W.S.694

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 694

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 694

Witness

Feargus (Frank) de Burca,
16 Willbrook Road,
Rathfarnham,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'E' Company, Fourth Battalion,
Dublin Brigade (Rathfarnham) 1913 - .

Subject.

G.P.O., Dublin,
Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1998

Form B.S.M. 2

W. S. 694

File S. 1998.

Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

STATEMENT BY

Frank de Búrca,

Address 16 Willbrook Road,

Rathfarnham, Dublin.

Date 19th June, 1952.

ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Volunteers.

POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Volunteer.

PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

1912 - 1916.

COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

The witness was associated from 1909 with St. Enda's College as student and as a member of the teaching staff. He took part in the Rising as a member of the Rathfarnham Company of the Volunteers.

He impressed me as being a very reliable witness who was particularly anxious to render all possible assistance to the Bureau.

J. Kearns Comdt.

Signature of Investigating Officer.

Date 25th June, 1952.

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STATEMENT OF MR. FRANK de BURCA
16 Willbrook Road, Rathfarnham,
Dublin.

In September, 1909, I was sent as a boarder to St. Enda's College, which had been founded the previous year by P.H. Pearse in Cullenswood House, Oakley Road, Ranelagh. In 1910 the school was transferred to the more spacious and more beautiful grounds of The Hermitage, Rathfarnham, where despite many difficulties it managed to survive until 1935.

On matriculating in 1912 I decided to remain in residence in St. Enda's while attending lectures in University College. Shortly after "leaving school" I was enrolled by Con Colbert into that secret organisation which to a great extent was responsible for the launching of the Irish Volunteers' organisation in October, 1913. Previous to the formation of the Volunteers I used to attend the weekly "drillings" in 41 Parnell Square.

I remember well the vast meeting in the Rotunda Rink to inaugurate the Volunteer movement. I had the honour of being one of the stewards inside the hall. P.H. Pearse was for us the chief speaker at that meeting. Soon afterwards Volunteer Companies were formed throughout the whole country. On the formation of the Rathfarnham Company (E of the IV Battalion) those of us ex-pupils still in residence in the College became members. P.H. Pearse was elected Captain and the Company was generally known afterwards as "Pearse's Own". The following ex-pupils were members: E. Bulfin, Jno. Kilgallon (The Yank), D. Ryan, B. Joyce, Conor and Eunan McGinley, Joe Buckley, Joseph Sweeney, Fintan Murphy and myself. Peter Slattery, better known as "Sla", was

also a member of "E" Company. He was Science Master in the College at the time.

For some months previous to Easter Monday 1916 I, with the other members of our group, was engaged in making preparations for the Rising. Every evening we spent in the "University Room" making hand-grenades, filling cartridges with shot and fashioning batons for use against looters, etc.

During this period of feverish activity we managed to procure as much equipment as possible. Each Volunteer had to provide himself with a bandolier, haversack and knapsack.

I had a lovely long Lee-Enfield rifle which I had got from the hands of P.H. Pearse himself some months before. It was, to me, a lovely weapon and perfectly new and I took great pride in keeping it well-oiled and free from rust. We kept our rifles at the head of our beds.

Every Sunday morning we'd parade with the Company and go for route marches and military exercises around the neighbourhood. Of course, we always carried our rifles on these route marches.

In connection with our "bomb"-making, the question of collecting a sufficient number of empty containers was very important. We had soon used up all the empty tins that had accumulated over a long period in the College premises. Friends and sympathetic shopkeepers also supplied us with small quantities. I remember being sent by P.H. Pearse over to Tom Clarke's house in Philipsburgh Avenue, Fairview, to collect a case full which Mrs. Clarke had in readiness. 'Twas my first visit to this house and the first occasion I had of meeting Mrs. Tom Clarke, a

daughter of the famous Fenian, John Daly of Limerick. On my way home I called to Glen Tolka, Richmond Road, and collected a few more tins.

Every year since the opening of the school we had a special celebration on 21st March in honour of St. Enda. The celebration usually consisted of a play in Irish and English performed by a group of the pupils and members of the staff. As our Headmaster and most of the staff were engaged in more serious work, the usual plays were dispensed with on 21st March 1916. A short concert was held instead. The usual friends that helped at our frequent concerts and céilidhthe were invited to regale us with music and songs. Amongst those who never failed us and who were present that night were Seán O Beirne, Padruig Caffrey and Captain Tom McCarthy.

As Easter was only a bare month away, the pupils were being sent home for the Easter holidays somewhat earlier than usual and P.H. Pearse took the opportunity on this night, when addressing his pupils and the few outsiders present, to refer to the work accomplished in St. Enda's.

> /Sgoil Eanna, he declared, had gone on for eight years. He hoped it would continue for eighty, but so far as he was concerned its work was done. He had founded Sgoil Éanna to make Irish boys efficient soldiers in the battles spiritual and temporal of their country.
>
> In the Irish Volunteers that day were many such soldiers. It had taken the blood of the Son of God to redeem the world. It would take the blood of the sons of Ireland to redeem Ireland./

Extract from "The Story Of A Success", page 98, by D. Ryan.

'Twas evident to us that Pearse was making what he knew was his last farewell to the "2nd achievement" of his life. The 3rd achievement was on the horizon. We were all thrilled by his words that night and by the rousing national songs and recitations given by our guests. I thought poor Willie Pearse looked sad and lonely as if he had a premonition of the fate that was in store for him and his beloved brother.

To add to the excitement of the occasion, word came through to the College during the course of the evening's entertainment that the first shot in the Insurrection had been fired in Tullamore. It seemed that the local Company of Volunteers had succeeded in defending their hall against an attack by the R.I.C. the previous night. Volunteer Seamus Ó Braonáin, fresh from the Tullamore affair, had arrived in St. Enda's during the concert and the place resounded with our cheers when P.H. Pearse announced the tidings to us.

The school was shut for the Easter holidays about a fortnight before Easter Sunday. I had hopes that I would be able to pay a flying visit home to see my people and to be back in time for the "Easter manoeuvres" but, on asking permission from P.H. Pearse, he advised against doing so.

The "manoeuvres" were planned for a long time before to take place on Easter Sunday. All the Volunteers in the country were to be mobilised on that day and certain tasks had been allotted to each area.

All, I think, in St. Enda's knew what the outcome of these manoeuvres was to be. We had all made a good Confession and all had received The Blessed Sacrament on Easter Sunday morning. Commandant Pearse

had addressed our company the previous week and had hinted as much as was safe, to coming events. He impressed upon each and everyone present in the drill-hall to go to Confession and to make his peace with God before going out on "the manoeuvres".

During Holy Week we were busy in clearing out of the room in St. Enda's all the war material we had manufactured during the previous months. Cars and vans called to the College and took away boxes of grenades, bullets, rifles, etc., to various destinations in the city. In the meantime we took our turn in standing guard over the place in case of a raid for arms or to make arrests.

By Holy Thursday all the stuff for outside Companies had been removed and we were left with nothing but what was intended for our own use.

About three weeks before Easter we had as a lodger a young man dressed in the garb of a priest. He had just escaped from a place of detention in England where he had been deported some months beforehand on account of his national activities. The first evening I was shown into his room I immediately recognised the "priest" as Liam Mellows, as I had known him long before his deportation to England. He now became one of the "family circle" (as our little group was called) and was the life and soul of the party. On Spy Wednesday evening Eamon Corbett called for him on his motor-cycle combination and brought him to his destination in Galway. He was to take charge of operations in that area. We were all very lonely after him. I was not to see him again until he returned to Ireland in 1921.

Holy Thursday, 1916 - On the afternoon of this day E. Bulfin, B. Joyce and myself went to town to

finish our purchases. We got practically all we needed in Lawlor's of Fownes Street. I finished up anyhow by having a haversack, two bandolier pouches, knapsack, billy-can and a pair of green puttees. 'Twas the only thing green in the way of a uniform I had. A number of Volunteers, of course, had the complete uniform - much the same as our National Army has to-day, but of a darker shade I think.

On Good Friday we remained on guard in the College except for the usual visits to the Church in Rathfarnham. On this day we heard of the disaster which befell the three Volunteers on their way to contact Sir R. Casement off the Kerry coast. Later we learned of the details of this mishap and of the arrest of Casement.

'Tis difficult to recall after so many years the details of what took place on Holy Saturday. I remember however that I went to Confession and I'm sure the others did likewise. During the afternoon John Kilgallon took a snapshot of our group in "full kit" out in the quadrangle. That night was spent in getting everything ready for the morrow's fray.

Easter Sunday morning dawned beautiful and clear. The weather at this time and all during Easter Week was all that could be desired. The sun shone brilliantly from an almost clear sky.

I remember the disappointment and dismay experienced when, on coming out from Mass, we learned the news that the manoeuvres had been cancelled on orders from Eoin Mac Neill. It was the talk of all in groups around the Church and on our way home to breakfast. It looked as if Commandant Pearse and his comrades would be foiled in their attempt to start the Rising. We got our orders to 'stand to' and to await

further instructions.

I got permission from Lieutenant Bulfin to go over to Glen-tolka to inform my sister, Eva, of the tidings I had heard. She was ready to join her contingent as a nurse. I came back to the College early in the evening. The brothers Pearse called back to see their Mother and sister late this evening.

Easter Monday:

I was aroused from a sound sleep by Bulfin and told to get up immediately, that we were mobilised for Rathfarnham Church at 10 a.m. I was soon up and dressed and joined my companions in the refectory where we sat down to a good substantial breakfast, the last we were to enjoy for some time. After breakfast we donned our equipment and made our way in two's and three's to Rathfarnham Church. Mrs. and Miss Pearse met us at the entrance gate of the "Hermitage" and bade a fond farewell to each. I found it very hard to move quickly as I was carrying extra equipment for a Volunteer I was to meet at the Church. It was funny to meet the usual Bank Holiday hikers on their way to the mountains oblivious of the stirring events that were about to take place.

When we arrived at the Church we met other members of "E" Company from the district but we had to wait a considerable time for some who lived a distance from the Church and who had received the order to mobilise later than we had. However, we mustered 37 strong when we got the order to march. Just before we set out Eoin MacNeill approached our leaders and warned them that we were being led into a trap; that we should disband immediately and go home. He was told that we were acting under orders from our own

Commandant. However, on getting the order to march we set off at a brisk pace to the tram terminus. We boarded a '17' tram - one of those open-top vehicles which are not to be seen now-a-days - and the driver got orders "full steam ahead to O'Connell Street". Our destination was Liberty Hall.

The first sign that there was anything unusual in the air was at Jacob's Biscuit Factory. When passing there we noticed a large crowd of civilians - men and women - being ordered back by Volunteers with fixed bayonets. Jacob's factory was in the hands of the insurgents! The excitement was commencing. On down George's Street our tram rattled its way. Near the junction of George's and Dame Streets we heard a burst of rifle fire - the attack evidently on Dublin Castle. Our tram stopped right opposite the Bank of Ireland. Evidently the situation had become too hot and dangerous for our driver. He just left the tram there. We got out, formed four-deep and marched via College Street, Tara Street and across Butt Bridge into Liberty Hall. We were assigned positions immediately. Along with others I was ordered to take up a position on the roof. On my way across to the parapet overlooking the Liffey, my foot went down through slates, plaster and all. I had great difficulty in extricating myself. I thought at the time that this building wouldn't stand very long against enemy bombardment and I was glad when, after about ten minutes, we were ordered to proceed "at the double" to Headquarters in the G.P.O. I remember C. McGinley was in front of me. We "doubled" up Abbey Street and across O'Connell Street into Prince's Street. O'Connell Street was thronged with sightseers, some

dumbfounded at the sight while others raised a cheer.

The G.P.O. had been charged promptly at mid-day by the Kimmage Company and all inside had been ordered to clear out. All was bustle and excitement when we arrived in Prince's Street. As we were entering Prince's Street there were shouts, "Here come the Lancers!", from some of the onlookers. We were immediately given the orders, "About turn", "Fix bayonets", etc. 'Twas a false alarm however as far as our group were concerned. The Lancers had charged up from the Parnell Monument but, on running into a blast of fire from the G.P.O., they turned around and retreated.

The problem facing us now was how to get into the G.P.O. as the main entrance was locked for the moment. There was nothing we could do but clamber in one by one through the side window near the corner. Two of our Company stood at the window and helped each man as he came along to climb up on the window-ledge. 'Twas at this time that Volunteer Jack Keeley got mortally wounded. I was quite close to him when he fell back into a comrade's arms. He was our first casualty. It has never been ascertained whether the shot that killed him came from the enemy or from one of our own men.

When I got through the window I found myself in a small room, the door of which was locked but, as the partition wall did not extend to the ceiling, I succeeded in climbing over it. In the meantime Lieutenant Boland had managed to burst the lock by firing into it - a reckless thing to do, no doubt. Eventually we all got inside and out to the main yard at the back.

Shortly after our arrival the tri-colour was hoisted on the flagstaff at the left hand corner facing Prince's Street. Commandant Pearse read aloud to the public on the street the Proclamation of the Irish Republic and copies of the Proclamation were posted on the walls and pillars of the building.

When Lieutenant Boland had reported our arrival to Commandant Pearse, we were ordered to take up a position on the roof, to which the access on the Prince's Street side, was by a spiral staircase at the back. Brian Joyce and I were stationed beneath the tri-colour at the Prince's Street corner. We were soon joined by an old friend, Eoghan Ó Briain, one of the few who was always present at our social gatherings in St. Enda's. We were delighted to have him with us - he was so good-humoured. The rest of the Company occupied a position over the porch of the G.P.O. and the corner opposite the Pillar. As most of the barricading and window-smashing had been done when we arrived, our main duty was to keep a watch out for the enemy as he was expected to attack any hour. We had a supply of the home-made bombs in front of us and we got detailed instructions how to use them if the soldiers succeeded in getting near the entrances. As no attempt was made to rush our position during the week, we were saved the trouble and risk of using these "bombs". One of our officers, Lieutenant Liam Clarke, received severe facial wounds when he was unloading some bombs from a handcart prior to distribution to the men. He had to be removed to hospital and was unable to participate in the fighting.

As far as actual fighting was concerned, there was nothing doing in our department on the first day. From all around us we could hear bursts of rifle

and machine-gun fire as the British troops were taking up attacking positions. Our forces held Jacob's factory, the Mendicity, the Four Courts, Boland's Mill and certain houses between these outposts. Rumours of all kinds were floating around - "The Volunteers were rising throughout the country." "All Kerry in a blaze." "German submarines were operating in Dublin Bay." Heartening news for us certainly. I was elated but soon disappointed when Jimmy McElligott joined us that evening and told us that his brother had just come up from Tralee and that all was quiet down South. Dublin was alone in the fight! Later in the evening my sister, Eva, reported for duty to Commandant Pearse. Judge of my delight when a message was brought to me on the roof to say my sister was in and would like to see me. We saw each other for a few moments each day.

As night approached the fighting became more intense. We were able after some time to distinguish the different sounds of the guns. The Howth rifles sounded like small cannon compared with the modern rifle. It was easy to recognise the report of the shotguns and the rat-a-tat-tat of the machine guns. There were still crowds outside the G.P.O. and the number was increased by those returning from Fairyhouse Races. A number of Volunteers, thinking that the manoeuvres had been postponed indefinitely, had gone to the Races. Some, on returning to the city, joined up with their units or with the nearest group they could contact.

I need hardly say that we got no opportunity of sleeping on this our first night on the roof. As I lay on the sloping roof gazing up at the star-studded

sky, my thoughts naturally turned to my loved ones at home. I knew how worried my parents would be when I did not go home for the Easter vacation. However I put away these thoughts as much as I could lest they would interfere with that which had a greater claim to our love and loyalty.

As dawn broke over the Bay of Dublin we resumed our watch on the Liffey.

Tuesday:

I was still one of the group on duty on the roof. We were so excited the previous day that very little in the way of food satisfied us - there was no shortage of tea and bread and butter. On Tuesday meals were more regular as the kitchen staff were better organised. We went down at specified times for our meals. Desmond Fitzgerald seemed to be in charge of the commissariat department and at times we thought him very niggardly in dishing out the grub. He was evidently expecting a long sojourn in the G.P.O.

As I mentioned already, Brian Joyce and Eoghan Ó Briain were my companions in our section under the flag. Each night we said the Rosary and indeed at frequent intervals during the day. 'Twas not an unusual sight to see a Volunteer with his rifle grasped firmly in his hands and his Rosary beads hanging from his fingers. Eoghan Ó Briain "gave out" the Rosary in our corner. He was much older than either Brian or I and was a married man with more responsibilities on his shoulders than we had. He couldn't stand any cursing or swearing or strong language. In this connection there was a famous character by the name of Jack White whose language was of the lurid style. He belonged to the Citizen Army and had been engaged by Commandant J. Connolly for special work and had afterwards re-joined

him in the Post Office. One would have to see Jack in order to appreciate the stories about him. He was a seafaring man and, according to his own yarns, had seen the seamy side of life in many lands. A small sallow man, with ear-rings, you'd take him for a foreigner, certainly. His story of how he succeeded in cutting the head off of a Greek in one of his "foreign encounters" thrilled us but his mode of expressing himself had poor Eoghan in a state of collapse almost.

Towards evening the fighting all around us was growing in intensity. The military were gradually closing in around the city. Shelling from a gun-boat on the Liffey commenced on the buildings around the G.P.O. Machine guns from the direction of Trinity College and the Tivoli (now the offices of the 'Irish Press') were spraying bullets across O'Connell Street. By this time the crowds had melted away. The streets were deserted. We had a few men posted in buildings opposite the G.P.O. but we had not sufficient numbers to make a counter attack.

Wednesday:

We were still in our corner on the roof but the position was becoming more and more dangerous. One never knew when an enemy sniper might find his target. Our snipers were busy too but for most of us 'twas a hidden enemy encircling our position. As a result of the shells from the Liffey gun-boat, fires had started all around us. I shall never forget the sight of Clery's in flames. We could feel the heat from our place on the roof. I remember Commandant Connolly coming around on this day to inspect our positions. He inspired us with great confidence by the cool calm attitude he adopted to the firing all around. He

was a grand character and did everything he could for the comfort of his men. We were becoming, towards evening, rather weary from lack of sleep and the constant strain of watching and waiting for the attack was beginning to tell on us. That night, however, our group was replaced by others and we were brought down to the ground floor, where there were mattresses strewn just behind the front entrance to the building. Here we stretched our weary limbs and tried to sleep as best we could.

Thursday:

I slept soundly enough but was awakened very early in the morning to take up duty again. This time, however, we were stationed at the front and corner windows of the ground floor. I remember I was put at the corner facing towards O'Connell Bridge, but we would exchange positions now and then to relieve the monotony. Before going on duty we had a wash and then something to eat. The windows were well sandbagged with just a small opening for firing through. Most of the St. Enda's boys were with me at this time. George Plunkett seemed to be the officer in command of this particular section.

I should have mentioned that on Monday evening we got news that a contingent of Volunteers from Maynooth had reached our Headquarters. I naturally was very anxious to meet anybody from Kildare and proud of the fact that my County was represented in the fight. I went down to meet them. Joe Buckley's father was with them. I was glad to get news of Joe who would have been with us only that he had to take his father's place at home, as the rest of the family were very young and his mother was an invalid. The Maynooth men

were led to the city by Captain Tom Byrne, a man who had seen active service under Major John McBride in the Boer War of 1899-1900. On Tuesday the Maynooth men were sent over to strengthen our unit in the "Evening Mail" office.

Towards mid-day on Thursday our position in the G.P.O. became very serious. The fires had now extended from Clery's right down to Hopkins' corner and from the Metropole Hotel, the next building on our right, down to O'Connell's Bridge. In fact, the whole area was one mass of flames but the G.P.O. had not as yet caught fire. But it was only a matter of time until this would also be on fire. Shells were constantly bursting on the roof and many of the Rathfarnham Company who had relieved us on Wednesday received facial wounds. All eventually were ordered down to the lower floors. We were ordered to build barricades further back from the front windows. We were sent down to the coal cellars and ordered to fill bags with coal and carry them up to the ground floor. A foolish move, I thought afterwards, as coal would not prove very effective protection against bullets. However, 'twas all we had convenient. We worked like navvies for a good spell and then resumed our front line positions. What a change had come over the scene since Monday and Tuesday! Not a soul was now to be seen, only a huge wall of flames towering to the sky and great billows of smoke. The noise of bursting shells and tumbling walls and roofs was indescribable. As one old soldier prisoner remarked, "Twas worse than Flanders". Machine guns were still spraying the street with bullets. I saw one poor civilian rushing out in front of Nelson Pillar only to meet his death right in front of our window. By this time all our men had been withdrawn from their posts on the

opposite side and brought back to the Post Office. It was miraculous that none of our men were shot whilst crossing backwards and forwards from Clery's to the G.P.O. It was necessary on one occasion for a party to go across for a supply of mattresses, etc. They got across safely but when returning they ran into a shower of bullets. One man tripped and fell with the mattress on top of him. He got up quite calmly, however, and got in without a scratch.

I was wondering where Eva was all this time. It seems she had been sent across the other side of the street to Reis' shop to attend to some wounded men there. Captain Tom Weafer was killed while she was there. She was the last, I think, to be with him when he died. Not long afterwards the whole building took fire and she along with others of Cumann na mBan and garrison were brought back to the G.P.O.

It was on this day also Commandant Connolly was wounded. He was lying on a stretcher at the back of the Post Office. Jim Ryan was the doctor in charge and he had the assistance of an English R.A.M.C. who was one of our prisoners.

Coming on towards dusk Captain George Plunkett asked Conor McGinley and myself to go with Paddy Weafer (Tom's brother) to help in boring through the houses in Henry Street in order that we might find a way of joining our comrades in the Four Courts. We set off in single file, Weafer leading the way. The poor fellow had just heard of his brother's death and he was greatly upset. On our way we passed Tom Clarke. He stopped us and shook hands with each of us. The three of us continued our way upstairs - through walls already bored - down 2nd floors and up to top floors,

zig-zagging our way in the darkness through the Coliseum. I remember how weird and ghostly the auditorium of the Coliseum looked as we made our way through the gallery and on into the "Wax Works". I don't know how far up Henry Street we had gone when, "Halt! Who goes there?" rang out. It was, of course, one of our own men whom we were to assist with the continuation of the boring. It appeared that we had reached the terminus of the boring operations and were told that no further movement in that direction was contemplated for the moment. It was late at this time, so Conor and I wrapped ourselves as best we could in the one overcoat, sat down on the floor with our backs to a wall and fell fast asleep. I remember awakening in the middle of the night - just as Commandant P.H. Pearse and two other officers were passing through on a tour of inspection.

Friday:

Came the dawn and Conor and I woke up feeling very sore and stiff in every bone. We were anxious, seeing that no further boring was to be done, to get back to our own section on the ground floor of the G.P.O. I managed to get down to Commandant Pearse and asked him for a note ordering our transfer back to our own comrades. He readily gave me the necessary order and included the name of J.J. MacElligott who wished to be with us. I was one of the few whom J.J. knew in the G.P.O. He really should have reported to Jacob's Factory where his own Company were operating and where his cousin, Paddy Kelly, was but he was unable to reach there and had come into the G.P.O. We were both glad of one another's company.

We got back without any difficulty, had a wash

to take the sleep out of our eyes and resumed our posts at the windows. The place was now an inferno. Some of our men were hosing the flames that had spread along the roof and, between the flames, the smoke and the water dripping down on us, we didn't feel very comfortable. Still we made the welkin ring with rousing song and chorus, just to keep our spirits up. Soon we heard the sad news of The O'Rahilly's death. He had gone out at the head of a section to try to force an opening up Moore Street when he, with some others, were killed by machine gun fire. Amongst those killed with The O'Rahilly was Francis Macken, one of our own "E" Company. He had a hairdressing establishment in Rathfarnham and came regularly to the College. He was a great little soldier and, as Section Commander in the Company, always gave the commands in Irish.

Owing to the seriousness of the position, the Cumann na mBan were sent with the wounded and the Red Cross section to Jervis Street Hospital. I had no opportunity of seeing my sister, Eva, before she went.

About 2 o'clock in the afternoon all the Companies were ordered to line up in the yard of the G.P.O. in preparation for leaving the burning building. All the available food, including hams, bread, tinned food, etc., were collected in one place and a portion given to each man as he passed by. Jimmy Kenny (Terenure) and I, amongst others, were distributing the food. While thus engaged a shot rang out and one man fell wounded. I cannot recall whether this man was J. Kenny or Dr. Ted Kelly (Maynooth). Both were wounded at this time anyhow. I thought 'twas the beginning of an attack so I procured a "gammon" and

promptly took my place in the ranks. The retreat was carried out in a very orderly manner. There was no panic whatsoever. We marched out in two-deep, each man holding his rifle pointing upwards lest, in the closely-packed formation, a rifle might go off accidentally. I remember well E. Bulfin was in front of me. When we reached the side door leading into Henry Street Commandant Pearse was standing in the small hallway watching and waiting until the last man had passed out of the building. As the street was being swept by machine gun fire from Mary Street direction, we had to make a dash across in one's and two's into Henry Lane. Bulfin made the journey with great speed. My turn was next. I thought my overcoat, to which I had the gammon fastened in front, might be an unnecessary burden and might possibly trip me as I ran, so I discarded both and threw them in a corner. I could see the bullets like hailstones hopping on the street and I thought that 'twould be a miracle to get to the other side scatheless. With head down as if running against heavy rain, I ran as I never ran before or since and got into Henry Lane without a scratch. The remarkable fact was that no one was hit while running this dangerous gauntlet.

When we got into Henry Lane all men with bayonets were ordered to the front. I was unfortunate in that I was the only one of the St. Enda group to have a bayonet attached to my rifle. I never liked the idea of a bayonet charge as I always pictured myself being at the receiving end. There was nothing for it anyhow but to leave my comrades and go up to the front. Just at the bend of the lane, "Commandant" McLaughlin (who afterwards said he had been promoted to that rank "on the field" by Commandant James

Connolly) was roaring and shouting at us to "charge the white house". I'm blessed if I could see any white house but in company with the rest I charged.

We had to pass a laneway which runs parallel with Moore Street down to Parnell Street. At the Parnell Street end there was a barricade from which the British were firing. We got by the lane opening safely, however, and it was then I saw the "white house" indicated by our officer. It was at the corner of Moore Street and Henry Lane. We broke in the door and found ourselves in a "stone-beer" store. There was no enemy in waiting for us and for the moment we were out of the firing line. Bat. Bourke, Paddy Donnelly and the Sweeney brothers, all of "E" Company, were with me inside. We went upstairs and proceeded to barricade the windows on the instructions of a fine young Captain in full uniform. This was our first meeting with the famous Mick Collins. I don't think he was pleased with the way we had barricaded the windows but we could do no better as we had not the material at hand. Besides we were practically exhausted by this time from lack of food and sleep. 'Twas impossible to keep awake. As soon as one sat down, one's head began to nod over one's rifle. The only remedy was to try to keep on one's feet. After some time we got orders to leave the store and go into the house opposite. This house faced on to Moore Street and our men had bored their way through the houses until they reached a yard which opened out on the second lane in Moore Street near Parnell Street end.

What a queer life! Creeping through holes into bedrooms, then downstairs and through another opening into sitting-rooms, through shops, and finally to our

resting place for the night near the above-mentioned yard (I think it belonged to Hanlon's). All was silence. We were under strict orders not to make any noise or to use our fire arms. The owners or occupiers of the houses seemed to have all gone away as we met with no opposition. All our men had got safely from the G.P.O. and were in silent occupation of the row of houses on this side of Moore Street (i.e., the right-hand side looking from Henry Street).

The wounded Commandant Connolly was carried on a stretcher right through to a house about half-way up the street. Commandant Pearse and other officers were with him. We were completely surrounded. The military were entrenched behind a high barricade at the end of Moore Street. We could see from our windows dead bodies of civilians lying out on the path opposite. I took particular notice of one poor man with a white flag grasped in his hand, lying dead on the door-step of his house. He had evidently been shot while evacuating his home for a safer place. We had a very patchy sleep that night as we suffered from the hunger and the thirst.

Saturday, 29th April, 1916 - The Surrender:

I don't remember what time we awoke but I well remember the gnawing feeling of hunger and how I longed for a good strong cup of tea but there was nothing to be had up at our end of the line anyhow. I thought what a fool I was to have parted with that gammon. I would have eaten it raw. After some time somebody came along with a tin of pineapples which we shared amongst a few of us. It relieved the thirst anyhow. The shelling and firing had commenced again. The Post Office now was a huge mass of flames and the roof was

falling in. Explosions were frequent as the flames came in contact with the bombs which we were unable to retrieve from the building. Sometime after mid-day an order came along for "all men with bayonets to proceed to the front". I prayed God that I'd get my blow in first if I should succeed in coming into close quarters with the enemy. On my way up to the yard, I had the awful temptation of getting rid of my bayonet as no one was looking, but thank God I overcame such a cowardly action and proceeded to join the men out in the yard. Poor Harry Boland was there, Jim and Paddy Sweeney and a few others from "E" Company whose names I cannot recall. We were in the first batch that were to charge out on to the street. We were told to keep very, very quiet. There was only a wide door separating the yard from the lane into which we were to go. We were then supposed to proceed into Moore Street and charge the big barricade about fifty yards away at the end of Moore Street. I could see none of us reaching that far. Harry Boland had previously said that we could only do our best, that there was little hope of any of us coming safely through. One man was loosening the bolt of the door gently so that no noise would be made when the actual order to move would be given.

J.J. Walsh now came along. He was evidently in control. We all got into place, ready to make the plunge, when I saw another officer approaching J.J. and I overheard him asking if Commandant Pearse was aware that we were about to go into action and J.J. said that he thought not. He was then told to hold back until Commandant Pearse was informed. The officer, I afterwards learned, was Diarmuid Lynch (R.I.P.).

Word came back that the charge was to be postponed until darkness in order to give us a better

chance of success. The relief to me anyhow was like an answer to prayer. But we were to keep our places and for God's sake not to make a sound. There was a market cart near where I was standing and two of us lay down in it for a rest. The sun was shining brilliantly down on us and all around was silence. Suddenly a terrific explosion occurred. It was the roof of the G.P.O. caving in. Again all got quiet. I was resting peacefully, gazing up at the clear blue sky and thinking of my poor Mother and how anxious she must now be feeling. There seemed no hope of escape for any of us but nevertheless I prayed that, if it was God's Holy Will, He'd bring us through. We were unaware, of course, of what was taking place in the house where the Headquarters staff were installed.

In the midst of my reflections on home, on St. Enda's and the pleasant days we spent at school, whom should I see coming across the yard towards me but my bosom friend, Brian Joyce. He had a joyous expression on his face. "Did you hear the news, Frank?" "No", I said. "A truce has been arranged", says he. He had to repeat the news several times before we'd believe him. But he had come from further back the line and was in a position of finding out what was taking place at Headquarters. To say that I was glad and thankful to God would be putting it mildly. The chance of once again stretching our cramped limbs and being able to walk back and forth amongst our comrades was new life to us. We learned that Commandant Pearse in consultation with Commandant Connolly and the other officers had decided that enough had been achieved to save Ireland's honour and "that it was time to arrest the slaughter of the civilian population by British

shells and bullets". It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon when the unconditional surrender took place.

We were all called back to one of the larger rooms and there Seán Mac Diarmuda explained what Headquarters had decided to do and the reasons which compelled them to come to such a decision. He spoke with emotion of the fight against fearful odds by the Dublin Brigade, that they, the leaders, knew what fate awaited them but they hoped that the rank and file would be treated leniently. There were tears in his eyes as he was speaking.

We were formed up in four-deep out in the yard and we marched out by the door, through which we were to have made our bayonet charge, into Moore Street. We then marched into Henry Street and O'Connell Street. We were halted near the Parnell Monument end, opposite the place where Aer Línte now have their offices. The first person I met (outside our own Company) whom I knew well was Barney Mellows. We shook hands as if we hadn't met for years. On orders from the British O.C. we advanced to the centre of the street, laid down our arms and equipment and proceeded to the opposite side. Whilst standing here, looking around at a city in ruins and thinking that by our action we had earned the hatred and contempt of the populace, a fine big member of the Fire Brigade passed along and in a low voice said, "Ye have my sympathy, boys". What a consolation it was to us to hear that simple expression. Here was one anyhow who held no blame for us.

When all the arms and equipment were given up, we were marched in a body into the small green in front of the Rotunda Hospital (This green plot is no longer there) and ordered to lie down on the grass. We were

kept there till next morning. The officer* in charge of the soldiers did all he could to make trouble and was particularly severe on Tom Clarke and Seán MacDermott. He afterwards paid the penalty for his cruelty.

* Lea Wilson. Capt.

Sunday, 30th May, 1916:

On Sunday morning we were again lined up in four-deep, a soldier on each side of every four, and marched via O'Connell Street, Dame Street, James Street to Richmond Barracks. 'Twas a long trek for us, especially after all we had gone through. What with lack of proper sleep and food we were hardly able to drag our weary feet along. But we faced the ordeal bravely and showed no sign to the enemy that we cared. As we were passing the vicinity of the Castle, the wives and dependents of the soldiers were lined along the street and they certainly made no secret of their antipathy towards us. The soldiers were encouraged by words and gestures "to give us the bayonet and finish us off". Their language, I must say, was most choice.

On reaching the square in Richmond Barracks, each man was searched and anything of value taken off him. I had only 10/- in my pocket but that, of course, was taken. I remember afterwards when we were all making claims for property stolen from us, that for fun I filled in a form for my 10/-. Over a year elapsed and I had forgotten all about the affair, but His Majesty had not. The money was even brought by hand to me when I lay sick with the 'flu in St. Enda's at Easter, 1917.

After being searched we were led into a big hall or gynasium. The "G" men now advanced rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of being able to

render such service to their King and country! What a degrading sight! Irishmen picking out their fellow-countrymen for the firing-squad and long terms of imprisonment. Most of these "G" men also paid for their misdeeds.

From the gymnasium those of us who were of "the unknown class" were transferred to a smaller room and left there without food until the evening. We were then given a tin of bully-beef each and told to get ready for a journey. As we marched out of the room, each man's name and address were taken by an Army officer at whose side a "G" man was standing. When I gave my address as Carbury, Co. Kildare, this "G" man (whom I had not noticed till then) remarked that he knew that place well. I recognised the man who was always at the Broadstone Railway station watching the trains. His name was Hoey. He was afterwards shot.

We were formed up again on the square and marched down through the grounds of the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham via the northern quays to the North Wall. There we were given a life-belt each and placed down in the hold of a cattle boat. Our first thoughts naturally turned to submarines. It would have been so convenient to get rid of so many and blame the atrocity on the Germans! I fell asleep, not caring much at the time whether I was under or over the water. When I awoke we were in Holyhead. From there we were put on a train for Stafford Gaol.

Thus ends my feeble attempt to describe after

so many years my humble part in one of the most glorious episodes in Irish history - "The 1916 Rising".

SIGNED: Feargus de Burca
(Feargus de Burca)

DATE: 19/6/52

WITNESS: J. Kearns Comdt
(J. Kearns) Comd't.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 694

"PEARSE'S OWN"

"E" COMPANY, IV BATTALION, DUBLIN BRIGADE (Rathfarnham)

Members of the Company who participated in the Rising 1916

Commandant P.H. Pearse	(Capt. of "E" Coy.).	Executed.
Captain Wm. Pearse	H.Q.	Executed.
Lieut. Éamonn Bulfin	Sgoil Éanna.	
Conchubhar Mac Fhionnloic	Sgoil Éanna.	
Éamonn Mac Fhionnlaoic (decd.)	"	
Jos. Sweeney	"	
Desmond Ryan	"	
John Kilgallon	"	
Francis Macken		Killed in action.
John Keeley		Killed in action.
James Sweeney		
Patrick Sweeney		
Chas. Donnelly		
Patrick Donnelly		
Thos. Corbally		
Francis Sheridan (decd.)		
Kevin O'Carroll		
Joseph Lee (decd.)		
Hugh Lee		
William Reilly (dec.)		
Michael Cowley		
Batt. Burke		
Henry Gannon (decd.)		
Lieut. Michael Boland (decd.)		
Patrick Gallagher ("Chun")		
James Kenny		
Michael Cremin		
Thos. Kearney ("Tossie")		

Members of "E" Company who participated in the Rising 1916. (Continued).

Liam Clarke (decd.)	
Matt. Caffrey	
Wm. Mulvey	
Dom. Mulvey (decd.)	
James Wardeck (decd.)	
Patrick O'Connor (decd.)	
Peter Slattery ("Sla")	Sgoil Éanna
Brian Joyce	"
Fintan Murphy	"
Micheál Mac Ruaidhrí (decd.)	"
Feargus De Búrca	"

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