

# Extracts from Easter Week in Ireland 1916

by B.J. Hackett

Submitted by Michael O'Dwyer for 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary County Kilkenny Commemoration Booklet. Summarised by Brian Boyd.

ON EASTER Monday, April 24, Fairyhouse Race Meeting came off in Meath and, with many thousands, I went down by train. It was the usual holiday crowd; lots of horses, pretty girls, and luncheon baskets. After the second race I was talking to Gray, County Inspector for Meath; he was in very good spirits saying all his friends abused him every Easter Monday about the traffic. He was shot that day or next with nine of his constabulary at Ashbourne. He just had time to make his will, which was a sad one. About that time of the day Michael Cox, Privy Counsellor, told me there was trouble in Dublin, that the Sinn Féiners had seized the Post Office and that John O'Neill had tried to stop the trouble the evening before and had resigned. No one at Fairyhouse had any idea of the gravity of things.

Coming back in Ben Kennedy's car, with Billy Boydell, wife and Miss Jackson, we began to hear the news. At Clonsilla a very excited lady tried to head off all motor cars from going to Dublin. She said they were being captured and made into barricades, which I believe was true. On my suggestion the car went on to the police station at Castleknock. The police there had no information so we went on gingerly to the Chief Secretary's Lodge (the last place in Ireland where information can be obtained). The policeman there was very willing to help and advised us to go on to Dalkey by Chapelizod and not go through Dublin at all. This was sound advice and I bade them good-bye and started to walk through the park to get to Mountjoy Prison, which I expected would be attacked.

I noticed, on my way down through Phoenix Park about twenty men in civilian clothes with bicycles at regular intervals but whether police or others I could not say. Down the magazine side there was a rattle of musketry cracking away without stop; still people were standing about in groups along the North Circular Road, in twos and threes, looking very much as usual.

o - o - o

Leahy was recalled to duty and heard that Neilan, an officer in the Tenth Dublins, had been killed; that the North Dublin Union had been captured and that the rebels had Stephen's Green and Jacob's Biscuit Factory. Well, we had another meal, a whiskey and soda and I prevailed on them to go to bed.

I dozed down in the smoking room in my sleeping bag and Dalton and his father-in-law went upstairs. About 2 a.m. we were rung up on the telephone to say the soldiers had arrived and we were to come over. Some overstrained nerves snapped then but I went back to bed.

Next morning I found the Dublin Fusiliers lining the streets. Having found out where the Colonel, J.J. Meldon, was, I introduced myself and said I would be very glad to volunteer. As there was another Medical Officer there in Cahill's, Dorset Street, a very good sort named King, of Castlepollard, I took a stretcher-bearer party up to Blessington Street, a fairly hot shop, and left them while I went home and got sandwiches for them. When I came back they were gone. I often wondered whether I should have got them court-martialled, but the next pair I had were fine.

I took part of Leary's public house, at the corner of Dorset Street and North Frederick Street, as my aid post. A fellow was sniping at us from Duffy's roof, a very poor shot. While I was there I was told that they had been trying to get a wounded officer and two men from the Granville Hotel in Sackville Street since Monday. This was reported to me by a sergeant with the Canadian Women's Motor Ambulance. As things were quiet, I thought it feasible to have a try at getting them.

We ran down parallel to Rutland Square and Sackville Street till we came to Marlboro Street Church. There, next a shattered lamp post, and beside a huge pool of partially dried blood, I got out of the car. I walked towards Sackville St. intending to go into the hotel by the front door. It did not take me long to get upstairs and get down the two men; no dressing, just

wrapped them up in blankets and away; the third man was dead. I ran the other two up to King George V Hospital and the only question I was asked there was, "Why didn't you bring the dead man?" I said I was too damn well frightened and I thought he'd keep. It was several days before we could get him away as a matter of fact.

o - o - o

About lunch time I got word to go down to Great Strand Street, that a woman was wounded. I was annoyed as it was quite close to Amiens Street, which had medical officers, but I got my bearer squad and guide and we popped along fully a mile, having to pass six or seven cross streets, a fairly real danger because, on our way back, a woman was shot just before we got to her street. The first woman was dead, stone dead, and our journey was in vain. Her name was Jenny Costelloe. The old woman, Redmond Cahill, was in a bad way and I ran her up to the Mater. On the way back got a bullet through the ambulance; it went through the back of the seat chest high. I was sitting in the front with the driver going fifty miles an hour so it would have been a bit of bad luck if I or the driver had been hit. That bullet hit a man and he had to be taken to hospital, so it wasn't very safe to be on the streets that day.

o - o - o

Down Sackville Street the rifles barked and sang and the "overs" moaned up the hill and smacked our roofs or squeaked over the prison. About midnight a beautiful rosy glow waked the southern sky. The huge eddying billows of smoke churned up and swayed across the sky. Then there were two great bodies of smoke springing from caverns of flame and the Post Office and Linenhall Barracks went up in flames; these were not the only buildings burned that night. From the Liffey to Henry Street was red ruin except for a few shops — Chancellor's, Frewens, and half Elvery's. On the other side no buildings survived from the Bridge to the Tramway Office. Clery's fine shop, the Imperial Hotel and the large D.B.C. were gone.

The cordon of troops were now very tight and, as regards the north side, very effective. The houses slept, doors shut, windows darkened. Old people died; infants were born, poor people got hungrier and no help could be given them. Next morning I met the Provincial of the Jesuits, Father Nowlan, and he worked manfully and was able to arrange relief and supplies of milk for the poor.

On Thursday morning, another cloudless day, my visit to the police station brought me the information that things were still very grave, the rebels in great force in the Mount St. area and Sandymount. Early in the day the mob looted a house in Dorset Street but a few rounds of ammunition, fired over their heads, dispersed them. There were no casualties on the north side where we were.

o - o - o

On Friday some Sherwood Foresters arrived; two companies rather green troops and their officers of a type I had not hitherto met. The story is told — and I believe, truly — that when this Midland Division landed at Kingstown, a nice old lady, all grey curls, shawls and cameos, sent her trim maid with a tray of cakes and cocoa for the brave soldiers. A young officer rushed up before the soldiers could get any and tilted up the tray, sending the cakes and cups flying. "This is an enemy country", said he, "and we must be careful". The lower the stratum of English society, the more the want of tact is apparent. The Seventh Dublins, with whom I was, were very good for a depot battalion and stuck the hard days very well, but the English green troops were not what they should be.

\*Dr. B. J. Hackett was a member of the well-known Kilkenny literary family.