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STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Commandant Thomas F. Byrne,
69 Old Cabra Road,
Dublin.

Identity.

Captain in Irish Volunteers pre-1916;
Commandant 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade I.R.A.

Subject.

(a) The Boer War;

(b) His national activities 1913-1921.

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Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY COMMANDANT THOMAS F. BYRNE

69 Old Cabra Road, Dublin.

I was born in Carrickmacross in 1877. In 1882, when I was five years old, my family moved to Dublin. In 1896, when I was 19 years of age, I went to Johannesburg in South Africa. This was 10 months after the Jameson Raid. Johannesburg at this time was practically an English city. The country around this town for an area of thirty miles on each side is studded with mines. The people working these mines were practically all British. There were very few Irish people there. Curiously enough, the only Irish organisation in Johannesburg when I was there was a branch of the Irish National Foresters. Sean McBride belonged to this Branch and I also became a member. McBride was the only outstanding Irishman in the Transvaal at this time.

After the fiasco of the Jameson Raid, the British made demands on the Boer Government regarding citizenship and complaining that they were not getting the franchise. At that time the British population in the Transvaal was so large that if they had the vote they would be in a position to outvote the Boer residents and take over the Government. The Boers agreed to a seven years franchise. The British had not much interest in the vote, as their principal aim was to make money as quickly as possible and get out of the country. They were not genuine settlers. The British also wanted the Oath of Allegiance changed so as to make them citizens of each country. Those British demands were

not genuine grievances and were only excuses for picking a quarrel.

In the Cape Colony the British had established an organisation known as the South African League. They extended this into the Transvaal where they could formulate grievances against the Boer Government. It was a case of telegrams going from the Boer Government to the British Government every other day - demands and refusals.

When the Boers saw that war was inevitable they bought thirty thousand Mauser rifles from Germany, batteries of artillery from France, and Long Toms from France, also some Krupp guns from Germany. They also sent some men for training to the Cruesot Armament Works in France. The thirty thousand rifles were shipped to Capetown, but the British Government in the Cape Colony refused to allow them to be landed there. A ship carrying Boer rifles was diverted to Portuguese territory on the east coast - to the port of Lourence Marques in Delagoa Bay. The Portuguese practically lived on the duties paid on goods, mining machinery and so forth, going into the Transvaal and from the earnings of the railway running into the Transvaal. At this time the Portuguese were very much under the heel of the British financially, and at first they demurred about allowing the equipment to be landed at Lourence Marques. The Boer Government warned the Portuguese that they would close down the railway if they did not let the arms in. This would spell ruin for the Portuguese, so they gave in. The thirty thousand rifles, several batteries of cannon and Krupp guns were landed at Lourence Marques and transferred to the Transvaal.

In the meantime Britain was mobilising in England and elsewhere and the seas were carrying many troop ships going towards Capetown. The final answer that the Boer

Government gave was : "We will regard the sending out of more troops as a declaration of war". The British Government gave no answer to this but continued to send out troops and the Boers nominally delcared war. This led to a state of war between the Transval and the British Government.

One day in Johannesburg I met Dam O'Hare, a Belfast man, and Richard McDonagh from Listowel, Co. Kerry, and the three of us discussed the possibilities of war. Dan O'Hare suggested that, in the event of war, we should have an Irish contingent with the Boer army, to which McDonagh and I agreed. The question then was how to get in touch with all those who were liable to have the same opinions as ourselves, and it was decided that one or two of us should interview John McBride on the Langaatee mine. McBride, of course, agreed. A Mr. Mitchell from Galway, who had a cleaning and pressing works in Johannesburg, agreed to let us have the use of his place for meetings. We held some meetings there on Sundays when the men would have come in from the mines. This was about two months before the war started, and the attendance at the meetings was getting better every Sunday.

It was suggested at one of the meetings that two organisers shoubd be appointed to go out through the mining districts, which extended about thirty miles each side of Johannesburg. Each mine had huts for the men who were working there. McDonagh and I were selected to do the organising. It was also suggested at the meeting - quite rightly - that we should do this organising in secret, so that in the event of there being no war, we would not be known or victimised with regard to work.

McDonagh and I spent the weekdays going from one mine to another, interviewing Irishmen, whose names had been given to us, or whom we happened to know. On Saturdays we returned to Johannesburg to attend the meetings on the following Sunday mornings. This organising went on for about six weeks.

I was appointed also, with one other, to interview the Boer Commissioner in Johannesburg and explain to him about our projected action. The Commissioner's name was Thomas Menton. The jail and fort in Johannesburg were situated on a hill outside and called Mentonville. We knew that Menton's real name was Madden, that he had deserted from the British Army in the War of 1881 at Majuba Hill, had come into the Transval, had married a Boer wife and had changed his name to Menton. We told Menton our plans and objects, and he agreed under secrecy.

About a fortnight before war was declared, the organising ceased on the mines, although we still met. Then we got wor to mobilise. At this time the Johannesburg newspapers, which were all pro-British, had got wise to us and were making all kinds of 'dirty digs' against us.

Before mobilising we started to fix up the officer ranks. It was suggested that an American in Pretoria, named Colonel Blake, who had military experience, would be suitable to lead us. He was an officer in the 6th United States Cavalry and a graduate of Westpoint. So we sent for him, as we wanted to have a look at him. He came down from Pretoria to our meeting. We elected Blake as our Colonel, and John McBride as Major. There were a lot of other ranks elected, but they were all wiped out sometime after the fighting started. Those ranks were not necessary as we were now organised on a Commando basis.

As every man was mounted, there was no such thing as drilling. We marched to Park Station, Johannesburg, where we were mobilised. We entrained for the Transvaal and Natal border. On our arrival at a town on the Transvaal side (Volksrust) we were given horses. Most of us had no previous riding experience. The next fortnight was spent learning to ride, and this created a great deal of fun as well as painful memories. We were supplied with Martini rifles, which were only single shot weapons, as there were not enough Mausers to go round.

On the 10th or 11th October 1899, war was declared and we entered British territory. We rode on without opposition to a town called Newcastle in Natal, and stayed there for the night. Next day we continued on, and we had our first brush with the enemy. Two hundred Dublin Fusiliers, Mounted Infantry and 18th Hussars were captured. We also got some of their horses and a heliograph. We continued on and the British retreated down to the Dundee-Glencoe Junction, where there was a lot of Scotch settlers, and on to Ladysmith. We continued on and encamped on the north side of Ladysmith, where the Boers arranged a temporary railway station. The Irish contingent was about a hundred strong. We had not been there two days when the British came out from Ladysmith and a terrific fight ensued. We lost three killed and ten wounded. Colonel Blake was wounded here. McBride was now in command of the Irish contingent. He had no previous military experience. We had ten men in the Irish contingent who had some experience in the British army. After this engagement, Ladysmith was completely invested and surrounded. We became great friends with the Boer Artillery as, when they ran short of ammunition our boys carried the shells up the hill, and where they went we went. We always guarded the Boer guns at night.

A few attacks were made at night

to try to silence these guns, which were repulsed.

During the siege of Ladysmith, ten Irishmen arrived from Ireland via France and Delgoa Bay to join us at Ladysmith.

We were not long in the field until we got Lee Metford English service rifles and dum-dum ammunition, captured at the town of Dundee, also food stores, and I personally had a Lee Metford two or three days after the war had started.

The Inghinidhí na hÉireann sent us out from Ireland a beautiful silk-poplin flag, which we carried as the flag of our Brigade. It is now preserved in the Museum in Dublin.

At this time General Buller was in command of a big army, which was increasing every day by the arrival of troops from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India and elsewhere. Even from the Life Guards in London, who were never supposed to leave the Palace, those under a certain weight had to go. In his endeavours to relieve General White, the Commander in Ladysmith, General Buller was repulsed many a time, particularly in one big battle, called the Battle of Colenso, where three or four Irish Regiments of the British Army were decimated. So much were these Regiments decimated that Queen Victoria, who had not been in Ireland for forty years, was sent over by the British Government on a recruiting campaign.

Whenever there was a big push on by Buller to relieve Ladysmith, the Boer Commands, were required to send half the strength of each Commando south of Ladysmith to hold back Buller, notably at the Battle of Colenso. At that battle,

the Boers bluffed the British by letting them observe smoke issuing from certain positions on the hillside, and odd corners of tents erected here and there, while the Boers were really in a position in little dried-up streams half a mile in advance of them. The British, believing the hillside to be occupied, sent up two batteries of artillery to shell the hill, but were met with rifle fire from the concealed Boer positions, and most of the artillerymen and horses were killed immediately. Buller, who was in charge of the British, asked for Volunteers to go to save the guns, in which attempt Lord Roberts' only son was killed by Boer rifle fire. The Boers charged on horseback with rifles, and Major McBride and the Irish contingent rode with them. Patrick Fahy of Clare, and Pat Richardson, an Australian of Irish blood, were killed in the charge. McBride brought back to Ireland a souvenir of this fight. It is a portion of a gunsight, and it is held in Ireland at the present moment.

At Spionkop the Boers withdrew their outposts and allowed the British to occupy the ground. At dawn they attacked the British in those positions and decimated them.

By this time, the garrison and inhabitants of Ladysmith were in dire straits and were on quarter-rations. They had to be relieved at all costs, or else they would be compelled to surrender, The Boers realised that there would be a big battle in the attempt to relieve Ladysmith. Again, half of the besieging forces were detailed to proceed southwards of Ladysmith to meet the British relief column. I was one of the party of Irish who went on this contingent, not having been on the Colenso one.

What was known as the key to Ladysmith was at a place called Pietershill. For three days and nights, they brought

immense artillery fire on this hill, and the Boer guns were now out of ammunition. The Boers finally retired from the hill and were streaming in all directions, east, west and north of Ladysmith. Ladysmith was relieved at last. The Irish contingent retired across the Klip river, and we waited there with the Boer artillery, in order to escort a Long Tom, which was up on a high hill called Umbuwlwana. The rain had come down in torrents, and the lightning was terrific, but it lit the way for us. We waited there till three o'clock in the morning. The gun had not been got off the hill. It was decided then to retire. We had proceeded about fifty yards when we met General Botha with a party of forty Boers. He asked us would we not go back, save the Long Tom and several 18 pounders. We immediately turned round and went with him. After some time the Long Tom arrived, and we escorted it north of Ladysmith. It was only by means of the vivid lightning flashes that we could see our way on the road around Ladysmith. If the British garrison in Ladysmith had made a sortie, they could have easily captured our small party. Despite the terrific weather and the flooding, we succeeded in getting everything back safely, with the exception of one of our own wagons which we had to leave in a stream.

(While south of Ladysmith, the British had started using a new shell, called Lyddite, which was the forerunner of poison gas. If a shell burst near a man without killing him, his face became yellow from the fumes and he fell asleep).

It was at this time that I met Mr. Lynch, afterwards M.P. for Galway. He was Australian-born and a graduate of Melbourne University. He had come out to Africa as a war correspondent for "Collier's Weekly" an American publication,

and the "Figaro" of Paris. A couple of our men, who had personal grievances with McBride, left the Irish Brigade and prevailed on Lynch to form a second Irish Brigade, telling him that, if he did so, all the men of the 1st Brigade would go over to him. Colonel Blake was our Commander and he was a most lovable character. Lynch did start a second Brigade but only a few went over. He had collected a few others from around Johannesburg and Pretoria, who either had to leave the country at that time or go down to the front. He was with his party when I met him. The party consisted of thirty or forty of a cosmopolitan bunch.

When we retreated from north of Ladysmith we were transferred to a place called Help-Ma-Kar Pass in Zulu Land. After a short while there, we were transferred to the Orange Free State. We had heard the sad news of the surrender of Cronje, which left no army to oppose the British in that State. We rode from Help-Ma-Kar Pass into Dundee and entrained, with our horses, for Johannesburg, where we met fifty of the Irish-American Ambulance Corps, who, of course, were really sent out to fight, the ambulance being only a fake. They had come down from Pretoria and we met them at the station in Johannesburg, where we all entrained together for the Orange Free State. It meant that we had forty more men. We got off at a station forty or fifty miles north of Bloomfontein, which at this time had been captured by Lord Roberts. We were in the thick of the fight early on the following morning, as Lord Roberts had rested his troops and was on the move again. We had fighting that day, and next day, retreating all the time.

We arrived at a place called Kronstadt, which the

Boers had made their second capital after losing Bloomfontein. We were told that Kronstadt was to be defended but they decided to leave it. We retreated to another town, called Heilbron, which was made the third capital. Here, for the first time, I saw the famous Boer General, De Wet.

About this time, Lord Kitchener had issued a proclamation declaring that, if the Boers did not surrender within a certain time, they would be treated as rebels. He had ordered the destruction of all the Boer farmhouses, seized all their cattle and taken the women and children into a concentration camp near Bloomfontein. There is a monument erected by the Boers near Bloomfontein to twenty-eight thousand women and children who died inside of two years in the concentration camp.

In retreating through the Orange Free State, a half dozen of our men, who were miners, were put on a special dynamite train. Their job was demolitions all along the way, blowing up all the bridges, culverts, railway stations and everything. All the rest of us assisted with iron bars, boring holes, etc. We, with a few Boer artillerymen, were always the last at crossing rivers. The Boer artillery would then open up fire on the advancing British cavalry to hold them back until all our commissariat was across the river. Unfortunately, at this time, horses had become scarce with the Boers and, in crossing the Sand River, I saw one of our Long Toms drawn by oxen. When all the remnants of the Boer Army had gone, we did our work of destruction on the bridges. We always left a notice "With the compliments of the Irish Brigade", which was read by the British fifteen minutes afterwards. This demolition work delayed the British advance. Also, in order to starve the

pursuing cavalry horses, we would light a match and put it to the grass. It was a most marvellous sight to see the whole country burning up. British statistics showed that the average life of their horses during the war was six weeks. I suppose this was really the forerunner of the scorched EARTH policy in modern warfare.

We retreated, closely pursued all the time by the British cavalry, on to Johannesburg, where we spent one night. The British were in town the following morning, and we were ordered to Pretoria, 36 miles up. Five or six of us, who were staying in the outskirts of Johannesburg, decided that before we started off for Pretoria, we would have one last look at the town. We were told that the British were already in the city. As we were passing a convent at Jeppestown, some nuns at the gate invited us to come in and have a cup of tea, and one of our party, Micky Dalton, accepted. He was an Irish-American. The cannonade was going on all around and when he was finished, it was too late for him to get away. The four or five of us continued on until we came to a store run by a Jew. We commandeered a rifle from him for one of our party, Pat Quinn of Co. Down.

When we arrived at Pretoria, such a scene of confusion I never came across in my life. The Boer Government had spent millions of pounds fortifying Pretoria and we thought it would be defended to the last. After we had been there a few hours, word came that the town was not to be defended and that everybody was to get out. We were all downhearted and surprised, but the wisdom of this decision was plainly evident to us afterwards. The British were allowed to have the towns and cities, while the Boers held the country. It left us without any base, as the towns were all in the

hands of the British. The Boers became short of horses and clothes, so much so, that in the taking of prisoners they had to take a certain amount of their wearing apparel.

After leaving Pretoria, we took to the country and kept together as much as we could. A big number of our men were dismounted at this time, as there were no horses. Shortly after leaving Pretoria, I lost my horse. We then had to keep close to the railway. A couple of our waggons were driven by Kafirs. We were retreating on foot to the eastern portion of the Transval into the mountainous districts. We had an engagement at Belfast station, near Dahlmanutha, which raged all day.

Still retreating, we arrived at a small station called Maschadorp. Here arrived five hundred prisoners of the Irish Imperial Yeomanry who had been captured by De Wet. I recognised a few of them, but I did not go near them. They were all Volunteers who had come out from Ireland. They had been recruited almost exclusively from the loyalist elements in Ireland and were mostly North of Ireland men. On arriving in Capetown they had entrained for a place called Lindley in the Orange Free State. They detrained at Lindley Station and had only got a few miles away when they were attacked by De Wet who was lying in wait for them. Sir John Power of Dublin whiskey fame, who was with them, was killed. Lord Langford was wounded and about twenty more killed and wounded. Immediately the white flag went up and that was all the service they saw. I often afterwards had a good laugh when I read in Irish papers of that time about the wonderful service this unit rendered in the Boer War to her Majesty, the Queen.

We were proceeding towards the Pretoria-Delagoa Bay line in the mountains, still followed by the British. We put up a fight here and there and lost two more men. We continued to retreat towards the Portuguese border. There were some eight hundred or a thousand Boers and other nationalities who had no horses. Coming towards the border we burned up all the rolling stock on the line there and smashed up all our rifles and equipment. We crossed the border and surrendered to the Portuguese, who took us into the town of Lourenco Marques and made us prisoners. The British Consul in Delagoa Bay got the Portuguese to transfer us to an old ship in the Bay. After a few weeks' semi-starvation on board the vessel, we were given the option of remaining prisoners or of going to Europe or any country we wished, until the war would be over. We elected to sail for Europe and America.

In the meantime, about a dozen of our men, who still retained horses, had stayed in the country with Colonel Blake and were there until the very end of the war, while McBride and the rest of us were prisoners on the ship. The Boer prisoners elected to remain. There were some Frenchmen and they were very pleased to get back to their own country. I elected to go to America.

We sailed on an Austrian Lloyd vessel, the "Styri", from Delagoa Bay to Trieste, which was then in Austria. We spent a week in Trieste and travelled overland to Hamburg, Germany. We sailed for America from there on a ship, called the "Furst Bismarck". Our passage had been paid by the Boer Government agents in Lourenco Marques and we had been given money and clothes.

On our arrival in New York, we were received by the Irish Societies and John Devoy came on board. I suppose

there were about fifty or sixty of us, including an odd few Irish-Americans. We were received by the Clan na Gael and were given the option of going to any of the mining camps. They would send on word to the Irish societies in those places to receive us. The majority of us went to the mining camps in the West. We worked in Montana, Nevada, Colorado, California and other places for eleven or twelve years. Most of them died there.

While in America, I was a member of the Clan na Gael. Whatever mining camp I was in, there was always a Branch of the Clan na Gael there. Another Irish society was the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

I had no actual contact with the movement in Ireland until I returned there late in 1913. McBride was then in Ireland. I returned to Ireland on a visit, but I elected to stay because the Volunteer movement had practically started.

I was at the first meeting to form the Volunteers in the Rotunda. When they started to form Companies and Battalions, I became a member of "B" Company, 1st Battalion. I took part in the Howth gun-running and in the Kilcoole gun-running.

About 1915(?) I was on one very interesting raid for arms. The Redmond element of the Volunteers had purchased a hundred rifles. These were service pattern single shot weapons. Larry Kettle, who was on the Volunteer Executive at the time, did everything in his power to have these rifles, which were detained at the Midland Great Western store at the North Wall, released. In the ordinary way, if he had been able to obtain their release, we would not have interfered but it seemed that

there was no hope of his getting a release order for them. We therefore determined that we would release them to ourselves. I was detailed with a party of I.R.B. men to raid the place. We did so and secured all the arms, which were in cases consigned to "John Redmond, President of the National Volunteers, Dublin". This label was superinscribed in blue pencil with the word, "Detained". We had lorries to take away the cases of rifles, and they were safely disposed of in the city. I remember one case was brought to a house at Glasnevin. I called there every day and took away a few rifles each time. When a raid was made on the house, not one rifle was found there.

While I was attached to "B" Company, we drilled in the Foresters' Hall, Parnell Square.

I attended one or two meetings of the I.R.B. Circle. I forget the name of the Circle, but we met at Parnell Square. I remember Seán Tobin and Joseph Reynolds being there.

At one time, there was great controversy as to whether Connolly was a member of the I.R.B. or not. I don't know if he was, but I can tell you something that occurred a few months before the Rising. Tom Clarke sent for me and said, "I want you to-day to go around with James Connolly and go over to Harcourt Street station. In the event of trouble, you are to take charge of that, with a line of retreat through the National University grounds". That is how I met Connolly first. I went over and Connolly gave me instructions. Actually, when the Rising did come off, I was not sent there at all.

A few months before Easter, 1916, it was generally understood that there would be a fight.

A fortnight before the Rising, I attended an all-night Volunteer dance in Parnell Square. At about 4 or 5 a.m. a message arrived from Pearse, asking me out to St. Enda's, Rathfarnham. I went immediately and Pearse told me that he wanted me to go down and take charge of County Kildare. He gave me a note to show that I was in charge because I was to take over from Ted O'Kelly, who had been organising there for a month or so previously. Pearse said he was going to recall O'Kelly, and I asked him would he not let him stay down there as my second in command, as he was familiar with the locality, to which he agreed. Pearse gave me definite word that the Rising was to take place soon. I was not to travel by train to Kildare but to cycle down as I might be spotted by the police at the station. I had a few hours sleep in St. Enda's before leaving for Co. Kildare.

My first place of call was to Donal Buckley of Maynooth. I showed him my credentials. I next got in contact with Tom Harris of Prosperous. I cycled then to Newbridge and put up at the Prince of Wales Hotel, now the Central Hotel, where Mrs. Hurley, the proprietress, was thoroughly in sympathy with the movement. I met Ted O'Kelly there. Young Tom Harris guessed that there was something about to happen and he stayed with us for some days. He was very keen. With O'Kelly, we visited several of the Volunteer Companies, notably Rathangan. Rathangan had a fairly strong Company and quite a few rifles. A man called Kenny was in charge there. Outside this there was little in the way of armament in the county.

On about Holy Thursday I received instructions in a despatch from Pearse that the rebellion was to start on Easter Sunday at 4 p.m. I was to mobilise all the Companies

in Kildare and they were to march in full kit to Bodenstown churchyard. At 4 p.m. I was to address them and tell them that the fight was on, that those who wished to fight could follow me, and that those who did not wish to fight could go home. I visited all the Companies and sent word around. There was promise of a big response.

On Easter Sunday morning we read the countermanding order from McNeill in the "Sunday Independent" and we were in a muddle because I had received no countermanding order. Kelly, Harris and myself decided to cycle into Naas. We contacted Kelly and Tommy Patterson there, but they could give us no information. As we were standing on a sidewalk in Naas, a motorcycle came tearing through the town. The rider was Dick Stokes and he brought me a despatch, which read - "Postponed until twelve o'clock tomorrow". It was signed by Pearse. In the short time at our disposal, O'Kelly and I cycled here and there, visiting the different places to let them know that the fight would be on. I remember when we visited Athgarvan, there was a concert in progress, the principal singer being Cuffe. We visited as many places as we could, telling them to be at Bodenstown churchyard the following day at twelve o'clock. We again had promises of a good mobilisation.

Some members of the Moran family had been instructed to bring some sticks of gelignite to me, in order to blow up the railway bridge at Sallins. Our instructions were to carry out demolitions and fight delaying actions back into the city. The instructions were from the I.R.B. I could not say that they actually came from Pearse. I was experienced in the use of gelignite. When Moran arrived wit his sister on Saturday from Dublin, I interrogated him about the stuff. He had none. All he had was a little revolver.

I had to go up to Dublin on that Saturday evening to get it. I went to the house in Phibsboro where I lodged (Sheehan's). There were two brothers in it and their sister. Miss Sheehan put sixty (?) sticks of gelignite in a bag and travelled by train to Newbridge. I could not take it as I had to cycle back and I was not allowed to travel by train. She actually got some soldiers to help her to carry the bag from the station into the town, where she stayed overnight at the Central Bar.

On Easter Monday morning, Harris, Kelly and myself left Newbridge on bicycles (carrying the gelignite) for Bodenstown. We were looking for bridges that were suitable for blowing up. Having examined the bridges near Bodenstown and near Sallins, I could not see any place that would be suitable to use it. Being a miner, I knew we had no time to do a good job with the gelignite. There was an ordinary passenger train going back and forth along the line. The Rising had actually started and the train could not get into the city, and we did not want to do any damage to it. I eventually decided that blowing up a bridge like that would not delay the British five minutes from getting into the city. Nobody mobilised at Bodenstown, though we waited a considerable time there to give them a chance to do so. After some hours we disposed of the gelignite by putting it into rabbit-holes in a field, and cycled to Maynooth.

When we arrived at Donal Buckley's shop, we found that he had already mobilised the Maynooth Volunteers in the stores at the back of the shop. As soon as he had discovered that the Rising was on, he had mobilised some sixteen or seventeen men. He told me that there were one or two workmen in the College who were members of it.

I took over then. We left the store and marched down the main street towards the College. The whole town was looking on, including the R.I.C., who did not interfere, however. Ted O'Kelly was in the act of drawing his revolver to shoot them on the spot, but I said, "No, Ted. They are not armed". The R.I.C. gave credit for this to Donal Buckley and after his release the Sergeant thanked him for saving their lives. We got one man, I think, in the College. The students were all at the windows cheering us. The President of the College was not there, but the next-in-charge appeared at the main door. He asked us to kneel down, which we did, and he gave us his blessing, while stating that he did not approve of our action. We left the College by a side entrance and made our way to the canal and railway line.

I had been told beforehand that I was to pick up a Company of Dunboyne Volunteers, under Seán Boylan, at Clonsilla Bridge. When we arrived there, nobody had turned up. During our march towards the city we sometimes went from bridge to bridge on the railway and sometimes from bridge to bridge on the canal. I knew the country very well. It was dark when we left Clonsilla. At Clonsilla railway station we saw all the people coming from Fairyhouse Races. They had to walk back along the line to the city as there were no trains running. They were amazed when they saw us. We continued along the canal until we got to Broom Bridge, that is the bridge just outside Liffey Junction. Taking the road to the left, I brought them across country into Finglas and across the river Tolka. We still did not know how things were in the city. We continued on into Glasnevin Cemetery, and there I told the men to lie down and rest while I would find a place to stack our various assortment of arms. I went around the

cemetery in the dark by myself. I examined the vaults but none of the doors would open. Finally I succeeded in getting into one of the towers along the wall dividing the Botanic Gardens and the cemetery, and saw that it contained a big tank, eight or ten feet off the ground. I decided that it was a suitable place to hide our arms, and I went back to tell the men to move in with their arms. We hoisted one man up on the tank and he found it was dry. We stored all the arms there. I think we had two or three rifles and the remainder were shotguns. I had a revolver myself.

Very early on Tuesday morning I said to the men: "It is getting daylight. The grave-diggers will be here early in the morning and you must all scatter around. I am going into the city to see how things are". I made my way to the G.P.O. first, without trouble, and I told them that I had some men on the outskirts of the city. I forget who I saw at the G.P.O. There was nothing to bar my way to and from the G.P.O. On my way back to the cemetery, I decided to call to the house where I lodged and put on my Captain's uniform which I had left there when proceeding to Kildare. When I went in, I found that the Sheehans had disposed of it. I left the house and proceeded to Doyle's corner, just in time to see my men marching along in the direction of the G.P.O. Someone had informed them they were to go there and they had decided not to wait for me. I had been gone from them for a considerable time. They had brought their arms with them. I placed myself at their head and we marched down to the G.P.O.

We got some food in the Post Office but before we had time to get a rest, I was ordered, with the same men and about half a dozen members of the Hibernian Rifles, to

proceed to Parliament Street and to take over a house there. This house was not to be directly opposite the City Hall, which was occupied by the British, and not at a corner, but one from which we could have a full view of the City Hall. I was not told to take over any particular house. We left the G.P.O., crossed the Metal Bridge and turned up an alleyway at the back of the Exchange Hotel. We went by a back way into Sir Patrick Shorthall's house, where a wallpaper and paint business was carried on. From upstairs, we broke through into the Exchange Hotel. We were the first people to occupy this place. We had a full view of the City Hall, whereas the British garrison there had very little space to fire at us. The British made several attempts to get into the "Mail" Office across the road via the main entrance. We had complete control over them. One of our men, Donal Buckley, shot a few of them. We were up on the roof, which we had barricaded with great big rolls of wallpaper. One of our men - Walsh of the Hibernian Rifles - was killed. I sent word to Dr. McKee in the G.P.O. He was a Northern Ireland man. They came for him and took him away, but he died afterwards.
The house in Parliament Street was not of any tactical value except to prevent the Mail Offices from being occupied. Some time on Tuesday evening I got word to get back to the Post Office as there was no further point in holding on there. The British had given up this attempt to get into the Mail Office. We returned exactly the same way as we came and met no obstruction en route.

We stayed in the Post Office for two or three days. I did not get any sleep there at all because I was in command of the men in the windows and had to see that they kept awake.

On Thursday I was ordered to take about ten men and occupy a corner house at Capel St. Bridge, about one door from Lemass's. I think it belonged to Webb at the time. I am not sure if it was Connolly who gave me this order. I left the G.P.O. with the ten men. We went along Henry St. and into Abbey Street. We were proceeding towards Capel Street when we met an armoured car. There was no back alley where we could break into the house, and we were in full view of everyone. We retreated to the Post Office. At the Henry Street entrance, which we never entered, we met Connolly at the door. "Come on", he said. He told me we were to occupy a house at the corner of Liffey Street and the quays which would cover along the quays facing west. I and my party followed Connolly. We went down Liffey Street. The most useful corner on Liffey Street was derelict. He told me to take the one house that was standing there. Connolly went off. He went around the corner and into the "Independent" Offices. We entered the house. We could not see around any of the corners from it, but from the back of it we could see thirty or forty yards away the back of the "Independent" Office. I think, in evacuating that, Connolly got wounded. We stayed in this house on Thursday. Occasionally I would go out to the corner and peep up Capel Street. I saw one woman shot crossing the street. The British were commanding the whole of Abbey Street from Capel Street, and had been in occupation of Capel Street with armoured cars from the day before.

There were a couple of young men with me who were deserter from the Dublin Fusiliers and they asked me, seeing that the fight was over, would I give them a chance to make their getaway as it would be very serious for them if they were caught fighting with us. This was on Friday. I saw

the force of their necessity and let them go. That evening (Friday) I said to the others, "It is all over now. There's no use trying to retreat to the Post Office. Each one of us can now make his getaway". I forget where we dumped our arms. I crossed the street, with Jack Kenny and a couple of others, and we went into an old furniture premises. No one would every suspect us being in this house. I went upstairs. There was no one in the house. I went in there and got something to eat, and also a moleskin trousers and an old jerry hat. I changed my clothes and with a few days' growth of beard on me, looked quite the part of an ordinary "navvy" or working man. That night, I could see British officers outside the door and hear them talking. I stayed in the house Friday night and Saturday night.

On Sunday morning I saw the people moving around outside, going to Mass. I dug my hands down into the two pockets in front of the moleskin trousers. I had the old hat on my head. The only thing that looked respectable about me was my shoes. I had got a new pair of shoes in the G.P.O. as my own were worn out after the march from Kildare. I left the house in Liffey Street. I had in mind where to go and how to get there. I went up Liffey Street, intending to cross Henry Street and go along Upper Liffey Street to Dorset Street, but there was no exit that way.

I came back. There seemed to be no exit outwards. I walked along Abbey Street into O'Connell Street. I slouched up O'Connell Street. All the fighting had ceased. I passed a British officer holding our flag, and I think it was the Post Office flag. The only danger I felt was that I would meet some police or detectives

who would recognise me. I could see people outside the Gresham and places like that. I passed the Post Office, intending to get up to the Rotunda, but that exit was closed.

I returned, on the Gresham Hotel side, and at Findlater Place I turned and went down by the back of the Gresham towards the back of Marlborough Street Cathedral. Sitting on the steps outside the Cathedral were a lot of young fellows from Carson's Army. They had never been away any distance from their homes in their lives. There was another lad along with me and these young fellows did not make any attempt to stop us. We talked to them for a while about the deplorable state of affairs. I had a plug of hard tobacco and gave pieces to some of these fellows. Then I slouched by them and around the corner to the front of the Cathedral. I made my way up to what was Gloucester Street towards the Diamond. I had an object in view. I turned into Great Britain Street, now Parnell Street, and went by unfrequented routes to Mountjoy Square. When I came near the old Hibernian offices at the corner of Gardiner Row, I sat down on some stones and kept an eye out. After a while, I saw on the far side of the street Mrs. Wyse-Power and her daughter coming up to Gardiner Street Church for Mass. I walked over, came behind her and spoke to her. She nearly had a fit when she saw me. I walked with her for a few hundred yards. Then I walked on until I got to Dorset Street. I stood waiting outside Joe McGuinness's drapery shop hoping to see someone I would know, who would bring word to my mother in Eccles Street that I was alright. An old school-mate, with his wife, came along and I asked him to do so. He went around to Eccles Street and told my mother that I was alright and

would call there after a certain.length of time. She lived near the bottom end of Eccles Street and had a room in one of the houses there. When I got there my aunt from Phibsboro' was visiting her and she brought down a good suit of clothes for me. Curfew was on, of course, and I stayed there that night.

Next day, I went out for a while and scouted around. I came back to the house in the evening, intending to spend another night in my mother's place. It was just before curfew. The man who rented the house lived with his family in the basement. I knocked at the door, but he did not open it. After repeated knocking, he came out of the basement and said: "Who is that?". "Mr. Byrne", I replied. "You can't come in here", he said. That was one of the worst moments in my life, to be turned away in curfew. I was dressed pretty well, fairly clean and neat and active. I decided to visit the lady who later became my wife. I went along to Eccles Street and turned into Nelson Street. I put on a brave front - I believe I looked like a detective - I crossed without interrogation into Mountjoy Street. I went up Palmerston Place to No. 1 where this lady lived with her mother and brother. She had been in the Post Office herself and went out with the wounded to Jervis St. Hospital. I had given her my watch and some money to mind for me. As her home was liable to be raided she advised me to go over to the Athlone Hotel and said that Mrs. Grogan, the proprietress, was all right and a personal friend. I had only to walk 30 or 40 yards to the hotel where I registered under the name of Burke. I stopped there for two nights.

I was looking out of the window of the hotel one day

when I saw a regiment, with their colonel on horseback in front, coming up the street from Dorset St. towards the Broadstone station. I got the idea that they were going to enclose the area. Afterwards I discovered they were going to the Broadstone to escort the Galway prisoners. At any rate, I got hold of an umbrella, as it had started to rain, and left the Athlone Hotel. Crossing Constitution Hill, I got to Brunswick Street. My object was to get to Senator McKean's place. I went around by Grangegorman and came out where Sheridan's garage is on the North Circular Road, just at the foot of Charleville Road. McKean's house was only two doors from the Cabra Road end. There was a soldier on duty at each end of the road. I said I wanted to go to see some friends of mine. "How long will you be?", he asked. "I won't be any length of time", I said. He allowed me to go on. I went into McKean's and stayed there for a couple of days. As this place was liable to be raided at any time, I only stayed there two nights and made off for the country.

I wanted to get to Baldoyle. I went up Cabra Road, turned around by the Deaf and Dumb Institution and came out across the Finglas Road into the top of Glasnevin. By now the trams were starting to run again. I saw "Sceilg" coming out of his house and he saw me too. My next move was to Baldoyle, to a friend, at whose wedding I had been best man. His name was Michael Keane. I stayed there one night and was off the following morning, with his bike, which he lent me.

My next object in view was to go to the home of one of the Irish Brigade in South Africa. He was Joe Kennedy of the White Hart, Balbriggan. The place

was off the main road on the Dublin side of Balbriggan. I cycled there all the way from Baldoyle. I stayed at Kennedy's for a few weeks.

I rode on to a place beyond Stamullen in the County Meath where I stayed with a friend named Dardis, for a while.

I rode further north to a place called Magheracloone, just over the Meath border, about six miles from Carrickmacross, where my aunt and cousins had a farm. As a constabulary hut had been erected a few hundred yards away, my relatives advised me not to hang around there.

I started off again, on my way towards Derry. At each place that I called at or stopped in, I was given the names of people ahead who would put me up. I arrived in Derry alright and stayed with the Doherty's for a week or two. Any time I met police on my journeying I always tried to look very important and passed them without glancing at them.

My next move was to Belfast. I cycled for half the journey and went by train for the remainder. I stayed several months with my cousin there. He was unmarried and had a spirit grocery business, in which I helped.

As a promise was given by the British that there would be no further executions, I returned to Dublin. It was just before Christmas. I was not arrested for some time. In Dublin I found that the movement had re-started, and I rejoined. I took over as Vice-Commandant of the 1st Battalion. I think Dermot O'Hegarty was Commandant. This was only a temporary arrangement until the men would be released from the jails.

When the Lewes prisoners returned home, an election of officers was held and I was appointed Commandant. I held that rank for about three years.

I got married in 1919 and we were living in Upper Eccles Street. I was arrested in the middle of the night in 1920. I had been staying at home as my wife was after having her first baby. The military broke into the house and I was taken away.

I was sent to Wormwood Scrubbs. There were a couple of thousand of us there, under the leadership of Joe McGrath. When they shifted McGrath to Brixton by himself, we went on strike in order that a few comrades would be sent with him. As a result, permission was granted for four or five men in Wormwood Scrubbs to be transferred to Brixton. When word came that McGrath had mentioned the names of those who were to go, mine was one of them. I was then transferred to Brixton. Prison conditions were not too bad. The food was good enough. We were about to go on hunger strike in Brixton for some reason, which I cannot remember now, but we were all released before it came off. I came back to Dublin.

I was arrested again in 1920. It was after curfew and I was interrogated by British agents in plain clothes. I said that I had nothing further to do with the movement. I put down that I was an American citizen, although I was not. I was sent to Rath Camp, the Curragh, from which I escaped with Joe Vize through a tunnel. There were about twelve hundred prisoners there, and only about forty or fifty of us escaped. That was during the Truce. I came back to Dublin.

When I was appointed O/C. of the Battalion,

Piaras Beaslaí was elected Vice-Commandant but he was transferred later. On my arrest, Paddy Houlihan was appointed in my place. In the meantime, I was not doing anything. As a matter of fact, I left the Battalion at the request of Michael Collins. I know it is a fact that it was owing to the failure of the 1st Battalion to carry out certain operations on Bloody Sunday. In any case, he thought perhaps that Paddy Houlihan would be a better man. We held a meeting which was attended by Brigadier Oscar Traynor. He told me that at the request of Michael Collins, Houlihan took my place. The Battalion officers did not want me to resign but I told them to obey G.H.Q. At any rate, whether he, Collins, thought he might have done me an injustice or not, it was he put my name forward for the job I later held in Leinster House.

While I was O/C. I think our Battalion carried off more raids than the other three together, including Collinstown, where we got 75 rifles and ammunition, and King's Inns. Kevin Barry was arrested at one raid which was carried out on Kennedy's Bakery. Actually, when the plan for this raid was put to me by one of my Companies, I was against it, but the raid was later carried out by another Company without my knowledge. When they first put it up to me, I had said, "Troops will come on the scene from the North Dublin Union, which is only a couple of hundred yards away. They will come down in lorries to the bakery for their bread. There will be a soldier with a rifle standing on the lorry, which is high above the ground, and you will not have as much control over him as you should. The man standing on the lorry will give the alarm". That was what actually happened. He was shot, and brought the others on the scene. The result was that three harmless British tommies were shot.

Kevin Barry was caught and later executed.

Earlier, our Battalion went into the 4th Battalion area to carry out a raid on some railway waggons at Kingsbridge. We got some rifles there.

For the Custom House raid, which was in the 2nd Battalion area, men were picked from all the Dublin Companies. A lot of our men took part in it and some of them were shot.

When Piaras Beaslaí, who was my Vice-Commandant, was transferred to take charge of the Army journal, "An t-Óglach", G.H.Q. sent me George Ervine to fill the vacancy.

(Pre-1916).

I visited Tom Clarke's shop every day. Of course, there was always a detective watching the shop. Many years afterwards, I visited the Castle and was talking to Colonel Broy in his office. He said, "Your name used to come up here every day as visiting Tom Clarke".

Shortly after my return to Dublin, Tom Clarke came to me and said, "There is an organiser-instructor needed in the Galtee Brigade, around Galbally. Their instructor has been called up to the front. I think you should go down there". The Galtee Brigade instructor, who was in the Sherwood Foresters, was a man named Burke of the locality. "Well, Tom", I said, "I don't know **much** about military instruction. We had nothing of that kind in the Boer Army". "It's not so much of that kind of thing, forming four's and saluting", he said, "but I want you to keep them right nationally". As a matter of fact,

I found that part of my job only too easy as all the lads down there were thoroughly well up and were readers of Griffith's paper "Nationality".

The split in the Volunteers occurred while I was in the Galtee Brigade. I had about half a dozen companies in the Galtee district. I visited a different company each night in the week and on Sundays there was a concentration march of all to one of the other company districts in turn. They were well equipped and were a fine body of lads. When the split came on, I addressed the various companies when I met them, and told them that, no matter what sides they took, not to fall out with one another but that I wished them to stay with the original. They all remained. It was the only place where they did, with the exception of a few places in Dublin.

The Mitchelstown company, under Joe Hannigan, visited us often.

On the Sunday before the split came on, a coup d'etat was carried out on the Redmondite Volunteers while they were at Naas. Our fellows seized all their rifles and band instruments, and marched with the brass band to Anglesboro'.

I took the companies to the fields and put them on field work all the time. The R.I.C. were always present at our parades and marches, but did not interfere with us.

I remember addressing the men at Anglesboro' when the split came and they did not know what side to take. Tom Lundon, M.P., was going around, brandishing a rifle out of a car, but no ammunition, and telling them he

could give them arms. I was not allowed into the hall, but I addressed them outside. The R.I.C. were there. I said, "Your fathers would be glad if only they were alive to-day to be handed the right to carry rifles".

I spent three months in the Galtee Brigade in 1914, organising.

SIGNED Thos. F. Byrne

DATE 30th July 1951

WITNESS Martin Kavanagh