

W.S. 724

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 724

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Desmond Ryan, B.A.,  
"Oulart",  
Forrest Road,  
Swords, Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Lieut. Irish Volunteers (Dublin Brigade) 1916;  
Author and Journalist.

Subject.

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

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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# Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

## STATEMENT BY

Desmond Ryan, B.A. (Author & Journalist)

Address.....'Oulart', Forest Road, Swords,

.....Co. Dublin

Date.....5 September 1952

## ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Republican Brotherhood (Con Colbert Circle)  
Irish Volunteers, 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade.  
Irish Republican Army do. do.  
Gaelic League.

## POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Volunteer.  
1st Lieut.

## PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

Easter Week, 1916.

## COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

This statement was compiled from notes made by witness while a prisoner in Stafford Jail, in the autumn of 1916. It was submitted to me in rough manuscript form which the witness subsequently corrected and revised.

I have no comment to make.

*m. J. Ryan Comdl*

Signature of Investigating Officer.

Date.....9 September 1952.

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'Oulart', Forest Road, Swords, Co.  
Dublin.

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BUREAU STAIRS, MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 724

Statement of Mr. Desmond Ryan,  
"Oulart", Forest Road, Swords, Co. Dublin,

On Events in Easter Week, 1916, compiled from notes  
made by Witness in Stafford Jail.

Easter Week : Dublin 1916.

I wrote the following account in the autumn of 1916 from notes I made in Stafford, and checked from a friend's diary so they are substantially accurate. Events mentioned should not be taken as necessarily occurring on the day mentioned as even now my memory is a trifle confused. At the time all days seemed as one day. Where I have set down anything upon hearsay, I have indicated the fact. What follows may seem a dreary collection of notes of not very exciting happenings. However, Easter Week records must, I fear, be that, at least to participants until someone weaves the inspiration and the occurrences of that five days into a novel or an imaginative history. Thomas McDonagh used to cheer up the Volunteers after night manoeuvres with the words: "Standing in wet fields for days and never seeing the enemy." Why many modern battles are just like that!"

The postponed mobilisation for the Easter manoeuvres of the Irish Volunteers was a rather dangerous hint to Dublin that trouble and mischief were afoot. It broke the nerve of the Rising and what might have passed into history as a War for National Independence became Easter Week. We had Easter Week instead of a revolution. But the glory and the tragedy of that time shall outlive our lives. Its personal shock too shall outlive our lives. When justice has been done to the leaders and the circumstances

have been weighed, when in the fulness of time we see the results, we may reach a proper judgment. Easter Week now vies with '98 in the popular imagination.

Soldier and politician are helpless before the Irish enigma, an enigma they long strove to solve by settling the Irish in Dublin's Castle, at the ends of the earth, in Westminster and in Dublin's streets. It is good to gather records of the shock we gave them; they had forgotten we were capable of persuading them with vile salt petre and cruel steel. Aye, it is good to gather records of the fight, because, briefly, in the words of a Stafford prisoner - Éamonn Dore of Limerick:

"Tom Clarke has shown us what to do,  
And McDermott is not dead.  
Each Irish heart was leal and true,  
When Patrick Pearse led.  
While Colbert's ground is holy ground,  
And holier yet shall be  
When all confess from east to west,  
Old Ireland shall be free".

Within the G.P.O. for the Five Days and the  
Sights in O'Connell Street: A Synopsis of  
several Narratives.

Easter Monday, 1916, ushered in the Irish Republic. One would never have gathered from the capital's external life that war was at its gates, ready to enter its street gates and scatter death and men upon one of the most placid and queenly of cities. Sunday, the 23rd of April, and the night preceding must have presented many a Volunteer with an unpleasant choice. A test and a crisis were at hand. Whispers of a military raid, the postponement of Sunday's manoeuvres, visions of the repetition of Ireland's eternal gesture, the arm raised to strike only to fall limp and hesitant by her side. But the unexpected happened.

The attack upon the G.P.O. took place at noon. A Company of Volunteers armed with pikes, shotguns and rifles charged the front of the building at the ringing command of the gallant officer in charge. They disposed of the resistance of the practically unarmed guard whose lack of ammunition rendered them helpless, laughed at the angry ladies who were disturbed buying stamps, watched the staff fly out pell-mell and soon had occupied the position. Simultaneously the Four Courts, the South Dublin Union, Jacob's, Boland's Mills, innumerable houses in proximity to these, and several other important positions were occupied. An attack upon Portobello also came off. It was believed, at the time, that the Castle had fallen. Later the story was current that McDonagh had taken the Lower Castle yard but had been driven out again by machine-gun fire. W. Pearse believed this at the time. The Irish Republican Army had taken Dublin by surprise. It effected the capture with little more noise and excitement than many a public meeting creates.

Four years before, O'Connell St. had witnessed a far more tumultuous scene, when the President of the Republic had spoken beneath the smile of Joseph Devlin not far from the now Republican Headquarters and Eoin MacNeill had basked beneath O'Connell's smile.

We had taken the tram from R. <sup>after</sup> after considerable delay at the chapel. Our journey in was without incident except for the sight of our cycle scouts posted near the approaches to Jacob's where we learned subsequently our men were then breaking in. A crowd of four or five women were hustling a perspiring D.M.P. man down an adjacent side street. The world, in general, preserved

an unperturbed aspect; it enjoyed its holiday and passed on. Entering Dame St. we saw a long string of empty tram cars near the Castle and City Hall. Passengers and other sight-seers were congregated upon the pavements apparently unconcerned despite the evident reports of firearms. A more serious congestion of traffic occurred outside the Bank of Ireland. Trams were moving away with jerks from the O'Connell St. and Grafton St. areas. Soldiers with their girls strolled past the ancient Parliament House. Our small and well equipped company dismounted, handled its rifles with business-like precision, lined up smartly and uttered a growl of remonstrance when the tram jerked a few paces onward. The recruiting posters still appealed to us from the walls. An odd D.M.P. man moved past as we marched through College St., crossed Tara St. Bridge and arrived in front of Liberty Hall.

A feeling of unrest creeps into the atmosphere. The area has a desolate appearance. We see faces in the upper windows. The door is locked. When our leader knocks, we are hurried into Larkin's palace and upstairs. Great excitement prevails. We are in the midst of an armed revolt. Dublin has risen and the Volunteers are out. Doings and preparations inside make that very evident, not to mention the subsequent altercation of the excited youth, Harry Walpole, in charge with our leader;

"Mr. Connolly said from the moment the row started, there was to be no longer Volunteers or Citizen Army but simply the Irish Republican Army." "The front windows are not barricaded. Men stand round in groups while snipers are hurried to the roof. A close watch is kept upon the railway line and all vessels are filled with water. Behind, we hear, boring through houses proceeds. Part

of our company goes to the front stairs, conversing in whispers and fingering its guns. So Ireland is in arms! A momentary spasm of sickness, wild exultation or sheer wonder. The dream-like sensation follows which lasts for many days in which one would do or dare almost anything mechanically.

Commandant Pearse sends down an order that we are to go to the G.P.O. "Load up", and we rush up Abbey St. at the double. An aged working man cheers us as we sweep past puffed, but showing little of the excitement we feel. "Hurrah"! he yells, "Hurrah for the Volunteers! Hammer the .... out of them"! Kids cheer from doorways. A girl passes crying bitterly under the escort of a well-dressed young man. Across O'Connell St. we dash in a bee-line to Prince's St. The great thoroughfare is deserted. I have a sense of vividness and bleakness and a dim notion of some great crowd standing up towards Parnell Monument. The side windows of the G.P.O. loom suddenly before us. "Who are you?" comes the question from behind the sacks and tables in the first two windows. The great side gate cannot be opened. "Mind, mind yourselves, the Lancers!", roars someone. "Line up!" cries another. Half a dozen of us do so in full expectation of rushing charges and flashing steel. "Break the windows, you bloody fools!", and our leader's rifle (Éamonn Bulfin's) splinters wood and glass with terrible effect. The windows go down before us as a dozen rifle butts shatter them to splinters. Cut and bleeding, we scramble in. A boy of sixteen falls upon the pavement wounded while shots ring deafeningly in our ears. Another of the Company drops mortally wounded, shot through the stomach (by his own rifle it is said). Glass crashes, locks are being blown in, all hitherto undefended windows are being barricaded with sacks, sand-

bags, boards, books, typewriters. We meet a priest in biretta and cassack. He wears a worried expression and hastily adjusts his stole. A florid and dazed D.M.P. man sits upon a barrel, his head buried in his hands. (Later on, he plucks up courage to ask the 'rebels' for beer as he has five children and one wife; he gets nothing but kindness).

A determined volley from the front windows drives back the advancing lancers who leave two dead horses upon the street almost below Nelson's Pillar.

The yard presents a curious scene, a wild confusion of carrier-bicycles, vans, motor-cars, milk-churns, baskets and dust-bins, vessels from milk jugs to huge churns filled with water. A make-shift barricade covers the side-gate. Men are constantly rushed to different positions. Noise and excitement, desolation without, disorder within - these are the prevalent impressions.

"Hurrah, boys, hurrah!", shouts a young Volunteer officer, Liam Clarke, excitedly as he rushes in and recognises us. He waves his hand and leaves us. Men injured in dash through the windows are attended to. Bandages of startling whiteness through which the blood creeps, keen eyed officers and nurses who paint the wounds with iodine and laugh good-naturedly at those who suffer from shock or weakness, telling them not to waste their strength - all these agents of the paraphernalia of healing appear.

Commandant Pearse and his brother arrive, the former calm and tense, Willie likewise, but a trifle sad and pale. Near them lies a Volunteer, his face twisted

in pain, his knee cruelly cut with glass. Commandant Pearse bends over him and questions him. He cheers him with a word and turns to supervise the inside organisation rapidly proceeding. Reports arrive. He asks for the young Volunteer Officer who had rushed in cheering. Later we see that enthusiastic Lieutenant hurried past, his eyes set, his head bent, the thick blood streaming over the lower part of his face and hands - the result of a bomb explosion. When his wounds are dressed and the shock subsides he is persuaded at the revolver's point - according to some accounts as he certainly grew obstinate and protested he wanted to see the fight out - to hospital. This is the probable origin of the Sinn Féiner whose head was blown off by a bomb. Blood is new to us and we only learn later he has recovered.

The interior grows more orderly every minute. Reinforcements come and go. The rough and courtly heroes of the Republican forces make a gallant show. Some are splendidly accoutred in the trim green Volunteer uniform, modern rifle and automatic pistol, neatly rolled puttees and martial sabre, soldierly cap and dashing turned-up hat. Some - the majority - are attired merely in Sunday or everyday clothes, crossed and inter-crossed with shoulder-straps, water-bottle and haversack, shotgun and, in some cases, twenty-two miniature rifle. McBride strides in, laughing and saluting his friends with genial and eloquent gestures. Gaily he moves through the throng. He, at all events, has smelled the battle from afar. Brian O'Higgins, Wolfe Tone Annual, 1950, states McBride was at the Forester's Hall, 41 Parnell Square, for some time on Easter Monday, and then left, later meeting MacDonagh at Jacob's Factory. The statement above gives a vivid

impression - right or wrong - from my memory of that time. (I had seen him at St. Enda's where he lectured on his Boer War Brigade. Did I merely imagine I saw him? I find it hard to agree).

Ambulances draw up outside and convey the injured brought thither from the surrounding area to hospital. The Cumann na mBan set up a hospital of their own in a former sorting room upon the ground floor. A rough barricade screens it from the front room. The wounded lie around the floor upon mattresses or on the sorting tables. Piles of glistening lint and bandages, rows of bottles, splints and similar aids to healing are heaped in neat layers and rows on the tables or in the countless pigeon-holes. As the fight progresses, the room gradually fills. Here one notices a powerful and intelligent Volunteer, semi-conscious and lying flat, his leg supported by wooden props, his eyes rarely moving, breathing heavily, there, another pale and asleep, again another smiling with forced cheerfulness..... Cumann na mBan everywhere.

Henry St. corner and some of the houses opposite are now occupied. The three flags of the Republic are hoisted over headquarters, a green flag flies on Prince's St. corner, a green flag with "Irish Republic", emblazoned in orange letters upon it flies in the place of honour, highest and most central. Again a wrong impression in the haste of the event. My memory tricked me. I really saw the "Irish Republic" flag from the ground later and thought it central. It flew on Prince's St. corner. And on Henry St. corner flies the Republican tricolour. Even when the fire has spent itself and a rain of shrapnel has swept the roof carrying chimney stack, slate and glass before it, even when the walls alone stand, even as we are

lined up to surrender a few hundred yards away, the flags still fly. A crowd cheers them as they flutter defiantly out, then, and the proclamation and Pearse as he speaks beneath the shadow of the porch. Connolly, a grim, manly figure in his dark green Commandant's uniform grasps his hand: "Thank God, Pearse, we have lived to see this day!"

A soldier walks unconcernedly down O'Connell St. to halt amazed at Henry St. corner. Women persuade him to retrace his steps and he does so unmolested. We, on the ground floor, busy ourselves with our several duties, commissariat, hospital or purely military. A munition factory is set up. Bombs are made. Rifles are repaired. The ammunition is examined and distributed. Eventually the ammunition supply was equalised. Parties go off to commandeer food of which we have a good supply already. Three lorries laden with cabbages arrive. The cooking is resumed where the G.P.O. staff had left off. The captured soldiers act as cooks under the eyes of the Cumann na mBan and a distinguished knight of the pen (Desmond Fitzgerald). Rumours of Ireland ablaze are as common as rosary-beads round the necks of the watchers at the front windows. Cork and Kerry and Limerick are up and the Curragh line is held on both sides. Soldiers are attacking the Archbishop's Palace in Drumcondra. Forces are marching to our relief. Jim Larkin is fighting his way across from Sligo with 50,000 men. Submarines have sunk a transport in the Irish Sea.

"Holy Ge"!, cries John A. Kilgallon, <sup>in</sup> his American accent to two bewildered postal officials: "This 'ain't no half-arsed revolution! This is the business. Thousands of troops and seige guns outside. The whole

country is ablaze. Twenty transports outside are coming in when the submarines have sunk the rest of the warships. We have our own mint. Light your pipes with Treasury notes and fling all but gold away. When we do things, we do things." "Thank heavens!" cries one of his victims, "it's safe enough in here to sleep". He sleeps.

Looting begins. The plate-glass of Noblett's is shattered. The crowd breaks in. A gay shower of sweet-stuffs, chocolate boxes, huge slabs of toffee tosses over amongst the crazy mass. Tyler's suffers in its turn. The old women from the slums literally walk through the plate-glass panes. Heavy fragments of glass crash into their midst inflicting deep gashes and bloody hurts, but their greedy frenzy is unchecked. Purcell's, tobacco shop and the Capel Shoe Co.'s store are also attacked. Lawrence's next falls a victim. Volunteers emerge and remonstrate, baton and revolver in hand. They deal sturdy blows with rifle butts and threaten with the bayonet's point when all else fails. Rifles are levelled threateningly and once or twice are discharged over the looters' heads. Water is thrown from above the chemist's shop on Henry St. corner. McDermott limps across the street and protests vehemently, his hands raised passionately above his head. A looter rushes madly past flinging away a valise in terror, the smack of a baton synchronising with the thud of the valise upon the cobbles.

The looters would never have dared to come into O'Connell St. had a full mobilisation taken place. Batons had been manufactured for the especial benefit of the turbulent element and could not be employed effectively for want of veterans to wield them. Even in commandeering, the Volunteers exercised discretion and paid their well-wishers for value received. Thus one

baker was given £20 for bread. P.H. Pearse gave out money for butter and other foodstuffs to the Cumann na mBan. Wilful damage was as severely eschewed as indiscriminate shooting. Orders were given that prisoners were to be treated courteously. No firing was to take place except under orders or to repel attack.

Inside defences are assiduously strengthened and the organisation grows better every minute. Glass is removed from all windows used for purposes of defence. Sandbags, wooden forms, books, tables, are piled compactly behind, to cover, at least, three-quarters of the aperture, with the exception of a few loopholes lower down. Beside the guards behind them, howls of shotgun ammunition are placed as a reserve supply. Buckets filled with a liquid preparation as a protection against gas attack in which handkerchiefs float are placed around at intervals. Pikes and revolvers lay at hand in readiness for a fight at close quarters should the soldiers ever break through. Behind the central counter mattresses had been placed. Here Pearse, Connolly, Plunkett, McDermott and Tom Clarke slept in turns. They all had to be given opium according to a Red-cross worker, before they could sleep. Beds were brought in later for them. On the Tuesday morning, they were all seated together on boxes and barrels, pale and tired. But they were very calm and humorous. Connolly startled them with the announcement that the Citizen Army had captured the King and Kitchner. "In the wax-works", he added with a twinkle in his eye. When asked his opinion on Monday night, he replied scornfully "They are beaten!" . He never expected artillery would be used against the city until things had gone to the last extremity. He gave two reasons for this opinion: the admission such a use implies

of the occupation of the capital by formidable hostile forces, the destruction of property such a use would cause.

Plunkett was a striking figure. He was assiduous and persistent in keeping up the spirits of the men. During the worst stages of the bombardment, when the conflagration steadily encircled us and closed in upon us nearer and nearer, I remember him walking down the long lines of men at the front windows, smiling carelessly his automatic Mauser dangling behind him, his eyes twinkling scornfully; "One of the enemy's barracks is on fire"! P.H. Pearse admired O'Rahilly's spirit. "He is great", he said, "he comes into us although he is opposed to this thing". The story that P.H. Pearse sat all the time in a little room writing is untrue, or rather hypercritical. I think Winifred Carney, Connolly's grim and hero-worshipping secretary started this tale as she thought Pearse spent too long over his manifestoes. It didn't matter, he was busy enough. His real work was done. He was the most central figure in that dangerous front room. McDermott was as gentle and as fiery as he always was. Tom Clarke seemed quite at home.

A large poster of the proclamation was displayed prominently. A telephone communicated with the block opposite. We had our own electric supply. The water supply was not cut off until shortly before we evacuated the building. Food was never scarce. The nerve of the men never weakened. But the greatest thing in the Post Office was the stubborn courage of its defenders, their gaiety, their courage, their indifference.

Let us now turn to the scene as it appeared from the roof.

We were rushed to the roof almost upon our arrival. Up winding passages we went until we reached an iron ladder which led to the slates. We scrambled up and occupied the sides and corners of the parapet along which are lined handgrenades and ammunition. Except for the dead horse beneath Nelson's Pillar, nothing unusual is visible in the street. We see armed men across the road on Henry St. corner. They shout to us for more hand-grenades and read us the Lord Lieutenant's proclamation derisively as soon as it is published. The phrase "whereas certain evilly disposed persons" tickles us immensely. We soon hoisted the Republican flags. Defiantly they float in the breeze over the building. "Irish Republic!" Dublin has waited long for this.

Below the crowd watches curiously and waves its greetings. It scatters and runs down side streets whenever there is a rumour of the approach of the military. We strengthen the position with boards and sand-bags and wait for those gentlemen who never come. But in rumour they arrive every half-hour from Tuesday onwards. Talbot Street is blocked up by a tram-car and a barricade. Children dance and ring the bell inside the car.

We send messages below to inquire if Nelson's Pillar is to be occupied. We are assured there is no need to do so as our fire commands even its summit. No attempt was made to blow up the Pillar; it served as a screen against fire from Amiens St. Tower where we early observed a British officer watching us through field glasses. We returned the compliment but did not fire at him, by the O'Rahilly's orders, as "it might give away our position". The story of the attempt to blow up the Pillar originated, no doubt, in the fact

that a hand grenade was thrown at its base one morning. An effort to remove the eyesore, subsequently, was, however, certainly contemplated.

Gradually the garrison above is strengthened. We meet several recruits who have come in upon the impulse of the moment or who had been only three weeks or a fortnight in the Volunteers. We have our first meal of rice, tea and rumours. We hear the kids singing below in the distance:

"We are the Volunteers, the Volunteers, the Volunteers,  
We are the Volunteers, we'll whack the British Army."

We discuss the day's news. We compare notes, we laugh and sleep is a past and dead sensation. Noblett's and Purcell's are looted. The fire brigade arrives and extinguishes the fire in the Cable Shoe Co. O'Rahilly comes up to tell us, "No attack is expected to-night". Dark falls but we cannot sleep. The quiet roofs of the city spread out before our eyes, the lamps are droning along the noble thoroughfare. We cover ourselves with our coats and lie down on the slates. We parade the parapet in twos. We screen our cigarettes from observation. We drink tea at intervals. We hear heavy firing from the Four Courts direction. The resounding and continuous volleys are a strange and cheerful contrast to the darkened and subdued atmosphere which hangs over the roof. Wireless flashes away on the D.B.C. Dawn rises, at last, over the sea of chimney-stacks, and roofs and towers and spires - a clear and quiet dawn.

We care about nothing. I cannot sleep but watch Lawrence's clock. The hands move as quickly as the minute hands of a watch. A few tired Volunteers drop off, at last, to sleep. A wild figure in a blue,

fur-trimmed motor coat, his face and hands blackened rushes across the sloping slates to bring us the morning's wild tidings. We are regaled with a veritable mental revolution. We don't heed much. We get used to the bullets whistling over us. "Who'd miss it" we ask. "Is so-and-so out?". "Who was killed?" "A good man, a pity". A genial officer, Lieutenant Michael Boland, comes to implore; "Will-yiz-keep-under-cover?"

The roof is re-organised. Grenades are protected with sacking. Ammunition is placed in readiness along the ledges. The street becomes more deserted. Inquiries keep coming up as to reported advances of troops down Henry St. and Prince's St. Fires and looting begin. We have grown used to the sight.

Even when Lawrence's blazes to the heavens, we watch it impartially as a fine spectacle. The Brigade makes a desperate effort to control the flames, but in vain. The fire engine rests almost against the kerb, off Henry St. The frequency of the fires opposite lead many to believe there was some military ruse behind it. We complete general preparations and resist seige and if need be, to make the last stand.

I pay a few visits to the food room below. The knight of the pen (Desmond Fitzgerald) sternly refuses brandy to his prisoners. New country contingents stream into meals. As one sees familiar faces arriving one realises what a terrific night, Easter Monday must have been throughout Ireland. Everyone is in good spirits. Tom Clarke sits benignly upon a chair pensively surveying the scene. In the officers mess the tale is the same. Some even read the "Irish Times", and the rumour is current that conscription has been

applied to Ireland.

Above rain falls with the evening and drenches us to the skins. We procure oilskins and await a threatened attack. We notice the nervous movement of the crowds in the streets. Dark descends and still we do not sleep. I see queer faces in the sky while I lie on the slates and the rain drizzles gently down. A drunken man below yells in the porchway: "Yiz are Irishmen and if yiz were bet tomorrow, yiz are Irishmen!" Exposed to English bullets a stray shot puts an end to his life. The fires proceed, gaining in intensity and flickering low by turns. Dawn finds us sleepless but happy.

The worst day of all follows. We remain upon the roof with an odd visit below. Tap-tap tap! Tap! Tap! Tap! Machine guns and artillery are destroying Liberty Hall. The air quivers and the machine guns play down O'Connell St. Bullets whizz over our heads and strike the pillars of the porchway and cut grooves in the cobble stones. Duels are waged across the roofs between our snipers and the machine guns on Trinity and Westmoreland St. Tap-tap-Tap. Then the zip-zip-zip-zip-zip of our automatic Mauzers. We have just grown used to this sensation and heard the news of Capt. Wafer's death when we are visited by a priest who gives us conditional absolution. He wants a kid of 14 years to go below but the blood-thirsty young scamp is offended and obdurate. The priest passes on and a member of the Citizen Army (Jack White - not to be confused with Captain White) who has travelled in foreign parts, proud possessor of the most fluent vocabulary of "cuss words" ever moulded by the sins of man arrives. He teaches us how to throw bombs. P.H.P. and Willie inspect our positions. P.H.P. receives the genial and languid warning to keep under cover.

"A curious business", says Willie to me as he passes, "I wonder how it will end?" Of course a lot of good work has been done but there is more to do.<sup>H</sup> We are promised relief and shortly afterwards a company takes our place. We go downstairs through the holes now broken in the slates, and see many of our friends.

I walk round and hear the eternal rumour of the attack from Prince's St. "Hush!" murmurs someone as I enter a wash-house off the yard, "two men are dying within". I return to the centre room where we are to sleep behind the counters on mattresses. All is dark within. Outside the fires glare from Tyler's corner. We have already commandeered the Imperial. Willie Pearse gazes at the fires. "Nothing will stop that fire from spreading down the whole block" he says. I later have a conversation with P.H.P. I stood beside him as he sat on a barrel looking intently at the flames, his slightly flushed face crowned with his turned-up hat. He suddenly turned to me with the question: "It was the right thing to do, wasn't it?" "Yes, I replied in astonishment. He looked at me again more keenly. "If we fail, it means the end of everything, Volunteers and all", "Yes", I answered. He looked back at that fantastic and leaping blaze. He spoke again: "When we are all wiped out, people will blame us for everything. But for this, the war would have ended and nothing would have been done. After a few years, they will see the meaning of what we tried to do". He rose and we walked a few paces ahead. "Dublin's name will be glorious forever", he said with deep passion and enthusiasm. "Men will speak of her as one of the splendid cities, as they speak now of Paris! Dublin!" "Ireland is a splendid nation", I answered. "They can never despise us again, and the women - "Yes", he broke in, "the women,

hundreds of them carrying gelignite along the quays in spite of every danger".

I slept for ten hours and was then sent to a corner room where the rest of us were. We sat behind our loopholes. Time dragged. We even wrote letters. We watched the bleak and deserted street tumble into ashes. We watched the smouldering ruins rise. We watched for the soldiers who never came. A cheerful sniper from the roof returns now and then from the roof. He has the happy knack of laying out "old fellows". He tosses his hair and cries "Do you mind that now?" as his "bag" mounts. Time and space vanish to a sniper, he tells us. One feels only the heated rifle and the desire to reach the target.

I am transferred to the front windows. Like a Kitchner, Connolly numbers off the men, and sallies out on the sortie in which he is wounded. He is removed to the hospital but still issues his orders. P.H.P. and his brother stand together and watch the parties march out. The latter two had a narrow escape when they inspected the O'Connell St. positions. The blaze creeps steadily towards the Imperial. Every quarter of an hour we are called to arms. The telephone breaks down. We signal with difficulty to the Imperial. Boom! Boom! Boom! The place shakes. Boom! Well, let them waste their ammunition. We spare ours. Boom! Gets stale with repetition. Transferred to gate in the evening. The entire block, nay the entire street opposite is one huge leaping flame which makes every cobble stone distinct and murmurs horribly and laps the very clouds. I think over the events of the past few hours as I and my companion Fintan Murphy pace up and down the darkened archway: Connolly wounded, P.H.P.'s address to us, the news we have heard from a visitor of the despondency in the city as

well as the news that the country has not risen. We are in the middle of a circle of fire. It is the fire which is stealing in and around us which eventually drives us out. A Volunteer Officer (Gearoid O'Sullivan) looks out of the gate beside me. "This will have a terrible effect upon the country", he remarks. "Are we done?" I ask him. He tells me we are. The Metropole men evacuate their position through a misapprehension but return again. I leave my companion occasionally to see my friends kneeling rifle in hand behind lurid barricades. Suddenly the song rings out from all quarters of the building: "Soldiers all are we!" Fire and death and the beginning of the end but we have lost all fears and cares. The noble side of war appeared. The great strength and goodness of Ireland shone vividly before me. And a deep respect and admiration surged up in me for these men and women in this doomed building. Like the little girl who died after eating ices and hot pudding I felt we were in for a jolly death. Dawn came after this most terrible night.

A lull succeeded in the morning. The report went round that it was arbitration. The Cumann na mBan were sent home under white flags. The street lay in ruins. We strengthened the front defences with three rows of coal-bags which we filled and dragged up from the cellars and drenched with buckets full of water, a very tiring labour. As I rested in the corner room, Eamonn Bulfin, our leader received a message to hold his men in readiness to retire and send two men upstairs as the roof had taken fire. I and another went up. A petrol bomb had struck the glass-work in the topmost room while snipers made the spot more dangerous. We helped to drag hose-pipes to the numerous ladders leading to the roof. Axes were plied. The snipers got as good as they gave. We saw the general

clearance of explosives when we went downstairs. The desperate fight against the flames was abandoned as hopeless. The floors began to give way. Debris crashed in. Thick columns of smoke and flame rose steadily and increased in volume with the minutes. Men on the roof were called down. Some remained an hour and a half after orders to descend struggling vainly to check the fire's progress. The O'Rahilly had to order one obstinate sniper down at the point of the revolver. We hear troops are advancing through the ruins of the Imperial. We have one constant stand to arms and tension. The fire roars through the building. Walls of flame seem to surround the yard. Sheets of flame seem to cover the top of the ground floor and the floor above. Cracks begin to show in the outer walls. Plunkett and Pearse march round and call the various companies to attention before they are marched into the yard. Explosives are carried to and from the cellars. Flames sweep down the shafts. The water supply fails. Plunkett's voice rings sharply out, his eyes have a strange laughing expression, his head and figure have a peculiarly proud and gallant tenseness.

As we watch from the yard, the front floors collapse. We secure rations in what was the hospital. Pearse stands in the midst of the men in the darkened and roaring house of fire. He directs the distribution of food and gives orders that as much as possible is to be packed into haversacks and knapsacks. Cheese and bread are served out. "Bang!" A tall, dark, handsome man falls in front of me, his face pallid, his eyes closed. A moan escapes from his lips. A shot-gun has been discharged by accident. "Bang!" Within two minutes a similar accident occurs. "Unload, and hold the muzzles of your guns up". We can see the street through

the crevices in the walls. We move down a passage towards a door opening upon Henry St. We dash across the flame lit and bullet swept street, up Henry Place, into stables, down sombre alleys lighted by machine gun fire. The bullets patter upon the walls. Men fall. Plunkett rallies the men past a bullet swept barricade. Connolly has been borne on a stretcher to Moore Street beneath a red-cross flag. O'Rahilly outdistances his men and a machine-gun riddles him within a few yards of the barricade. (Pearse, last to leave, charges gallant in green, revolver in hand, his head high, his eyes flashing). Tom Clarke heads another contingent and fires his revolver. Mrs. Kathleen Clarke claims Tom Clarke told her in their last interview that he was the last to leave. The scene was chaos and confusion and it may be so. In a press controversy other G.P.O. witnesses backed my story as given above. A small point. We reach Moore St. and enter a grocery store. We soon bore the walls of the adjoining house. Half a dozen houses are bored with pick and crow-bar. While Nelson's Pillar looks down on the blazing G.P.O. we snatch a few hours sleep.

Next morning we proceed with the boring, barricade windows and see all manner of shops and houses. A charge upon the barricade closing Moore St. is postponed six hours. Report that lower end of block we occupy has taken fire proves untrue. We are told to take as much rest as possible. We lie along floors, on beds, around tables, too tired in many cases to eat or sleep. A lull falls, deadly and ominous. A few snipers are heard in the distance. Finally Headquarters room where Connolly lies wounded and silent with Pearse and Plunkett conversing beside him gives orders for its last meal. "Cheer up, boys", cries an officer passing through the room I am in, "Good news soon". The officers are reported to be tidying

themselves up. I meet Willie Pearse and ask for news. "Connolly has been asked out to negotiate", he says, "They have decided to go to save the men from slaughter, for slaughter it is. But say nothing yet as it may not come to anything". Orders are given that there is to be no shooting upon any account. Pearse passes out alone as firm as a rock. I went up to Headquarter's room. Plunkett is calm. Tears are in McDermott's eyes. So too with Willie Pearse. Connolly stares in front of him. We are marched through the rooms in companies. Sean McDermott reads Pearse's letter and explains we have surrendered to save not ourselves but the citizens.

We are hopelessly outclassed in munitions but he is proud of us. Our work will tell some day, and this week of Easter will be remembered. He orders food, cheese, bread, and some fruit from cans to be served out, and recommends us to take a good meal as we may not get much where we are going to, and we may be there some time.

At last we line up in Moore Street for the last march as some Volunteers term it. Plunkett marches beside us, with Willie Pearse, carrying, both of them, white flags on small poles. (At least in my memory of the time it was Willie Pearse - of this I am certain; and I thought Plunkett but this was later disputed). Corpses lie here and there on the cobbles and pavements, waxen with red gashes in their heads - British soldiers, Volunteers, civilians, bloody, prostrate, strangely still and quiet. Around and as far as we can see the buildings smoulder still. We turn into O'Connell Street, and as we do, two British officers cover every pair of us as we pass the Henry St. corner with enormous revolvers and a grim look. The street is lined with troops. Our flags still fly even yet over the ruined Post Office and the

huge shell of the Imperial Hotel. We line up in front of the Gresham Hotel, and carry out the order to lay down our arms and equipment. Names and addresses are taken with the warning that false information will have serious consequences. A high-ranking British Officer, perhaps General Lowe snaps out in reply to a question, "You will be watered and fed". Second Lieutenants prowl behind him and loot the dumped Volunteer heaps of surrendered weapons for automatic revolvers to low groans of rage from the ranks of the surrendered. An appalling outburst of lurid army language with lurid threats of what machine guns and bayonets will shortly do to the Etecetra-Eteetras, comes from the lips of an army of bluff and tough old sergeants, some of whom are very much ashamed of being disgraced by a lot of So and Sos who call themselves so and so Irishmen. A sympathetic Tommy behind us says he wishes we had got more of his officers, that he was glad we had stopped but we wouldn't half catch what for. An old sergeant roars out as he waves a Howth bullet in our faces that the British Army wasn't a herd of elephants. Another that Old Casement had a bullet put through him down in Kerry and he would soon have company where he'd gone to. Angry officers roar at the old sergeants for talking to the damned rebels. Other contingents of Volunteers march into the street. A swell crowd of curious folk on the Gresham steps is ordered inside. The peaceful sky darkens, and more and more surrendered Volunteers arrive beneath white flags looking preposterously small in numbers to the lines of khaki soldiers stretching from Parnell Street to Earl Street. The fires flicker against the sky. Armoured motors and the Red Cross waggons flit by. The rifles are taken off the street by the British. Dark descends upon this nightmare.

Finally we are marched to the grass plot in front of the Rotunda Gardens, rank and file, leaders, Cumann na mBan girls, and all herded together there. A circle of bayonets surrounds us. We pass the night there. High above us on the Rotunda Hospital roof a party of snipers and machine gun are stationed. An officer arrives (Lee Wilson who was shot dead in Wexford later), a darkbrowed, florid, thick-lipped man, either drunk or mad with hysteria, who behaves in a bullying, half-crazed manner. He strides around, yelling that no one must stand up, that no one must lie down, and as for the needs of nature, anyone who chooses the Rotunda Gardens for a bedroom can use it as a lavatory as well, and - well lie in both. He threatens his own men. He will have them shot in the morning as looters. He threatens the Volunteers in similar terms. He strikes matches and holds them in the Volunteer's faces, yelling at his men, "Anyone want to see the animals?". A Volunteer snaps out at him, "You are a nice specimen of an English gentleman". He walks on and ignores the taunt. When the relief guard comes, he begins a litany of "Who are the worst, the Germans or the Sinn Feiners?" "The Sinn Feiners" chant the Tommies. "What shall we do with them?" "Shoot 'em, stick a bayonet in 'em" chorus the Tommies, or some of them, and their tone is rather one of humouring a maniac than real conviction.

In the morning we are marched to Richmond Barracks, and later to the North Wall, a cattle boat and deportation.

Signed Desmond Ryan  
(Desmond Ryan)

Date Sept 5, 1952.  
Sept. 5, 1952.

Witness M.F. Ryan Comd't.  
M.F. Ryan, Comd't.

