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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21
No. W.S. 1,431

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1431

Witness

Dr. J.C. Ridgway,
Newcastle Sanatorium,
Co. Wicklow.

Identity.

Officer of Royal Army Medical Corps (British)
1915-1925.

Subject.

Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No .. . S.2726 ..

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STATEMENT BY DR. J.C. RIDGWAY,

Sanatorium, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow,

Permanent address - University Club, St. Stephen's Green.

I was born on 25th July, 1879, at Riverview House, Newtown, Waterford, son of Richard Grubb and Kathleen Mary Ridgway. I was educated at Newtown School, Waterford, and Warwick, England. I obtained my B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) and M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) at Trinity College, Dublin.

It is now just on forty years since the 1916 Rising took place. I had almost forgotten that I had quite unexpectedly taken a very minor part in it until I was reminded in the course of a conversation with a learned and esteemed colleague.

He persuaded me to record my experience in writing. I therefore now do so with some degree of hesitation, as the intervening years have somewhat dulled my memory.

I had returned from abroad and had obtained a Commission in the Royal Army Medical Corps. I was staying at the Shelbourne Hotel. Easter Monday morning came in bright and sunny and remained so for the remainder of the day, in fact, all that week was fine and warm.

Officer's Warning:

I had been invited to join a party to go by motor car to Fairyhouse races, and as we drove along the country roads it was pleasant to see the gorse coming into bloom and the birds in the trees. The time passed pleasantly. Then, nearing the last race, a red tabbed staff officer stopped me and said that a Rebellion had occurred in Dublin.

He warned me to be watchful on the way home.

After some difficulty I reached the Shelbourne Hotel, and in the front hall found officers in uniform and mufti and people up from the country for the races. A Platoon of the 16th Lancers arrived from Marlborough Barracks, Parkgate Street, and set up a machine-gun in the front hall of the hotel.

The following morning I was told by an officer to be in the lounge at the top of the first landing (since altered) at 4 p.m. that afternoon. About twenty officers were present. A colonel took the chair and then informed us he had that morning received a 'phone message from Dublin Castle (the 'phone lines remained intact throughout the Rising) for all officers in uniform to report for duty unarmed at midnight that night at the Lower Castle Yard.

At 11.30 p.m. four of us met in the front hall of the hotel, and after a little discussion it was decided to leave by the tradesmen's entrance in Kildare Street.

Curragh Troops:

On arrival at the Castle, troops from the Curragh had just arrived; some were lying on the ground in their great-coats, their rifles stacked; others were around two field kitchens, which were serving out food.

We entered the Castle building and on the right was a large room in which officers were sitting at a long table eating bullybeef and bread and butter and drinking tea.

During my stay at the Castle I was detailed to take charge of the wounded prisoners who were in a large bedded ward, and also to act as a special dresser for an important

political prisoner who was in a small room by himself. There was an armed guard on duty at the door and on entering I saw in bed, a medium sized, stoutly built, bald, florid complexioned middle aged man with a bushy moustache.

Bullet wound:

He had sustained a bullet wound on the right leg causing a compound fracture of the two long bones (Tibia and Fibula) in their middle third.

A few days later he was brought to the operating theatre where I gave him an anaesthetic and the late Mr. Kennedy of Merrion Square, and the late Colonel Tobin - honorary visiting surgeons to the Dublin Castle Red Cross Hospital - operated.

Two aluminium rods were placed on each side of the leg to immobilise it, and were held in position with plaster-of-paris, a "window" being left for dressing the wound.

The patient was James Connolly, one of the leaders of the Rising.

Twice daily I dressed the wound and had little chats with him and so I naturally got attached to my patient.

When dressing his leg one evening I said in a low voice: "Is there anything I could do for you in a small way?".

Message for wife:

He looked surprised and on my repeating my question, he said: "Yes, I would like to get a message to my wife". So far as I now can recollect he was given notepaper, an envelope and a pencil and a message was sent and a reply came back. I was aided by one of the V.A.D. ladies who

were giving their services to this Red Cross hospital.

One afternoon later I was instructed to take over the medical charge from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. I had been working in the casualty room. On leaving it and on crossing the front hall an orderly saluted and handed me a telegram. I casually opened it and this is what I read: "Officer Commanding Dublin Castle. The execution of James Connolly is postponed. - Asquith".

I put the telegram in the left hand top pocket of my tunic and went to tea. On meeting the officer who had detailed me for duty, he asked if everything had been quiet in his absence and I said yes, and then I handed him the telegram. He read it and looked alarmed, and asked me if I had mentioned its contents to anyone and I assured him I had not. He seemed relieved, and said, "This should have gone to G.H.Q."

Threat to resign:

It was said that when General Maxwell, the General Officer Commanding the troops, read the telegram from the Prime Minister, he at once declared he would resign if a reprieve was granted to any convicted political prisoner.

As this would have caused a sensation at that critical stage of the Great War his wish was granted.

Later, as I sensed that events might occur in connection with the medical duties, which might be unpleasant, I obtained permission to rejoin my unit, so I came gladly out into the sunshine of a glorious spring morning.

Signed: *J. Ridgway*
Date: *4th June 1958*

Witness: *Alan Brennan Lieut Col.*
(Investigator)

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