

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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NO. W.S. 311

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 311

Witness

Very Rev. James Doyle, P.P.,
Barndarrig,
Co. Wicklow.

Identity

Curate St. Mary's, Haddington Road,
Easter Week 1916.

Subject

Occupation of St. Mary's, Haddington Road,
by B.F., and events in surrounding
locality Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1405

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY VERY REV. FR. JAMES DOYLE, P.P.

Barrdarrig, Co. Wicklow.

In Easter Week, 1916, I was one of the clergy attached to St. Mary's Church, Haddington Road. The Parish Priest was Most Rev. Dr. Donnelly, Bishop of Canea. The other clergy were, Fr. Wall, later Bishop of Thasos, Fr. McKee who died during Easter Week from natural causes, and Fr. John Hook.

On Easter Monday afternoon I was called to the City of Dublin Hospital, Baggot Street, to attend to some members of the G.R.'s. who had been wounded earlier that day when they were attacked by the Volunteers at Northumberland Road.

On Wednesday morning Bishop Donnelly sent word to the Clerk of the Church (Mr. Christopher Clarke) to lock the Church gates. As far as I can remember at about 11 o'clock the same morning a man in civilian attire, with two cases of maps hanging from his shoulders, arrived at the Church with a party of British soldiers. I think the man dressed in civilian clothes was a local J.P.

of the right colour and I think the troops were the Sherwood Forresters. Mr. Clarke went out to them and said, "do you want to get in, the Bishop told me to lock the gates?". A bayonet was thrust through the railings at him and he was ordered to open the gate. Mr. Clarke said, "I have no responsibility for it, I have the keys here", and he threw the keys to them. The British opened the gate and went straight into the Church. They were fully armed and equipped.

A guard was placed on the gallery, and a few men, I cannot say the exact number, occupied the Church tower and they used it as a firing position. Their fire was replied to from Cussens house at the corner of Haddington Road and Northumberland Road. It was not long before two of the British snipers in the tower were wounded. Two medical men, wearing white coats, came and went up the tower to attend to them. I went a few steps up the ladder and enquired if they were seriously wounded. The reply I got was that they were only slightly wounded. The medical men and the soldiers remained in the tower under the bell until after dark and then came down.

On Wednesday morning Cussens house at the corner of Haddington Road was attacked by the British, and firing went on all day. At about 1.30 a message was received at the Presbytery saying that a badly wounded officer was at No. 72 Haddington Road (the house next to Cussens) and would a Priest come down and attend to him before he died. I went immediately and attended to him. He died a few minutes afterwards; he was a convert, having being a baptist. I went to leave by the front door and when coming out I heard the whiz of bullets. I said, "is there any back way out?", and was told I could get out by Percy Lane. I went out by Percy Lane. There were some soldiers of the Staffordshire Regiment with fixed bayonets guarding the Percy Place entrance to the lane. They appeared to be rather astonished when they saw me coming out of the lane and they shouted "halt". I thought they said "come on", and I went on. "Halt", they said again, and I still went on; then they dropped on their knees and levelled their rifles at me. I put up my hands and said, "I thought you said 'come on'; you should be taught to speak proper English before being

sent over here". That was the first time I looked down a rifle barrel and I did not like it. I went on towards Baggot Street, by the canal, and at the little bridge at Mount Street Crescent, there was another platoon of the Staffords. I said to them, "are there any Catholics among you; if there are I am going to give general absolution now?". One of the soldiers spat on the ground and said, "naw-a-o, Church of England". I said, "how dare you; I will report you to your superior officer". They all stood to attention. I again told them I was going to give absolution. I then gave the Field Absolution. I saw one man at the back bless himself. Some of these fellows were killed about ten minutes afterwards when attacking a nearby house.

On Wednesday morning also I got another sick call to Turner's cottage. I went down and when there I met a boy named Nolan who was in the Dublin Fusiliers and home on leave. His father was a cabman who lived in Waterloo Lane. There was a mark on his nose. He told me his father's horse bit him. I said to the women who were there, "don't let this boy out of this; he will be

shot. at sight being in uniform".

I heard about 6 or 7 o'clock that evening that a boy named Nolan was shot, so I went down to the mortuary. A large number of bodies were there piled up on top of each other. I looked among them and then I saw the mark on the boy's nose. That same day I saw something happening which well illustrated an incident in the Gospel when the sinful woman was brought to Our Divine Lord. The hall room of the City of Dublin Hospital was full of people who were certainly not pro Sinn Féin.

An ambulance drove up to the door and a woman was carried in on a stretcher and another woman walking beside her wearing a shawl. The woman on the stretcher was brought upstairs and the other woman remained downstairs. Some people asked, "what happened?". Very skilfully she collected her audience and said, "do you know the drawbridge at Ringsend?. "Do you know the drawbridge at Ringsend?". "Do you know the drawbridge at Ringsend?", each time addressing people in different parts of the room. They all said, "yes, yes, what happened?". "Meself and Mrs. Murphy were going to the

Hospice for the Dying. Do you know where the Hospice for the Dying is? They all said, "yes, yes, go on". "Do you know where the Hospice for the Dying is? Poor Mrs. Murphy's daughter is very sick and we were going to visit her. Meself and Mrs. Murphy were crossing the drawbridge at Ringsend when the soldiers who were firing at the Sinn Féiners from the top of Sir Patrick Dunn's Hospital fired. "Oh, my God, I'm shot", said Mrs. Murphy, and down she fell. In the Gospel we read where Our Divine Lord bent down and wrote on the sand. Some commentators say that He wrote the secret sins of the Pharisees on the sand, but when He stood up the Pharisees were all gone. In the same way within one half minute that room was empty except for the poor woman and myself.

Later in the evening I was standing in the hall of the hospital and I saw with my own eyes a fully equipped soldier with a rifle being brought upstairs by members of the hospital staff. I heard someone say the firing was from one of the high houses in Wilton Place. I heard the soldier say "show me the way, I'll get him".

Fr. McKee died on Sunday, 30 April, in a Private

Nursing Home, Baggot Street. At about 7.30 that evening I left the Presbytery to go to my lodging in St. Mary's Road. The Nurses' Home is about one hundred yards from the door of the Presbytery. Just as I got to the gate of the Nurses' Home there was a bang what must have been a bullet, hit the wall beside me about waist high. At first I thought it was a nervous sentry. I heard the scurrying of feet down Baggot Lane the minute the shot went off. I shouted out, "may I pass" and I got no reply. I walked down the middle of the road and went to St. Mary's Road.

Next day Father Felix Waters, S.M., Leeson Street, came up to sympathise with us on the death of Fr. McKee. Father Wall said to him, "you know how much we appreciate your coming. You should not have taken such a risk. You should go home now; it is dangerous to be out, it is getting dark". Afterwards Fr. Wall told me just as he closed the door he thought he heard a shot. When Fr. Waters was near the gate of the Nurses' Home he felt a pain. He put his hand to his side and saw blood on his hand. He walked to the City of Dublin Hospital where they detained him. He died

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the following day as a result of the wound. There was no inquest. Had there been an inquest it is possible the assailant might have been traced.

The moment the trouble started all differences in social standing disappeared. I saw one man, a K.C., walking along the road with a salmon or a cod in his hand. I saw another rather prominent man wheeling a perambulator full of groceries; all the artificialities of life suddenly disappeared, only to return of course.

I volunteered as a Chaplain to the English Army in September, 1917. I walked in Thomas Ashe's funeral with my Commission in my pocket. Collins delivered an oration which did not at all please me. Collins who was in Volunteer uniform at the graveside, turned to where we Priests were standing and deliberately said to us, "you stand here at the grave of a Fenian". I did not like his attitude. I never liked Collins after that.

SIGNED

John T. Doyle PP

DATE

23rd 6th 49

WITNESS

Seán Brennan. Comdt.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 34