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STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Matthew Connolly,
Gledswood Close,
Clonskeagh,
Dublin.

Identity.

Brother of Captain Seán Connolly, I.C.A.

Subject.

I.C.A., Dublin, 1914-1916;
Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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Form B S M 2

STATEMENT BY MATTHEW CONNOLLY,
2 Gledswood Close, Clonskeagh, Dublin.

Memories Of Easter Week, 1916.

Born in Dublin, and reared in an Irish national atmosphere, I had reached the age of fifteen when the time came for that historic event of which I write.

With about three years' training in the Fíanna Éireann, and at the request of my father, I joined the Boys' Section of the Irish Citizen Army at Croydon Park, Fairview, in the mid-summer of 1914. On my first parade, the night of enrolment, I was promoted Section Leader and given a squad of eight boys to drill. In due course, we were allowed to take part in general parades and route marches, attend lectures on first-aid, given by Doctor Kathleen Lynn, on street fighting, given by James Connolly, and in target practice on the miniature rifle range in Liberty Hall.

Early in the year 1916, a special mobilisation order was issued, and every man on parade was interviewed privately by Commandant James Connolly. When my turn came for the interview, I stood before Connolly, who was seated at a small table, and saluted. He asked my name and, having heard it, he smiled. My father and four brothers had already been before him, and, now, here was another of the same family, a mere lad, but feeling important. Having warned me that the answer to the question he was about to put to me could

be given at my own free will, that it was not an oath, and would not be binding in any way, he said, "Do you promise faithfully, on your word of honour, that, if the Citizen Army have to fight alone in the coming revolution, you will take your place in the ranks?"

I answered, "Yes, sir, I do".

We had been very busy at our headquarters, Liberty Hall, for some weeks, making preparations for the rising which now seemed inevitable. Since the day of the attempted police raid on Connolly's newspaper shop, on Eden Quay, after which a general mobilisation order was issued and dramatically obeyed, a constant armed guard was being kept, day and night, on the premises, particularly on the "machine room", situated on the ground floor, where a printing press, on which were being printed political newspapers, pamphlets and suchlike, was being run. The now famous Proclamation of Easter Week was also printed in this machine room.

During these weeks immediately preceding the Rising, armed men could be seen, on guard at the entrance, on the stairs and landings or in the corridors, some in the dark green uniform, some in their ordinary working clothes, some in their Sunday best, complete with collar and tie, but however they were dressed did not seem to matter much. They were all fully armed, and the building resembled a military barracks in everything but in name.

Meanwhile, each man, not doing guard, was lending a hand at one job or another. The "armoury

room", on the first floor, was a busy place. Improvised hand grenades were being manufactured. Cartridges were being altered, to fit rifles and guns for which they were never meant. Bayonets, of an old French type, were being heated over a blow-lamp and bent or reshaped, to fit an old German Mauser rifle. It was quite a common thing, on entering the armoury room, to find a man sitting over the fire, brewing a can of tea on one side of it, while melting a pot of lead on the other side; two or three men at a bench, making some repairs to a rifle, while, at the same time, two or three others were stretched on the bare floor, snoring, fast asleep.

On Easter Sunday, at about two o'clock, Dr. Lynn sent me, on her bicycle, to her home at Belgrave Square, Rathmines, with a letter, telling me to bring back a message. Having waited about half-an-hour at the house, the maid handed me two large parcels which, she warned me, should be carried carefully. One, I managed to tie on the handle-bar, and, with the other - a vegetable tureen, apparently containing a hot meal - precariously balanced on one arm, I arrived back at Liberty Hall, in what I thought was record time.

The general mobilisation was called for that afternoon at three o'clock. Headed by Connolly, Mallin and Countess Markievicz, the entire Citizen Army made a tour of the principal city streets, and returned to the Hall at about five o'clock, where, lined up in front, Connolly addressed us, saying that we were no longer the Citizen Army, that we were now merged with the Irish Volunteers, under the title of the Irish Republican

Army, that we were to be confined to barracks until further orders, and that nobody was to leave the Hall without permission.

On Easter Monday morning, while standing guard on the landing of the main staircase, I saw several Volunteer officers pass to and from Connolly's private office; among them were Patrick Pearse, Thomas McDonough and Tom Clarke. At about eleven o'clock, Connolly came to the landing, and, seeing a bugle slung over my shoulder, called, "Bugler, bugler! Sound the fall-in!". I complied, and immediately men came out from all parts of the building, along the corridor, to the drill room.

I fell into line under my brother, Captain Seán Connolly, and, as our company passed down the stairs on the landing, I was handed two home-made bombs or grenades. They were made from canisters or milk tins, with a small stump of fuse projecting from one end, on which was a blob of sulphur, like the end of a match, only much thicker. They weighed about four or five pounds each, were crudely soldered, and, as my coat pockets were on the small side, I had a troublesome time trying to get the bombs into them. Each man was told to strike the sulphur on a wall or stone, count one-two-three, and then throw, if and when the enemy was at close quarters.

As we lined up in front of the Hall, on the street, the sun was shining, and the Custom House clock told us it was twenty minutes to twelve. A body of about sixty or seventy Volunteers wheeled round from Abbey Street, and halted nearby. A group of about eight women, leaving the Hall, formed up at the end of our company, which numbered about twenty-eight men. We started off, across

Butt Bridge and along Tara Street.

We were moving pretty fast, and, as we went, Seán, our Captain, came down along the side of the ranks, speaking to a man here and there. Every man was either given separate instructions, or was told to follow someone else who had instructions, and to take orders from him. We were now moving along Dame Street, and groups of people, in holiday mood, were moving about. A voice from the footpath remarked, "Here's the Citizen Army, with their pop-guns!" Another said, "There goes Ireland's only hope!" And they laughed at their own jokes. Little did they know!

Someone in the ranks, speaking to his neighbour, said something about Dublin Castle, and, only then, did I realise where we were bound for.

The Angelus bells were ringing out from the city churches.

We were now at the small cul-de-sac in Dame Street, and adjoining the City Hall. Suddenly, the man, whom I had been instructed to follow, stepped from the ranks and turned into the cul-de-sac. Accompanied by two other men and myself, he opened a door and entered a room, about ten feet square. It was very dark inside, and, to give us light, we held the outside door open. Another door in a side wall refused to open, so we demolished it with the butts of rifles, only to discover that, behind it, was a built-in cupboard. Meanwhile, shooting had started outside, somewhere on the main thoroughfare. We left this chanber, and went further down the cul-de-sac where we entered another doorway,

to find ourselves in the basement of the City Hall.

Led by our Section Leader, we proceeded up the stairs, through the main building, to the roof where, on arrival, we found Seán Connolly, with four or five other men. They had entered through the doorway facing Castle Street, had reached the roof before us, and Seán was placing his men in position, at various points along and behind the parapet. He ordered me to mount a roof ladder, leading up the slope behind the stonework of the roof pediment or gable, facing down Parliament Street, and to watch out for any British military which, if seen, was to be reported at once. Unarmed, individual soldiers were not to be interfered with.

The municipal flag of green, with blue corner and three white gates, fluttered in the breeze on the pole, behind which I sat.

In this elevated position, I had a commanding view over a good portion of the city; the air was clear, and visibility good. Across the street from where I was, men were taking up positions on the roof of Henry and James' building, at the corner of Parliament Street, and on the roof of the "Evening Mail" offices. These were members of our own company.

The sound of rifle-firing could be heard in the distance, with, now and then, the ping of a rifle nearby. We soon got to know the various sounds of the different types of guns and rifles being used, the shotgun with a bark all its own, the German Mauser with a loud explosion and echo, quite distinct, and the sharp crack of the Lee Enfield, with a ring to it, as if one could hear the

bullet whistling through the air.

A troop of Lancers on horseback, numbering about twenty, moved at an easy pace along Ormond Quay, in the direction of the Phoenix Park. They made a fine show as the horses pranced and helmets glistened in the sunlight. I asked Seán if we should open fire on them, and he said, "No! They will get it before they go much further!" He was right, for, about five minutes later, a volley of shots rang out from the direction of the Four Courts, and the Lancers, about one-quarter of their original number, came charging back along the Quays, in single file, soldiers bent down over the horses' necks, sparks flying from the hoofs. In a flash, they were out of sight.

The firing had now increased in intensity, and seemed quite close, on the Castle side of the building. Presently, I saw Seán coming towards me, with one sleeve of his tunic rolled up to the elbow. He had what, at first, appeared to be a red handkerchief bound round his forearm. I asked what it was for, and, holding out his arm, he said, "Look at the blood I'm shedding for Ireland!" He had been wounded, and the handkerchief was soaked with blood. I offered to dress the wound properly, as I had a first-aid kit on my belt, but he made light if it, saying that it was only a revolver shot and would be alright soon. He then returned to the rear of the building.

Shortly afterwards, a strange-looking motor lorry, carrying a huge horizontal boiler or cylinder, turned off the Quays into Parliament Street, and was

making its way slowly towards us. It had a large, steel plate in front, completely covering the driver's cab, with just a vision slit cut in it, through which the driver could see. I couldn't make out what it was, but someone shouted, "Armoured car!", and soon we were all on the alert. Seán told us not to open fire until he gave the order. The lorry came nearer and nearer. As it reached the corner of Dame Street, the order, which was loud enough for all men on the adjoining buildings to hear, came, and a volley of fire rang out. The lorry stopped, started again, stopped, and started, in a jerking manner, and slowly crawled up the slope of Cork Hill into Castle Street while we poured down a hail of lead on it. One of our men told me afterwards that it stopped at the Castle gates and that, as the military driver stepped out, he immediately fell to the ground and lay still.

As the firing continued intermittently, I noticed that the roof slating near me was becoming cracked and chipped. Pieces of slate would slide down into the valley, every now and then. Suddenly, I noticed that the slating quite close to me was becoming perforated with bullet holes, and, descending the ladder, I took up a safer position. Soon afterwards, I was sent by one of our junior officers to the north-east corner of the building, to relieve another man who had been called away.

The view from my new position was limited, as the parapet wall was high, and I could only see a short distance down Dame Street, between the rails of the ornamental balustrade. If any troops came from this

direction, the only thing I could do was to snipe at them. Behind me, and towards my left, was the large dome of the City Hall roof which, with chimney stacks here and there, cut off my view of most of the area where my comrades were situated, but I could still see the men on Henry and James' building. They were shouting down to pedestrians on the street, advising them to go home, but some of the people stood and stared in wonder. It was while thus engaged that one of our men, Charles Darcy, quite young and a particular friend of mine, came in the line of fire, received a fatal wound, and I saw him fall back into the roof gutter.

A little later, word was passed along to me that my brother, Seán, had again been wounded, this time seriously. I attempted to get to him, but our Section Leader, with his rifle pointed in my direction, ordered me back to my post.

Reports of other casualties were passed along, from time to time, and, among the news reaching me was that Doctor Kathleen Lynn was in the building, attending the wounded, that reinforcements had arrived from the G.P.O., and that a detachment of military had tried to enter the Castle vie Castle Street, but had been beaten back. A typewritten sheet of paper was passed along for me to read and pass back again. This told of a general uprising throughout the country, making special reference to Wexford and Galway, and that a large body of men from Kildare were marching on Dublin. There were also words of encouragement to the fighting men and women of the Irish Republican Army, and for the

gallant stand being made for the independence of Ireland.

I felt proud at being associated with this great movement, and, although my spirits were high, my anxiety to get to the side of my dying brother was more than keen. Knowing that it was easy to get in the line of fire from military snipers from the clock tower of the Castle, I moved carefully up the slates of a roof slope nearby, in order to cut across to the opposite side of the building, to where I might have a word with Seán before it was too late, but, as I reached the top of the slope, a burst of rifle fire splintered the slates around me, and it was impossible to cross over the top without being hit. I did, however, get a glimpse of Seán, lying wounded. I then realised that it was much more important to man the position allotted to me, that, if the enemy was to approach from my side of the building, the consequences would be serious for our little garrison, so, with my rifle ready at the parapet railing, I stood and watched.

The sky became clouded, and a light shower of rain fell, just sufficient to make everything damp. Rifle fire on the Castle side of the building continued, but there was no sign of any military movements along that section of Dame Street which I kept under observation. For the first time in my life, I heard the rattle of machine guns in the distance, but, due to the echo, could not be sure from what direction the sound came. I had a feeling that, sooner or later, an attack would come in my direction and, with all the courage I could muster, waited patiently.

At about six o'clock in the evening, one of our men came to relieve me, and said that I was to report at once to Dr. Lynn who was waiting for me in one of the caretaker's rooms below. Passing through a small roof doorway, down a steep ladder leading to the caretaker's quarters on the upper floor, one of our women directed me to Dr. Lynn's room where I received a brief medical examination. She asked how I felt. I told her that, as I had not had any sleep for three nights running, I felt somewhat tired, but was otherwise fit. She was very brave, and told me of my brother Seán's heroic death, of the other casualties among our men, of my sister, Katie, nursing the wounded on the ground floor, and of the stand being made by our garrisons in all parts of the city. She gave me two medicinal tablets, and ordered me to report to the dining room for a meal, and then to go to bed for a rest. Having taken the tablets with a cup of tea, I was shown to a small tidy bedroom, on the right-hand side, at the end of a corridor, where, throwing off my equipment and without taking off my clothes, I lay on the bed and fell asleep.

When I awoke - it must have been some hours afterwards - the building seemed to vibrate with explosions and the rattle of machine guns. The room was dark. Glass crashed, doors and woodwork were being shattered, and, somewhere in the building, women screamed. I heard a familiar voice shouting, "Come in off the roof! Come in off the roof!" And, almost immediately afterwards, the same voice - "Go back on to the roof! Go back on to the roof!" I jumped out of bed, groped, in the dark, to find my equipment

and, while buckling it on, called out, "Who's there? What's wrong?" The voice, which seemed to be in the room, answered, "Come on quick, they're here!" I could not see a thing, but felt my way along the wall till I came to the door, opened it, and stepped into the corridor. It was crowded with British military, and a small glimmer of light, coming from one of the rooms, was reflected in the shining bayonets and cap badges. They were talking excitedly, with English accents, and, although quite close to me, I couldn't understand a word they said. Turning quickly into the room again, I shut the door, and stood back from it, with my rifle at the ready, determined to shoot the first one who tried to enter. Five minutes must have passed, and nothing happened, except that the shuffling of feet and incoherent voices became more faint, as if moving away from the door. The firing had died down, and the machine gunning had ceased. My eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, and I could see the outline of the bed and, beyond it, the form of a step-ladder, rising up to the ceiling. This, I mounted and passed through a small door, out on to the roof. I crept along to the spot from which I had been relieved earlier, but there was nobody there. The men had also gone from the roof of Henry and James.

There were snow boards along the valley gutters, between the sloping sections of the roof, and these I traversed, in an effort to find out where my comrades had gone, but without success, until I came across the body of my brother, Seán. I knelt to say a prayer for his departed soul.

Sniping was still going on in the vicinity, and the sharp crack of rifle fire echoed through the night. I had no idea of the time, but guessed it should be about midnight. Peering through the rails of the stone balustrade opposite the "Evening Maill" offices, I could see the bluish light of the arc street lamps shining down on the wet cobblestones, while, above, the upper part of the surrounding buildings took on a dark, almost black appearance. The lanyard on the flag pole shook in the wind, and rattled against the pole every now and then.

I moved back towards the Castle end of the building, took the two home-made bombs from my pockets, laid them on the stone ledge near me, and sat down on the slope of the roof. I tried to figure out where my comrades had gone, but couldn't. There was a sound of men's voices and movement on the street below me, near the Castle gate. There were footsteps and the sound of wheels, as if a wagon or vehicle was being pushed along by hand. A loose chain rattled, and I concluded that a field gun of some description was being moved into position. Shortly afterwards, a loud explosion followed, and a bright rocket, or Verey light, shot skywards from somewhere in the Castle yard. It seemed to light up every dark corner over the whole district, lasted only a few seconds, and then went out. I lay down flat in the valley gutter, and remained quiet.

Some form of helplessness then came over me, and I felt I couldn't move. It was more of a drowsiness, which I tried to fight against, but failed, and I

passed into a sound sleep.

A hand gripped the shoulder of my coat, and a voice shouted, "Get up!" My eyes opened, to see a revolver pointed at me. The man was an officer in khaki uniform, and I remember distinctly seeing a white band on his arm, bearing a red cross. It was now daylight. He asked if I was wounded, and being told no, called out for an escort. Seán's body lay near me, and I thought it would not be long till my soul would join his.

Two soldiers came out, through a dormer nearby, and I was marched off between them. On our way down the stairs, we met two other soldiers carrying a stretcher, going towards the roof.

While crossing the upper Castle yard, which was entered through a large window from the ground floor of the City Hall, the military were standing about in small groups, all over the place. While passing one of these groups, an officer in charge, speaking to the one who had arrested me and was walking behind, said, "That's a young 'un!!!" "Yes! The bugler!", was the reply. My bugle was still slung across my shoulders.

In the guardroom of Ship Street barracks, where I was taken, sat an officer who took my name and address, and had me searched. I think he was a colonel or a major, judging by his gold braid. My escort stood behind me, while another soldier took off my equipment and turned out my pockets. When the search was completed, I asked that my Rosary and a small, brass

Crucifix should be returned. The Rosary was handed back, but the Crucifix was refused.

The soldier, who made the search, picked up a small piece of paper which had been taken from my pocket, and read the following:-

"THE HYMN ON THE BATTLEFIELD"

Armed for the battle, kneel we before Thee.
Bless Thou our banners, God of the brave!
Ireland is living, shout we, exultant,
Ireland is waking, hands grasp the sword.
Who fights for Ireland, God guide his blows home.
Who dies for Ireland, God give him peace.
Knowing our cause just, march we, triumphant,
Living or dying, Ireland to free!"

He looked into my face, and then back at the paper, as if I were mad.

I was then pushed into a dark cell, which was off a narrow passage, adjacent to the guard room. There were a few inches of stagnant water on the floor, and the smell was sickening.

Out of the darkness came the voice of one of my comrades who had been taken prisoner earlier. He asked who it was, and, when I told him my name, he

shook hands, and was glad of my company. We were kept in this dundeon for several hours, and then taken out, into a large detention room, where some more of our comrades from the City Hall garrison were being held. This room was off the guard room of Ship Street barracks. There were about twelve of us in this room for the first day or so, but then the number was being added to, by other prisoners who were being picked up on the streets at odd times. We remained here until the following Sunday, April 30th, 1916, when we were marched to Kilmainham Gaol under heavy escort, through several groups of hostile people.

SIGNED: Matthew Connolly.

DATE: 27th Nov. 1958.

WITNESS Sean Brennan Lieut-Col.