

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 871

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 871.....

Witness

James Rowan,  
168 Galtymore Road,  
Drimnagh,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Fianna Eireann,  
1913-1914;

Telegraph Messenger, 1916.

Subject.

Easter week, 1916 -

G.P.O. and Beggars Bush areas,  
Dublin.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2073.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MR. J. ROWAN,

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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NO. W.S. 871

168 Galtymore Road, Drimnagh, Dublin.

I was a Telegraph Messenger in the Postal Service during the period of the 1916 Rebellion and was employed in the General Post Office. I was then 15½ years of age. I remember vividly the incidents which I now relate.

On Easter Monday morning I delivered some telegrams, on foot, to the "Irish Independent", Abbey Street, the "Evening Mail", and Provost Office, Dublin Castle. On my return, I decided to walk down Dame St. and, while passing the Bank of Ireland, I noticed a company of what I later knew to be the Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan headed by the Countess Markievicz swinging around from College Green into Dame St. This was the contingent that attacked the Castle.

Whilst awaiting my next detail in the "Delivery Room", General Post Office, the D.M.P. man who was on duty in the Public Office came to tell us that he had been disarmed by the Volunteers and wanted to ring his superiors, but found the 'phone out of order. Everything was, in fact, dislocated, as from the rear windows of the "Delivery Room" we saw the staff from the "Instrument Room" being marshalled out into the yard together with the military guard of the Royal Irish Regiment, now disarmed.

Then, after a short time, we heard a rousing cheer and the Inspector in charge - Mr. C. Garrett - decided to open the door and investigate. What he saw excited him and he shouted to us: "Quick, look at what these fellows are doing". I was one of the crowd to look and this is what I saw: a cab had drawn up in Princes St. and, while some Volunteers were smashing windows with the butts of their rifles, others

were handing down boxes of ammunition from the cab and pushing them through the broken windows. It was then I heard a voice in stern tones demanding the keys which were held by Mr. Garrett. The speaker having arrived from the blind side, I saw the face of a man with horn-rimmed glasses and a revolver in his hand before I scurried. That face was photographed in my mind. The keys were thrown on the footpath and the door slammed, consequently locking us in.

The demander of the keys I recognised after the Rebellion from photographs in the papers giving particulars of those who had been arrested and identified as being prominently associated with the movement. He was Sean McGarry, who may be able to confirm this account of the incident.

About 1 p.m. we were released with the Instrument Room staff by the Volunteers who had them in charge. We could have gone into the yard and found our way out, but for some reason or other we were prevented. There was some confusion in opening the door and a Volunteer said: "it is easier to get out this way" and there and then proceeded to smash the window and helped us out. His last words to us were: "Don't go through O'Connell St., boys". I took his advice and went through Loftus Lane into Abbey St. It was there I saw a Volunteer being carried to Jervis St. Hospital with his leg literally hanging off. I inquired how it happened and was informed that he had slipped when getting through one of the windows and had fallen on the jagged and broken glass. I decided to cross the Halfpenny Bridge into Dame St. and to go home and change into civilian clothes.

I was then living in Bath Avenue close to Beggars Bush Barracks. On Monday there was a wave of excitement and tension all over the place. The reason was soon evident

as the Volunteers were barricaded on the railway bridges which span Bath Avenue and South Lotts Road. There was an occasional shot being fired at the "Bush" as we knew it. It later transpired that a contingent of the "Home Defence" or "G.R." men, too old to serve in the British Army, had left the "Bush" that morning about ten o'clock on a route march. I remember this contingent drilling and parading; those who were not in uniform wore an armband with the letters "G.R." in red.

It was rumoured that the party were equipped with rifles and it was the concern of the authorities in the "Bush" to get them home safely and that a dispatch rider had gone out to contact them. I was standing outside Nolan's publichouse at the corner of South Lotts about 3 p.m. when I saw a dispatch rider come down Shelbourne Road and enter the barracks. I learned that the contingent were grouped on the Shelbourne Road beyond the bend and out of my sight and the rider had evidently come for further instructions. I saw him leave the barracks later and speed up Shelbourne Road. On his return I could see the barrack gate being kept ajar, and awaited developments. Then a small party of approximately thirty "G.Rs." came along Shelbourne Road and swung up Haddington Road towards the barracks. I looked at the railway bridge over South Lotts Road to see what notice the Volunteers there were taking, if any. I saw a Volunteer setting his rifle on the parapet of the bridge and then my glance turned to the company on their way to the barracks. One of the company must have had the same curiosity as myself, for I saw him down on bended knee and in a position ready to fire, but the Volunteer on the bridge fired first and I saw the "G.R." topple over. Some of his comrades doubled back

and dragged him into the barracks. His name was Sergeant Cleary. The remainder of the "G.Rs." were brought in the back way, up Shelbourne Lane. Why this was not done in the first instance beats me. The Press stated that this body, although equipped with rifles, had no ammunition, a statement which I could never verify. I think only the N.C.Os. had ammunition.

On Monday afternoon I saw two Dublin Fusiliers from the Ballsbridge area at the corner of Grand Canal St. and South Lotts Road. They were under the influence of drink and were ragging the Volunteer sentry on the railway bridge by shouting at him and placing a cap on a stick, showing it around the corner and inviting him to fire. Eventually Duffy pushed Kelly into the open and the sentry shot him.

I happened to be up very early on Wednesday morning and, at about 6 a.m., I saw three Jacob's Biscuit Factory lorries, which had evidently been commandeered by British military, enter Beggars Bush Barracks with supplies of food and ammunition. From that afternoon firing from the barracks started in earnest, a practically continuous fusillade being kept up on Horan's grocery shop from the Shelbourne Road side of the barracks.

At about 10 o'clock on Wednesday morning the driver of the delivery van belonging to Horan's grocery shop at the corner of Grand Canal St. and South Lotts Road got permission from the Volunteers who were in occupation of the premises to go to the stable at the rere to feed the horse. As he was leaving he dashed across South Lotts Road and was riddled with bullets from Beggars Bush. He must have been mistaken for one of the Volunteer garrison.

I saw the British military retreating down Haddington Rd.

after they had been fired on from the house in Northumberland Road. They were scattered in all directions and very badly disorganised.

On Thursday an ambulance was arriving at short intervals at Sir Patrick Dunn's Hospital. The Volunteer sentry at the Dispensary in Clarence St. approached the driver about ignoring his challenge to halt. He told him if he continued to do so he would not be responsible for what happened. I learned that the ambulance was engaged in collecting "drunks" who had broken into a Bonded Store on the quays.

About four days after the surrender, I saw the body of a Volunteer of the Boland's Mill Garrison, who had been found dead in a railway carriage, being taken away in a handcart and covered over. He had lived in Sandymount Road, and on the way there the British military held up the accompanying crowd and allowed only the relatives to proceed.

The Rebellion over, I was standing on South Lotts Road when I saw the English military approaching with two prisoners, Joe Wall and Jackie O'Shea. I was particularly interested in the latter who was my officer commanding when I was in the Fianna Eireann, St. Patrick's, Ringsend.

Jackie, I know, fought with the garrison in Boland's Mill, and is now in the Revenue Department.

The Ringsend Branch of the Fianna was controlled by a Father Flannagan who always boasted that we were the first body to carry rifles openly through the streets of Dublin in defiance of the law. He was referring to a display we gave in Shelbourne Park in June 1914. One of the high lights of the programme was an attack on the camp and its defence. Rifles with blank ammunition were used and I know we paraded

from St. Patrick's School, Ringsend, the parties taking part in the exercise carrying rifles to Shelbourne Park and back. This was just before the Howth gun-running episode; hence Father Flannagan's remark.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War I, I entered the Telegraph Messenger Service and had to sever my connection with the Fianna as my duties did not permit me to attend meetings. I had two school nights and two late duty nights each week - otherwise, perhaps - but what is the use of conjecture!

Signed: *J. Rowan*  
(J. Rowan)  
Date: 23/6/22

Witness: *J. Kearns Comdt*  
(J. Kearns) Comd't.

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