

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUNO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 162

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.162.....

Witness

John F. Shouldice

Identity

1st Lieut. F/Coy. 1st Bn. 1916.

Subject

The Rising 1916. Church St. area.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No.S. 255.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF J.F. SHOULDICE
1st. LIEUT. F.COY., 1st. BATTALION, IRISH VOLUNTEERS
1916.

I left home in Ballaghaderreen in May 1899 when 17 years of age to join the Civil Service in London. Very soon after I became a member of the G.A.A. and about 1901 was sworn into the I.R.B. by either Sam Maguire or J.B. Mulcahy. Dr. MCBride was Circle Leader and among other members so far as I can recollect, were P.S. O'Hegarty, Sam Maguire, J.B. Mulcahy, M.S. Hunt and Con Collins. There were about a dozen in the Circle. I do not recollect the name of the Circle which usually met in Chancery Lane. Dr. Mark Ryan was Head Centore in London. I was transferr- ed to Dublin in 1907 and became attached to the Teeling Circle. I resigned from the I.R.B. in 1912 owing to certain differences amongst the Leaders, ^{details of which I cannot recall (R)} but rejoined some time after the formation of the Irish Volunteers.

I joined the Irish Volunteers at the Rotunda Meeting in November, 1913; and at the first meeting of F.Company, 1st. Battalion afterwards I was elected 1st. Lieutenant of that Company. I held that rank throughout the Rising. Edward Daly was Commandant and Pierce Beasley, Vice-Commandant of the 1st. Battalion. Fionan Lynch was Captain of F,Coy. and D.O'Hegarty 2nd. Lieutenant. They all took part in the Rising. Half of the Company were members of the Gaelic League and about one third were members of the G.A.A.

The I.R.B. were largely responsible both for the formation of the Volunteers and for the direction of its policy which it did mainly through the Brigade, Battalion, and Company Officers of the Volunteers practically all of whom were members of the I.R.B.

Early in April, 1916 I was informed confidentially by Harry Boland a fellow member of the I.R.B. that the Rising would take place at Easter.

I believe there was a general plan for the whole Country and that such plan did not contemplate immobilisation in buildings as our instructions originally provided for a retreat to the Country, North County Dublin and Meath. These instructions were afterwards cancelled and we were ordered to fall back to the Four Courts.

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I am not aware that any street manoeuvres took place before the Rising.

Early in Holy Week I received instructions from Fionan Lynch Captain to mobilise the Company on Easter Sunday. I notified the members of the Company through Company Mobilisers to parade at Blackhall Place at 11. a.m. on Easter Sunday with full kit and three or four days rations. The Countermanding order issued by MacNeill affected the attendance. Out of a strength of approximately 100 about 40 between Company Headquarters at Parnell Square and Blackhall Place paraded. The parade was dismissed about 12 noon with instructions that they were not to leave Dublin pending further orders. The Countermanding Order caused complete disorganisation. I felt surprise and disappointment. I made my own decision as a member of the I.R.B. and of the Volunteers. On Easter Monday my Company paraded at the Colmcille Hall in Blackhall Street at 10.30 a.m. About one quarter, namely 25/30 men, of my company paraded mainly due, I believe, to the lateness of the decision regarding the Rising and the difficulty of reaching all members before 12 noon. However, this number was doubled during the day and the days following; 52 members of F.Coy. actually signed the Easter Week Roll of Honour for the Four Courts Garrison Area. The officers of the Battalion had been in conference all day on Sunday in the rooms of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League in Nth. Frederick St. and it was late in the night or early on Monday morning when the final decision was made to begin the Rising at noon on Easter Monday. I was at the Gaelic League Hall in Nth. Frederick St. when I received instructions from my Coy. O.C. Fionan Lynch. I sent out the Company Mobilisers immediately to inform all members of my Company to parade at Blackhall Street at 10.30 a.m.

I would say that perhaps one-third of those who mobilised on Easter Sunday and the majority of those who mobilised on Easter Monday were aware that they were going into action. Along with my brother Frank I joined the Battalion on its way to take up the positions allotted to each company. The duty

allotted to me by Commandant Beasley and Capt. F. Lynch was to hold and fortify the crossing at Nth. King Street and Church St. and to occupy and fortify the adjoining houses and erect barricades. On our way to the crossing we attacked the balance of a small party of ^{British} Lancers apparently on their way to their depot at Marlborough Barracks. I later learned that the main party had been held up earlier in O'Connell St. After a few shots from our men the Lancers surrendered and were put under guard in the Father Matthew Hall in Church St. which had been taken over as an hospital. We put the horses, about four, into Sammon's Horse Repository in Nth. King St.

The plan was to defend the crossing from enemy attacks coming from British Barracks, e.g. Royal and Marlborough on the west or Smithfield side, from military posts such as Broadstone Railway Station and the North Dublin Union on the North and East sides and to keep the crossing open for our own forces from the Four Courts, and to maintain a line of communication with the G.P.O. Garrison.

The Barricades were built with a variety of articles taken from adjoining houses, stores, yards etc. (excepting necessary articles of furniture) such as barrels, full and empty, boxes, carts, cabs, old furniture, planks, sacks filled with sand and Rubble. One of the corner houses was unoccupied, it bore the name of Reilly on the Sign Board. We removed three windows and fortified the place with sacks of flour and meal taken from the Blanchardstown Mills shop on the opposite corner. During the week it became known as Reilly's Fort and served as a good shelter and place of rest for the first two or

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three days and nights when it was possible for the men on the barricades to get relieved. Communications were made through Reilly's and an adjoining house in upper Church St. by boring through the walls; with crowbars obtained locally, to the back of Lenihan's Public licensed premises and so on to Nth. Brunswick St. Part of a house on the opposite corner diagonally from Reilly's was occupied and put in charge of Frank McCabe assisted by Maurice Collins. This House commanded the Nth. King St. - Smithfield side from which sniping took place and later machine gun fire from armoured cars. The main attack, however, did not come from this side but from the Capel St. side. New cottages were in course of erection between Church St. and Beresford St., backing on Jameson's Malt House Granary. These Cottages were manned by a group of men under Seamus Byrne and the Malthouse by a small group under Frank Shouldice. The Malthouse was used as a sniping post and as Coy. Headquarters by Capt. Lynch.

Monk's Bakery part in Church St. and part in Nth. King St. was held by G.Coy. under Capt. N. Laffan. Comdt. Daly put some Volunteers in charge and compelled the bakers to continue at their work as long as the supply of Flour lasted. A small tricolour flag was mounted on a Lance captured from the British Lancers at the centre of the crossing King St.- Church St.

The total garrison of my post in Reilly's and at the crossing was about 20 men, about 10 in uniform. They were practically all members of F.Coy. with a few from other companies of the 1st. Battalion. We had about 10 or 12 service and Carbine rifles suitable for 303 ammunition, about six Howth rifles for which the supply of ammunition was limited; and about six bayonets. There were about 3 or 4 revolvers. We had no explosives or grenades. In addition to the rations brought by some of the men we obtained our supplies of bread, meat &c by requisitioning them in the name of the Republic from local Grocery and provision shops. We were able to cook for the first few

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days in the fireplace in Reilly's, but the cooking ceased on the last few days we were there. Two members of the unit did the cooking. The meals generally consisted of rashers and eggs and tea and stew.

Battalion Headquarters was at first situated at St. John's Convent in Nth. Brunswick St. and later in the Four Courts Building. The latter was made H.Q. when it was considered no longer feasible to retire to the country via North County Dublin as was, I understood, originally intended. Father Matthew Hall was a first aid station primarily but was also used to detain prisoners and suspected spies. I don't know if it was ever used as a H.Q.

Some of our first activities were to regulate the hundreds of people who came clamouring for bread to Monk's Bakery in Nth. King St. in the early part of the week. Most of the city bakeries had been closed down by Tuesday and a number of people from outside areas came to Monk's. On Monday and Tuesday a good number of the local residents, especially those who had relatives fighting for England in the European War, were very antagonistic and their womenfolk especially made our fight none the easier. However, we gradually got the sympathy or, if not, the respect of the great majority of the people when they saw for themselves that we were conducting the Rising in a fair and clean manner and with such small numbers against the might of England. On Monday evening and night we had quite a busy time with returning race-goers and holiday makers who were unable to get along by the main route via the Quays to O'Connell ^{BRIDGE} ~~Bridge~~ etc. They were mostly in a state of panic and anxious to get through our barricades at the crossing to their houses as speedily as possible - a few were inclined to be obstreperous at being held up and wanted to know what it was all about.

The fighting in the early part of the week mostly consisted of sniping from elevated positions like the top

of the Malthouse, the roofs of Reilly's and adjoining houses at the crossing where our men had some narrow escapes from enemy snipers. Bullets spattered round the chimneys of Reilly's Fort where some of our snipers including Tom Sheerin, William Murphy, Michael O'Kelly etc. were busy sniping enemy posts. The roof tops soon got too hot for our men who were forced to come down.

On Wednesday the Linenhall Barracks to the back of Monk's Bakery off Coleraine St. was taken by Captain Denny O'Callaghan of A.Coy. with some of his men and some from G.Coy. The garrison consisted of about 20 British soldiers of some non combatant department of that Army who surrendered and were taken to the Father Matthew Hall and kept prisoners there till near the end of the week. The barracks were afterwards set on fire by O'Callaghan's men and burned fiercely for a few days. The fire spread to Messrs. Moore and Alexander's Chemical works and they were soon a mass of flames. Captain Laffan procured a hose from the North Dublin Union and with some men from G.Coy. and my own Coy. we proceeded to save the adjoining houses and protect our firefighters from possible attack by enemy forces. The fire was eventually got under control or burned itself out. The barracks were completely burned to the ground. The whole of that night and following nights were as bright as day in the area of Nth. King St. and the adjoining streets when the fire was at its height.

On Wednesday night Commandant Daly contemplated with other officers the advisability of making an attack on enemy forces in Capel St. who had been actively sniping our barricades. Owing to the brightness of the streets all round from the Linenhall barracks fire and our small numbers, the project was abandoned.

On Thursday the British military were being strongly increased in numbers and severe attacks by rifles and machine guns were directed on our barricades which were

strongly defended. Thursday night and Friday the British military adopted breaking through tactics from house to house to reach our position. One open attack was made on Saturday morning ^{at dawn} on our barricade facing Bolton Street. The attacking party numbering 12 or 15 meeting with a hot reception from this barricade rushed into Beresford St. about 50 yards up Nth. King St. on our right from the crossing. This was a veritable death trap as there was another barricade unmanned about 10 or 15 yards in but covered by our men who were holding the partly built cottages backing on to Beresford St. and Stirrup Lane. This part of Beresford St. was also covered by our snipers in the Malthouse and between their fire and the fire of the men in the cottages the military party was practically wiped out. This was an opportunity to get some badly needed rifles and ammunition for our men which was promptly taken advantage of and about a dozen Lee Enfield Rifles and about a hundred rounds of ammunition fell into our hands. The most of the rifles were found to have been shattered by the Volunteers' fire and were consequently useless. This finished the open attacking by the military who continued their tactics of breaking through the houses. Attacks by machine gun and rifle fire on our barricades became more intensive from the Capel St. and Smithfield ends. The barricades facing both ends became untenable for our men who fell back into Reilly's Fort which commanded part of Nth. King Street facing the Bolton St. or Capel St. end. Throughout the Friday night and Saturday morning the gunfire was practically continuous. We sustained casualties at the crossing losing a few who were killed outright and a number wounded. Volunteer Patrick O'Flanagan of C.Coy., who was one of our defenders, was sent out for ammunition to Father Matthew Hall or wherever he could obtain it and was, on his return, shot fatally coming into Reilly's.

The military had, about daybreak on Saturday, reached Upr. Church St. through the houses at the back of Nth. King St. and were commanding Reilly's from that side. Some of them were silenced by our fire but they kept up their reinforcements. Our supply of ammunition was becoming exhausted and a number of our rifles were getting jammed with the continuous firing. Great difficulty was experienced in getting supplies. Some of our men who were sent out from Reilly's for ammunition failed to return. Probably the supplies were not available, but ^{it} was not an easy matter to get in or out of the building owing to crossfire from the Bolton St. and Smithfield ends. and from the back of Monk's Bakery (Now held by the English military) in Upper Church St. This was the position from about daybreak to about 9 or 10 a.m. on Saturday Morning.

Through death, wounds and illness~~and~~, I may add, exhaustion after nearly two days of continuous defence of the position, our little garrison had been reduced to 7 or 8 wearied-out and almost stupified men, some of us with practically no sleep since Wednesday. With no rest possible, ammunition nearly gone and no sign of reinforcements, a consultation was held by the remnant left of us, about 10 or 11 a.m. when a lull came in the attack it was decided to fall back to the next barricade in Church St. (near Father Matthew Hall) which appeared to us to have been vacated as no activity was discernible there. We lined up in the window shop front of Reilly's and at a given signal all dashed together across the fire-swept North King St. and reached Father Matthew Hall barricade. After getting in touch with Vice.Commandant Beaslai and Lt. O'Hegarty it was arranged that we should have some hours rest. Subsequently some of the officers decided to get fresh men to retake Reilly's and the crossing, but without success as the enemy had obtained

a strong footing and resisted the attack in which one Volunteer was killed and a few wounded.

Later in the day, perhaps about 2 or 3 p.m., it was learned that negotiations were on foot for a conditional surrender and about 5 or 6 p.m. instructions came through from the Four Courts that we were to return there and surrender as directed by our Commanding Officer, Comdt. Daly. It was then ascertained that the surrender was unconditional which put us all in a very depressed state - knowing that we would meet with very little mercy from our old enemy. Nevertheless there was a feeling of pride amongst us that we defied the might of England for a whole week.

That Saturday evening, about 7 o'clock, after the surrender of our weapons, the members of the Four Courts Garrison Area, excluding the men at the Nth. Brunswick St. end who had been cut off from the main body, were lined up under a strong force of military. We were marched off via Capel St. and Parnell St. to the Rotunda and put inside the iron railings on the grass plot in front of the Hospital. We were joined there by a number from the G.P.O. Garrison amongst them being Tom Clarke and Sean McDermott. The trials we had to undergo were beginning. We were kept throughout that night until the Sunday morning following on this confined space. The conduct of the military officers in charge of us was most aggressive and insulting, but there was no redress - a few who protested were hit with the butt end of rifles or pricked with bayonets. One of these officers was an Irishman, but he met his deserts I believe some years afterwards during the Black and Tan regime. We were marched off about 8 or 9 am to the Richmond Barracks near Kilmainham. Our route was through O'Connell St., and the Quays. The appearance of O'Connell St. and the G.P.O. - what was left of it - was an unforgettable sight. From the G.P.O. to O'Connell Bridge on both sides of the street the

buildings were mostly burned out; a number of them were still smouldering, also a good portion of Lr. and Middle Abbey St. The bodies of some civilians shot during the week were lying about also a few horses about O'Connell Bridge. The heart of the city presented a picture of utter desolation.

At Richmond Barracks we were thoroughly searched and personal belongings, such as cash, watches and anything of value were taken and, so far as I am aware, never returned. We were marched into the Gymnasium where G. Division (Detective members of the D.M.P.) got busy sorting out the "black sheep" or those known for their prominence in the Volunteer and National movements and put on one side of the Hall. I was one of that number. We were taken to another part of the Barracks and during the days following were joined by other marked men from Dublin and the provinces. The main body of the prisoners were deported that evening or next morning to Frongoch and Stafford Detention Camps in Britain. The selected men were tried before a Field Courtmartial of British Commanding Officers and were brought before the latter singly or in twos on different occasions during the week. During that time we had to take our rest on the bare floor as there was no seating accommodation of any kind and we had to sleep as best we could. The trials were obviously a farce. A young British soldier who was a prisoner in the G.P.O. swore that he saw Con. O'Donovan and myself (we were tried together) in the active fighting in the G.P.O. Con was in the Four Courts and I was in Nth. King St., Church St. Area the whole week.

The G.men(detectives) for all practical purposes were the Judge and Jury as they were present through the whole time of the trial and identified us for the Courtmartial Officers and no doubt gave our characters according to our prominence in the national movements so far as they knew them prior to Easter 1916. A few years later most

of these Detectives, including Smith, Hoey, &c. paid for these activities with their lives. O'Donovan and myself and others were taken to Kilmainham Jail about the Friday following the surrender. We were put into the cells of Mallin and Ceannt, on the 3rd. floor, who were actually being taken down to the ground cells that evening prior to their execution at dawn on the following morning. We could not say but the same fate awaited us. Every morning at dawn for the few days I was detained there I was awakened by the executions of two or three of the leaders at a time. We were in doubt as to our own fate until the following Monday or Tuesday when an officer came along to our cells and read out our sentences. Mine was "that I was sentenced to death - a pause - but the officer presiding at the courtmartial had commuted the sentence to 5 years Penal Servitude". That was some relief, though at the time I was prepared for anything after the executions of our comrades and leaders, and our experiences since the surrender. The day, 8th. May probably, following our sentences, about 20 or 30 of us were removed to Mountjoy Prison and a sorry sight we were, unkempt, unshaven, no change of clothes since Easter Monday, sleeping on floors &c. It was like home in Mountjoy where we had a complete change of clothing, after a hot bath, even though the clothes were of the prison variety, they were clean, and we had a bed to lie on, also regular meals though of prison diet. The warders were generally humane and reasonable unlike our military guards, though a few of these were not bad when it was possible to bribe them with a few shillings. Various rumours were afloat in the "Joy" as to where we were to be sent for our terms of Penal Servitude, some to the effect that we were to be sent to the Western Front to make trenches, fill sandbags, &c. - shipped to Tasmania, West Indies, &c. After a week in Mountjoy a batch of 12 of us including DeValera, Harry Boland, Jack McArdle, Con O'Donovan, Frank Lawless, Jim O'Sullivan, &c. were marched off under military escort

and put on board a cargo vessel at the north wall and locked below decks until our arrival in Holyhead. There I saw Diarmuid O'Hegarty, a fellow officer of F.Coy. We learned that he was released on his way back to Ireland - lucky devil-. It appears that Diarmuid was taken to be another prisoner of the same name who had been wrongfully arrested and deported and whose release had been ordered. After leaving Holyhead we boarded a train taking us southward and had no idea where we were bound for. The military guard said they did not know either, which was probably true. Anyhow we eventually reached Dartmoor where we started our terms of imprisonment as criminal convicts which made further history subsequently in the fight of the 1916 Rebels.

At Richmond Barracks after the surrender I had some conversation with Sean McDermott and Sean McBride who were quite satisfied with the fight made during the week. They expected death after the trials but were quite cheerful about the prospect. I met Kent and Mallin at Kilmainham on the night before their executions. Both were fully resigned, and happy in fact, awaiting their fate in the morning.

SIGNED

J. J. Phelan

DATE

16th November 1948

WITNESS:

A. J. Feely Comdt.

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