

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

BURU STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 531

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 531.....

Witness

Captain Thomas Young,  
22 Furry Park Road,  
Raheny,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'F' Company, 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade,  
1915 - ;

Lieut. 'F' Company 4th Battalion Irish Volunteers,  
1917 - ;

Inspector of Munitions, 1921.

Subject.

- (a) Marrowbone Lane Distillery, Easter 1916;
- (b) Trans-shipment of arms from England, 1917;
- (c) Munition Factory, Parnell St., Dublin, 1919.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S. 996.....

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY CAPTAIN THOMAS YOUNG,  
22, Furry Park Road, Raheny,  
Dublin.

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STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN THOMAS YOUNG,  
22, Furry Park Road, Raheny, Dublin.

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I joined the Volunteers towards the end of December, 1915. I joined "F" Company of the 4th Battalion. My Company officers were Con Colbert, Larry Murtagh and Christopher Byrne (known as Kit Byrne). Later on, through Kit Byrne, I joined the I.R.B. I have very faint recollections about that. I attended about a dozen of their meetings altogether. I don't remember anything interesting about my association with the I.R.B.

Early in 1916, nothing much happened except constant drilling and suchlike. I think it was less than three months after I joined the Volunteers that Con Colbert appointed me Corporal; and in another short space of time I was made Sergeant, which rank I held in Easter Week, 1916.

The Rising:

I had no knowledge beforehand that a Rising was to take place during Easter, 1916. On Holy Thursday I was instructed by Con Colbert, my Company Commander, to reconnoitre an area comprising the South Circular Road from Wellington Barracks, as it was then called, to Rialto Bridge on the one side, bounded on the other side by Guinness's Brewery, James Street, Cork Street, Marrowbone Lane and Ardee Street, and to prepare a sketch map of the locality. I remember he told me to take a day off from work to do it. It did not convey anything to me except I thought it was just another efficiency test, as we were subject to tactical tests at the time. On Good Friday

there was a general distribution of arms in our Company from the Brick Works Second Lock, Inchicore. The instructions that we already had about those arms were re-issued; "You chaps note that you are not allowed to load your rifles or ammunition; that order still holds". As a matter of fact, I had two rifles that time - a Mauser and a Lee Enfield. Men who were issued with arms - rifles, revolvers and, in one or two instances, pikes or bayonets - were instructed to bring them home and hold them in readiness for the manoeuvres on Easter Sunday. Saturday was spent preparing for the manoeuvres on Easter Sunday. I remember spending most of the afternoon cleaning my two rifles and getting my equipment ready.

As far as I remember, we were to report, as a Company, on Easter Sunday. As a Unit, of course, our usual place of mobilisation was either the Third Lock Bridge, Inchicore, or Emmett Hall, Inchicore. We did not mobilise on Sunday, as originally intended, because we read a notice in the "Sunday Independent" cancelling all manoeuvres. I think that, as an N.C.O., I got instructions from Lieutenant Kit Byrne that, although the manoeuvres were off, I was still to stand by for further orders. On Sunday night, with a view to having the Company together in case of urgent necessity - that is the way Con Colbert put it - we held a ceillidhe in the Cleaver Gaelic League Hall in Donore Avenue, at which all the officers and most of the Company attended. Anyone in possession of uniform was instructed to wear it. Nothing else happened on Sunday night. No further instructions were received.

At about nine o'clock on Easter Monday morning, Con Colbert appeared in my bedroom and instructed me to arise at once - he had a very dramatic way of speaking - and to mobilise my section without any delay; that the manoeuvres

cancelled on Sunday would take place to-day; I was to have my section on parade in Emerald Square at ten o'clock. I carried out his instructions and paraded at Emerald Square at ten o'clock. After a delay of five minutes or so, Con Colbert called me from my Unit and asked me if I remembered the sketch I had drawn for him a few days previously. I said I did. He instructed me to get six men from my section and to proceed down Cork Street to Marrowbone Lane, around by Guinness's, Thomas Street, back into Ardee Street; if I met any British troops on the route, I was to open fire and shoot to kill. Seeing my hesitation at this order, Captain Colbert asked me was my rifle loaded and, on my replying "no", he instructed me to load my rifle and revolver and to give similar instructions to the party of men whom I had to pick out. I carried out these instructions.

In addition to the instructions I had already received, I was further ordered to take my party to a position where I could command a view of the gates of Wellington Barracks, so that I could prevent any troops in numbers leaving the Barracks. I was to maintain this position until twelve o'clock noon, when I could withdraw. I took up a position at the junction of Wellington St. and Wolsely Street where I had a fair view of the main gate of Wellington Barracks. No British military came out from the Barracks. I withdrew at twelve o'clock and returned to Emerald Square, but found no Volunteers there. I proceeded down Marrowbone Lane. On my way down, I was informed by civilians that the Volunteers had gone into Marrowbone Lane Distillery. Having knocked at the gates of the Distillery without response, I proceeded towards Forbes Lane where I met a party of unarmed British troops, headed by some members of their families who caused some commotion amongst us. It was only the soldiers' wives that attacked us. We were on bicycles. The ladies pulled us

off the bicycles and we had to use the butts of our rifles to defend ourselves. We went back up Marrowbone Lane to Watkins Brewery where again we found it impossible to enter. There were marks of blood outside the entrance gate, but I don't know what caused it. I spoke to Kit Byrne through the gate, and he informed me that he could not permit me to go in for the time being and that I should go to McCabe's yard in Cork Street and join up with the other "stragglers". I went to McCabe's yard and contacted Joe McGrath there, with a small party of men which was gradually increasing. Joe McGrath informed me that he was hoping to bring his party into Marrowbone Lane Distillery sometime in the afternoon. At his orders, I posted a sentry at the corner of Cork Street and McCabe's yard, but later found the sentry's rifle and no sentry. About this time, a considerable amount of firing could be heard from the direction of Dolphin's Barn or Rialto Bridge.

At about four o'clock on Easter Monday evening, Joe McGrath informed me that he was ready to move into Marrowbone Lane, that I should take charge of his rearguard, and warned me of the possibility of attack from the direction of Dolphin's Barn. We reached Marrowbone Lane within a period of less than ten minutes. On entering the Distillery, I was immediately detailed by Captain Seamus Murphy to report to a Lieutenant Byrne, I think, who instructed me to prepare the first floor of the building and the bridge across Marrowbone Lane to repel an attack. I was given approximately twenty men for this purpose. I then prepared the defence of the first floor and the bridge. In addition to the men handed over to me, a party of approximately twenty members of the Cumann na mBan were placed under my care. I arranged a system of signals with Sergeant Neá Neill, also of F. Company, who was in charge of the main gate. These

signals would indicate to him the type of person wishing to enter, the movements of animals, vehicles and suchlike, the reason being that it was considered unsafe to open the gates without prior knowledge of the person seeking admission, and it was a means of diverting foodstuffs which might be en route to other British garrisons, the Vice-Regal Lodge and suchlike places.

As a result of this signalling system, I would like to record two amusing incidents. I signalled that there were three cattle being driven along Marrowbone Lane towards Cork Street. Ned Neill opened the gates and drove the cattle through them. He closed the gates. In a few moments the owner of the cattle came along and stood in consternation. I asked him what his trouble was, and he replied by asking me had I seen three heifers. I, of course, assured him that no cattle had passed that way. My reason for signalling the arrival was due to the fact that, earlier in the day, a herd of cattle had passed by, the drovers, in their usual way, making plenty of noise. Captain Seumas Murphy sent for me and asked what was the cause of the commotion. I replied that it was merely a herd of cattle being driven along the lane. He appeared to be annoyed at my reply and asked me where did I expect to get meat for the troops in Marrowbone Lane. Another incident was when I saw a messenger boy peering through the closed gates. I noticed a basket on his bicycle containing trussed chickens, and frantically signalled Ned Neill, who opened the small wicket gate and asked the boy what he was doing and where he was going. The boy replied that he was delivering these chickens to the Vice-Regal Lodge. Ned Neill took the basket of chickens off the bicycle and told the boy to give the Lord Lieutenant Ned Neill's compliments. The boy's reply was: "For ..... sake, Mister, take the ..... bicycle as well".

On Easter Monday evening we could hear firing and actually in the distance, towards the city, we could see flames and hear an occasional bullet. I would say a stray bullet struck the brewery from the direction of Thomas Street.

On Tuesday, while I was changing the guard on the bridge, I looked out on to the Lane and noticed a party of soldiers coming towards us from Cork Street direction. I took up a firing position, aimed at a soldier in the front rank and opened fire on him. The soldier fell, mortally wounded, and his comrades retreated around a bend in Marrowbone Lane before I could fire a second shot. I was informed that Captain Con Colbert and his party would withdraw from Watkins's Brewery, Ardee Street, during the early hours of the morning (Wednesday) and that I should be extremely careful about firing on any persons in Marrowbone Lane between the hours of midnight and the arrival of Con Colbert's party.

At about three o'clock on Wednesday morning the expected party arrived, headed by my mother. She had been out from midnight, going around the whole neighbourhood and making sure there were no soldiers in any groups or formations in any place. She reported then to Con Colbert that the area was perfectly clear and said she would lead them in to Marrowbone Lane, which she did. My two brothers were also members of Con Colbert's party.

I can't remember whether it was Wednesday or Thursday - I rather think it was Thursday - that the British troops began to mass in Cork Street area, and Peadar Dunne and myself were engaged for a whole afternoon sniping from the bridge into Cork Street. On account of the distance, I can't say if our firing had any effect or not. It became rather routine after that. I was told that there was a heavy attack on Marrowbone Lane from the direction



of the canal and that Joe McGrath's party were engaged. Mick Riordan, a member of my Company, received a slight scalp wound which was bandaged by a member of Cumann na mBan.

On Friday, the sniping continued on Cork Street. On Saturday I think it was somewhat similar. On Sunday afternoon I saw, I think, Thomas McDonagh, accompanied by a Franciscan priest, coming along on foot to Marrowbone Lane. After their arrival, we were told to fall-in in the yard of the building, and there we were informed that we had to surrender. We returned to our posts. While at my post, I saw a British officer approaching to take the surrender, and he was at once admitted. In a short space of time, all the members of the garrison had fallen in and were marched to Bride Street where we laid down our arms and then proceeded under British escort to Richmond Barracks.

In Richmond Barracks we were interrogated by members of the Dublin Metropolitan Police Detective Branch (G-men). Certain officers were removed to other places from the Barrack room in which we were. I remember Con Colbert being taken away. I saw de Valera coming into the Barracks with a bandage on his head. I think we were kept in Richmond Barracks for a couple of days and deported, in my case, to Knutsford. I was later transferred to Frongoch. I was released about the middle of August, 1916.

#### Volunteer Re-organisation:

A general amnesty was granted by the British at Christmas, 1916, and in January, 1917. Kit Byrne contacted me and instructed me to commence the re-organisation of my section. We succeeded in re-building the Company. I was promoted Lieutenant, Kit Byrne being then Company Commander. About this time, I took up employment in Cork and joined the Volunteers there. I remained about six months in Cork and returned to Dublin. While in Cork,

my health broke down, and I returned to Dublin, where I remained under the doctor's care for a period of three or four months.

Arrangements for trans-shipment of arms from England:

Peadar Clancy, knowing that I could pass in England as an Englishman, asked me to go to Manchester, Liverpool and Chester and arrange for the transport of arms (rifles) which were in these three cities. I spent a fortnight in England and carried out the instructions. All that was necessary was for me to go over there, make myself known to the individuals in charge of the rifles and tell them that the rifles were to reach a certain point at a certain time. They had their own method of getting them aboard ship, and Peadar Clancy had his own method for getting them off the ship. I did not see the rifles at all. One of the individuals concerned with the trans-shipment was Peter Murphy of Scotland Road, Liverpool, and a man known as "The Pope" - I never knew his name - in Manchester. Another man I had to contact was a man named McMahon, Old Boar's Head Yard, Manchester. Another agent was Teresa McGeehan, who was from Donegal. She was employed by the Manchester Banking Company and lived in Urmiston, Manchester. She frequently travelled to Dublin carrying a fiddle case which contained rifles. Another man was "Father Peter". I never got his name either. He was not a clergyman but was known in Manchester as "Father Peter", where he carried on a business of second-hand general stores. I would meet all these people after business hours and after dark. Once I knew a man was alright, I never asked him any questions. On delivering my instructions, I returned to Dublin.

Site for Muniton factory selected:

Peadar Clancy informed me that it was their intention to start a muniton factory, and that I was to see Michael

Lynch, who was then in charge of the City Abattoir and also organist in High Street Church. It was at the latter address that I contacted Michael Lynch who gave me instructions to go to a cycle shop at 198 Parnell Street, trading under the name of Heron and Lawless, to view the site and report on the possibility of fitting up a foundry and a fitting shop there in the basement. I reported that it was quite suitable. However, for some time no further move was made, and I was still suffering from the effects of my recent illness.

Activities with a Belfast Battalion:

I went to Belfast on the 15th August, 1918. I remember the date because my birthday was on the 14th. I met some interesting people in Belfast, to whom my brother, who was already there before me, introduced me. One of the men to whom I was introduced was Mr. McGuinn, whose two sons were severely injured in 1919 when bringing ammunition in their own truck to Belfast from, I think, Ballycastle. One of them had spent some years on the "Argenta" and the other later served as Captain in the Defence Forces. Amongst the many people I met there were the Dobbyn family, the McDevitts, Jerry Barnes, Denis McCullough, Roger McCurley, the Hendersons and the Rev. Fr. Toal (who originated the Toal method of teaching Irish). Sean Cusack and Tom Maguire, alias Connolly. They persuaded me to remain and help out in the Volunteer organisation there. I took up a job as a navvy at the Aldergrove Aerodrome, which was then the only place in the North where gelignite and detonators could be obtained in a safe manner. While in Belfast, I was appointed 2nd Lieut. of "C" Company of the Belfast Battalion. It became the 3rd Northern Brigade afterwards. At that time, Paddy Byrne who later served with me as a Sergeant in the Army, was Captain and a man named Creighton was 1st Lieutenant.

We were kept busy - at night time too - because de Valera was in opposition to Joe Devlin at that time when they both sat for the Nationalist seat in Belfast for the British House of Parliament.

At Aldergrove Aerodrome, the gang that I was working with were all members of my Company, and the ganger was the O/C of the Company. In the levelling of the aerodrome, we were frequently given orders to blow up trees. For this purpose, gelignite was issued. We, however, retained the gelignite and buried the tree stumps. Additionally, this gave us an opportunity of discovering stores in which gelignite and detonators were retained. We judiciously removed some of the gelignite and detonators over a period of time, and we handed them over to Paddy Byrne, the Company O/C.

Munition factory in action:

At Christmas, 1918, I returned to Dublin. My mother was dying. I found myself in difficulties with Peadar Clancy for having gone to Belfast without his permission. He instructed me to waste no further time, to get a foundry started in Parnell Street at all costs, and to remain there until further orders. At this time, Mat Furlong, who was later killed, was fitting up the fitting shop assisted by Sean O'Sullivan, late of Manchester. Of course, the staff was increased later by the addition of Gabriel McGrath, brother of Paddy McGrath, who was executed, and Sean Kiernan, alias Paddy McHugh of Dundalk. Tom Kehoe and Michael Kehoe were both employed for short periods. Two others were Jimmy Coughlan and Christy O'Reilly who was a messenger boy at first and became a good man afterwards. In a short time, we had furnaces built, moulding boxes assembled and patterns of grenades ready for moulding. These patterns, incidentally, were made by an Orangeman in the Royal College of Science, who did not

know what he was doing. My father was an instructor in the College of Science, and I had an entry to the place. As a matter of fact, the College supplied an amount of stuff to us without their knowledge. Moulding boxes, patterns, special tools - nearly everything we wanted I got a loan of from the College of Science. Professor Taylor, who was in charge at the time, did not know anything about it, and anybody who did was too frightened to say anything at all. We commenced the manufacture of grenades about January 1919, and we continued doing so until December, 1920.

I am positive that the Foundry was not operating before my return from Belfast. The main reason was, of course, that I was the only one of the staff with any knowledge of Foundry work. No furnaces were ready - no patterns - no moulding sand; in fact, only the frame work of the Furnace was under construction. The patterns, as I mentioned before, were made in the Royal College of Science and I was the only one of the staff who had entry into that place, by virtue of my father's position there. Regarding moulding boxes, without which no work could be done, I procured a pattern from my father and cast my own boxes.

These had to be faced and fitted with guide pins before being used.

Regarding patterns of grenades, core boxes, etc., patterns for the grenades were made to resemble dumbbells in shape, and when received from R.C.S.I. had to be serrated by ourselves to ensure that no unauthorised person in R.C.S.I. would guess the purpose of the dumbbells. Core boxes were finished at R.C.S.I.

All this took time. We still had to procure moulding sand - core sand, scrap iron, pig iron, limestone, brass scrap used for the grenade necks - and most important

hard coke and soft coke.

I cannot be sure of the date on which we cast the first grenade cases but it definitely was not before Christmas 1918.

A raid on Parnell Square was carried out by the Detective Division, Dublin Metropolitan Police, in June or July 1918.

In anticipation of such an occurrence, a switch had been fitted convenient to the door leading to the basement of the premises in which the foundry area fitting shop was situated.

This switch controlled a 100 watt bulb fitted in the basement and was operated only when any suspicious circumstances arose necessitating the covering up of grenades or other items of ordnance.

It was usual for one of the staff, according to the run of the work in the factory, to be present on the ground floor, either to attend to customers or to repair customers' bicycles. The work shop for cycle repairs was in the rear of the premises entered from the front shop by a flight of three or four stairs. Thus anyone in the shop being on a higher level than anyone in the front shop had a clear view of anyone entering from the street and was still left with a clear view of the street outside!

Joe Lawless was "Cycle mechanic" at the date of the raid and lost no time in operating the switch. In a few minutes all traces of grenades had disappeared.

My patterns I hid in the sand in the moulding bench, and I continued to mould grenade necks. At this time we were fitting long necks to grenades which contained the striker, striker spring and anvil for the percussion cap, on the inside, and held the release lever, split pin and

ring on the outside. This neck had a screwed flange at the bottom by means of which it was screwed into the grenade shell or body.

Also, at this time we were casting them in brass, and not in aluminium, as we did later.

The detectives naturally wanted to know what those things were, and I informed them that they were ~~future~~ <sup>PATENT</sup> water taps for the Dublin Corporation, and gave them full details as to their operation when finished.

My explanation seemed to satisfy them and they left me. At the same time others had been interrogating other members of the staff, and appeared to be quite satisfied that we were all lawfully employed.

Unfortunately, our cycle department let us down. Some magnesium powder, which, I believe was taken in a raid on Collinstown Aerodrome some short time previously, was found and Joe Lawless was arrested only to be released a couple of days later.

I had been supplied with a cycle about the same time which also was found in the raid on Collinstown. It bore the "Broad arrow" very conspicuously but was not noticed by the raiding party. In fact I had a considerable amount of trouble over that bike later on when detectives on ordinary duties of checking cycle shops noticed it and asked me to account for it. I had no receipt for it and had to make up a story about the "chap I bought it from over a year ago having gone to Glasgow", etc., etc. As soon as they had left I had to dash home and warn my sister of the story in case the detectives decided to follow up my story. They followed it up with a visit every two weeks to the shop but merely asked if I still had the bike, and if I had yet got the receipt. In fact, during the next 18 months I became very well known to those

two detectives. A few days after the final raid in December 1920, I walked straight into the two of them in South Great George's Street.

They, of course, recognised me, and knew that a fierce search was being made for each member of the munition staff by the Tans, the military and police. They stopped me and one spoke to me and said, "Will you for ! ! ! sake, keep out of our way". No more was said. I moved off very quickly.

About November 1920, I remember it was a week or two before Peadar Clancy and Dick McKee were arrested - we were out at Dunboyne testing a trench mortar which we had manufactured ourselves. I think it was a fourteen-pound shell. We fired six empty shells, as a test, successfully. We also fired five loaded shells, as a test, successfully. The sixth loaded shell failed to explode. Against the advice of each one of us present, Mat Furlong attempted to re-fire it, with fatal results. Peadar Clancy and Seán Boylan were present during the test, and I cannot say whether Dick McKee, who was Director of Munitions at the time, was there or not. Peadar Clancy and Seán Boylan of Dunboyne managed to get an ambulance to convey Mat Furlong to the Mater Hospital, notwithstanding the fact that curfew was in force at the time and that the attention of the Tans had been attracted by the noise of the explosions and they were even then searching the locality. We spent the night after that in various fields, and returned to our work as usual at nine o'clock the following morning.

To understand the cause of the explosion, it may be necessary to describe the shell. The shell was approximately 4" in diameter and about ten inches in length. Guide rings were cast on the exterior of the shell, one near the top and the other at the opposite end. At the



lower end also incorporated in the casting was a tubular extension of about 1" in diameter, the centre being of sufficient dimensions to take ordinary sporting cartridge. This was the means of projecting the shell from the mortar. A sporting cartridge specially prepared by the removal of the shot, and an extra filling of gunpowder was placed in the exterior, percussion cap outwards. When the shell was dropped down the mouth of the mortar the weight of the shell caused the percussion cap to meet the striker in the base of the mortar and thus explode the sporting cartridge which in turn forced the shell out of the mortar at a fairly high velocity.

Unfortunately, the force of the initial explosion was inclined to crack the base of the shell surrounding the extension piece.

In the case of the fatal shell, I examined it after it failed to explode on reaching the ground after firing, and then noticed a crack in the base of shell and suggested to Matt Furlong that it would be as well not to use it again.

He was more interested in the mechanism of the shell and I believe he removed the safety pin which was, in his opinion, too strong, and replaced it with a light pin. It should be mentioned that the shells were designed to explode on percussion, the striker protruding through the top of the shell and held in a "safe" position by a safety pin through the striker pin. The safety pin was designed to shear off on percussion and permit the striker to operate.

Again, in this case the safety pin did not shear off, indicating that it was too heavy. It was dusk at this time and we could see the lights of the "Tans" lorries having been attracted by the explosion.

However, Matt threw the shell into the mortar which immediately blew to pieces causing terrible injuries to Matt. We were all shocked at the sudden calamity.

Appointed Inspector of Munitions:

Towards the middle of December, 1920, the place was discovered by the Black and Tans and closed against us. We had already anticipated them by having a fitting shop ready for operation in Luke Street but had not been able to obtain suitable premises for foundry work. I, however, found a small room over a stable, owned by Andy Clerkin, where I could continue to turn out the aluminium parts of grenades. About this period also, Seán Russell was appointed Director of Munitions. I can't say that this appointment had the approval of any member of the munitions staff, as Seán Russell had no engineering ability but considered himself, by virtue of his appointment, to be in a position to instruct and direct all munition workers. It was as a result of this peculiarity that I found myself suspended for a period of, I think, four months, which extended into the Truce period. I was reinstated after an inquiry, presided over by Austin Stack, and appointed Organiser and Inspector of Munitions for the whole country.

My first undertaking was in Bailieborough where we turned out a considerable number of shells each week relying on the Dublin factories to supply the firing sets. I went all over the country setting up other munitions factories. The Truce was on. In some places there were factories but they wanted re-organisation because their methods were obsolete. I remained at that until I joined the Army on February 8th, 1922.

Signed: *Joe Gannon*

Date: 7/6/51

Witness: *William Jerry Bond*

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