



Bloody Sunday, in the words of those who were there

The Military Archives in Dublin provide a treasure trove with first-hand accounts of exactly what went on in the fight for Irish freedom, writes **Katherine Donnelly**

Key players in the events of Bloody Sunday, and of that time, provide first-hand accounts of what happened across thousands of pages of testimony stored in the Military Archives.

Of the 1,773 statements in the Bureau of Military History Collection, covering the history of the movement for independence between 1913-21, there are 131 in which Bloody Sunday is mentioned.

The Military Service Pensions Collection is the second rich trove in the Military Archives covering the period from 1913. Among the files within that collection, there are 168 where involvement in Bloody Sunday is used to support a pension application: 156 men and 12 women.



Patrick McCrea: 'Baggallay tried to escape through the window, but before he reached it he was put out of action'

Patrick McCrea returned to his home in Dollymount, Dublin, at about 11am on November 21, 1920 and told his family that he had been "out with the boys, fishing, as this was a practice with the local boys, and was at Mass".

He became uncomfortable when his wife asked him where the fish was, and also said she was planning to go to Mass. There was no fish to show and he still had not been to Mass himself, although he wanted to go.

"In order not to give myself away, after breakfast I took the tram into town and went to the short 12 o'clock mass in Marlboro Street," he said in his 1950 statement to the Military Archives.

Up to that point, he said, his wife "did not think I was deeply involved" in the struggle for independence. In fact, he had been a member of Michael Collin's Squad since the previous year.

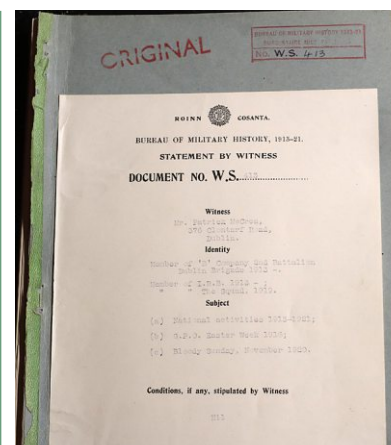
The previous night, at a meeting in Gardiner Street, he and other "transport men" got their instructions. He was told what has to happen the following morning and how to distribute cars. He had also been assigned to assist the unit operating at 28 Lower Baggot Street.

McCrea left home at 7.30am and there was an initial meet-up in North Great Charles Street where he and others collected guns.

They arrived at Baggot Street at "two or three minutes to 9".

"The British agent in Baggot Street listed for elimination was, as far as I know, Captain Baggallay, who I believe was one of Kevin Barry's torturers," he said.

"Three or four of the men entered the house and two stood guard. They had particulars of the agent's bedroom. When the room was entered, he tried to



The folder holding the statement Patrick McCrea gave to the Bureau of Military History, now held at the Military Archives. PHOTO: FRANK McGRATH

escape through the window, but before he reached the window he was put out of action. The job was completed in the space of few minutes. We got away without incident."

After Mass and having decided not to go to Croke Park, McCrea was back home for lunch and, afterwards, fell asleep on the couch.

His wife woke him at about 4pm. She was crying and had a "stop press" — a term given to late news inserted into a newspaper — in her hand.

She asked if this was the fishing expedition he had been on. "I said 'yes' and don't you see we had a good catch, or words to that effect. She then said, 'I don't care what you think about it, I think it is murder'."

"I said: 'No, that is nonsense; I'd feel like going to the altar after that job this morning.'"



Cpl Joe McDermott from the Military Archives with some of the Collins Papers in Cathal Brugha Barracks in Rathmines, Dublin.

Opposite page: the field glasses of Peadar Clancy (vice-commandant of the Dublin Brigade) at the Military Archives.

PHOTO: FRANK McGRATH

Patrick Butler: 'Seán Hogan gave Michael Hogan some despatches for GHQ'

When Michael Hogan left his home in Grangemockler, Co Tipperary, for his final journey to Croke Park, he carried with him a football containing despatches from local IRA leader Seán Hogan for GHQ in Dublin, one account states.

The area was a hotbed of activity. As Michael Collins was preparing for the Sunday morning attacks in Dublin, local volunteers were planning their own mission for the afternoon of November 21.

Patrick Butler, commanding officer with the Third Tipperary Brigade, and others were going to take over Glenbower RIC barracks.

They had been watching it for weeks and decided Sunday afternoon, when five or six men generally left the barracks, was the time to strike.

"But the great problem was the lack of arms," Butler said in his witness statement to the Bureau of Military History.

He went to brigade headquarters in Rosegreen and asked for assistance.

"The Brigade O/C decided to send Seán Hogan and Seán Hayes to help us. Jerry Kiely also came with them, and all three stayed in the home of Michael Hogan.

"Before leaving for Dublin, Seán Hogan gave Michael Hogan some despatches for GHQ. Michael placed these in a football he was taking with him."

The Glenbower party met on Sunday but the job was called off, to Butler's great disappointment. Seán Hogan and Hayes felt the plan would not work "and that to attempt the job might only lead to serious loss of life".

Michael Hogan returned home in a coffin. Patrick Butler and others maintained an overnight vigil in the parochial hall on the night before his burial and was part of the firing party over his grave.

The child begged John O'Donnell 'not to shoot Daddy'

John O'Donnell's job on Bloody Sunday was to be a door guard at 119 Morehampton Road, where three men were shot. Two of them, Lt Donald Lewis MacLean and the landlord Thomas Herbert Smith, died.

The incident haunted O'Donnell and another member of the unit that consisted of eight to 10 men, James Norton. Both men subsequently suffered mental health problems.

In a sworn statement accompanying his 1935 application for a military pension, James Bird said he was in charge of the Morehampton Road operation and provided a short, graphic description: "I put three men up against a wall and 'plugged them'"

Harry Farrell, who was O'Donnell's IRA commanding officer over the period 1916-22, gave evidence to support his pension application and referred to the Morehampton Road incident "where the child begged of him 'not to shoot daddy'. It later played so much on his mind as to cause the trouble from which he has suffered."

Farrell added: "His condition became very noticeable, frequently referring to this incident. Later he became very sullen and silent, in fact an all-round peculiarity in his manner which compelled me to withdraw the work which up to this I had entrusted him."

A medical report accompanying James Norton's pension application stated that he attributed his mental health problems to his experiences on active service, culminating in the events of Bloody Sunday.

Norton was "personally responsible as one of the firing party of three British intelligence officers, two of which were killed, and one seriously wounded in the presence of their screaming wives and children," it stated.

Norton was in and out of psychiatric institutions in Ireland and England from 1922 onwards. He was made a ward of court in 1954 while a patient in Grangegorman mental hospital, where he remained until his death in December 1974.

O'Donnell was a patient on Grangegorman in 1931 and 1932 — but unlike Norton, he did not spend the rest of his life in psychiatric institutions and does not seem to have spent any further periods of time there.

Catherine Rooney: 'My mother was always known as the mother of the "Guards"'

The day before Bloody Sunday, the Byrne family in North Richmond Street got their instructions.

"I was told on the Saturday afternoon that they wanted the back parlour and we had to put a few mattresses on the floor and clear out some of the furniture. Mother was warned to have the grub ready," according to Catherine Byrne, who was 25.

It was Paddy Daly, one of the Squad, who asked them to set up a "sort of first aid station, in case some of the boys got wounded".

"Usually if there was an ambush on the south side, they would always have a refuge in the north side and vice versa".

It was also the house at which units were told to report after the morning's operations.

Four years earlier, Catherine Byrne

was the first member of Cumann na mBan to enter the GPO for the Easter Rising, she said in her 1952 statement (now under her married name Catherine Rooney) to the Bureau of Military History.

For years, the Byrne house acted as a meeting place and refuge for republican activists. In 1919 a group of volunteers, who were called the Guards, used to visit regularly and from this group the Squad was picked. "My mother was always known as the mother of the 'Guards'," she said.

The Byrne family had an early start on Bloody Sunday. "We had to go to a very early Mass as my father was told the job would take place early in the morning," she said.

The first wounded man to arrive was Billy McClean, who had been in action in 22 Lower Mount Street, and was

wounded in the trigger finger.

"He was greatly shocked and was accompanied by another man who had a wound in the ankle. I dressed Billy and my mother dressed the other men. Then Tom Keogh arrived, but he was not wounded. We gave them all dinner."

After dinner, Byrne went to Croke Park with her future husband in the aftermath of the British attack.

"We were up in the dump near where the Hogan Stand is now. Father Potter was near us trying to console three women who had become hysterical when the Black and Tans attacked the crowd," she said.

"The crowd had cleared out or had been swept out, and we were the only five people left sitting in the dump," she said. She saw Michael Hogan's body, "the Black and Tans having shot him emptied their guns into him".