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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 842

Witness

Sean Kennedy,
28 Bath Avenue Gardens,
Sandymount,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company, 1st Batt'n. Dublin Bgde.,
1914 - ;

Lieutenant, same Company, 1916 .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, 1910-1916;
- (b) Four Courts area, Dublin, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

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Statement by Mr. Seán Kennedy,

28, Bath Avenue Gardens, Sandymount,

Dublin.

(Formerly 1st Lieutenant of C Coy.,
1st Battalion, Dublin Bde.,
Irish Volunteers and Irish Republican Army).

Part 1.

I joined Fianna Éireann some time in the latter part of 1910 at 34 Camden Street, Dublin. The Fianna at that time was being controlled and administered by Con Colbert, who was later executed, Bulmer Hobson and Countess Markievicz. We took part in drilling, fencing, signalling, general scout work and field craft.

Some short time after joining the Fianna, we were detailed for a camp in the grounds of Belcamp House, Raheny, which I understood at the time was the property of Countess Markievicz. We spent a week-end there.

On another occasion we attended a camp at Finglas and took part in sports organised for us. Con Colbert also took part in some of the races. I remember him distinctly as he was dressed in a green jersey with a high collar, kilts, long stockings and shoes.

I was at this time about fourteen years of age and I remember that on one occasion I was placed on guard at a week-end camp and was given a .22 rifle, which I did not know how to handle.

We took part in tableaux organised by the Gaelic League in furtherance of the Gaelic language which was a feature of the city life at the time.

In 1911 on the occasion of the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to Dublin, we organised and took part in protest meetings throughout the city. Farrell of Talbot Street, who was a tobacconist, was Lord Mayor of Dublin and an ardent Imperialist. The Dublin Corporation was divided on the question of a presentation of an address of loyalty to the British King. Feelings ran fairly high as between the different elements and, on a number of occasions, police interference led to baton charges, when our organisation took part in the burning of Union Jacks and other emblems of Imperialism. We took part in the many protest meetings organised, one of which I remember was held outside the Custom House and was addressed by Seán Milroy, Sheehy Skeffington, Miss Helena Molony, Countess Markievicz, Seán MacDermott and Arthur Griffith. Immediately prior to the date of the British King's visit, the Protest Committee applied to and obtained from the Streets Section of the Dublin Corporation permission to erect two flag-poles at the College Green end of Grafton Street. These poles were used to string a banner across the street on which were printed the words, "Thou Are Not Conquered Yet, Dear Land!". As Grafton Street in those days was the centre of social activity of the Imperialist element, the appearance of the banner created consternation, and Dublin Castle, the Corporation and City Hall were at loggerheads over the matter. The banner was removed by the police after being up a short while.

On the night preceding the King's visit, we were mobilised and taken out to Lamb Doyle's where we went into a camp adjacent to a cottage, the property of the Countess Markeivicz. There we remained while the King was in residence in the Vice Regal Lodge.

I remember on occasions being detailed for duty outside 34 Camden Street while members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood were meeting and drilling inside.

I was one of a party detailed to report to the large room in the Rotunda (now used as the premises of the Gate Theatre Company). The hall was packed with members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the meeting was addressed by Tom Clarke, Seán MacDermott, Dr. McCartan and other men prominent in the movement at the time. We were given bundles of the first copies of 'Irish Freedom' for selling among the audience.

Some time in 1912 I left the Fianna organisation and joined the militant body then known as the Dublin Guards. At this time a dispute arose in the Fianna higher Councils regarding the manufacture of the Fianna uniform. While some of the garments were made in Ireland by Irish craftsmen and, as far as possible, of Irish material, the hats which we wore were made in and imported from England. This gave rise to a good deal of dissatisfaction. As a result a large number of us broke away, formed and joined the Unit known as the Dublin Guards which was organised by Matt Stafford, an old Fenian, Frank Lawless of Swords, a Mr. McGowan, building contractor in the city, and Paul Gregan.

We had our Headquarters on the north side of the city - in Drumcondra - and, to show our distinctiveness from the Fianna, we had a special hat made of Irish tweed designed and manufactured for us. As the material was soft, an attempt was made to stiffen it by several rows of stitching but we found that, after a few showers of rain, it shrunk to unwearable size and lost its shape. We also had Branches of our Unit in the Columcille Hall, Blackhall Place, and at 36 York Street.

During the period we marched on one occasion from Dublin to Bodenstown for the Wolfe Tone Commemoration ceremony and returned on the same day. On arrival at Sallins, we formed a guard of honour to P.H. Pearse, using dummy rifles which we had hauled in a trek cart with us on the march to Bodenstown. We arrived back in the city on the Sunday night, having covered thirty-five miles to and from Bodenstown Churchyard in one day.

I left the Dublin Guards immediately after the landing of the arms at Howth in July, 1914, and joined C. Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers at 41 Parnell Square. My Company officers were Michael Judge who was the Company Captain, Frank Fahy, 1st Lieutenant, and a man named Brady, who was 2nd Lieutenant. Later Lieutenant Fahy was elected Captain and held that post subsequently.

At this time I was apprenticed to a locksmith and, because of my trade training, I was selected by my Company Commander as Armourer to the Company. In

order to receive training to enable me to repair and maintain the arms on Company charge, I was sent to an Armourers' Course at 2 Dawson Street, which was then the General Headquarters of the Irish Volunteers. I attended this course nightly for a period of some hours. After some training, we were engaged in converting a number of French bayonets for fitment to the rifles which had been landed at Howth the previous July (1914). These bayonets could be purchased in Lalor's of Fownes Street for 1/6d. and a large number of men in the Brigade availed themselves of the opportunity to get one. It was found, however, that when they were fitted to the rifle, the bayonet protruded out over the muzzle, in the line of fire, and consequently it was found necessary to carry out modifications to them, so that they would fit properly. We were also employed on the manufacture of bayonets for fitment to the Short Lee Metford and the Short Lee Enfield rifles, a number of which were in the possession of Volunteers throughout the city. The bayonets were a very crude job and would, I think, have been more a danger than of use. As far as I can recollect, all the tools with which we were supplied for these jobs were got in McQuillan's of Capel Street.

I was also detailed on occasion to mobilise the particular section of my Company to which I belonged, my Company Commander being Lieutenant Joseph McGuinness - there being no such things as platoons in those days.

I was present at the removal of the remains of O'Donovan Rossa from the City Hall to Glasnevin Cemetery

on the 1st August, 1915, and formed part of the guard of honour mounted over his remains during the period that he was lying in the City Hall. There were four men on the mounted guard over his remains during that period, being changed every two hours. The guard on this occasion used a small room off the City Hall premises.

For the balance of the year 1915 and the early part of 1916 I was engaged with other members of my Company in routine training, such as, arms drill, route marching and field exercise, in addition to my duties as an armourer undergoing training at the Headquarters of the Volunteers in Dawson Street.

During this period I took part in major field operations conducted by the General Staff in the Coolock, Santry, Raheny and Swords area. The entire Dublin Brigade was engaged in the exercise. On its completion we assembled at Swords and marched in a body to Parnell Square where we were dismissed.

Immediately prior to the Rising, we were engaged in training in methods of street fighting which were conducted by Captain Robert Monteith, the area covered being Stoneybatter, Smithfield, Arbour Hill, Prussia Street, Aghrim Street and the surrounding district.

On Easter Saturday night, while in my home at 7 Lower Jervis Street, I was detailed by Lieutenant Joe McGuinness to mobilise my section, which I did. This duty entailed my travelling from Jervis Street to

places as far apart as Bath Avenue, Sandymount, Denzille Street, and Inchicore, but the job was completed by twelve midnight, having taken me three to four hours. The gist of the instructions I was told to give to the members of my section was that they were to hold themselves in readiness and not to leave the city.

On Easter Sunday morning the McNeill countermanding order appeared in the "Sunday Independent", with the result that I stayed put, as did also other members of my section. I did not move out of the vicinity all day, Sunday.

On Easter Monday at about ten or eleven o'clock in the morning I was detailed on the instructions of Lieutenant McGuinness to again mobilise my section and have them to report to the Columncille Hall, Blackhall Place, at twelve noon that day. Realising that it had taken me from three to four hours on the previous night to mobilise my section, who were living so far apart from each other, I felt I could not cover the ground in the time at my disposal and I only contacted those within reasonable walking distance. Having done this, I then contacted a comrade of mine, Seán Prendergast, who was later Captain of my Company, and both of us in uniform and with full equipment proceeded to our Battalion Headquarters in the Columncille Hall, Blackhall Place.

While in the Columncille Hall, I noticed a man in mufti, whom I knew to be a Volunteer and who had reported to tender an apology for failure to turn out

on parade as he was going elsewhere. The Battalion Vice Commandant, Piaras Beaslai, who was passing at the time, ordered the man to be placed under arrest and instructed myself and another Volunteer, Dinny Holmes, to act as escort. While we were holding the man in question under guard, the Battalion, as far as I am aware, was assembled downstairs and it may have been during this particular time that the unit was addressed by Commandant Ned Daly. In any case, the Battalion had moved off and reached the Four Courts before we became aware of the fact that it had left. We then, in company with our prisoner, proceeded down to the Four Courts as quickly as we could, but before going in, we allowed the prisoner to go.

While going down Hammond Lane in company with other Volunteers, I was given the job of taking over one of two horse-drawn lorries which were proceeding in the direction of the North Wall and which, I understood subsequently, were returning for the purpose of collecting ammunition for conveyance to the Magazine Fort. I took my horse-drawn vehicle to Church Street Bridge and, with assistance, unyoked the horse and placed the lorry in position on the bridge to form a barricade. These two vehicles, with a cab which we seized, formed the main portion of the barricade. Later on in the evening, Joe Griffin, who was also a member of the 1st Battalion, turned up with one of Thompson's motor taxis which was also used to barricade the bridge. Griffin was a driver employed by Thompsons, the motor people of Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street) who were the first taxi proprietors in

the city. Griffin then proceeded to join his unit and took part in the fighting during Easter Week. We also commandeered porter barrels from some local publican to strengthen the barricade. At this time there would have been about six of us manning the barricade, namely, Peadar Clancy, Volunteers Monroe, Jack Richmond, Jack O'Brien and some others whose names I cannot at the moment recollect.

Before we had properly settled down to organising our position, a number of Lancers on horseback came up the Quays from the direction of O'Connell Bridge. As soon as we saw them approaching, we opened fire. The Lancers retreated up a side street and, as far as I was concerned, that was the last I saw of them. These Lancers were apparently engaged in escorting ammunition from the North Wall to the Magazine Fort.

At about two o'clock on Monday we observed a British officer in uniform proceeding to an outside car, travelling in the direction of Kingsbridge. I left the barricade and, crossing to the South Quays, held up the hackney car, took the officer off it and brought him a prisoner to the Four Courts where I handed him over to Captain Frank Fahy, O/C of C. Company.

During this period we forced the side gate leading into the Four Courts opposite the Bridewell entrance, which reduced considerably the distance to the courtyard, as the main entrance was further away.

The cab which formed part of the barricade, incidentally, was captured while it was conveying a

British officer in uniform in the direction of Kingsbridge. This officer we also took into the Four Courts as a prisoner. While I was escorting him, he remarked to me that he also was a Catholic like ourselves and, to prove it, he put his hand in his pocket and produced what I took to be a number of religious emblems.

While I, with others, was engaged in strengthening the barricade, a number of women - presumably soldiers' wives or what was known as separation women - approached the barricade and attempted to pull it down. We repulsed their attempts. During the course of the melee one of the women, using her finger-nails, scratched me badly about the face. We eventually drove them away.

One of our men, while escorting a D.M.P. man, to the Bridewell for confinement, had a close shave when the D.M.P. man attempted to draw his baton with a view to resisting his arrest. However, another Volunteer, who had him under observation, fired on him with the result that the policeman dropped his baton and offered no further resistance.

There was an empty house in Church Street adjacent to the barricade and adjoining the Four Courts proper, which we took over late on Monday evening. We knocked a hole in the boundary wall and, by this means, we had short and easy access from our position to the Four Courts premises. This saved us time and risk in our line of communication with our Company headquarters, as it cut out the journey around Church Street and portion of Chancery Street via the entrance

opposite the Bridewell.

To further strengthen the barricade, we took up some stone sets in Hammond Lane and collected some bed-ends from Starkey's Foundry Yard adjacent, also some wire which we strung across from wall to wall. In addition, we commandeered a lot of empty bottles from a local publican which we broke and spread all over the front of the barricade, to keep enemy soldiers from approaching our position on their hands and knees.

On Tuesday night I was detailed by Lieutenant Joe McGuinness to vacate my position on the barricade and report to Lieutenant Thomas Allen who had charge of a post in the Four Courts overlooking Hammond Lane. To strengthen that position we broke the windows and barricaded them with heavy legal volumes and any other books we could get in the room. This particular part of the Four Courts was at the time the Records Office, so that we had ample material for the purpose. We arranged the books in such a manner as to give us loopholes from which to fire on the enemy. During the course of breaking the window I received a severe cut on my left hand which I bandaged and carried on. I was given a home-made bomb which was a canister filled with an explosive and packed with small junks of iron nuts and bits of bolts. From it protruded a short length of fuse, about 2 inches in length, which we were required to light with a match and count "three" before getting rid of it. I thought at the time that, if I had a stutter and were to count three, I would not be here now to tell the story.

Convenient to this particular post, an iron ladder fixed to the chimney breast gave access to the roof, from which myself and Lieutenant Allen availed of to observe enemy movement. Up to this there was really no heavy fighting in progress, with the exception of occasional sniper shots. Our stay on the roof did not draw enemy fire.

Some time on Wednesday night or in the dark hours of Thursday morning, Lieutenant Allen came up on the roof with five other Volunteers and instructed us to fire six rounds each from our rifles into the air. He emphasised the fact that the fire should be from Howth rifles. At the time we did not know for what reason this order was given, but I often thought afterwards that the object might have been to draw enemy fire on our particular position so as to relieve some of our comrades who were being hard-pressed elsewhere. The crack from a Howth rifle had a very distinctive sound and was easily identifiable as such by those used to the handling of firearms. When we had accomplished this mission, I forgot that the Howth rifle, not being furnished with wooden casing, would be very hot after use and in grabbing it with my hands I got severely burned from the red-hot barrel.

Some time on Thursday we were withdrawn from our post on the roof by Lieutenant Allen, who ordered us to another part of the premises, almost facing Winetavern Street Bridge but in direct frontage to Merchants Quay Church. Some time prior to this, the British had commenced to shell the Chancery Street end of the Four Courts and it was expected that they would attempt a

frontal assault on the building. It was with the object of repulsing this assault that we were ordered to our new positions. We were kept there for about half an hour and, as nothing transpired and there did not seem to be any likelihood of an immediate attack, we returned to our former position on the roof.

By mid-day on Thursday the British had got the range of our position on the roof and we were subjected to some intense rifle fire from concealed snipers whom we failed to locate. As the position became untenable, we were withdrawn to the first landing overlooking Hammond Lane.

We remained on the first landing from mid-day on Thursday until mid-day on Friday, returning the fire of the enemy. In the room with me was Lieutenant Allen and another Volunteer named Seán O'Carroll. The three of us were in position when an enemy sniper, having got our location, opened fire. The bullet struck Carroll on the tip of the elbow and, as Allen was standing somewhat in rear of him, the bullet struck Allen in the left breast and he fell mortally wounded. Myself and Carroll removed him out to a corridor. I ran down to the courtyard where I met an officer and told him what had happened. He ordered me back to my position and told me not to create a commotion. As I was satisfied that my comrade, Allen, was badly wounded and in need of attention, I used my own discretion and went to obtain assistance. Some short time afterwards, a stretcher party, accompanied by a doctor in a white coat, whom I presumed was from the Richmond Hospital, came and took Allen away to the Richmond where he died some short time afterwards.

During my visit to the courtyard some short time afterwards, I found my Company Captain, Frank Fahy, speaking to a British officer in uniform who was wounded and whom I learned later was Lord Dunsany. Dunsany was accompanied by another British officer, Colonel Lindsay. They had been captured some time previously while driving from the Phoenix Park in the direction of O'Connell Bridge. They had approached our barricade at Church Street and had apparently attempted to crash it. Our people on the barricade opened fire and Dunsany was wounded in the cheek. As far as I could gather, the outcome of the parley between Captain Fahy and Lindsay resulted in Dunsany giving his parole not to escape if he was permitted to go to the Richmond Hospital for medical attention. As his greatcoat was lying in the car some short distance up the Quays on the Park side of the barricade, and between it and Arran Quay chapel, I was detailed to go and get it for him. I went out on to the Quays and over to the car. While I was collecting his greatcoat, I noticed that there was a revolver and some ammunition in a small box also in the car, which I took possession of. While I was doing this, my comrades on the bridge kept shouting to me, "Get in. Get in", and it was only after some time that I realised that British troops were advancing down the Quays, taking advantage of any cover that they could find and keeping close to the railings on the chapel side. Having collected Dunsany's belongings, I returned to my post without undue haste as I had only a short distance to cover between the car and the end house. Having handed over the greatcoat and revolver to Captain Fahy, I returned to my post overlooking Hammond Lane. There I remained until the surrender on Saturday evening.

I remember one particular incident while manning the barricade on Church Street bridge and while the attack on the Mendicity Institute by the British was at its height. A street musician came along, and from some secure cover close to the Mendicity itself, commenced to play an Irish tune. The effect was so extraordinary upon all of us that, with the exception of the fight going on at the Mendicity, action in our vicinity almost ceased.

In the early part of the week, after the attempt to set the Magazine Fort on fire, the Tara Street Fire Brigade, which was proceeding in the direction of the Phoenix Park with the intention of subduing the blaze, was stopped at Church Street bridge and the Brigade told to return to their station.

Some time about 4 o'clock on Saturday afternoon I heard a shout from the Ground Floor to my post, which I manned in company with Bob Leggett, to vacate our position and report down to the courtyard as the fight was over, or words to that effect.

I cannot say who gave us the message but myself and Leggett came down as directed and when we reached the courtyard I noticed other members of the garrison had been fallen in - we fell in. We were told by Commandant Daly when we reached the courtyard, to hand our rifles out through the railings to the British troops who were outside. The British troops were accompanied

by a Capuchin Father from Church Street.

It was our intention to destroy the rifles sooner than hand them over, but we were warned against this action. We were told that such a procedure would not be honourable and we handed them over as directed. When all the arms and equipment had been handed over we were then fallen in by Commandant Daly and numbered off.

As far as I can recollect and I am open to correction in this matter, I think the number which fell in on Commandant Daly's command was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 75, which included men from Church Street, King Street, the Bridewell and the Father Mathew Hall.

We were then formed into fours and headed by our officers Ned Daly, Piaras Beaslai and two others I cannot remember. We marched out through the Chancery Street entrance of the Four Courts where we were surrounded by British armed troops. We proceeded by way of Chancery Street down the Quay, up Capel Street, Parnell Street into O'Connell Street and were halted outside the Institute for the Blind in O'Connell Street.

After some short time there we were approached by a British Officer who was apparently going round taking the names of the men in the ranks. He was, apparently, a very decent type, and he told us if we had anything on us which we should not have, we were to drop it on the ground at our feet.

Our first sight of O'Connell Street in ruins made such an impression on us that anything could have been happening in our immediate vicinity without our

knowledge. The flames of the burning buildings and the crackling of the burning timbers had such an effect on us that we were dumbfounded. It is a memory that I will never forget.

We were then marched from the Blind Institute in O'Connell Street to the enclosure in front of the Rotunda Hospital where we found members of the G.P.O. garrison assembled. Among them I recognised Tom Clarke and some others whose names I cannot at the moment remember.

We remained on this grass patch in front of the Rotunda Hospital in Parnell Street all through Saturday night until Sunday morning. We were compelled by orders of the British to seat ourselves upon the grass patch and there were so many of us congregated there that we had to sit with our knees drawn up to us and held in position with our hands. This cramped position during the night was very uncomfortable but as there was one British Officer who was particularly unpleasant and who had issued orders to his men to use the bayonet if we moved, we had no option but to comply with the orders.

The British Officer referred to I subsequently learned was a Captain Wilson. He made himself particularly unpleasant and in his treatment of Commandant Daly he excelled himself. I remember seeing him ripping the epaulettes from Daly's tunic in a most insulting and threatening manner.

Wilson was subsequently executed by our people in Wexford during the Tan War.

We got no food during Saturday night and the last meal some of us had was on Saturday morning before the surrender.

On Sunday morning we were ordered out on the roadway in Parnell Street, fallen in and escorted by heavily armed British troops we were marched up Parnell Street, Capel Street, Parliament Street, Lord Edward Street, High Street, Thomas Street to Richmond Barracks. While going through Thomas Street we were subjected to a good deal of abuse by the wives of British Service and ex-Service men, then known as the "Separation Women".

When we arrived in Richmond Barracks each one of us was searched on the Barracks square. The Sergeant who was searching me found a few shillings in my uniform breeches pocket and with a remark, "you will not want this", he stuck to a half-crown and put the balance back, which amounted to three or four shillings. It struck me as being a very low type of action on the part of an N.C.O. who should have had some sense of responsibility.

After being searched we were placed in a large barrack room which, with our complement, was fairly full. I cannot remember whether we got a meal while in this barrack room but I have a faint recollection that some liquid; whether it was water or tea I cannot say, was served out to us.

During our stay in this room we were surveyed by members of the Detective Division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police who scrutinised each one of us carefully.

Among the Detective Officers concerned I noticed Smyth, Hoey, Gaffney, Barton, all of whom, with the exception of Gaffney, were subsequently executed by our forces during the Tan war. Gaffney, as far as I can recollect, left the country and went to England.

Early on Monday morning we were served with a tin of bully beef and some war-time biscuits and ordered out on the Barracks square where we were fallen in and surrounded by heavily armed escorts. After some time we were marched from Richmond Barracks to the North Wall where we were put on board a boat which left for Holyhead. We were placed below decks convenient to the engine room, and as we were all pretty exhausted a number of us went to sleep and when we awoke we found we had reached our destination. I slept throughout the voyage and I am unable to say what class of sea journey we had.

Signed:

Sean Kennedy

(Sean Kennedy)

Date:

1st May 1953

1st May 1953.

Witness:

M.F. Ryan Comd't.

M.F. Ryan, Comd't.

