

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 282

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 282

Witness

Mr. Charles J. O'Grady,
27 Emerald Square,
Dolphin's Barn,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of Fianna Eireann;
" " C/Coy. 4th Battalion Dublin
Brigade Irish Volunteers 1913 -;
Member of I.R.A.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1913 & 1921;
- (b) Howth Gun-Running 1914;
- (c) Roe's Distillery, Easter Week 1916;
- (d) Reorganisation of Irish Volunteers 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S.992.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY CHARLES O'GRADY, 27 EMERALD SQUARE,

DOLPHIN'S BARN, DUBLIN.

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I enrolled in the Irish Volunteers at the meeting in the Rotunda Rink, November 1913. Some time later I was told to parade at 34 Lr. Camden St., a hall at that time used by Fianna na hEireann, of which I had been a member.

We were divided into companies and I was allocated to C/Coy. Battn. IV. We paraded on Thursday nights at 34 Camden St. and at Larkfield, Kimmage, on Saturday evenings for field exercises, company and battalion drill.

Sometime in 1914 we made Larkfield our permanent H.Q. and all Coy. and Battn. parades were held there. My experience in foot drill in the Fianna was useful. I was appointed to instruct recruits in foot drill, squad and section drill. We used the 1911 British Army Infantry Training Manual. We had some ex-N.C.Os. of the British Army as instructors; the one I knew best was a man named Whelan, afterwards killed in France. He did great work as battalion instructor. Eamon Ceannt thought a lot about this man's work for the Battalion.

I remember one squad I had for instruction included The O'Rahilly, William Cosgrave, Phil Cosgrave, Willie Pearse, the Reddin Brothers.

I was with the battalion on the march to Howth, July 1914, for the gun-running. In this connection I remember seeing some photographs, either in "The Sphere" or "Graphic" or "Illustrated London News" about August 1914. One picture showed some of our battalion drawn across the shore end of the pier at Howth. It included Comdt. E. Ceannt, V/Comdt. Cathal Brugha, Captain Seamus Murphy. Another picture showed part of our company on the march back to Dublin carrying the Howth Mausers. On the return march we came into conflict with the D.M.P. and Scottish Borderers at Howth Crescent, Clontarf. One of the men of A/Coy. was wounded by a bayonet thrust in the neck. I afterwards helped to take some of the rifles into the city in a motor-bike and sidecar, leaving them at Andy Clarkin's, Pearse St.

On the formation of the Fingal Brigade I was sent to Swords with Volunteer Pat Egan, the Battalion Instructor Whelan, and P. McDunphy to help to drill the local company on its first parade. What a laugh the people tried to make of us that day, telling us we should be out in France fighting the Germans. At the time of the split most of our Coy. stood fast for Ireland, only a few went over to the Redmondites. It was only after the split that we really settled down to get the companies properly organised. Officers were elected, section and squad leaders appointed and the arming of the men began in earnest and what a collection we had. Long Lee Enfields, short Lee enfields, Boer Mausers, Howth Mausers, Martini Enfields, .22 rifles, 20 gauge shotguns and revolvers of all types and sizes.

During 1915 we continued our training, route marches, field exercises, etc. At Easter 1915, I was one of the "Agony Column" which marched from Rathfarnham to Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow, and back to Dublin by the coast road. We started 50 strong under the command of Con Colbert and Sean Heuston. We marched by way of the Featherbed Mountain, Glencree, and halted early on Sunday morning at Cronybyrne Wood for a few hours rest before marching into Rathdrum for Mass. We finished up at Parnell Statue on Monday evening, 43 strong only; 7 men failed to finish the march. We had marched $84\frac{1}{2}$ miles in $47\frac{1}{2}$ hours carrying full kit, except rifles. A lot of the men carried small arms. This was the weekend on which the Redmondite Volunteers held their big review in Phoenix Park, Easter Sunday 1915.

On Patrick's Day 1916, we were on parade round the city and the Brigade inspection in College Green. We had Mass in St. Michael's and John's Church and marched from there up the quays, Manor St., N.C.Rd., down O'Connell St. to College Green. All the men on this parade were armed with some sort of rifle or shotgun. The men with shotguns had an improvised bayonet with thumbscrews for fixing. The "G" Division of the D.M.P. paid special attention to us on that day and had plenty to report.

Part of our Coy. did guard in the City Hall the Saturday night before O'Donovan Rossa's funeral and we had a full parade at the funeral to Glasnevin on the Sunday.

During the latter part of 1915 and up to the Rising we continued our training. Arms were secured from all sources; from British soldiers who smuggled them out of barracks and from men who had access to British posts, such as travellers, postmen, Board of Works men, etc.

We were mobilised for the manoeuvres on Easter Sunday 1916 and, on the cancellation of the order, we were told not to leave the city that day. We all felt that something was about to happen; most of the men went to confession on Saturday night, Easter 1916.

On Easter Monday 1916 Captain Tom McCarthy, our Coy. O/C., came to my house at about 9.30 or 10 o'clock. 1st Lieut. Pat Egan was sleeping with me that night. We were ordered to mobilise our half-companies for 10.30 at Emerald Square, Dolphin's Barn, all men to carry arms and ammunition and rations. We proceeded to warn all the men on our mobilisation lists and reached Emerald Square sometime about 11 o'clock and reported to our Coy. O/C. There was a lot of confusion and no one seemed to know what was going to happen. F/Coy., Inchicore, came marching down the Back of the pipes. They carried with them a supply of pikes. Capt. McCarthy told me I would not need my rifle - a short Lee Enfield - so I handed it over along with my bike to Vol. Peter Ward. He was sent on a message by Comdt. Ceannt and was afterwards wounded during the fighting at the S.D. Union - that was the last I saw of my rifle or bike. I was handed a 10-ft. pike and I had my .38 revolver and 30 rounds of ammunition. I was ordered to escort a car from McCabe's yard opposite Emerald Square and, taking some men, we formed round the car. This was a horse-drawn cart. The order was given to march and we went down Cork St. and wheeled into Marrowbone Lane. One half of the column with another cart wheeled into the distillery in Marrowbone Lane. The front half of the column with the cart which I was escorting continued on past the

Distillery round James's St. Harbour, Basin Lane and Pigtown Lane into James's St. and halted at the gate of the S.D. Union. I went into the courtyard of the Union with the cart and was told to join Capt. McCarthy out in James's St. where a section of C/Coy. was halted. He sent me back into the Union to get a sledge hammer from the cart; as I was leaving to return to James's St. the front gate was being blocked by a float filled with paving sets. I was let out by the wicket gate. A section of men had moved down Cromwell's Quarters, or Murdering Hill, as some people call it, to the gate of Roe's distillery, and broken into the yard at the rear. Capt. McCarthy ordered me to build a barricade across Bow Bridge which spans the Camac river just outside the wall of Roe's. I took some men and we dragged out old packing cases, barrels, planks, etc. and piled them across the bridge. A hostile crowd assembled and some men attempted to cross the barricade and others to pull away some of the planks. We had to force them back with rifle butts and after some of them had been forcibly pushed down they had a little more respect for us and moved away to a respectable distance. I was then sent back up to James's St. where Lieut. Egan and some men were holding back another hostile crowd of men and women who were cursing and shouting at us. This party of men had detained a member of the D.M.P. who had followed us from Cork St. We were only a short time there when British troops advancing from Richmond Bks. and a machine gun from the Royal Hospital opened fire and swept the roadway and the Union field, and Mount Brown, where the houses known as McCaffrey's Estate are now built, Not having any orders what action to take, we released the D.M.P. man and went back down the lane to the gate of Roe's only to find ourselves barricaded out. We tried to climb the wall, but could not. We seemed to have been forgotten about. Some of the men inside heard us hammering on the gate and let us in and we reported to the O/C. All this time the firing had been getting heavier. I went to the top floor and with a party of men proceeded to put the place into a state of defence, filling sacks with grain and piling them up at the windows. I posted a couple

of men at windows covering the back wall and gate and ordered them to stop any enemy troops who might attempt to cross the wall or smash in the back gate. We tried to locate the enemy guns or snipers in the Royal Hospital, but without success. Bullets were still smashing against the back wall and into the windows. Two volunteers, the brothers Pat and Bernard Ward, had a narrow escape as a hail of bullets crashed into the window at which they were lying. This room was lined with zinc or sheet iron. I think it was used as a drying room for grain; how they escaped the ricochets was a miracle! The remainder of Monday was spent in improving the defences, filling jars with water, posting sentries and various other jobs. We had to keep continuous watch as we expected to be attacked every moment from the rear and, as our ammunition supply was limited to the few rounds the men carried on them, we could not afford to waste a shot in firing at the windows of the Royal Hospital; so the men were told not to fire unless they were sure of their targets.

During Monday night we were constantly on the alert as we were sure the enemy would attack during the night. We had no communication with the Union garrison since Monday morning and had no news of how the fighting had gone; the only enemy troops we had seen were Red Cross men and one unarmed British soldier who passed down Mount Brown. Vol. Jack Owens of B/Coy. was killed in the Union field opposite our front windows. He had been firing steadily for some time and I believe he was caught by fire from the machine guns we could not locate. A Red Cross man from our Battalion, Vol. Gannon, crawled out to him and did all he could to ease his suffering, but he died shortly afterwards.

We had no food except the small rations carried by each man; these were soon exhausted. No one thought of making arrangements for cooking; the men were worn out; the strain of waiting for action was telling on us all. All efforts to get in touch with the Union failed. We got our Coy. Signaller up on the roof (Vol. Mick McCabe) but had to call him in owing to the heavy firing. We sent men over to the front gate of the S.D. Union and they hammered and

kicked on it but could get no reply from inside.

Tuesday morning dawned over a weary garrison. We went round the men and checked up on all the posts; every man except one was there and ready to do his bit. Some time about 4 o'clock on Tuesday I went down to the middle floor and found the men kneeling down saying the Rosary. When it was finished Captain McCarthy told the men he had decided to evacuate the place as he saw no sense in holding it any longer as we had no food supplies and our ammunition was so scarce. As he was our O/C. and as soldiers on active service, we obeyed his order. The men were told to leave in small groups and it was every man for himself. Some of the men got down James's St. and round to Marrowbone Lane without being spotted by the enemy; others walked right into them and were taken prisoner; one of the latter told me afterwards that he was taken to Kilmainham and closely questioned as to the names of his officers and one of the first to identify him was the D.M.F. man whom we had prisoner in James's St. He, of course, refused to give them any information, saying that the men in charge were strangers to him. About 8 o'clock Lieut. Egan left and went down James's St. but was stopped at the Fountain by British troops and ordered back. He came back and he and I left together and went down, but we could not get by as all civilians were being turned back. I took Lieut. Egan to a house in James's St. where a cousin of mine lived and we were given shelter in a cellar for the night. Next morning we got a change of clothes and went out again. This time we got through all right and, as all the streets leading towards Marrowbone Lane were held by British troops, we went on down Thomas St. and, meeting a younger brother of mine, he took us into where he was stopping on Merchants Quay and got us a feed and a place to sleep and as we had no sleep since Sunday night we must have slept for 12 hours, and when we woke it was Thursday morning and we were hemmed in on all sides by British troops who were attacking the Four Courts. We did not get out until Sunday morning and we separated, Lieut. Egan going down towards O'Connell Bridge, and I made my way towards my home in Nicholas Place. I was stopped by

British troops at the top of Nicholas St. and questioned as to where I was going. I said I was out looking for bread and they let me go by, warning me to be sure and come back that way so that they could be sure I was telling the truth. I went on down towards my home and turned into Nicholas Place, and the first person I met was a D.M.P. man's daughter. She stared at me and came over and said "Thank God you are alive. I am sorry about your brother". This was the first I heard of my brother's death. He was a volunteer of A/Coy. Battn. III. - John O'Grady - and had been killed on Saturday morning at the corner of York St.. He was one of a party of cyclists from Jacob's garrison and I believe he was the only fatal casualty in this garrison. This party was commanded by Dan Reardon, C/Coy. 2nd Bn. My brother died in the Adelaide Hospital and is buried in James's Churchyard, James St.

After Easter Week we were lucky to escape arrest and sometime late in 1916 we started to get together again. An inquiry was held by Vice Comdt. Cathal Brugha and Capt. Liam O'Brien into the circumstances of the evacuation of Roes. The verdict of this inquiry was that all the men of Roe's garrison were exonerated from all blame and told to report back to their company. Lieut. Egan and I were present at a meeting of all surviving officers which was held late in 1916 in Cathal Brugha's house in Upper Rathmines and presided over by Cathal Brugha and it was decided to reorganise the battalion and carry on the fight for freedom. We started first as an Irish class in Upper Rathmines and later moved to the Weavers' Hall, Donore Ave. We gradually got the Company together again under Captain Garry Byrne. Lieut. Egan was 1st Lieut. and I was 2nd Lieut. and we resumed training again as soon as it was possible to do so. We had many meeting places. Our principal outdoor one was the sandpits behind the Halfway House on the Crumlin Road opposite Drummagh Castle. The fields behind Whitehall House beyond Kimmage were also used. The Sinn Fein club, Winetavern St.; Gorevan's old shop in James's St., a house now owned by Guinness's, just beside Watling St.; an old loft in St. Augustine St.; Donnelly's Bacon Factory, Cork St. and other places I cannot at the moment remember.

Our company was actively engaged during 1917-18-19-20 and 21 right up to the Truce; election activities during 1918 general election and we also sent men to the North during the elections. We supplied some of the first armed patrols on the streets of Dublin; did fine work in the general raids for arms; burning of Income Tax offices; burning of Custom House; destroying R.I.C. Bks. removing enemy Intelligence Officers, and Belfast boycott work, and all the numberless activities of destroying the British Government in Ireland. No one but the men who carried out this work day after day and night after night, without any hope of reward, except prison, the hangman's rope, or a firing squad, know the job it was to keep going and little thanks they got for it. But the national spirit was very much alive in them as was shown during the recent emergency when hundreds of these men came back and formed the 26th Battn. of the Defence Forces. A big number of men of C/Coy. Battn. IV. served in D/Coy. of the 26th and one of them was its last Commandant. I served with this Battn. for 5 years until the 'stand down'. I was with C/Coy. Battn. IV up to March 1922. I then joined the Irish Republican Police and served with them until the disbandment of this force in August, 1922.

I think this concludes my story of my service in the Irish Volunteers from 1913 to 1922 and hope it will be of some value in compiling the military history of the Independence movement.

Signed: Charles J. O'Grady

Date: 21-7-49

Witness: Siobhan O'Grady
William Jerry Bond

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