

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1499

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1499.

Witness

Michael Dempsey,  
5 Derrynane Terrace,  
Dalkey,  
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Retired Civil Servant.

Subject.

Easter Monday, 24th April, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2838.

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

EASTER MONDAY, 1916.

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On Easter Monday, 1916, I arrived at Harcourt St Station from Bray (where I then resided) shortly after 7.30 a.m. and walked to the G.P.O. where I was due for duty in the Central Telegraph Office at 8 o'clock. On the way I paid a brief visit to University Church and then crossed by St Stephen's Green to Grafton St. I entered the G.P.O. by the first door in Henry St, left my hat and coat in a locker in the cloak-room which was located on the ground floor, a short distance from the entrance, and then proceeded to the C.T.O. which was on the top floor. I worked there until noon and as I was due for duty in the Sorting Office - on the ground floor - about four or five o'clock in the afternoon and did not intend returning home for lunch, I proceeded to the Dining Room which was also on the top floor.

Being a Bank Holiday there were not many people in the Dining Room at that hour. When I was a short time there I could not help noticing some commotion or excitement and it seemed to be increasing rather than diminishing. People were gathering at the windows which were at the Princes St side of the room and from which it was possible to see portion of Lower O'Connell St in the direction of Clery's and Lower Abbey St. It was obvious that something unusual was occurring in the street, though naturally at the time, I did not realise what it was. Without hurrying, I finished my lunch and could see that there were far fewer people in the room than when I had entered it over half an hour earlier. From a window I saw a body of Citizen Army men crossing at the double, from Lower Abbey St towards the front of the G.P.O. They carried rifles. Leaving the Dining Room with one or two others, I went back along the corridors towards the C.T.O. and looked in there. It was almost deserted and work seemed to have ceased. I could see people at the opposite end of the room, which was a very big one, carrying office furniture - chairs, tables etc, through the doors leading from the Princes St stairway. Most likely they were Volunteers collecting material for barricades. They could scarcely have been British sentries as by that time such had probably become prisoners. (There had been sentries at some of the entrances to the building. They certainly had rifles, but I have a recollection of reading, some time later, that they had no ammunition). I turned back along the corridors, noticed a few people going in various directions and I also recollect passing some armed men - Volunteers, no doubt-- but certainly not in full uniform. On reaching the yard I noticed that the big doors leading to Princes St were closed. There were three or four others with me and we were approached by a fully uniformed officer - the late Gearoid O'Sullivan - whom I had seen from time to time in the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League during the previous 'Winter'. I recollect that he was surprised to see any of the G.P.O staff still on the premises. It could not have been far off one o'clock at the time. He asked us to wait a while to see if any more would turn up and advised me against going to the cloak-room at the Henry St side for my hat and coat. Eventually, being apparently satisfied that no more of the staff were on the premises he opened one of the big doors and let us into Princes St.

I stood for some time at Mansfield's corner - Middle Abbey St - and then at Purcell's corner - junction of Westmoreland and D'Olier Streets. While there, I saw Lancers coming in single file, at little more than ~~walk~~ walking pace, by the Gresham Hotel towards Nelson Pillar. When the leading two or three had passed the Pillar and were turning towards the G.P.O. a volley rang out, one or two horses fell and the remainder doubled back towards Parnell Sq at a much livelier pace.

Soon afterwards I walked up Grafton St and met a friend who managed to get me a cap from a man whom he knew living over a shop in South ~~Annex~~ Anne St. (Going hatless was not then in vogue). From time to time the sound of gun-fire could be heard from various directions but nobody seemed to mind very much or to dash for shelter. The archway at the entrance to St Stephen's Green now presented a different aspect from what it ~~was~~ it did a few hours previously. The gates were closed and barricaded and the sound of firing could be heard very close-by. After a while I ~~retraced~~ retraced my steps as far as Carlisle Building and there met a next-door neighbour, a taxi owner, and he had one of his cars with him. He told me that he had that car and another taking passengers to Kingsbridge and that when an attempt had been made to commandeer both cars, about half way along the quays, he had managed by a subterfuge to get back to where I met him with one car. He was anxious about the other and waited some

time in the hope that it might turn up. As he was of the opinion that trains were no longer running I decided to drive to Bray with him. It was probably after four o'clock when we left and he drove via Grand Canal, St. Ballsbridge and Anglesea Road, to the Stillorgan Rd. He halted for a time at Cornells Court and had a conversation with the late Rev R.J. O'Connell then C.C. there. It was probably about five o'clock when we reached Bray.

About a month later I got into the G.P.O. with a colleague who was anxious as to the fate of his bicycle which he had left in the basement. At the spot where he believed he had left it we found a mountain of debris. Without having to use a ladder I was able to open my locker in the cloak-room by standing on the debris there. Apart from a pile of fine black ashes all I found was the chain hanger of my coat and a ~~bicycle~~ cycle lamp.

I was in the centre of the city - on foot - between approximately one and four o'clock on Easter Monday and during that time I witnessed one "incident" - the attack on the Lancers approaching the G.P.O. shortly after one o'clock. Neither then nor, at any other time, did I notice any crowd such as would gather in the case of an accident, outbreak of fire etc. I cannot recall seeing any police or military, whilst pedestrian and motor traffic seemed much the same as on any other bank holiday - forty years ago. I think, however, that the trams, with the exception of a few which may have been commandeered for use as barricades, had disappeared from the streets and returned to the depots - for the duration.

Michael Denny,  
5 Derrynane Ice,

Dakota

21.9.1956

At the time in question  
I was employed as Book-keeper  
& Telegraphist in G.P.O.

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BUR. STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,499