

## **Statement of British Soldier, Waters who fought at Beggar's Bush during Easter Week 1916**

Volunteer Training Corps to Ticknock sham fight. After rest Lord Chancellor arrived in motor car & informed Major Harris <sup>1</sup> of rebellion. Ordered to 'fall in' & marched at once to Dublin. 'We looked like a fighting force, with our rifles & uniform, but a few blank cartridges comprised the ammunition of the whole Battalion'. At Dublin suburbs they 'got a full account of the gravity of the situation'.

'Firing parties commanded the approach of our Barracks on Haddington Rd. from one or two houses where it is crossed by Northumberland Rd., & we were cautioned not to come near the point. We were halted, turned to the right & marched down the Shelbourne Rd., thus passing round by the rear of the Barracks. We got to the end of the road. Major Harris on horseback; front & the head of the column rounded the corner - & the sound of rifle shots rang out.

The S. F. had fired on us. They commanded their end of the road too from the Railway Bridge where crosses Bath Avenue at its end. There was some confusion in our first rank & one or two men ran back. O'Toole, who had been a Dragoon, was our Battalion Sergeant Major. He had the voice of a megaphone. He stepped into the middle of the road & turning his back with a calm indifference at the point from which the shots had come, he waved his stick, & gave us a stentorian command 'About turn'.

Poor Clery <sup>2</sup> had been shot & was carried in a dying state, through the barrack gate by some of his companions. One of those who had gone to his aid had been wounded, but got in too, & Harris & the others who were with him had passed in unscathed.

H. was marching beside me. He was 6' 2" & built to proportion & might be still called young, though he had seen service in S. Africa – altogether a fine type of soldier. He turned to me with disgust. 'Waters' he said 'it was a shame to retire'. I agreed for I had felt annoyed at the effect of the shots on the men who had broken our formation. But neither of us knew as perhaps the others did that two had been shot.

Then we moved up a lane on the right, crossed a barbed wire fence & got to the southern wall of the Barracks. Firing had begun about this time somewhere near us on our right but we could not see the enemy. I was not unhandy at climbing so I pushed to the front. By getting on the shoulders of another man we could just reach an iron spike driven into the wall, from that get to a second one above it & with one foot on this I could grab the edge of the wall. I pulled myself up & got outside on the top. The little drummer boys of our corps were first handed up to me. There was no difficulty in lifting them up by their waist-bands & dropping them down to the soldiers inside. Then came the men .... Firing was going on all the time & we hurried through the work. Some of the men crouched behind an embankment below & then

made a run for the wall, but as I heard no whistling of bullets & no one was hit, I came to the conclusion that the shots, whatever they meant were not directed at us.

The barracks were filled with wounded soldiers & inefficient about to be discharged & our men were a welcome reinforcement to them. We were 80 in number but our rifles were useless & we had no cartridges to fit them, & we learned that there were only 17 service rifles in the Barracks for its defence.

Our second column had been less fortunate than we. They were at some distance behind us on the march back to Dublin & when we heard of the S. Feiner's position at Northumberland Rd., we posted sentries at one or two points on the way, to tell the others of the danger. They had, however, unfortunately changed the route home before the approach to these places, & did not come into touch with our men. Unconscious of what awaited them, they reached the danger-point, & were going to pass it when a lady ran out from a house & warned them. They were halted & after a short consultation between the two Officers in charge it was decided to go on.

As the front ranks of the column rounded the corner a volley was fired on them. Twelve were wounded – poor Browning<sup>3</sup> the second in command of the Battalion & two others fatally - & the column dispersed, some taking refuge in neighbouring houses & one or two reaching our men & getting in over the wall with them.

Prepared for Siege. Knocked bricks out of loop holes. Provisions short – on  $\frac{1}{2}$  rations.

Once or twice during the night the guard was called out when a summons for admittance came from the barrack gate. The men seized their rifles & formed up a line with their bayonet points facing the gate. It was swung open & the ambulance or other visitant let in & it got banged again.

Tuesday 25 April

Dickenson then Company Commander arrived disguised with a Parson's hat & coat. Sometime afterwards a drunken Tommy half concealed in a girl's hat & jacket knocked at the gate & was let in.

Breakfast 8am. Dinner 12. Tea 5. G.R.s put on duty. Waters as a good shot had a rifle. The roar of the guns had begun with the day & went on increasingly into the night – volleys of rifle firing, the sharp ring of individual shots from snipers outside or from our men at the loop holes or on the high central roof. The booming of the big guns in the distance or the thunder of one nearer to us, & the vicious rat-tat-tat – rat- tat – tat – tat of the Lewis guns – all mingled in the din.

Water's hours of duty at loop hole 12-4pm & 12 – 4 at night.

The unconcern of the people of the district was surprising. They came out of their houses & looked casually about & they stood on their door steps in small

groups not merely where there was danger of being hit by a stray shot, but sometimes directly in the line of fire. When a sharp fusillade occurred they went in, to reappear again when it was all over.

In the talk of the men there is sometimes a certain blood thirstiness & a boastful claim to acts of prowess, though I imagine it is for the most part 'talk only' & not evidence of the real failings or doings of the men. This morning when I saw no sign of enemy figures anywhere within range, a soldier 'sniping' from a high position fired his rifle & jumped down. 'Got him' enquired a companion. 'Yes I winged him'. People are frequently passing along the Shelbourne Rd., generally women & children carrying bags & parcels of provisions. As the shops have ceased to supply them, the people have to get food for themselves, but they are always suspected of bearing supplies to the insurgents - a girl went by with a bag of meal or flour - I'd put a bullet in that bag, Sir' - a man passed - 'Gent's a suspicious looking chap, I'd have a go at him' - I was watching the window of a house opposite & I saw a man at the back of the room bringing a pair of binoculars to bear on us & pointed him out to my companions'. I'd take a shot at him, Sir. If I had fired at every suggestion I should certainly have had some innocent lives to account for.

Wed. 26 April

Early this day we noticed a small body of troops at the Shelbourne Rd. We reported their approach & two of our officers came down to our post & made signs to them to advance. But they refused to come nearer. 'Come on, we are a British Garrison' but they would not stir. They thought we were enemies trying to lure them into a trap. We reassured them however & its young officer in charge came over the wall. They were a detachment of Sherwood Foresters - a scouting party - who had lost touch with their main body on their march from Kingstown. The regiment had been landed there that morning & even when they were marched off for Dublin the men were still in ignorance of the state of affairs there, & thought they had only been sent here for training purposes. On the way in they had been halted & told they were come to suppress a rebellion. The soldiers were got over the wall by ladder & rope.

They were a body of 30 young territorials who had only had a few weeks training and had never fired a shot in anger before. They scrambled over the wall each weighed down by enormous kit: - knapsack, haversack, blanket, overcoat and side-arms, entrenching implements and rifle. The 30 additional rifles were a welcome sight to us. The detachment was then marched off into the barracks. In about an hours' time they came back to us. They had volunteered, or been ordered, to make an attack on the position held by the Sinn Feiners on the Railway bridge over Bath Avenue. A young commissioned officer and Gamble<sup>4</sup> the Quartermaster Sergeant had volunteered to go with them from the barracks. We let them down over the wall encumbered with the same heavy kit as they had when coming in, to make an assault on what proved to be an impregnable position - a strange proceeding I thought. The Sinn Feiners had organised their defensive very cleverly. They had dug trenches across the railway track with communicating trenches which led up

to a row of houses at a higher level, to which they retired when the trenches below were threatened by some troops that had taken up a position at some distance from them on the line.

We could not see how the expedition fared but in less than an hour they came back – one by one they tumbled in over the wall in an exhausted condition. ‘Oim just able for it’ said a young fellow as we helped him down. The attack had failed – poor Gamble had been shot dead, and the young officer had been wounded and fled for shelter somewhere. The other never recovered from the effect of it, and though he got into the barracks with our men he remained prostrated by the experience and two or three nights afterwards was sent out in the ambulance. I heard of no instance during the whole trouble of the ambulance being molested or interfered with anywhere near the Barracks, no one in civilian clothes was fired at near the gate – in fact, one of our officers, dressed in mufti, on several occasions drove freely in and out in his traps. From time to time individual members of our corps got permission to leave for some urgent domestic reason, and on these occasions they were given suits of civilian clothes from the barrack store. These are known as Martini Henry’s – I don’t know why – and are such ludicrous misfits or hand me downs as to resemble nothing but the wardrobe of a music-hall humourist. The men looked such farcical scarecrows in them that one felt that they must attract several observations outside, with scarcely less danger to them than if they had been in uniforms but I heard of no case in which any of them came to harm.

1. Major G A Harris, Adjutant of the Dublin University Officer Training Corps. On 24 April he was in the Dublin mountains acting as umpire at military exercises carried out by the Volunteer Training Corps - the 'Gorgeous Wrecks'.

Browning formed two columns. Major Harris led his column to their depot at Beggar's Bush barracks.

2. Reginald Francis Clery. Irish Rugby Football Union Volunteer Corps. Son of Lieut.-Col. T. C. Clery, The Leinster Regiment, and former pupil of Belvedere College.

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=116284849>

3. Lieutenant Colonel Francis Henry Browning:

<https://www.tcd.ie/library/1916/frank-browning-a-casualty-of-the-1916-easter-rising/>

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Browning&GSiman=1&GScid=2233946&GRid=156046453&>

4. 8833 CQMS Robert Gamble, 2nd Bn. Royal Irish Rifles killed 26 April 1916:

<https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/397107/gamble,-robert/#&gid=null&pid=1>

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=162150722&ref=acom>