

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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W.S. 257

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 257.....

Witness

Mrs. Grace Plunkett,
11 Nassau Street,
Dublin.

Identity

Widow of Joseph Plunkett (executed 1916)

Nee Gifford.

Subject

Account of Plunkett's activities 1915-16;

Reference to document published in Holy Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No. S.395.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF MRS. GRACE PLUNKETT

11, Nassau Street, Dublin.

I have no knowledge of any of the military side of Joe's life. I did not know him intimately until late in 1915. I know he made a trip to Germany in that year. It was a very secret thing. He would not tell me much about it. They were bound by oath. He did tell me about it later on, after he came back. I remember him talking about a journey to Spain, and of how he fooled the authorities. He did not shave for a couple of days, wrapped himself in a muffler, and hunched himself into a corner. When the passport officials came along, he just held his papers out, and gave the impression that he was ashamed of going away for his health. He was great at play-acting. He went straight through to Germany. I have all his bills that he collected - they are in the National Museum now - going through Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland.. I do not know if he came back through France. He would only be yarning about it. He did not give me a history of it.

Joe spent some time in Italy, with a view to avoiding the British Secret Service, and passed into Switzerland. From Switzerland, he passed into Germany, where he spent some time with Casement. The only thing I ever remember him telling me about

Casement was that he saw Casement lying on the balcony of his hotel, in such a precarious position that, if he had moved another inch, he would have gone down into the street. I do not think that he expressed any opinion to me about the Irish Brigade, or about Casement's attitude to the Rising. It was all so long ago. I have never lived a normal person's life. I have always been in the thick of things.

While in Germany, Joe went to the Limberg Camp, where he designed a badge for them. I had that, as a matter of fact, and lost it somewhere. I think he met Hindenberg, the Chancellor. I think that is the name. Anyway, that is the name I seem to remember, and not Bethmann Holweig. Joe told me a thing that I can never understand. He said he changed his name from time to time on the journey. I may have taken it up wrong. When he met this German, the first thing he said, to Joe's surprise, was: "How are you, Mr. Plunkett?" Joe said he was astonished as to his knowing he was coming, and concluded that the Germans were just as good at spying as the others.

There was a man afterwards hanged in the Tower. He had been spying for the Germans. He was coming from England; and Joe said that, step by step, the two were making the same journey. The German was always a step in front of him. Joe eventually went by Barcelona, on a fruit boat. He

decided to speak to this man, and said: "I know what you are doing". The man did not know him. It was precisely the same, right all up through Italy, Switzerland and into Germany. He did not bother with him any further, especially as the German might be suspect, and might draw attention to him.

I remember Joe giving me a description of an air raid on a town, while he was in Germany. The people were all staring upwards. He boarded a train, which was crowded with soldiers. He wanted to ask for a match, but was afraid to do so, as he might have given himself away.

When Joe was in Germany, in 1915, he met Chancellor Hindenberg - was he Chancellor then? - and he got this treaty. He brought it to Switzerland, and it is now in the Foreign Office in Berne. It is lying there since. It was a treaty of promises to Ireland, that the Germans made. I often wonder whether that treaty, which Joe deposited in the Foreign Office in Berne, could be got. It is sure to be there. Joe brought a copy of the treaty back to Ireland with him. He told me he got a copy of "London Opinion", and acted a part. When the official came for his passport and to search him, Joe threw his copy of "London Opinion" on the window sill, and handed over his keys. The official searched, and did not find anything. The document was enfolded in his copy of "London Opinion".

As far as I know, Joe undertook no foreign journey in 1916. I knew he had been in America previous to that year. I would not know what he was doing there. He told me that he had been previously in Algiers for his health, and that he had been offered the managership of a skating rink there. He would be required to give special lessons, and would be dressed in a lovely white uniform. He was very athletic, and was a champion skater. He used be able to jump six chairs at a time. He said it was worth taking the job, for the sake of the uniform.

I got engaged to Joe on the 2nd December, 1915. I know that date, because it is in a book I have. I don't think we had any immediate plans for our marriage. I don't remember anything much about it. At one time, he was living in Marlborough Road, but all the time I knew him, he was living in Larkfield House. I think he was there in Easter Week. He was all the time in bad health. I don't know what was wrong with him, to tell you the truth. I think it was bronchitis. People thought it was T.B., but he went to a doctor three weeks before he proposed to me, and the doctor said he had not got it at all. He had glands in the neck. Of course, he was completely reckless about his health. He would ramble about the house in his pyjamas, looking for books. He was terribly careless. He was all the time composing poetry. Before the Rising, he was in a Nursing Home in Mountjoy Square. He had an operation

for his glands, and was being treated there. He was about a fortnight there before the Rising. I used visit him. During that time, even there, he continued to make preparations for the Rising, but I never discussed these matters with him, nor he with me.

I remember the document that was published in Holy Week, because I wrote it out myself for Joe, sitting on the edge of his bed, in Larkfield House. Joe did not do it in the Nursing Home. Although it was published in Holy Week, it had come out from the Castle some time before that. It did come out from the Castle. That is quite certain. I know who brought it. Donagh McDonagh was married to a girl, named Smith. It was her father who brought it out. Mr. Smith was in the Castle. He now lives, I think, at "Mayville", Bird Avenue, Dundrum; but Donagh will be able to give you the exact address. This man could not tell about it until he had retired. I think the document that Mr. Smith got out is a most interesting thing. He told Don about it. He got out the information piece by piece. It was not a straight document. He got the bits around, pasted all together, and gave it to Joe. I did not like to question Mr. Smith about it, as he had not retired; but it is alright now to ask him. I met him hundreds of times, and he never mentioned those things. It might affect his pension. His brother was a detective who was shot. I do not know what job exactly Mr. Smith had in the Castle. I could find out. Donagh would know. He has

retired from his position now. He can talk freely now. Joe had this in code. He deciphered it, and I wrote it down. I copied out the whole of it. It was the "Mail" that published it. Once it was finished, I forgot all about it. It would not be my job. The British certainly were up against it, if they had only known. You cannot be very careful, when the Civil Service is composed of Irish people. It could have happened in England, at Whitehall itself. That code is in the back of a despatch book, describing the Rising. It is in the Museum, on a sort of long loan. It is a despatch book, which Joe kept during the Rising in the G.P.O., and the code is in the pocket of it. This is in Joe's handwriting. It could not be confirmed at that time, but Mr. Smith ought to be approached, and asked to confirm it now. The pocket book was dropped on the street - presumably Moore Street - towards the end of Easter Week, and it was found by a waiter from the Granville Hotel. He brought it to me, at my mother's house, in Palmerston Park. It was in the pocket of it, I found the code.

I shall have to read a book about the Rising, as I know nothing of the military history of it.

In the week before the Rising, Joe was gay and bright. He never showed a sign of anxiety. Somebody said he was like Wellington, because he was so fearless - not worried by anxiety.

On Holy Saturday morning, Mick Collins came up to my house, Palmerston Park, where I was living. He had with him £20 and a revolver, and I don't know which frightened me more. He said that Joe sent the revolver to me to defend myself, and the money, in case I had to bribe the military; so Joe was evidently quite aware of what might happen - that he might be captured. Collins also said: "He wants you to come down and see him this evening". "Evening", to me, meant after six o'clock. To Collins, it would have meant between four and six o'clock.

At six o'clock on Holy Saturday, I went to the Metropole Hotel, and here was Joe himself walking down the stairs. He had skipped the Nursing Home - simply turned his back on it - and went over to the Metropole. I don't know what time he left the Nursing Home. When I arrived at the Metropole, he was walking down the stairs. His hair was shaved to the bone. He had his uniform on him, and a wide-awake hat. He had a new uniform, I think. As regards the state of his health, all I can say is that he was wretched looking. He was on the point of going away, having given me up as a bad job. Five minutes later, and he would have been gone. He was expecting me in the afternoon. He said: "I thought you would be here. I waited in all the afternoon for you". We got into a cab then. I did not know the north side of the city. All that part of the world was "no man's land" to me. He got out of the cab under a wide bridge in

Gardiner Street. He said good-bye, and went into some premises - somebody said it was the Typographical Society. You could see Beresford Place, coming down from the north side. It was not Liberty Hall. I don't know what took him there. I left him going in, and I went off in the cab to the house of my sister, Muriel, - Tom MacDonagh's wife - where I had tea with them. I did not see Joe again until the day before his execution.

Later on Holy Saturday night, now that you remind me, I did go in a car with Jack and Tom MacDonagh to Dr. O'Kelly's house. Yes, Tom went into the house. I don't know how long he stayed. It was not a very long time. You would remember a very long time, because you would get fidgety. I did not go in at all. I must have gone with them in the car, because I thought Joe would be there. Otherwise, why would I traipse around in a car with Tom and John MacDonagh? I don't know whether Joe was there, or nor. I did not see him anyway.

I would imagine Joe slept at Fitzwilliam Street on Holy Saturday night, or the Hotel. He did not go to the Nursing Home. I got a note from him on Easter Sunday. It was only a personal note, and had no reference to the Rising. I think it was addressed from 26, Fitzwilliam Street. That house was always open. There was always a kind of picnic there - as people said, it was like having a camp there. The Plunketts actually lived in Larkfield; but if they were in town, they would go in and make a

cup of tea at Fitzwilliam Street. I never went to Larkfield during Holy Week. For one thing, it was Holy Week, and I had to do the Churches, and all that. I was a Catholic then.

I became a Catholic in April. I was an enthusiastic Catholic; and the reason I got knowing Joe was that he was the same; and from that on, there was no talk about anything else; so that everything faded away. He was very keen on getting married. I remember he wanted to get married during Lent. As I was on the point of becoming a Catholic, I thought it was a fearful thing to do. I said: "Why not at Easter?" He said: "We may be running a revolution then". He said "may". I did not know it was fixed. That was a direct reference which he made to the Rising.

The cancelling order came on Sunday morning. I did not see Joe on Sunday, because that was the day we were to be married. I don't know whether he told me, on the Saturday, anything about our marriage. Colum O'Lochlainn sent the message to the priest; and whatever way Colum bungled it, the priest did not read the banns. I can't remember whether it was Easter Sunday, or Low Sunday we intended to be married. As a matter of fact, Geraldine was to be married on the same day, in the same Church.

I had two notes from Joe during Easter Week. They had nothing to do with the fighting. He

wanted us to be married, so that anything he had would come to me, because I had been thrown out of my home. He wanted to make sure that I would be alright. He and I realised that anything might happen - a stray bullet might put an end to him. In one of the notes, he suggested that we would be married by proxy. I could not understand it at all at the time, though I see his reason now. He wanted me to be secure. These notes are in the National Museum. They would be very interesting to you, especially one that he wrote from Moore Street, to say that he stood by all his deeds and would not wish them undone. It was headed, "Somewhere in Moore Street". He gave it to Winifred Carney. She was in jail after the Rising. When she was released, she gave the note to me. The note, suggesting that we should be married by proxy, was written in Richmond Jail and given to a British soldier, who delivered it to me. Joe's Will is on the back of that note. One of these notes is in the Museum, and the other is in the possession of a solicitor, Mr. J.J. Hannan, 205, Pearse Street. If, as you say, the Will is in the Museum, Mr. Hannan may have allowed it to be copied.

I was to go out with them in the Rising, but I did not. I don't know how it happened. I was not in Cumann na mBan, or anything. Joe had told me that he wanted me to marry him, so that we could go into the Rising together. My sister, Nellie,

went out at Liberty Hall. She never told me anything about it. She was keeping it awfully secret. Anyway, she thought it best to keep it a secret. She used go to the Hall and come home at night, but one night Connolly said: "Anyone who wants to 'come out' must stay the night in Liberty Hall". So she stayed. That is why I had to stay with my sister, Muriel, - Mrs. Tom MacDonagh - as she was alone, with two children, in Oakley Road. I could not leave her. Anyway, I would not have been any good as a soldier.

I went in to see Joe in Kilmainham on the day before his execution. I have a peculiar faculty that, if somebody in Drogheda, say, was thinking about me, - some casual thought - I would instantly feel and realise it. It is a sort of telepathy. I went out one day, and the papers had the news that MacDonagh and Pearse, and somebody else, had been executed. The next morning, although we had been up all night, I woke up as if I were being pulled out of bed by an unseen force, and dead beat after being awakened. I dressed, and went to the priest; and I told him Joe was going to be executed. I had no notion what I was doing, except I was being pulled on. I got a paper from the priest. I went down to a man, named Stoker, to get the wedding ring. He lived opposite the Gaiety. I went to Kilmainham then, to see Joe. His thoughts were so powerful that I was

simply pulled out of the bed. I was let in to see him; and the prison chaplain must have been there; and he married us. I don't remember how it came about that they got the chaplain. Next morning, Joe was executed. When I saw him, on the day before his execution, I found him in exactly the same state of mind. He was so unselfish, he never thought of himself. He was not frightened - not at all, not the slightest. I am sure he must have been worn out after the week's experiences, but he did not show any signs of it - not in the least. He was quite calm. I was never left alone with him, even after the marriage ceremony. I was brought in; and was put in front of the altar; and he was brought down the steps; and the cuffs were taken off him; and the chaplain went on with the ceremony; then the cuffs were put on him again. I was not alone with him - not for a minute. I had no private conversation with him at all. I just came away then.

I saw Joe twice that day before his execution - when we were married, and again that night. I saw him again that night, to say good-bye. I saw Pearse's letter to his mother lying on the British Governor's desk. I very nearly stole the letter; but they gave it to her alright. I did not see Pearse himself. I was allowed to stay only a short time with Joe, yet I believe that Min Ryan and Father Browne were allowed to stay a long time

with Seán MacDermott. Min Ryan was there with Seán MacDermott for ages and ages. In fact, she said her conversation ran out altogether. She did not know what to say to him. There would be a guard there, and you could not talk. I can't understand how she managed to stay quite a while. I was just a few moments there to get married, and then again a few minutes to say good-bye that night; and a man stood there, with his watch in his hand, and said: "Ten minutes".

After my second visit to Joe, I could not get home. The priest brought me to a convent. They would not let me in. Then they brought me to the house of a bell-founder, called Byrne, and I had something to eat there. For the second visit, a policeman, in a car, brought me a note from the Governor. I did not see any of the other prisoners. They were all locked up in their own cells.

My sister, Nellie, and myself went to see Professor Robert O'Donovan after Joe's execution. I don't know who suggested it. He informed us that his son was on the tribunal that tried Joe, and that Joe remained seated the whole time, never uttering a word or putting any questions, but that, when it was over, he stood up, with his hat in his hands, and said, "Up Ireland".

I have none of Joe's books about training,

etc. Jack Plunkett might be able to give some of those. As I have already stated, I was not interested in Joe's military aspirations. I was desperately interested in the Catholic Church. I did not know a single person, to whom I could talk about the Church, until I discovered him; and then I talked to him. MacDonagh was rather irreligious, and Joe was the opposite; and I sat listening to their arguments. We practically talked about nothing else.

I am now wearing a ring, which Joe wore during the Rising. It is an Irish-made one. Miss MacDermott of Belfast made it. I lost the little silver badge, with the circle and sword, which was the name of his book, and which he used as a symbol. I was not aware that his last unpublished poems were burned in the G.P.O. He had a marvellous cloak, which he had made. It was a large piece of material, which was put on the floor, and a circle cut out of it.

SIGNED:

Grace Plunkett

DATE:

1st June 1949

WITNESS: Tom Corcoran

