

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21
No. W.S. 780

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 780

Witness

Colonel Thomas B. Gay,
15 Grantham Street,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1914 - .

Subject.

Marrowbone Lane Distillery, Dublin,
Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No S.1351

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

DURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 780

Statement by Colonel Thomas B. Gay,

15 Grantham Street, Dublin.

I joined the Irish Volunteers just after Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge on 20 September, 1914. I was "A" Company, 1st Battalion, which met weekly in the Columcille Hall, Blackhall Street. At that time the Company Captain was Captain Robert Monteith; Dinny O'Callaghan was 1st Lieutenant.

The election of a Quartermaster was proposed at that time and two names were selected - my own and Michael Staines. Michael Staines was elected.

During that year we took part in field manoeuvres at Swords. I remember the two field commanders were Thomas MacDonagh and Pierce Beasley, and our Company was commanded by its Company Captain Robert Monteith. From then on up to the end of 1915 Company drills continued at regular intervals.

Early in 1916 Dinny O'Callaghan informed me that a rising was to take place early in the year. "I am telling you", he said, "because I know we can rely on you".

I had received orders to parade on Easter Sunday with full kit. On Easter Sunday morning I read an order published by Eoin MacNeill in the "Sunday Independent" countermanding the orders I had already received. I paraded as instructed and returned to my home.

On Easter Monday I had made arrangements to go to Fairyhouse and duly did so with members of my family and my fiancée at the time. While at Fairyhouse rumours reached the racecourse of fighting in Dublin and like all rumours greatly exaggerated.

We went by car. We reached town that evening and went to my fiancée's house, the car man being directed not to go by certain routes. We knew, of course, that fighting was in progress.

Having left my fiancée home (she lived at Mountain View, Grand Canal Harbour, James' Street, adjacent to the Marrowbone Lane Distillery) it was now quite dark - I went to my own place with my brother to Sandford Avenue, South Circular Road. Next morning I went to the Marrowbone Lane Distillery to report for duty and was told that I would be more serviceable outside than inside as they wanted to keep communications with other garrisons and outposts held.

I went down then and got as far as O'Connell Street close to the G.P.O. which was garrisoned by the Volunteers at the time. I did not intend to report there in face of the fact that I had already reported at the Distillery, but having seen that the situation was good I went back later to the Distillery and reported to Colbert. He advised me to keep in touch with him daily but not to take any unnecessary risks.

Going around in this way I noticed on either Wednesday evening or early Thursday troops coming along the South Circular Road from Harcourt Street direction. They were the Sherwood Foresters. They were in the main held at a pace along the Circular Road and the officers leading them by consulting maps as they went along. When they passed Wellington Barracks I turned down quickly to Marrowbone Lane and informed Colbert of the fact that troops were advancing and would shortly be coming towards Rialto. Immediately men were posted to vantage points in the Distillery and to commanding Dolphin's Barn - of whom I recollect well, Paddy McGrath. As a consequence, immediately the troops came to Dolphin's Barn they were met by a very destructive fire from

the Distillery which immediately halted them. Quite a number of casualties occurred here by the officers trying to force the passage to the east side of the Circular Road. It was not until nightfall that they were able to get across to the Kilmainham side and having reached that portion and the Rialto buildings they took possession of those buildings and turned fire on the back of the South Dublin Union then held by the Volunteer forces. On the following morning I again reported to Marrowbone Lane and found there was nothing to report.

On the Saturday of Easter Week Colbert told me that supplies were running out and he asked me to get in touch if I could make my way to Jacob's Factory, with a note to MacDonagh asking him to arrange to send some bread and any other supplies they could.

On Sunday morning I went early to Jacob's Factory to deliver this message only to learn that Commandant MacDonagh had already gone down to the Castle to discuss the terms of surrender. This information was given by Major John MacBride who told me in the circumstances there would be no necessity to send any supplies but that I could convey the information to Captain Colbert.

I immediately went to Marrowbone Lane as instructed and found Captain Colbert was resting. I gave the information to Seumas Murphy who was acting in his stead. Seumas Murphy said that they could not take any message of surrender unless it was in writing and he asked me to return and get the order in writing from Major MacBride. I returned at once to Jacob's, found Major MacBride and gave him the message and received this reply :-

"I have never in my life written an order for Irishmen to surrender and I do not propose to do it now. Will you return at once and inform whoever is in charge that when they see the flag coming down from the top of our building they will know the surrender is taking place; beyond that I will not go".

I went back to the Distillery and found that the information had come from other sources to them of the surrender. I was there when the military car came along with Father Aloysius of Church Street and the officer in charge of the military car. The feeling among many of those in the garrison was that they would not surrender and some made good their escape because of this feeling.

Following the week of the surrender a brother-in-law of mine, Jack O'Shaughnessy, who had been helped out of the South Dublin Union by his brother and who was wounded in the foot, reached home at 6 Mountain View. As it was extremely probable that his address might be known or revealed, I offered and he accepted to come to my house. His sister, subsequently my wife, used to come and dress his wound. He stayed some weeks during which time there was a cordon drawn round the Circular Road, and subsequently left my place when danger passed.

During this period I came in contact with outstanding people of the time, Professor Bernard Hayes, Mr. Joseph McGrath and also his brother George, since dead.

Through a man who subsequently became one of our principal Intelligence Officers, one Joe Kavanagh who was a Detective Officer in Dublin Castle, information reached me of Seán O'Duffy who wished me to know he was alright and who was subsequently transferred with other prisoners to I think Wakefield Prison and subsequently Frongoch Camp. This man Kavanagh with whom very naturally I preserved a good deal of reticence at first, kept contact with me and from time to time passed on pieces of information as regards prisons and their conditions as he was able to obtain. He used also give me copies of the "Gaelic American" which at that time could not of course be obtained direct through ordinary sources in this country. Naturally I was at a loss to know what to do with it or with the information that came my way, but I thought the best thing I could do apart from writing to my friends in Frongoch and particularly to

my friend Thomas O'Carroll who was in Lewes Jail, was to assist in the Volunteers Dependents' Fund by giving subscriptions, etc. This fund is no doubt well known and subsequently became known as the National Aid.

Following the release of the prisoners from Frongoch in December, 1916, Seán O'Duffy and myself kept up the contact with O'Kavanagh. Such information, including the copy of the "Gaelic American" which he continued to bring me from time to time, I passed on to Eamon Duggan (deceased) for transmission to the sources most likely to make use of the information. I did not regard the information I was getting at that time as of any consequence though I did pass it on.

Early in 1917 Harry Boland who, with other prisoners, was being removed from some particular jail with other prisoners to another jail, did manage to drop a note when being transferred, the purport of which to my recollection was this :- "If this note should fall into the hands of any woman whose son was serving in France and who because of anxiety for her son, would let my mother know, whose address is that I am in good health but am being removed to Jail, if she will do this for me I will remember her in my prayers". Information reached us through the O'Kavanagh that this note had been received and so far as I can recollect did reach Mrs. Boland.

The item has some importance because a meeting was held in Liberty Hall to enable the citizens of Dublin to come together and to demand the release of the sentenced prisoners. At this particular meeting there was some commotion. Inspector Mills was killed from a blow of a hurley. Cathal Brugha presided at this meeting. Michael Staines, following this meeting, advised me to keep contact with my intelligence friend in case any other information of somewhat similar value should be forthcoming. I cannot recollect anything of particular importance prior to the release of the sentenced prisoners, June 1917.