

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 463

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 463.....

Witness

A Member of the Community of the Sisters
of Mercy,

Mater Hospital, Dublin.

Identity

Member of the nursing staff of the
Mater Hospital 1916-1917.

Subject

- (a) Hospital treatment of wounded volunteers,
1916-1917;
- (b) Hunger Strike, September 1917;
- (c) Death of Thomas Ashe, September 1917.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.16.20.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement

of a

Member of the Community of the Mater Hospital.

A short time before the Rising Tom Clarke came into the hospital with a bullet wound in his arm. He was in St. Vincent's Ward and was a patient of Mr. Denis Farnan, a brother of Dr. Bob Farnan. We never heard how he got the wound but it possibly happened during drilling of the Volunteers. Dr. D. Farnan removed the bullet. Before an operation of that kind it is usual for patients to receive the Sacraments but he refused to do so, which caused a certain amount of worry to us. I cannot remember how long he stayed here and I cannot find the entry in the Register which is compiled from the charts. It is possible that Mr. Farnan, who like his brother was a strong nationalist, thought it advisable to remove the chart, in case it might lead to trouble for Tom Clarke whom he knew to be a Fenian. The wound healed and there were no complications.

Seán McDermott was here about 1912 suffering from infantile paralysis. He got every possible treatment during the months he spent here but he was not cured fully and he left on crutches. He was in St. John's ward and everyone was impressed by his fortitude and charm of manner. I am not aware that he was here for treatment on a subsequent occasion, but he could have been without my knowledge.

On Holy Saturday or Easter Sunday 1916 Dr. Pat McKenna, who was a house physician here at the time, told me of the catastrophe that took place in Kerry on Good Friday. He came from that district himself and was interested in the news. He was very sympathetic to the cause and very kind to the

wounded who were brought in here. One example remains in my mind. He brought in a young chemist's apprentice called Archie Shortis who was in a dreadful condition. I don't think Archie was in the Rising as he was in very poor health, but his brother Paddy was and after the Rising no trace of the latter could be found and it was rumoured he was killed. Archie spent days and nights searching the city for his brother's body and his health already weak, broke down. Paddy McKenna spent days and nights at his bedside before he brought him in here for treatment. Archie improved and on the specialist's advice he went to California. He wrote frequently to the hospital for a number of years.

During Easter Week Mr. Alexander Blayney (Surgeon) was on duty in the hospital. He never left it that whole week. He was operating day and night. There was neither gas nor electricity and he had to operate by the light of candles brought from the sacristy. There was no sterilisation of instruments or dressings as there was no boiling water at hand, yet there was no case of sepsis following any of the operations. We were instructed that patients with abdominal wounds should be brought straight to the theatre without waiting to remove any clothes except the shoes and stockings.

Tuesday was the first day that any wounded were brought. Nine of these were detained and the rest were treated and discharged. One of the badly wounded, Margaret Nolan who was a fore-woman in Jacob's Factory died that day, as did also James Kelly - a schoolboy who was shot through the skull. Another schoolboy John Healy, aged 14, a member of the Fianna whose brain was hanging all over his forehead when he was brought in, died after two days. Another man, Patrick Harris, died also on Tuesday of laceration of the brain.

Another wounded man that was brought in on the Wednesday was Patrick McCrea. He was suffering from pellet wounds in the hand, back-side and leg which he told me he got in the Post office fighting. His wounds being slight, he was sent out of the G.P.O. with a despatch. He then got shelter somewhere and was brought to the hospital for treatment covered up in a load of cabbage. Almost immediately a G man called McIntyre came to the hospital. He identified McCrea and took up his position on the corridor outside the ward to keep him under observation. He did not even go out to get his meals and I was unwilling to supply him with any. One of the nuns thought it a pity not to give him something to eat and brought him to the pantry. The students made various suggestions for dealing with McIntyre, including chloroforming him. In spite of McIntyre's vigilance McCrea managed to get away safely on the 4th May. While McIntyre was in the pantry having his dinner, one of the sisters who had made all the necessary preparations beforehand, got the key leading from the Pathological Department to the street. She took a nurse, a very fine girl, called Máire O'Connor from Ballybunion, into her confidence. The latter brought McCrea along the corridor through the mortuary to the exit door, let him out and locked the door behind him. The whole thing did not take five minutes and the sister replaced the key in its lock without its having been missed. McCrea was afterwards an active Volunteer and I heard he was in the armoured car that tried to rescue Seán MacEoin from gaol.

On Wednesday the numbers of wounded increased, twenty-one being detained. Two of them were already dead when brought in and six died in the course of the day. Twenty-one wounded were detained for treatment on Thursday. Seven of them died within a week and another on the 14th May.

Eight of the nine wounded brought in on the Friday and who were detained for treatment, died in the hospital.

Only eight were detained on the Saturday. One of these was already dead and another insane. The latter was removed to the Richmond Lunatic Asylum after a few days.

Only one wounded man was detained for treatment on Sunday.

Practically all the wounded men who were brought in were Volunteers, but very few of them were in uniform. There was at least one looter brought in. He was very drunk and was found wearing a couple of suits of clothes and was in possession of many other accessories including a toy revolver which was large enough to be taken for a real one.

The next Volunteer occurrence in which the hospital was involved was the hunger-strike in September 1917. Thomas Ashe was the first who was brought and it was on the 25th September 1917. We were notified early in the day by the Mountjoy authorities - I think Dr. Cooke - that they wanted us to take a prisoner who was on hunger-strike. He was brought in an ambulance and I'll never forget the kindness of the ambulance men and the way they lifted him into the bed prepared for him in one of the small wards. That night there was no one in it but himself. The patient was quite conscious and gave the usual particulars. When asked what his occupation was, he said he was an ex-National teacher. I suggested that we should call him one of the 'Felons of our Land' and he was very pleased at that. That was about 5 o'clock and I got Dr. Pat McKenna to come and see him, - so that he could communicate with his relations in Kerry. He rang up Dr. Martin Dempsey, one of our physicians who came immediately and found that his heart was in a very

bad condition. About 10 o'clock that night a great change came over him and we knew he was dying. He had coronary thrombosis. I can't say whether he had this condition before he was forcibly fed or not. He was unconscious only for a short time before his death which took place about 10.30.

A group of young men came early the following morning ~~early~~ and one of them, Mr. Harry Boland, said he was in charge of the funeral arrangements. They were told to return at 8. 0'clock. The body was kept in the ward from which the only other patient had been removed the previous evening. Harry obtained a uniform from Maurice Collins in Parnell St. and the two of them dressed the remains in it. The inquest was held in the Pillar-room. Many of the legal lights of Dublin were present. A tricolour flag draped the head of the bed and two candles in silver candle-sticks burned at the foot.

After the inquest some other persons, including Darrell Figgis, appeared with the intention of taking over the funeral arrangements but, after consultation with Harry Boland, they were not allowed to interfere - Harry said that one bad general is better than thirty good ones.

Four Volunteers in uniform acted as a guard-of-honour beside the bed. These were relieved from time to time. The public came in an unbroken procession to view the remains.

The funeral from the Mater to the City Hall was a most solemn and impressive affair and left an indelible impression on every one who saw it. Crowds lined the streets. The remains lay in state in the City Hall and all Dublin streamed in to pay homage to the dead patriot.

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The funeral to Glasnevin was on the Sunday and the removal of the Remains to the City Hall on Thursday evening.

Two other hunger-striking patients, Eamon Barry, from Tralee, I think, and Joseph Griffy from Ennis were brought in on Saturday. These recovered.

We were raided here by the Black and Tans on various occasions. One evening when they came to the hospital they went into the reception room and were searching under the couches and in every corner for I.R.A. There was a parrot in a cage in the room, which was usually covered at night with a cloth. When it was disturbed by the light and the noise it gave a dreadful shriek and all the Black and Tans threw themselves on the floor thinking it was the signal for an attack. Everyone in the place thought it a huge joke and the Black and Tans were shamefaced.

The night Professor Carolan was killed at Fernside during a Black and Tan raid, Dan Breen and Seán Treacy were wounded and Breen was brought to the private nursing home. We knew the house was always under observation and it was felt they were safer there than in the general hospital.

On more than one occasion the Black and Tans took some of our doctors and students out in the lorries as hostages. You see we had a very bad reputation in certain quarters.

I was not here when these last incidents took place, but I heard them from the other sisters. When the 'flu epidemic broke out I was one of a number of sisters from the Mater and Jervis Street hospitals who were asked to go to St. Kevins' Hospital to help to nurse the numerous patients who were suffering from the disease and I did not come back here for some years.

Date; _____

Witness; _____