monday nights.

I was in No. 2 Dawson Street on Good Friday night to collect ambulance material for my Battalion, and saw some of the ambulance men from other units coming there and collecting a certain amount of stuff for their units. While I was there I saw ambulance material and medical supplies being sent out to Swords to Dr. R. Hayes.

I was never definitely told that the Rising was to take place, but from observation and hearing remarks being dropped and unusual activity, I knew that something unusual was about to take place. During Holy Week I was instructed to parade at Camden Row on Easter Sunday morning and to bring all medical and ambulance supplies with me. On Easter Sunday morning I went to Camden Row. A member of "C" Company named Robert Cooper came with me and helped to carry the ambulance supplies which I had collected at Headquarters, 2 Dawson Street, on Good Friday night from my house to Camden Row.

After being some time in Camden Row we got word - I forget how the word came - that everything was off or something like that. We had a lot of stuff there along with medical and ambulance material, and I did not know what I was going to do with it. Two members of Cumann

na mBan arrived, one of them said she had some material and would she bring it along to us. I told her we had no place to put it and I would not take it from her.

I then decided that I would try to get in touch with the Commandant. On my way I met Simon Donnelly in Camden Street and told him what I was doing. He decided to come with me. We procured a car - I do not know whether it was Simon or myself procured it. The motor car was driven by a young man named Maher, who brought us down to 144 Great Brunswick Street to St. Andrew's Catholic Club, and we found the Commandant there. I asked him what was to be done with the material which we had in Camden Row, and he told me that it should be re-distributed amongst the men who had it. I told him I could not do that, as most of the men had gone away. I suggested that we would bring the stuff to 144 Great Brunswick Street. I thought that would be the best place because there was an armed guard there. The Commandant agreed to this.

Simon Donnelly and myself went back to Camden Row in the motor car; the stuff was loaded into the car and we returned with it to 144 Great Brunswick Street. I think it was the Commandant who told us that on our way to 144 Great Brunswick Street we were to avoid, as far as possible, all police stations and take a circuitous route.

I remember the Commandant was up in the front drawing-room. There was another officer with him. I am almost certain that it was Captain Joe O'Connor of "A" Company.

Having left the stuff in Great Brunswick Street we went back to the car and Maher drove it to Longwood Avenue where he lived. I went into his house and there was a number of Volunteers there. Jim Grace was amongst them. He was a ^{friend} friend of Maher's. After some time in that house we drove back with the car which we left in a garage at Portobello Harbour at the rear of South Richmond Street. I believe the car belonged to a man named Clarke, who had a provision shop in South Richmond Street. I think John Clarke was his name. It was supposed to have a false registration, or an out of date registration number, at least that is what somebody told me.

Having left the car in the garage I went to my own home where I remained some time and then went back to 144 Great Brunswick Street. I remained there all night - Easter Sunday night.

Very early on Easter Monday morning I came out to have a wash and a shave, intending to go to the Fire Station in Tara Street, where I was employed as a messenger at the time. Before I left 144 Great Brunswick Street I asked the Commandant for permission to leave. I am not sure now whether I asked for permission or just acquainted him with the fact that I was leaving. He asked me where I would be found, and I told him he would get me on the 'phone by ringing the Fire Station. The Commandant seemed to think that it might be difficult to get me on the 'phone, he did not seem to want to use it, and asked me again where he would find me. I told him he would find me in the Fire Station in Tara Street.

Some time later on Monday morning a Volunteer, Patrick McCabe of "B" Company, came to the Fire Station and

gave me a note. That note was the original mobilisation order for Easter Sunday and on it were the words: "Don't fail me. E. de V." I let McCabe go, and followed him to 144 Great Brunswick Street.

After being some time in 144 Great Brunswick Street, Detective Sergeant Lowe was brought in, and some time after that, when they decided to leave, Commandant de Valera told me they were going on to the railway, and he instructed me to remain there until all the material was removed from the house and then to report to him on the railway.

After arriving at the railway I remember the Commandant saying that he wanted the house on the corner occupied. That house was the Grand Canal Street dispensary at the corner of Clarence Street and Grand Canal Street. I was told that the occupants of the house were to be put out, and under no circumstances were they to be allowed take any documents with them. As well as I can remember, the only people in the house were a lady, Mrs. Healy, the wife of the dispensary doctor, and a maid. I think there were two doctors in that dispensary but Dr. Healy lived on the premises.

Mrs. Healy delayed in getting out and the Commandant came back and was very much annoyed that she had not been got out of the house. She was more or less concerned about her furniture. She had asked me would we be using her furniture, and I told her only what would be necessary to us for military purposes. She asked the Commandant who would compensate her for damage to it. As well as I remember he said something about the Irish Republic compensating her. She did not seem inclined to

leave the house at all. Eventually, having got Mrs. Healy out, we proceeded to barricade the place. We barricaded the hall door with forms, chairs and tables from the dispensary.

When we had been in the dispensary for some time Dr. Healy came along. He was rather excited and wanted to know what it was all about. At first he wanted to throw us all out but when he saw the situation he offered to serve with us. I did not accept his offer but told him to go on with his wife because she was not too well. I told him that if he told us where we would find him we would send for him if we wanted him. He gave us an address and we sent for him later but he did not come. I am not sure if our man went to the right house.

Some time after that, Mr. Flanagan came - he was a Lieutenant Surgeon in the Battalion. After a while a man named James Redican came in with a bullet wound in his thigh - I do not know which thigh. He was taken upstairs to one of the bedrooms and was attended to in the first instance by Mr. Flanagan and myself. Some time later somebody sent out a requisition for a surgeon. The surgeon came along and examined Redican upstairs. I believe I untied the bandages for the surgeon. Mr. Flanagan was also there at the time the surgeon was there. The surgeon's decision was that, under the circumstances, he could not have done more for Redican than what had been done. The name of the surgeon was either Farrell or Carroll, I think it was Carroll. He was an outside doctor and I heard he was from Westland Row. He was accompanied by a dark-

complexioned man who had a halt. I asked this man how things were in the city, and he answered, "Well, friend". He addressed me as "friend". Redican was removed to Sir Patrick Dunn's Hospital on Tuesday night.

On Easter Monday night Flanagan told me he was going up to have a rest, and that if anything serious happened I was to call him. Redican became restive and I thought it desirable to call Flanagan from his bed. I went up and asked Flanagan a few questions. He came down and was a bit annoyed because I had disturbed him. I might have been a bit anxious myself, not having any experience of serious cases.

On Tuesday afternoon or evening, Mr. Flanagan told me that he was not feeling well. He did not look well, and I advised him to go to bed. He mentioned something about going away and that he would come back again. I told him that I had not any authority to let him go away. I advised him to see the Commandant. I believe he went to the Commandant and got his permission to go away.

I do not know when the wounded men came in, or in what order they came in. I remember the names of most of them and I remember things some of them said to me, but I cannot be sure about the days they came. I am definite about one thing, and that is that the first man to be brought in was Redican, wounded in the thigh, and he was brought in shortly after the occupation of the dispensary.

Christopher Murphy of "C" Company was brought in with a bullet wound in the chest. While I was attending him he told me he was dying, and I told him he was not.

He was craving for a drink of water. He persisted in saying he was dying, but said that he did not care because it was for Ireland. He was afterwards taken to the Castle Hospital. He did not die and he carried on during the Black and Tan time afterwards.

The other wounded men brought in were Purfield of "B" Company, whose christian name I cannot remember - he had a bullet wound in the knee; Robert Cooper of "C" Company, already mentioned, was brought in with a bullet wound in the chest; Seán O'Keefe of "B" Company had a bullet wound in the elbow. The remains of another man, Peadar Macken of "B" Company lay in the hall of Grand Canal Street dispensary for an evening and a night. He was dead when he was brought to me; he had been shot in the stomach. This man's remains were buried in the yard near Boland's stables. The grave was dug by a man named Patrick Williams, who was a member of the Citizen Army. I do not know how he came to be in Boland's. He is still alive. I remember somebody found a prayer-book in Dr. Healy's house and it was given to the Commandant who read some prayers out of it over the remains at the time of burial. The remains were buried in a tarpaulin which had been over him while he was lying in the hall of the dispensary.

I was also called up the railway line to attend to a wounded man in the railway sheds or workshops. When I got to him his head had already been bandaged. I do not know who attended him, but I think he was attended by a man named John Bracken, an ambulance man from "A" Company who was on duty on the railway line at the time.

Byrne was bandaged but unconscious when I arrived and I could do nothing for him. I left word that the wounded man, Byrne, could be brought down to the dispensary when it would be nearly dark and safer for the men to move about. Later that night they brought him to the dispensary but I did not keep him there at all. We removed the barricade from the hall door of the dispensary and took the wounded man over to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital. I remember a man named Peadar O'Meara searching the wounded man's pockets to find some means of identification.

I was called up the railway line again and saw the body of a man in a railway carriage. When I examined him I found he was dead. I told the men that the best thing to do was to bury the remains but I do not know if they did or not. I think that man's name was Ennis.

I attended Leo Casey for injury to his eyes where broken glass got into them. He was taken afterwards to Sir Patrick's Dun Hospital. I attended Thomas Scully for an injury to one of his hands which was torn by glass. I also put a small bandage on Charlie Murphy's finger, and I remember he asked me to put a small bandage so that he could continue to use his gun.

Some time during the week, I remember packing material supplies on to a stretcher which was to be carried on to the railway line, as we had been told that a bayonet charge would take place from Beggars Bush Barracks. I do not know whether I got information myself from a civilian, or whether we got orders from the Commandant's headquarters. I remember that Leo Casey had a white bandage on his eyes when we went up the line.

It was dark at the time and somebody put something black over the white bandage.

After we had been on the line for some time the Commandant told me he would like a cup of tea. I found then that I had no gun. Charlie Murphy gave me one and I went back to the dispensary to get the tea ready.

Some time during the week I remember the Commandant telling me that the plan they were fighting on was only a supplementary plan which had been drawn up by himself and James Connolly. "Had the original plan been acted upon, he said, "we would not have been in the city at all". I think I remember him saying that the Citizen Army would have had charge of the city. He also said to me that O'Rahilly and himself were not in favour of the Rising at that time; they felt that it would be better at a later date - in the autumn when the harvest would be in. He also said he was asked if he would take a command, and he was then given back his old or own Battalion.

Occasionally, on his way round, the Commandant would come in and sit down and I would advise him to have a rest. I remember the Commandant came down one night after the pass-word had been changed. He gave the new pass-word but we would not let him in although we knew who he was, because we did not know that the pass-word had been changed.

Some people did not like the idea of our wounded being taken to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, but the Commandant said it was still within our lines and he was

contemplating taking it over. It has been said that we were not fired on from Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, but we were fired on from the hospital. To the best of my belief there were two shots fired, and the late Patrick Flanagan, afterwards Vice-Commandant of the 3rd Battalion, fired one shot in return.

Before that, a prisoner named Mackey had been brought to me from where he had been detained in the bakery. He was a Cadet from the Artillery College, Sandhurst, and he was in uniform. He had been with me a day or so when we were fired at from Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital. The Commandant made out a document to notify the public that the British were using hospitals for military purposes, and that if they continued to do so he would have no alternative but to shoot the prisoner. That document was signed by the Commandant himself, by the prisoner, and by me. I understood that the document was to be sent to the G.P.O. to be printed, for the purpose of having it read out in the churches. As well as I remember, the man appointed to take the document was Jack Murphy. He was a brother of Richard Murphy who was killed in Clanwilliam House. He was a cyclist and a dispatch rider. I remember him standing in the hall waiting to be given the document, but whether it ever arrived at its destination or not I could not say. The prisoner turned to me and said, "Do you think he will do it?", and I think I made the reply, "It all depends upon your people".

During the week the Reverend Father McMahon of Westland Row came in to hear our confessions. He came by Fire Brigade ambulance and I remember talking to two of the firemen who were wearing brass helmets at the time.

I asked one of the firemen how things were in the city, and he told me things were very bad, that the English were all over the place. I said, "We are done", and Simon Donnelly, who was near me, said, "Don't say that". That must have been late in the week. I think that is all that occurred until the Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning a lady came to the railings at Grand Canal Street Dispensary. She asked for the Commandant. I did not know who she was and I asked her her business and she said she had a message from Commandant Pearse. The Commandant was in the dispensary at the time having a wash, and when the lady was brought to the Clarence Street side, where there was a gateway belonging to the dispensary, as distinct from Bolands, the Commandant put a towel round his neck and went out to meet her. I did not hear their conversation. Somebody said she came back a second time, but I saw her on the one occasion only.

I do not know how the decision to surrender was arrived at, or how things happened. Somebody said there was a council of officers held, but I was not at the council and I do not know. I do know that the Commandant said to me, "Byrne, we are about to surrender and you will have to come out with me. You will need something that looks like a flag". Those may not have been his exact words, but they were to that effect. I tore a piece of material and it was tied on to a short piece of stick, either an umbrella stick or a walking stick. The cloth was either a piece of a sheet or a piece of a tablecloth out of Dr. Healy's house, but I think it was a sheet. We were in a room in the basement at the time.

After the Commandant told me we were going to surrender I passed some remark to him, and he said, "I know what is going to happen to me, but I will do my best for you and the men".

We had the prisoner Mackey still with us, and the Commandant told me to tell him that we were about to leave, or about to surrender, I forget which. He told me I was to give the prisoner the choice of staying in the dispensary or coming with us. Mackey elected to come with us, making the explanation that if he were to stay there and his own people were to come, they might treat him as a traitor. I remember giving him a brush to brush his clothes because he was a bit untidy and I also gave him a towel and soap to wash himself.

When we were ready to leave the dispensary we proceeded to the hallway. The barricade had been removed from the hall-door by this time. We came out the hall-door of the dispensary, down the front steps into Grand Canal Street and crossed the road into Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital. Three of us went out, the Commandant, the prisoner and myself, and I was carrying the white flag. I forget exactly who we met in the first instance, but I do remember a gentleman in British officer's uniform coming along, and the Commandant speaking to him. What the Commandant said to him I do not know, but I heard the officer say, "I heard about this but I have nothing to do with it. Come this way".

As well as I remember we were brought through a corridor and out on to the steps of a house in Lower Mount Street. I looked at the place afterwards and I believe it was a Nurses' Home in Lower Mount Street.

When we arrived on the steps we stood and the officer either waved his hand or called out, and another officer with a revolver hanging ~~in~~ his hand, came running up from the direction of Mount Street Bridge. The officer who had brought us there spoke to the second officer, who said something to the Commandant. I do not know what was said between them, but our Commandant was taken away. That left the prisoner and myself on the steps. The prisoner stepped down off the steps on to the footpath, and after the Commandant had been taken away the British officer with the revolver came back and asked the prisoner about himself. He told the officer who he was and was then taken away. Then the same officer came back and said to me, "Where are your men?", but I do not remember if I made him any reply. He brought me down along Mount Street and told me to march our men into "yon" street - meaning Grattan Street.

To the best of my recollection, there was a barricade across the top of Grattan Street at the time, and there was a space made in the side of the barricade nearest the house on the corner of Grattan Street and Lower Mount Street which was known as the Grattan Hotel at the time. I went through that space in the barricade, down Grattan Street and back into the bakery. I do not remember how I got back into the bakery, whether I got back through the dispensary or through Bolands' gate in Clarence Street, but I think I went through the dispensary.

When I got into the bakery I believe I met Captain Joe O'Connor of "A" Company. Somebody there asked me where the Commandant was and I said he was out in Mount Street. I do not remember who asked me.

I told Captain O'Connor what was to be done. The men had been withdrawn from the outposts and were all assembled in the bakery when I arrived there. We all marched out into Grattan Street where we were halted. I was still carrying the white flag. At a signal the men were ordered to ground arms. I think the signal was the waving of a handkerchief, because I do not remember a whistle being blown. I saw some of our men dig their heels into their rifles and throw them on the ground, other men tried to break their rifles off the ground. We were then marched into Mount Street with our hands up. When we arrived in Mount Street all the men were searched and their equipment was taken from them there.

I had a haversack, a belt and two pouches, and I think it was the Sergeant was going to take them from me when the officer said to him, "Leave that man his kit". Turning to me he said, "You have no arms?", and I said I had not.

After the men had been searched they were formed into fours and I was brought up to the front, still carrying the white flag. The British officer came to me and said, "We are going to Ballsbridge, you know where that is?". We then moved off. I was in front, the Sergeant was behind me, and Commandant de Valera at the head of the garrison; we proceeded in that order to the R. D. S. Grounds, Ballsbridge.

When we arrived at Ballsbridge, we all had to turn out our pockets, and cigarettes and everything were taken from us. I do not know who took the flag from me. We were put into horse stalls.

After sometime in Ballsbridge we were informed that the Commandant had been shot, and that they were shooting all the leaders as they brought them in.

After being put into the horse stalls I was sitting on the straw along with some other men when somebody said that three British officers were looking in at us. Out of curiosity I stood up and one of the officers said, "There he is". I was then beckoned out. The door was opened and when I came out one of the three officers had my white flag. He told me that some of our men had not given in, that they had no chance and that it was hopeless for them to hold out. The officers asked me if I would be able to do anything with the men and I said I would try. One of them told me to go down this road, pointing to a place which I believe is Serpentine Avenue, opposite the Show Grounds. He handed me the flag, and I went across the road and down Serpentine Avenue. I met a British Army Captain, a rather stout man, and he brought me down to a house. We were accompanied by two British soldiers, one of whom was wearing a canvas bag or pouch in which he had hand-grenades.

There was some furniture in the garden outside the house I was brought to, and an old lady was sitting in a chair in the garden. I was told to go into the house and when I hesitated to go the two soldiers were sent with me. In the house there was a landing window, from which the glass had been removed. I shouted, whistled and called out through this window, but got no reply. I came out again and told the officer that I had got no reply. He wanted me to go down to another house and I refused to go. He said, "Very well".

I came back Serpentine Avenue by myself, across the road, and into the Show Grounds. I met the three officers again and they asked me did I hear or see anything. I told them I did not. They made some reply, "Hard luck" or something like that.

A British officer asked me had we got anything to eat and I told him we had nothing except water and biscuits. He said to me, "I'll get some tea, because the same blood is in my veins as is in yours". One of the soldiers told us that this officer had paid for the tea out of his own pocket. I never heard this officer's name. Jim Grace was brought in to us in Ballsbridge. I took him into the stall where I was. He was very upset and in a very agitated state.

After spending some time in Ballsbridge we were taken to Richmond Barracks, where we spent a number of days and left on Friday. We arrived at Wakefield Jail on Saturday, 6th May. I do not know how long we were kept in Wakefield, but I know that from Wakefield we were sent to Frongoch. My number in Wakefield was 52 B.3.

From Frongoch we were brought in batches to Wandsworth Prison to appear before the Sankey Commission. Before going into the Commission we saw a solicitor named McDonnell from Manchester. His purpose was to advise us as to what attitude we should take up when we would go before the Commission. On the Commission was one Irish M.P., I think Mooney was his name but I am not sure.

During the interview by the Commission I was asked did I expect to get back, or when did I expect to get back, when I went out on Easter Sunday or Monday morning.

I gave the answer which I had been advised by Mr. McDonnell to give - that any time we went out we did not know when we would get back, that we were always prepared.

From Wandsworth we were brought back to Frongoch. I was released from Frongoch either at the end of July or early in August, 1916.

SIGNED

John Byrne

DATE

8th August 1950

WITNESS

Sean Brennan.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY-1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

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