

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 532

Witness

John McDonagh,
Bearna,
Goatstown Road,
Dundrum,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member Irish Volunteers, Tipperary, 1914;
Lieut. 3rd Battalion Dublin Brigade Irish Vol's. 1914 - ;
Member of I.R.B. Dublin, 1916;
Brother of Thomas McDonagh, executed 1916.

Subject.

- (a) Dispatch from Pearse to Volunteer Leaders,
Tipperary, Holy Thursday 1916;
- (b) Jacob's Factory, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1097

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 532

STATEMENT OF MR. JOHN MacDONAGH,

Beárna, Goatstown Road, Dúndrum,

Dublin.

I first heard of the actual date of the Rising about three weeks beforehand from my brother, Tom MacDonagh, at his residence, 29 Oakley Road, Ranelagh, where I had gone to live with him and his family, at his instigation as the crisis was approaching.

I joined the Volunteers in 1914 in Tipperary town where I worked for a year as officer in the National Health Insurance. I resigned in 1914 and came to live in Dublin, when the Irish Theatre was founded. I remained a member of the Volunteers in Dublin (3rd Battalion). I switched to the 2nd Battalion in 1916, in order to be in touch with Tom and at his disposal. As the crisis approached, he was out often very late at meetings, and I often went to meet him, as his wife was uneasy as the hours passed.

While I was staying at 29 Oakley Road, there were occasional meetings in the house which Pearse, Plunkett, Diarmuid Lynch and others attended.

On one occasion, about a month before the Rising, I went with Tom to meet James Connolly in the underground lavatory at Kevin Street. This arrangement was made to defeat shadowing by detectives. They wanted to look over the street positions, in view of the proposed occupation of ~~several factories~~ Jacob's and other posts in that neighbourhood. Tom was in charge of Jacob's during the Rising.

Some time before the Rising, a parcel of about thirty rifles was brought to 29, Oakley Road. The members of C. Company, 2nd Battalion, marched out from town to Oakley Road, and the rifles were handed out to them. We marched, with Tom at our head, back to Parnell Square -

probably the Foresters' Hall - carrying the rifles. All of us who could paid £2 each for these rifles. Later, I exchanged my rifle for a revolver when I became associated with staff work.

Tom was most particular that the Volunteers should be identified as soldiers, so Volunteers were encouraged to wear ^{uniforms +} puttees, at their own expense, of course.

The occasion of the public funeral of O'Donovan Rossa on 1st August, 1915, was used by the Irish Volunteers to demonstrate their seriousness of purpose and the point of preparedness which they had reached. The military arrangements made were most elaborate, and my brother, Tom, was General Officer Commanding of all the ceremonies connected with the lying-in-state and the impressive procession through the city to Glasnevin. For weeks beforehand, his time was taken up working out the details of the demonstration, and I think I still have his original sketches and plans of the streets where the participating bodies were to assemble and mobilise.

A society to insure Irish Volunteers against loss of their livelihood on account of their activities in the Volunteer movement was started at some stage. The O'Rahilly, Dr. Conn Murphy and I were appointed as a committee to administer it, and I seem to remember that Micheál Ó Hannracháin was the official but I can't say whether he was paid for it. We used meet in O'Rahilly's house in Herbert Park occasionally but as far as I remember the project fell through, or perhaps the preparations for the Rising put an end to it. I still have a copy of the Rules of the proposed Society, which was called "An Cumann Cosanta". (Appendix A)
Sinc

About a month before the Rising, there was a report of a proposed raid on Volunteer Headquarters at No. 2 Dawson

Street. Certain men were called ^{with arms} in to defend the place in anticipation of the raid. These men came in, some with rifles hidden under their overcoats. I remember one of the men telling me that, in order to explain his absence from home to his wife, he had said he was going on "night work." I was sent to Commandant de Valera's house, off Morehampton Road, to summon him to Dawson Street. It was after midnight when I arrived and he got out of bed to open the door. I told him he was to bring his gun. He dressed and joined me in a few minutes. He said, "Something is bound to happen soon". On the way to Dawson Street, we met Captain Michael Malone, who was killed fighting in Mount Street. He was a Captain in de Valera's Company. If the raid by the British was made that night, it might have changed everything.

One afternoon a short time before the Rising, I went to Hardwicke Street, where the "Irish Theatre", founded by Edward Martyn, Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett and myself, was housed. When I got to Hardwicke Street, I noticed two detectives entering the premises. As we had some military equipment stored there, I presumed that they were going to search the place. In those days Tom and I carried revolvers. I rushed over by tram to University College to get Tom. I told him what I had seen, and he said, "I shall go there at once on the bicycle". I followed him to Hardwicke Street by tram and, when I arrived there, Tom was waiting for me in the street. The detectives had left, and the explanation for their visit was that they wanted to question the caretaker about some bicycle theft. We laughed at this humorous ending to what might have been an exciting affair.

About Tuesday, 18th April, I was told by Tom that I was to go on a mission to Tipperary but, before doing so, I would have to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Eamon Ceannt initiated me into the I.R.B. one night in Dawson Street. When he was administering the oath, he said,

jokingly, "I hope I'll be able to remember it". I never attended any meeting of the I.R.B.

My mission was to carry a written despatch to Eamon O'Dwyer near Cashel, Co. Tipperary. The message was on a piece of paper, and was signed by Pearse. The wording of the message was as follows: "The grass-seeds on order will be delivered on Sunday, the 23rd, at 7 p.m.". That is as far as my memory goes regarding the actual words.

On Holy Thursday, April 20th, I left Dublin by an early train for Cashel. On arrival there, a jarvey at the station, who had previously driven me dozens of times, greeted me with pleasure as a Government official. That may have been the reason I was sent on the mission to that particular locality. Jones, the jarvey, told me that there had been great excitement there that morning (Thursday), as a gentleman or gentlemen "came off the train at Cashel and offered any money to be driven out to Mr. McCann". He referred to Pierce McCann who afterwards died in England as a result of a prison hunger strike. I afterwards thought that this gentleman or these gentlemen might have brought some sort of countermanding order to Pierce McCann, not from Pearse, of course. It might have been a contradictory order to the one I was bringing to Eamon O'Dwyer. The jarvey remarked to me: "Now, Mr. Mac, as soon as I get back, th'ould Sergeant will be up to know who you were and where I drove you. But sure you're one of themselves!" The jarvey was himself an old British army pensioner, so I let it go at that.

I told Jones to drive me to Mr. Ned Dwyer, near Goold's Cross, and he said: "Yes, I know him". He drove me to the area and to a publichouse kept by a Ned Dwyer. I went in and met the Ned Dwyer of the publichouse. He took me upstairs when I told him that I wanted to talk privately to him. I asked him was he expecting any message from

Dublin. After a pause he replied: "Oh! It must be the other Ned Dwyer you want". He then directed me to the house of Eamon O'Dwyer.

When I arrived at Eamon O'Dwyer's house, his mother, naturally nervous due to the rumours of the time, informed me that she did not know where he was. Someone else suggested that Con Deere of Goold's Cross might be able to help me to find him. I went into the Deere shop and asked Mrs. Deere. She was very abrupt with me and seemed not to want to give me any information. I don't remember how I eventually discovered that I might locate Eamon O'Dwyer in a farmhouse three miles beyond Tipperary town.

I started for Tipperary town by train and drove to the farmhouse indicated where, out in a field, I found Eamon O'Dwyer. When I showed him the message, he was very agitated and said something to this effect: "I thought it was called off" or "put off". "Anyway", he said, "there's an excursion up to Dublin on Easter Monday and I'll go up to see them". I said something like, "It might be all over on Monday". He then said: "I may be able to go tomorrow". It was clear that my message put him naturally into a state of confusion. I now realise that, when he said "I thought it was called off", he must have heard something of the message such as I presumed was sent to Pierce McCann. I left Eamon O'Dwyer and returned to Tipperary.

I took the midnight train from Tipperary town and was seen off at the station by a creamery manager, named O'Callaghan, whom I knew. He was very curious about my visit, although he was not a Volunteer. He asked me was my business connected with the secret rumours that were going around and had I come down about that. When I protested that I was down on Government business, he openly scoffed at the idea, knowing of my brother's prominence in the Volunteers.

The train left Tipperary town at midnight on Thursday, April 20th. I selected an unlighted third-class carriage, away from some lighted carriages with singing British soldiers. I presumed the carriage was empty until the train, leaving the station, passed a platform lamp and a woman's voice in the corner said, "Hello, Jack!". It was Marie Perolz. She was also a despatch carrier and was returning from her mission. Other despatch carriers joined the train on the journey up to Dublin, among whom, I think, was Gearoid O'Sullivan.

We reached Dublin at about half-past three on Friday morning, April 21st. I walked along the Quays with Marie Perolz as far as Grattan Bridge, where we parted. I went to the Clarence Hotel, and was admitted by the night porter. When I went to sign the hotel register, I had trouble with the pen, and the night porter remarked: "You were here last night too, sir!". Turning back the hotel register for the previous night, I saw my brother's name, "Thomas MacDonagh". I then signed his name and went to bed.

On Good Friday, April 21st, after breakfast I went to Volunteer Headquarters at Dawson Street, where there was much excitement. I don't remember who I saw there, or whether I stayed any length of time there. I don't remember when I saw Tom on Good Friday.

The next thing I remember was Saturday evening, April 22nd, at the house in Oakley Road, when Tom and I were about to leave in a taxi for Meldon's of Lower Gardiner Street, where we had planned to spend Saturday night. Before leaving Oakley Road, a message was brought to Tom asking him to call to Dr. Seumas O'Kelly's house, 53, Rathgar Road. Grace Gifford, who was to stay with Tom's wife, her sister, was also at Oakley Road. When we left Oakley Road, Grace

Gifford came with us in the taxi-cab. We stopped at Rathgar Road and Tom went into Seumas O'Kelly's house. Grace Gifford, I think, left the taxi at this point. Tom came out almost immediately, rather agitated. He said that MacNeill greeted him with, "We will be very glad to have you in consultation", or words to that effect. Tom told me that he replied, as he looked around the table, "I am sorry, but there is nobody here I can consult with". Then we drove to Meldon's in Lower Gardiner Street. As the cab drew up at the house, a messenger was waiting and called Tom, who told me, "I have to go to a meeting".

I went into Meldon's. Tom and John Meldon, both Volunteer officers, were there. A tailoring business was carried on by Tom Meldon on the street floor, and the three of us waited in that darkened room for Tom to come back. After some hours, I suggested to the Meldon's, in view of the Rising on the following day, Sunday, that they had better go to bed. I remained alone in the room and opened the street-door for Tom when he finally came after long hours. We slept there that night. He said the rising had been postponed. On a previous occasion, referring to Eoin McNeill, he said that McNeill would leave their meeting agreeing to their policy and, at the next meeting, would have changed his mind, due, as he said, to some outside influence.

The Military Council have been blamed for not informing Eoin McNeill, who was Chief of Staff of the Volunteers, of their plans for a Rising. They had reason to fear, however, that he was opposed to such extreme measures, unless the Volunteers were first attacked by the British. They were men exalted by their mission to strike once more with arms, as had been done in every generation against the British oppressor, and this purpose was so all-embracing that it completely dominated their lives, and no consideration, such

as family or strict adherence to any formal procedure, could be allowed to interfere with their accepted destiny, to which they gladly dedicated their lives. It was not a question of military success or failure, though there is always a hope for brave men. Armed protest would also revive the national spirit and demonstrate to the world that Ireland, described by the British Prime Minister as the "one bright spot" in the war outlook, 1914-1918, because of Irishmen joining the British army through the instrumentality of the Irish Members of Parliament, still preserved her national spirit to resist the invader.

Next day (Easter Sunday), we went early to Liberty Hall where there was a great number of people and a lot of excitement. I remember Madame Markievicz was prominent in her uniform and revolver. Later, Tom mentioned that he felt sorry for her when she insisted on passing the sentry and entering the room where the leaders were in close conference; she was sternly ordered out by Connolly. Bulmer Hobson had been detained by Volunteers to prevent further interference with plans, and the lady who later became his wife was in great distress about him. Everybody denied knowledge of his whereabouts. Diarmuid Lynch put his finger to his lips, behind her back, when she came to ask me. He was released at once when the Rising began.

On Sunday afternoon, Tom and I, with Donagh his son, drove out to Woodtown House, Rathfarnham, where Eoin McNeill was staying with his brother, James. There we found Seán Fitzgibbon and Seumas O'Connor, who were members of the Volunteer Executive, and, of course, John McNeill. I got the impression that Tom went there to see how the land lay. Referring to Tom's son who was sparring with me, Seumas O'Connor said, jokingly, "He is pugnacious like his father". I cannot recall details of our conversation as to Tom's talk

with the others when we departed.

Dr. Vincent O'Brien (the musician associated with Edward Martyn, founder of the Palestrina Choir in Pro-Cathedral, Dublin) in later years told me that Tom called on Edward Martyn in No. 4 South Leinster Street on Easter Sunday evening and had the usual talks ~~about the ~~Irish~~ ~~theatre~~~~, as if nothing unusual was impending.

cut
JMD

Very early on Easter Sunday morning, Tom asked me to go out to his house at 29 Oakley Road to recover a revolver which he had left under the boards in a bedroom.

I have no idea whether or not Tom was present at a meeting in North Frederick Street on Sunday, from which Pearse and MacDermott sent out messages to the country Volunteer leaders to carry out their orders on Easter Monday.

Tom and I slept at Meldon's in Lower Gardiner Street again on Easter Sunday night.

On Easter Monday morning we went to Liberty Hall. One incident I remember. Some Volunteer in the first-floor room looking out on the street, where there was great excitement, and recognising William O'Brien of the Labour Party and friend of Connolly, said to me, "You can always rely on Bill O'Brien!".

We were to mobilise on the west side of Stephen's Green and to march from there to Jacobs at twelve noon. Mrs. Blathnaid Salkeld had placed a room on the first floor of 130 Stephen's Green at Tom's disposal as a temporary headquarters, where messages were coming and going all the time.

At twelve exactly, we set out to take up position in Jacobs biscuit factory in Peter Street. Tom asked me to

march in front with him and, on the other side of him, marched an alert man, well dressed in a blue suit, carrying a cane and smoking a cigar. I whispered to Tom, asking who he was, and he told me, "That is Major John McBride". We were followed by a lot of well-known G-men (detectives). Prominent among them was Hoey, who was afterwards shot in the street during the Black and Tan period. As we marched through Cuffe Street and Mercer Street, the separation women of the Irish soldiers in the British Army became hysterical in their abuse of us. The mildest of their remarks was, "Go out and fight the Germans!". There was some difficulty about the keys which were to admit us to the factory, so a window, about six feet from the ground, had to be broken, through which we climbed in. One Volunteer, in scrambling through the window, let off his shotgun and bored a large hole in the ceiling. John McBride, who had already entered and was assisting others from above, picked some of the powder from his moustache and casually warned the boys to be more careful.

McBride's influence was useful in steadying our men. One day, an excited Volunteer, Dick Cotter, entered the headquarters room, where I was sitting with McBride, and announced that thousands of British troops were advancing up the street. McBride coolly replied, "That's alright!". Thinking McBride did not realise the importance of his message, Cotter persisted. McBride again said, "That's alright", and, turning to me as if continuing our conversation said, "So I played my king and won the game". Dick Cotter went away, satisfied that there was nothing to be alarmed about.

As we were entering the building, a very officious D.M.P. man refused to leave the street when ordered by Tom who warned him that he would be shot if he persisted. I

whispered to Tom, advising patience, but he answered that it might be necessary to shoot some of these policemen and detectives to show our own men that we were at war. We had six police prisoners during the week, and they were set free on Sunday, the 30th April. One of them, a Sergeant, thanked me profusely for saving his life and said he would never forget it.

We had men of all ages with us, and the girls of the Cumann na mBan remained until the last. They helped with the cooking, and everyone of them was prepared to give her life. Máire Ní Shiubhlaigh was in charge of them. I noticed an old man with spectacles on the Friday of the week and asked him when he had come in. He had his rifle propped up on a flour sack on the barricades. "I am here from the start", he answered. I asked him where he lived and had he a family. He said he had a family, adding, "I was never able to do much for them but isn't this the grandest thing I ever could do for them!".

The Capuchin priests heard Confessions of the men during the week. I remember McBride telling me what satisfaction he derived from Confession, as he had been away from the Sacraments for some years. "Just kept putting it off", he explained.

Reports came in that the Volunteers in Lower Mount Street were badly pressed, and Tom sent out a small column on bicycles to draw off the attack in the Mount Street area. Returning along the south side of Stephens Green, they were fired on from the roof of the Shelbourne Hotel, and one Volunteer was badly hit. His comrades succeeded in carrying him back. I had taken the names of the column before they went out, and was checking them on their return. I remember the anxiety of the wounded Volunteer to get his name and address in the list. His name was O'Grady. Tom sent across

*under
Donal O'Reardon
[initials]*

the street to the Adelaide Hospital for a doctor. The Volunteers were told that no doctor would come but any casualty sent over would be looked after. Tom sent them back to bring a doctor over by force. One did come, in a very bad temper, and announced that there was little hope for O'Grady. He assured us that he would get every attention in the hospital, so poor O'Grady was brought across and died almost immediately.

Little fighting took place in our area. The congestion of the streets and the crowded population made an attack on our position hazardous. There were rumours that the people had been ordered to leave their houses preparatory to attack by incendiary shells, and late in the week machine guns played on the building and hopped on the glass roof of the headquarters room but did no damage.

We had men from every Battalion who had left town when the mobilisation was called off on Sunday, and then returned and joined up wherever they could. One young Derryman was clamouring to get in but was not known to any of our men. He said he had a rifle in his lodgings, and it was arranged that, if he returned with his rifle, he would be admitted to the garrison. This he did and remained throughout the week.

To show how the countermanding order had disorganised the minds of Volunteers, Tom McDonagh sent for Michael Hayes, who was at that time lecturer in French at the University, and a Captain Byrne. Both of these men, though disturbed by scruples, came and remained all the week. Just before the surrender, Tom instructed me to tell them they could leave, and they did.

I had little opportunity of talking privately to Tom during the week, as our time was taken up with attending to the details of preparation for defence, the rationing of the

garrison, etc.

He got a few messages to and from his wife, whose sister, Nellie Gifford, came in during the week and again courageously left with messages to commandants in other areas.

We could see, towards the end of the week, the glare in the sky from the fires which were raging in O'Connell Street. This heartened us, for it showed the magnitude of the rising, which we knew would change the whole position of Ireland.

A Capuchin priest, Fr. Aloysius, came in on Sunday with Pearse's order to all the commandants to surrender, to save the lives of their followers. Tom, recognising that an order from Pearse, then a prisoner, was not binding, went with the priest, under a flag of truce, to confer with Pearse and the others.

A priest, Fr. Monahan, from the neighbouring parish came in, in the meantime, before we marched out and tried to get the men to leave and save their lives. He meant well, of course, but some of us stayed the few who thought of leaving, until Tom arrived back on the scene and the orderly evacuation was carried out.

When Tom came back, he called all his officers together and told them the position. He counselled surrender, as ordered by Pearse, though he knew well it meant death for himself. Some of the officers - the late Patrick Sweeney was one, I remember - were for making a last stand, but finally it was agreed that we would evacuate the building on Sunday and march, under our own officers and in arms, to St. Patrick's Park, where we would surrender to the British.

I remember Major John McBride saying to me that the

next time he fought, he would fight in the open and not be caught like a rat in a trap. He never lost his buoyant spirits, however, and joked about the wonderful dinner of lamb which we had projected for that Sunday.

On arrival at St. Patrick's Park, we saw Eamon Ceannt, a prisoner, and, beside him, William Cosgrave, later President of the Free State (1922-1932), and Philip Cosgrave. We were ordered to place our arms and everything in our possession before us on the ground. McBride laid down his revolver, which had been presented to him as a memento of his services as Major in the Boer War on the side of the Boers. A little Irish Sergeant of the British took up the revolver and read McBride's name on it. At once, he went to his officer and reported his great "find". I overheard the talk.

"Major McBride, sir - he fought in the Boer war."

"With us or against us?", asked the officer.

"Against us", replied the slave. The officer came over and examined the revolver. He began to question McBride but desisted, seeing the attitude of his prisoner. The little Sergeant was disappointed at the tame result of his discovery.

Finally, we were all lined up and began the long march to Richmond barracks in Inchicore. Again, as we passed, the British soldiers' separation women screamed and swore at us, imagining that we had perhaps stopped the money they were getting on account of their men fighting in France. On this long march over stony streets, I was struck by the sight of a wife keeping step with her husband, Seumas Murphy, both prisoners. I knew both of them, and knew they had left their young children at home.

On the barrack square we were halted, and at once were

surrounded by another contingent of soldiers' wives, who picturesquely ballyragged us. One "lady" called us "grocers' curates", meaning grocers' assistants.

"They're not even grocers' curates", screamed another.

We were all rushed into a huge room, where we passed Sunday night. Tom had a little box of concentrated food tabloids, which he distributed among those about him. The Volunteers, who had put up such a magnificent stand in the Boland's Mills area, came in later, led by Eamon de Valera, who towered above his men and got a cheer from us.

One man, Dick Davys, who looked very important in his uniform, was asked by the famous detective, Johnny Barton (in later years shot in the streets), "Don't I know you?"

"I know you", roared back the Volunteer, which answer got him put among the leaders and a long sentence as well.

I escaped, though Pearse's brother, Willie, was executed. On my way out, I was stopped by a detective and brought before Quinn, a Superintendent of the Police.

"This is MacDonagh's brother." The Superintendent made little of this discovery of his subordinate, and I passed through. At the door, I turned and saw Tom for the last time. He waved his hand to me, in the old cheery manner.

Re Tom's speech at his courtmartial before his execution, I have, from the beginning, believed that this is genuine, being so characteristic of him, both in feeling and language. It was, I believe, printed by the Manico Printing Works in Temple Bar, where he and I had gone often, in connection with the "Irish Review" (Mr. Latchford was foreman) which was printed there. The British immediately attempted to stop circulation of the speech, raided the printing offices and gave out that it was not genuine. The explanation given

for the reporting of the speech was that an officer or functionary, who was present at the courtmartial, was a journalist and took it down in shorthand. He presumably was sympathetic and got it into the hands of someone who had it printed and published at once. Naturally, publication of the speech was galling to the British, for it helped to defeat the purpose of the hurried executions, and also showed that there were "rebel" sympathisers in their own camp. Hence the raid on the printers, the seizure of copies and the proclaiming that the speech was not genuine.

On the square, I saw Joseph Plunkett being led to the doctor's office. He looked fearfully ill, though he made a picturesque figure in his uniform and sword.

On Wednesday, we were lined up again on the Barrack square, after an awful night without food or anything like sufficient lavatory accommodation. Each man was served with a ration of bully-beef, and we started our march through the city to the North Wall, to take the boat for England. We sang national songs until orders came that any man singing would be shot. In the temper our guards were in just then, we knew they would not hesitate to carry out their threat. We were amazed at the sight of O'Connell Street, smoking ruins and one half of the street practically demolished.

On the boat, we were packed like cattle, and a drunken British officer called us all sort of traitors and dirty dogs.

"And I am an Irishman!", he announced. At this, we jeered, which brought him somewhat to his senses. "Why didn't you wait till the war was over, and we'd all be with you!", he shouted. Finally, he wept and passed round cigarettes.

Lying on top of each other, we slept on the boat, and

again in the train, not knowing or caring where we were brought. We were imprisoned in Knutsford jail, but did not know where we were for weeks later. After some time we were transferred to Frongoch, and I was released in August, 1916.

SIGNED

John MacDonagh

DATE:

June 11th 1951

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 532

WITNESS:

John Crossin