

W.S. 1,154

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,154

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.  
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,154

< Witness

Sean O'Neill,  
609 North Circular Road,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Lieutenant 'H' Company  
1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade.

Subject.

- (a) 'H' Coy. 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade  
1917-1922;
- (b) Arrest of Kevin Barry and attempts by I.R.A.  
to rescue him.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2388

STATEMENT BY MR. SEÁN O'NEILL,609, North Circular Road, Dublin.KEVIN BARRY.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,154

I knew Kevin Barry intimately and propose to tell here what I know of his service and associated events.

Kevin Barry was born in 8, Fleet St., Dublin, on 20th February, 1902. His father died and his mother carried on a dairy business in 8, Fleet St.

There was nothing unusual in his early schooldays. He did his secondary studies in Belvedere College, Gardiner's Row, Dublin, and entered U.C.D. as a medical student. During his latter days at Belvedere he played rugby, which was one of the sports games sponsored by the school.

1917 came and with it the threat of the imposition of conscription by the British. Along with a lot of unselfish youths in the University who could not see their way to be coerced to fight for an alien country which had kept our country in bondage for the past 700 years, they joined the Irish Volunteers who were organising at full pressure throughout the country. Kevin Barry and Frank Flood, two students, joined 'C' Company, 1st Battalion, in Seán McDermott Club, Margaret Place, N.C. Rd., Seán Flood, brother of Frank and a 1916 man, was O/C. at this time; hence the choice of unit on their part. While the student element was joining at Margaret Place another set of lads, tradesmen, labourers, clerks, etc., joined the same unit in the O'Flanagan Club, Ryder's Row. Amongst the latter was Joe Stanley - Gaelic Press.

In 'C' Company at this period were a lot of old Fianna boys, some of whom had seen service in 1916 and the years previous, and they were asked by Seán Flood to

take over the training of these new recruits. These were referred to at this time as the "Conscripts" which, of course, was only a nickname and in no way meant to cast any reflection on these lads.

The numbers in both places becoming extra large it was decided to form a new company. It was called 'H' Company, 1st Battalion (120). They were called together in the Tara Hall, Seán McDermott St., and the joining together of doctors, students of every faculty, tradesmen, labourers, journalists, etc. took place. It was a unit in every sense of the word; brains and brawn. As it was the practice in the Volunteers to elect their own officers an election took place. Seamus Kavanagh, an old Fianna and 1916 boy, was O/C. Thomas McGrane, another Fianna and 1916 boy, was 1st Lieut., and Joe Stanley, 2nd Lieut. R.A. O'Flanagan was Adjutant and Matthew McGrane Q/M. The following were Section Commanders:

- (1) Joe Sweeney, 1916 man.
- (2) S. O'Neill, old Fianna and 1916.
- (3) Frank O'Flanagan, 1916 man.
- (4) Frank Flood.

Recruits started to be brought in by all elements, with the result that 'H' Company came to be one of the biggest units in the Dublin Brigade. Most of the grocers' assistants in Dublin joined 'H' Company, but as they had to work late in the night they were made a separate section (No. 5) under Mick Fitzpatrick. This section got so big that they were made 'K' Company, 1st Battalion, and a further company ('M') had to be made from same. 'H' Company reverted back to the four section unit.

The most earnest and intelligent lads were picked out and underwent a special course of training as potential

N.C.Os. Successful in this was Kevin, and he was appointed Left Section Commander No. 2 Section. Up to this, this lad Kevin was hardly noticed amongst the rest of the best lads in Ireland, but you could always see a young boyish smiling face on parade, one who gave no trouble and hardly spoke out of his turn. Bit by bit we all got to like the slight medium statured lad with the smile, and he got to be popular without his making any attempt to come out in the limelight. Never at any time did he slight his less fortunate comrades. On the contrary, he always had that smile for each and every one Volunteer in the unit. He took part in all the usual banter about officers, N.C.Os., etc., which was always usual in Volunteer companies.

In 1918 we went to Tone's grave in Bodenstown, by cycle. Kevin had a few punctures on the way, but eventually we all arrived, with the whole column packed with dust and actually black from same. I can tell you that his whole worry that day was to get to Bodenstown, and when we had washed and dined on tea, etc. mixed with leaves, brambles and stick ashes, he was still smiling.

1919 came and with it more marches, drilling, special classes and training and a camp in the Dublin Mountains, Ticknock. In this camp Kevin entered into every devilment, such as pinching cakes, etc., and dividing same. There were a few comrades who formed a special squad. Of course we did not forget the usual ceillis, etc., where we came to be known as the eye-wipers, Kevin included. We got the chance of a Lewis gun for £34 (1) out of Ship St. barracks. This, by the way, was the first Lewis gun the Volunteers procured. The money to purchase the gun was subscribed by Phil Shanahan, J.J. Walsh and

the company officers. Kevin carried it wrapped in newspapers on a Sunday evening to Davy Golden's home, 2 Victoria St., S.C. Rd. By the way, the £34 was paid by instruction from Peadar Clancy so as to keep the channel open for further such transactions. Kevin's name had already been put before I.R.B. members by the Clarke Luby Club. There was some crux over his age. When he was being sworn in he was told that he was the youngest ever to join the I.R.B. Strange as it may be, he was more than delighted to be admitted a member as he thought on account of his age he would have to wait until he was older. Frank Flood was also a member of this Club.

Now this Club which I mentioned previously started to do things in real style. We carried out several raids for arms, etc., not alone in our own company area but all over Dublin. We got sanction from Peadar Clancy to raid in any part of Dublin. On one such raid on the Shamrock Works, Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) a very important haul was made, including a Morris-Tube rifle for which Peadar Clancy had been looking for some time. The Comdt. of the 3rd Battalion, in whose area the Works was situated, reported us to Dick McKee, O/C. Dublin Brigade. Dick was told by Peadar about us, so he told the O/C. 3rd Battalion that they should have looked after this place long ago. After this we could go anywhere to search for arms, etc. On another occasion we raided Marks, the fireworks makers, Capel St., on a Tuesday evening. There were several girl assistants in the shop, so when the serious fellows were looking for the goods Kevin and some of the lads were having a bit of gas with the girls. In another raid on Clonliffe Road Kevin, Frank and P. Kenny were flirting with the girls while D. Golden and myself were searching the place.

Tommy McGrane was with us on this raid and he did not like the special technique we had of looking for arms and having a bit of gas with the girls.

When the oath was administered to all Volunteers 'H' Company was in 14, Nth. Gt. George's St. Dick McKee administered the oath to the officers and Section Commanders. He was called away and Peadar Clancy carried on, and it was he who gave the oath to Kevin and not Oscar Traynor who was O/C. 2nd Battalion. Tom Byrne and George Irvine, O/C. and Vice O/C., were present at the parade. It must be understood that Kevin knew already about the oath, as it was discussed in I.R.B. circles prior to the Volunteers knowing.

When the raid on the King's Inns took place all the squad were picked from 'H' Company to go on it, including the O/C., S. Kavanagh. It was their job to get the arms. Con Moloney, student, afterwards killed in an ambush in the Clare Flying Column, had the British troops with their faces to the wall in the guard room. A strange thing was that Kevin carried out the Lewis gun. This was his second time to get one. He also got the Corporal's uniform, which was afterwards dyed green. After the raid, the car, which was driven by D. Golden, 'H' Company, and which, by the way, was commandeered from the rear of the British Army and Navy Canteen Board Stores in Aungier St., took the rifles etc. to the G.H.Q. dump which was off Nth. Gt. Charles St. and Rutland St. While turning around Mountjoy Square a tin hat fell out, and that was the reason that the British military infested the north side of the city searching for the dump.

The next night the rifles captured in the King's Inns were brought to the rear of 44, Parnell Square and divided amongst the units of the 1st Battalion who had taken

part in the raid. 'H' Company got eight rifles and bayonets. As there were only four of us - Kevin, Frank Flood, Paddy Kenny and myself - we could not carry the whole lot, so we got Sean Flood, known as "Brasser", a car man and a member of 'H' Company, to yoke up his cab. He drove to rere of 609, N.C. Rd. with the four of us in the cab. We used this cabman on several occasions such as this and had christened him "Skin the Goat". Kevin and Frank picked their own rifles. Kevin marked his with two marks and Frank his with three. Frank took the bayonet with the curl on the boss. I got the Corporal's ground sheet and still have it. We took Kevin's rifle over to his place in Fleet St. and then adjourned to our usual spot - Matassa's, Marlboro St., for coffee etc.

Finding that the raid on the King's Inns turned out to be so easy, we started to look out for a similar job for ourselves. M. Douglas, 'G' Company, told us about a lorry of British troops who came every Tuesday and Thursday morning between 8 and 9 a.m. to Monk's Bakery, Upr. Church St., from Collinstown for bread. There would be about 7 or 8 soldiers in the lorry and they would nearly all get out and get minerals and cakes, etc. in a small dairy shop opposite the bakery gate. The Sergeant and Corporal would go into the bakery for the bread. We thought this a 'pudding' and decided to do the job. Peadar Clancy, our old pal, was informed, but he told us he would have to tell Dick about it. Dick agreed and complimented us on our foresight. Up to this our O/C. Seamus Kavanagh, knew nothing about these goings on, but we had to acquaint him of it.

On a Tuesday night, which was our meeting night, we decided to do the job on a Thursday morning. We were in

41, Parnell Square in the billiard room, when Dick McKee came in, and said in front of the men: "I believe this company is going to carry out a job. There is one word of advice I would like to give you, that is to remember that these men in the lorry are six feet above you, and the best of luck to you." Now due to telling our O/C. about the job, we did not do it on the Thursday morning as we had planned. The whole idea was gone over again and Capt. Kavanagh made new plans changing all the men from the positions which they already had arranged for. The following was the new arrangement: Rear of lorry - Mick Robinson (afterwards in Longford Flying Column with MacEoin), Frank Flood, Christy Robinson and Seamus Kavanagh; right-hand side near bakery - Seán O'Neill, R. O'Flanagan, K. Barry; left-hand side - Paddy Kenny, Tom Staunton, Seán Dwyer (Spivis), Eugene Fox and Tommy O'Brien; right corner, i.e., engine - Patrick Young, Harry Murphy (whose brother was killed by Capt. King after a bucket had been placed over his head in the Drumcondra area), J. Moran; opposite side outposts with grenades at the corner of Brunswick St. - Tom Kissane (afterwards cheddar explosive making at G.H.Q.) and Maurice Higgins at the corner of Nth. King St. with grenades; Davy Golden, Transport Officer, and Jimmy Carrigan, C. Company, with Ford van (same as with King's Inns raid) at the "Spinning Wheel".

Tommy McGrane, who had with him Frank O'Flanagan, Dave McDonagh, J.J. O'Carroll and Mick Douglas, 'G' Company, were to enter the bakery from Church St. (Main Gate) and seal off the door and look after members of the staff and also hold up the Sergeant and Corporal when they entered the yard. The job was to take place on Monday morning, September 20th, and all were to be in O'Flanagan Club, Ryder's Row, at 9 a.m.



Monday morning came and we all arrived before 9. Kevin turned up late. (He was at the Altar that morning and had to come from his Uncle's place, Dowling's of the S.C. Rd.). The only gun left was a short parabellum and Kevin did not like it. He wanted a .45. We went off in different parties to our allotted places, but as no lorry had arrived we had to ramble around. Bob Flanagan bought a newspaper and we read it in Nth. King St. while waiting. It was now going on for 11 o'clock and we got word that the lorry had arrived. We moved up to the corner of Upr. Church St. The back of the lorry was let down and two Sergeants were going into the yard when we got the signal from Kavanagh shaking his handkerchief. The three of us had to travel a 20 yards distance to the lorry against about 10 yards by all the others. I was on the outside, Bob Flanagan in centre with gun under paper, and Kevin inside with gun under trench coat. Bob Flanagan was to give the order "hands up, drop those rifles", but he asked me to do it as I could shout louder than he. This was O.K. We went on up towards the lorry picking out the winners from the paper (I don't think) and noticed that there were a lot of British soldiers in the lorry, 7 on left side, 7 on right side and 4 behind driver's cabin, and there was 1 man with the driver and the 2 N.C.Os., which left a force of 21 against 13 of the attacking party and 4 outposts. None of the troops made any move to leave the lorry. The three of us got to lorry and when I got to the corner of same I drew my gun and gave the order to the troops: "Hands up, drop your rifles." Everyone of them obeyed both orders and kept their hands up for about 10 seconds, but when they found only one man covering them they, being fully trained, grabbed their rifles and then the battle

started. After I had given the order I moved to the side of the lorry at the end and expected to see the men covering the back of the lorry coming up, but all I could see when things started was the muzzle of a rifle over side of lorry. Did you ever look down the muzzle of a rifle, especially with a man behind the trigger? It appears to grow bigger and bigger and you can take it from me I never want to look down one again in similar circumstances. At this time hell was at its worst. We on our side had to fire up at the troops who were above us. Bob O'Flanagan got shot in the head, left side nearest to me, and he had the presence of mind to retire back the way he came, which was not the safest. We could not tell what had happened to Kevin. I was now at the back of the lorry and some of the troops were lying down firing. I retired back around the way I came, firing at the troops until all my 6 rounds were gone, so I had to make a run for it around the corner to Nth. King St. Harry Murphy also got a slight wound on our side. P. Kenny, Dwyer and Staunton all got their hats shot off them. I got a cut on the nose from a bit of the wall which was struck by a bullet. Nothing serious. Paddy Young was going to throw his grenade but he was afraid that we would be hit. Tom Kissane got a bullet through his coat and so did M. Higgins. Dave McDonagh got a few digs at the Sergeants in the yard. We all got away as best we could. I saw Bob O'Flanagan getting into a cab at Mary's Lane. I did not know at this time that he was wounded. Mick Douglas, who was the last out of Monks's was running down Beresford St. with his gun out and I told him to put it up and get away. The troops were still firing down Church St. at this time, but it was only automatic as none of our men were there or firing on them.

We all got to Cathedral St. and it was then that we found that Kevin was missing. I told the men then that if it was Kevin was captured the rest of us would be quite safe as far as he was concerned, that he would never inform. Jimmy Moran brought Bob O'Flanagan to Jervis St. Hospital for dressing and then took him away to a safe place. Kevin's rifle was taken from his house by our men and was safe.

That night we all again patrolled the area armed with grenades, etc., as it was expected that the troops would beat up the civil population. Nothing happened. It appears that Kevin's gun jammed and that he went under the lorry to fix it. Only one shot was fired. You can understand about a parabellum; if you have not all the ammunition with the same mark and date it causes a jam. Of course, we did not know this for some time afterwards and did not make the same mistake again.

The troops in the lorry were from the (2) Duke of Wellington's Regiment. The official British communique gave their losses as 1 killed (Pte. Whitehead) and 4 wounded (a Pte. Washington subsequently died from his wounds). The medical students in the Richmond Hospital to which the British casualties were removed gave the losses as 3 killed and 7 wounded.

Kevin was captured by the Lancashire Fusiliers from North Dublin Union, which was only about 100 yards from Upr. Church St. They brought him to the Union and jumped upon him. They gave him a terrible grueling, pulled his arms from their sockets, blacked his eyes and practically left him next door to death trying to make him tell who was with him, but nothing passed his lips.

Kevin was courtmartialled in the Castle and charged with the murder of Private Whitehead who had three bullets in him, including a parabellum bullet, and, of course, finding a similar gun on Kevin they made the charge stick even though that bullet did not necessarily cause death. If this was an ordinary trial Kevin would have been acquitted as several of the men had parabellums and, another thing, Kevin could only shoot this private in the head from his position at the lorry. The courtmartial on the first day was the usual summary of doctors' evidence and the building up of the charge. It must be understood that instructions were issued to all I.R.A. men not to recognise the court. Kevin was asked had he anything to say. He only smiled. The next day G.H.Q. sent in word to Mountjoy to Kevin to recognise the court and that Counsel would defend him. He deliberately turned down the G.H.Q. instruction and threw the Counsel and everything that was rotten back in their teeth. In the Castle the next day he refused to recognise the court as a soldier of the Irish Republic and he was sentenced to death by hanging, same to take place on 1st November. He smiled all through the trial, and protested when sentenced to be hanged that as a soldier he demanded to be shot.

It is well to remember now the significance of the refusal of Kevin to recognise the court. If he had done this he would have got a sentence not too long, but the Irish nation and every I.R.A. man could hand up their gun and tradition and settle down to slavery for ever. This was the second and greatest test for Kevin. First - Greater love hath no man than he would lay down his life for his friends; 2nd - The whole future of Ireland depended on him. If he had only obeyed G.H.Q. orders and had Counsel to aid him and recognise the court, no one

would have blamed him. But he saw in a flash the import of this, the baseness of those who were supposed to lead us, their deliberate reversing of all the orders to every armed Volunteer and kindred organisations, the spineless individuals who set themselves up to lead a people deliberately renaging them when the issue was put to them. Hence when in December 1921 we had no Kevin to expose them they cringed to England, but thanks to God for another such as Kevin - we had Cathal Brugha who again, against the same terrible odds, saved the future generations of Irishmen and women. During Kevin's trial and his waiting death another great Irishman was carrying on the fight and he, too, won the battle against terrible odds in Brixton Prison - Terence MacSwiney. G.H.Q. could not attempt to even hint to this stalwart who was more matured and better fitted to fight and answer both the common enemy and the enemies at home. G.H.Q. had already issued an order stopping all Volunteers going on hunger-strike, but they couldn't stop Terence MacSwiney.

You may say to yourself that if the rank and file thought so much of Kevin why did they not do something to rescue him. Seán Flood, O/C. 'C' Company, 1st Battalion, was the man responsible for pressing for any attempts that were made to rescue Kevin. He first put his claim to those heroes of Ireland, the real G.H.Q. of the Gael - Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy and Seán Russell. They then demanded G.H.Q. to sanction an attempt and, of course, against such men they had to give in. The first attempt planned was the capture of an armoured car in Phibsborough. This happened on the day after Seán Treacy and Dan Breen's fight in Carolan's house, Whitehall, and the day that Seán Treacy

was killed. This attack was carried out by the men of 'D' Company, 1st Battalion, and along with Dick McKee and P. Clancy, amongst this party were Peter O'Connor, Charlie and Benny Byrne, Frank Bolster.

As is known, this failed and Willie O'Connell was killed in the attack. Things at this time were fairly pressing, coming on top of one another: Seán Treacy killed, a great soldier; Terence MacSwiney martyred, several attacks had taken place on the enemy, and the next attempt at rescue of Kevin did not take place until Saturday, October 28th.

Tommy McGrane was acting O/C. Seán Flood told Tommy and I to report to 35, Lr. Gardiner St. on Wednesday night, October 26th. We reported to D. McKee, who told us that an attempt would be made to rescue Kevin on Saturday evening, and instructed us to call and see Mrs. Barry in Fleet St. and inform her of what we were going to do and for her to visit Kevin on the Saturday between 3.30 and 3.45. We got in touch with Frank Flood, a pal of Kevin, and Paddy Kenny, and proceeded to Fleet St. to talk to Mrs. Barry. We agreed to let Frank do the talking. Kathleen Barry, Kevin's sister, came out when we entered the shop and told us that her mother was not too well. We decided to explain to Kathleen the whole arrangements. She went in to see her mother, who, she told us, did not want any attempt at rescue as it would only entail more lives lost and that one was enough and she was resigned to let him die for Ireland. She did not know or did we that already one man had died on his account. We reported back to Brigade H.Q. and were sent back again with the same instructions. The answer was the same. They left it over until Thursday night, when orders were given to Kathleen for her to visit Kevin between 3.30 and 3.45, no earlier and no later.

We were asked by Dick McKee to get two more good men, and Frank Flood, Paddy Kenny and myself went to Mark Wilson's, Nth. Frederick St., and there met who was talking to Frank Carbury (who was a married man from 'C' Company and Kevin's Section Leader in I.R.B.) and asked him would he come on a job. He asked what was the job and we told him. He said he could not go as his leg was sore and he could not run. We told him that we were going to stand. We told him that we were going to stand. We told him not to bother and keep his mouth shut. We then went into the billiard room and asked another I.R.B. man would he come and he, too, told us that he had a bad leg. We let him have the whole English language in Greek and Hebrew. We went back to 35 and told Seán Flood about the whole matter and he told Dick, who told us not to bother, he would get the two men for us. He was giving the chance to Kevin's comrades to do the job and we thought that both the men we asked, who were I.R.B. men and supposed to be, in their own minds, Robert Emmets, would be the best, especially after Seán Flood saying that they were both good men. He changed his mind about them after this. Frank Flood was in touch with G.H.Q. every hour and was instructed to ask Jerry McAleer, a student and a pal of Kevin, to visit Kevin. He had already visited him and got his boots for repair. He was told that those boots would be repaired at once by G.H.Q. and so they were, and he went in to the 'Joy' with them on the Thursday and handed them in with a note from G.H.Q. re the rescue. Kevin said to him: "Tell them no. I am quite happy to die for Ireland and have no regrets."

The following men were instructed to report to 35, Gardiner St. at 12 o'clock on Saturday, October 29th:

Davy Golden, 'H' Company and Transport Officer, Jimmy Carrigan, 'C' Company, Guard to Transport, Phil Leddy, 'A' Company, B. Byrne, Gus Byrne, 'D' Company, Paddy Doyle, 'F' Company, Frank Teeling, 'F' Company, Jimmy Conroy, Paddy Halpin, C. Byrne, Capt. 'D' Company, Tommy McGrane, Frank Flood, Paddy Kenny and myself. We duly reported. At the table in the return room were Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy, Mick Collins, Dick Mulcahy, Seán Flood and two others whom I cannot now remember. Dick McKee explained the operation; first that we were going to Mountjoy to rescue Kevin. He explained that the whole operation must take place any time between 3.30 and 3.45 but no later, as reinforcements of troops would arrive at 3.50 and we would have to be out of the way.

Charlie Byrne was made O/C. Jimmy Conroy, Frank Teeling and Paddy Halpin were the G.H.Q. sharpshooters who had to hold the guard, which was on the right inside the prison. If the sentry, who normally moved down by the left, did not move and stayed facing the gate, they were to shoot him down. Benny Byrne, Gus Byrne, Paddy Doyle and Phil Leddy were each to enter the Governor's office, Deputy's office and the other two offices, and one was to hold the circle in case of anyone coming or going. I was to hold open electric grill gate inside yard, Paddy Kenny same gate inside arch, and Frank Flood and Charlie Byrne the main wicket gate. Tommy McGrane was in the laneway beside jail to bring Kevin to car at the side of Mater Hospital. Davy Golden and Jimmy Carrigan were in the Ford car.

Our instructions were that we would move a few minutes after Miss Barry had asked to see Kevin and had gone into the prison. Kevin would then be brought to either the



Governor's or Deputy Governor's office. This was the important point. We were told by Dick McKee that we had about 10 seconds to do the job and that if any of our party were killed or wounded, to try and get them away and, if not, to leave them but get Kevin out. Every man present knew exactly what he had to do, and I can assure all and sundry that I never saw a more calm, cool and collected lot of lads in my life. You would think that they were entering a competition or going on an outing. Not one man gave a damn whether he came back or not. Dick McKee asked all the men did they understand what they had to do and asked each to state his instructions. He then turned to the table and asked the 'brass hats' had they anything to add and they said no. This would now be about 2.30 p.m. We were told to proceed slowly in pairs to Mountjoy and reach there just before 3.30. We all moved off by different ways and arrived at the jail gate. There were a few women and men enquiring re prisoners. Benny Byrne took upon himself the job of knocking on the door and saying that so and so wanted to see so and so prisoner. While the small gate was opened to admit the visitor Benny had a good look around. We could see the sentry right opposite the gate and he never moved from his position. Phil Leddy asked Jimmy Conroy what were his chances on taking down the sentry and he said 10 to 1 on. Phil said: "That's good enough for me" and told us. To see those lads there you would never think they were facing certain death, joking etc. Miss Barry came along and Benny told the warders that Kevin's sister wanted to see him. A priest arrived then and asked to see Kevin and, strange to relate, he was admitted then and there. Now this was the crux. A priest could visit Kevin in the condemned cell and to which we could not get. Our orders were only related to Miss Barry and we could not

deviate. Just after the priest coming in an officer with red around his cap came out and was going away from the prison, but he turned back and knocked at the gate to go in again. We nodded to Charlie would we hold him up but he shook his head, so we let him go back in. The time now was exactly 3.50 and, sure enough, coming up the avenue were two lorries of troops. Charlie Byrne, Frank, Paddy and myself moved away and we all went in twos and threes past the lorries. Miss Barry had still not got in and the priest had not come out. This finished the rescue attempt.

We met Dick McKee on Mountjoy Square after coming back and he told us that it was hard luck and that when he saw Corrigan in the car he thought we had got him out. He had already got the report from Charlie Byrne. We asked him could we do anything else, such as going in as British troops. He said they had thought of that and might try it to-morrow. We were to keep in touch with each other. You never met a more sincere human being in your life than Dick. He could get to the highest level and still come down to the level of the ordinary 5/8th.

On Sunday morning Jimmy Conroy told us to report to the Connolly College, Nth. Gt. George's St., and said that we would be going into Mountjoy as Tommies, but up till 4.30 nothing was done. Then we got instructions to mobilise all 'H' Company for 6 o'clock. 'C' Company was also mobilised. 'H' Company were in 41, Parnell Square and 'C' Company in Wilson's and George's St.

This then was the last desperate attempt to rescue Kevin. Paddy Kenny, Frank Flood, myself and Seán Dwyer (Spivis) 'H' Company were told to (when ordered) proceed

to the main entrance of Mountjoy and stick up the policemen who at this time numbered two to four, tie them up and then charge down the avenue, shoot or capture the sentry who was now outside the main gate and facing up the avenue and keep on shooting at the main gate. We were to do this when we heard an explosion at the back. The whole idea about this desperate attempt (and it was desperate considering that all that day troops were pouring into the jail and were around it) was to make a breach in the wall near the condemned cell in Killarney Parade and picked men would fight their way to Kevin. Joe Cripps was the man who made the mine and who would work it. When it went up we were to do our stuff. The main body of 'H' Company, under Tommy McGrane and Johnny Campbell, were to stretch from Parnell Monument to Blaquiere Bridge, and every man was armed both with gun and grenades and told not to allow anything creeping or walking or on wheels of the enemy to pass them while the main operation was going on. 'C' Company were behind the Mater wall facing the prison under Frank Carbury, and Seán Prendergast had a party holding the Dorset St. end of N.C. Rd. Frank Carbury's orders were to open fire on the barracks and also on the jail and fire down the avenues. I pointed out to Frank that we would be going down the avenue and he would wipe us out. He said he did not give a damn as long as we got out Kevin, so you can just fancy our chances. The pick of the Dublin Brigade were now on the job and in the Connolly College with Lewis Gun etc. Men were taken from their girls when they were going to the pictures, etc. Assembled there were Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy, Charlie Byrne, Seán Flood, Seán Russell, Paddy McGrath, George and Jack Plunkett, Mick Collins, Tom Ennis, Dick Mulcahy, all the lads who were on the job before, Tom Keogh, "Specky" Griffin and the whole crack men of the

brigade. After arrangements were made the next thing was who would lead the attack through the breach in the wall. Whoever got this job hadn't a ghost in hell of coming out alive as he faced the might of an armed empire inside the breach. Charlie said that as he was in charge of the previous attempts he should lead the men. Seán Flood said that as he brought Kevin first into the Volunteers and pressed for his rescue it was his privilege. Peadar Clancy, Mick Collins, Tom Keogh, Tom Ennis all in turn requested the honour, but Dick McKee said as O/C. Dublin Brigade it was his duty and no one would take it from him. Just think, vieing with one another as to which of them would face death first and give their lives to save the life of a brave lad. During this time some of 'H' Company men were in the men's lavatory opposite Mountjoy. The rest of us were in Mark Wilson's filling grenades etc. and waiting the word to proceed to action. The time was heavy on our hands. Each man knew what he had to do. Now apart from the troops who had entered the 'Joy' and were around the jail, somebody asked the students, male and female, to go to the 'Joy' and recite the Rosary. With their arrival more and more people kept adding to the already swelling crowds at the 'Joy'. Word was whispered to the students to leave quietly but still, even when some left, more people kept coming and hence more military. In Wilson's where we were we were getting anxious as it was just 9 o'clock and it began to look that things were not going too well. At 9 o'clock Seán Flood came from G.H.Q. and called me out. He told me to tell the men to go home, that it was all off as the slaughter would be awful. He started to cry and so did I, and I told him I could not tell the men and would he do it? He came into the room and when the men saw us they had no need to be told. They could see the answer in our faces.

Every man there cried like a child. The same scene took place in all the positions which were taken up by our men, and I believe it was pitiful to see such strong and gallant men as were in the Connolly College break down and cry like children when they found that the attempt at rescue was off.

Kevin Barry had to die for Ireland. It was God's will.

Signature Sean O'Neill Lieut.  
(Sean O'Neill) Lieut.

Date 6<sup>th</sup> May 1955  
6th May 1955.

Witness M. F. Ryan Comd't.  
(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.

