

W.S. 1, 221

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITARY HISTORY
NO. W.S. 1221

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,221

Witness

Padraig Ua Floinn,
Burke St.,
Fethard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Captain Fethard Company Irish Volunteers
Co. Tipperary, 1913-~~1921~~

Subject.

National activities, Fethard, Co. Tipperary,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2525

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STATEMENT BY PADRAIG UA FLOINN,
Burke St., Fethard, Co. Tipperary.

I was born on 13th May in the year of 1875 at Lisronagh, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. My father, who was a tailor, was associated with the Fenian movement and in or about the year of 1867 he took part in the rescue of James Stevens from Clonmel Jail.

After my schooldays in Lisronagh I served my apprenticeship to the tailoring business with my father. Having completed my apprenticeship, I worked for a short time in Clonmel before moving to Fethard, where 58 years ago I established my present tailoring and outfitting business.

On Easter Sunday 1913 a company of Irish National Volunteers was formed in Fethard. The meeting to form this company was held at Kilnockin Hill, and I was elected as Company Captain. Drill instructors were appointed, parades were held and the general routine of Volunteer companies was carried out. Each member of the company paid a weekly subscription towards an arms' fund. A fairly considerable sum of money for the arms' fund was collected but no arms were purchased. The funds were lodged in the Munster and Leinster Bank at Fethard, the trustees of the fund being the late Eamon O'Shea, John Byrne and myself.

When the 1914-1918 Great War broke out in August 1914, the Irish Home Rule Bill was passed by the British House of Commons and placed on the Statute Book. The late John E. Redmond, then leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, pledged the support of the Irish

National Volunteers to Britain for the duration of the war. This caused a split in the movement, but for the moment at any rate Redmond retained the support of the majority of the Volunteers. Those who followed him were, after the split, known as the National Volunteers, and the minority who stood by Patrick Pearse and Eoin McNeill became the Irish Volunteers. Here in Fethard I and some others, including the other two trustees of the arms' fund, did not see eye to eye with Redmond and we withdrew from the movement. We were often pressed by those who remained in the National Volunteers to hand over the money in the arms' fund. We were even threatened with being black-listed, but we (the trustees) refused to hand over the money. Our point was that this money was collected to arm Irish soldiers, not those who went to the support of England. Meanwhile one of the trustees, Eamon O'Shea, died, and eventually Byrne and I withdrew the money and I sent it to The O'Rahilly to assist in the purchase of arms for the Irish Volunteers.

In September, 1915, with my brother-in-law, - William Morrissey, P.J. Heneghan and another whose name I cannot now recall, I went to Dublin to attend the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa. We were deeply impressed by what we saw and heard. We were thrilled by the sight of Irish Volunteers armed and marching in uniform. We returned determined to start an Irish Volunteer company in Fethard.

With those who had withdrawn from the Irish National Volunteers a year earlier we made a start. At first we had only 14 or 15 members, but by Easter 1916 we had built up the company strength to between 40 and 50.

John O'Shea was elected Company Captain. A few revolvers were procured, and with the exception of a few shotguns which were the property of individual members, these were the only arms we had. In addition to the company in Fethard, small parties or outposts of Irish Volunteers were established in Kiltinan and Rosegreen. ~~Walter~~ Walter and Arthur Cantwell were prominent in the establishment of these parties or outposts. Our contact with G.H.Q. in Dublin was maintained through the late Pierce McCann, later T.D. for South Tipperary and who died in an English prison in 1919. My premises were used as the centre through which dispatches from G.H.Q. or from Pierce McCann were forwarded to the outlying posts and to the Irish Volunteer company in Clonmel.

Sometime before Easter Week of 1916 we had a visit from Colm O'Loughlin of Dublin. He was on organising work at the time and he gave us a lecture in the Town Hall at which he demonstrated musketry and bayonet drill. On the following Sunday he took us on a route march.

I had no prior notice that the Rising was to commence on Easter Sunday of 1916, but on Easter Saturday afternoon a rumour circulated amongst the members of the company that something in the nature of a Rising was to take place next day. I do not know how this rumour originated, but fuel was added to it when the late D.P. Walsh, who was a member of the Fethard Company and who was leaving by the evening train for Dublin, remarked to some other members of the company that they would hear some sensational news before his return. If D.P. knew

that the Rising was arranged for the next day, I do not know how he came by the information.

On Easter Sunday morning a man by the name of Jack Looby brought me a dispatch from Pierce McCann instructing me to notify the companies to hold themselves in readiness. This instruction I transmitted to the companies in Fethard, Rosegreen, Kiltinan, Waterford and Clonmel. On Easter Monday morning I received a further dispatch from Pierce McCann to instruct the companies to mobilise, and then sometime about midday another dispatch arrived, also from Pierce McCann, countermanding the order to mobilise. Both these dispatches I transmitted by messengers to the various units.

That evening I received a visit from Sergeant Clancy of the R.I.C. in Fethard. Clancy was a decent type of man. He told me that he had information that the Volunteers were mobilising at Rosegreen to march on Fethard to attack the barracks there. He said that if this was true he would like to make arrangements to accommodate his wife and children outside the barracks. I assured him that there was no need for him to worry about it, and he departed a very much relieved man. I cannot recall any further activity in this area during Easter Week of 1916.

Early in May, 1916, P.J. Heneghan of Fethard and D.P. Walsh, who had just returned from Dublin, were arrested by the R.I.C. Both were subsequently interned in Frongoch Internment Camp. On the same day as Heneghan and Walsh were arrested, the County Inspector and District Inspector of the R.I.C., accompanied by

Sergeant Clancy and a constable, called to my premises. The County Inspector proceeded to question me as to my whereabouts and movements on Easter Monday. Before I had an opportunity to reply to him, Sergeant Clancy interrupted and said: "He was here, Sir, for I checked up on him, and his brother-in-law-, William Morrissey, was here also". This was not altogether correct, for at the time that Sergeant Clancy called on me on Easter Monday evening my brother-in-law was gone to

Rosegreen
~~Clancy~~ with the dispatches to which I have already referred. *→ He had delivered the dispatch ordering the mobilisation and on his return I had to send him back with the dispatch containing the countermanding order.*

During the summer of 1917 the work of reorganising the Irish Volunteers and of starting Sinn Féin clubs in every parish commenced. Both went hand in hand. My son, James, and James Keating of Brookhill interested themselves in the reorganisation of the Volunteers in this area. A younger son of mine, William, started to organise Fianna Éireann, and I turned my attention principally to the Sinn Féin side of the movement. From this time until it was closed by the British forces in June, 1921, my premises was used by the Volunteers as the centre for dispatches, and men on the run, such as Seumas Robinson, the late Seán Treacy, etc. often visited us and occasionally stayed with us.

Seamus O'Neill of Clonmel (now a Superintendent in the Garda Síochána), Charles Boylan (a North of Ireland man then employed in Clonmel), and a Mr. Bowen from Dublin came to Fethard to attend the meeting at which the Sinn Féin club was started. I was elected Chairman of the club. Later on when the area was better organised I was a member of the East Tipperary executive of Sinn

Féin. At that time Pierce McCann was President of this Executive. After his death in March, 1919, I succeeded him as President of the Executive.

On the 25th October, 1917, I attended the annual convention of Sinn Féin which was held in the Mansion House, Dublin. I was accompanied by Walter Cantwell, who was the other delegate from this area. At this convention Eamon de Valera was elected President of Sinn Féin. Arthur Griffith was also a candidate for the presidency and Cantwell and I were discussing between ourselves which man we would vote for, when Arthur Griffith addressed the delegates and said he was withdrawing his nomination in favour of de Valera, whom he described as a soldier and a statesman. Thus de Valera was unanimously elected.

During the conscription crisis in the spring and summer of 1918 a special committee, composed of representatives of all creeds and parties, was formed in Fethard to assist in opposing the conscription act. Similar committees were in existence elsewhere. There was great earnestness amongst the people. Anti-conscription meetings were held and the anti-conscription pledge was signed outside the church gates on a particular Sunday morning by all men of military age. In this area the Catholic clergy of the parish were the principal members of the anti-conscription committee.

In the general election which was held towards the end of 1918, Pierce McCann, whom I have already referred to, was nominated as Sinn Féin candidate for the East Tipperary constituency. He easily defeated Thomas Condon, the outgoing Irish Parliamentary member,

in the contest. On his (Pierce McCann's) behalf I addressed public meetings at Ballingarry, at The Commons and at Killenaule. My speech at Ballingarry was my first attempt at addressing a public meeting. On polling day I acted as agent for him at the polling booth in Fethard and after the close of the poll I escorted the ballot boxes to Clonmel where the count took place. A few months later, in March, 1919, Pierce McCann died whilst a prisoner in an English prison. No by-election took place and the seat remained vacant until the general election of 1921 when Seumas Robinson, then O/C 3rd Tipperary Brigade, was returned unopposed for the constituency.

In the local elections of 1919 I was elected to the Tipperary (South Riding) County Council as the representative of the Fethard electoral area. We had the unique distinction of having no opposition in the County Council as all the members were elected on the Sinn Féin ticket. Despite the activities of the British forces at the time, all the meetings of the County Council were held in the Courthouse, Clonmel. One of the first acts of the newly elected County Council was to pass a resolution repudiating the authority of the British Local Government Board and recognising instead the Department of Local Government which had then been set up by the 1st Dáil. This created a lot of difficulties for the officers and staff of the County Council, and I take this opportunity of paying a tribute to their loyalty and devotion to duty then and in the difficult years that followed. The council also insisted that in all cases where a person was killed or murdered by the British Crown Forces, the Coroner should attend to hold

an inquest whether he was permitted or not to do so by the British military authorities. Representatives of the press attended the County Council meetings and the discussions were reported in the local newspapers. A rate was struck and collected, and, generally speaking, the affairs of the council were administered in a normal way.

Towards the end of the year 1919 or early 1920 I had a visit from Mr. Robert Brennan, late Irish Minister in Washington. His visit was in connection with the collection in this district of subscriptions to the Dáil Éireann Loan. I agreed to act as collector for Fethard and district. A substantial sum of money was collected, which I sent to Mr. Brennan at an address in Dublin which he left with me. In due course I received the receipts or certificates, which I distributed to the subscribers. Many of the subscribers subsequently destroyed the receipts so as to prevent them falling into the hands of raiding parties of British forces.

When the Sinn Féin Courts functioned in the latter half of 1920 and the year 1921, I acted as presiding magistrate in the local Sinn Féin Court in Fethard which was held at irregular intervals in the Town Hall. There were never many cases to be dealt with, none of particular note, but I do recall one particular case, a trespass case in which two farmers, one of whom was a staunch supporter of ours, were the litigants and in which I had to give a decision against our own supporter and in favour of the other man.

There were a number of raids on my house. On

one occasion military called to take me with them in a lorry as a hostage. I chanced to be absent when they called. Another time I was brought to the military barracks for questioning. The officer who asked the questions told me that they knew I was a Captain in the Volunteers. This, of course, was wrong for I had held no rank since the days of the Irish National Volunteers away back in 1913 and 1914. He then accused me of having received German money at some stage or another. Otherwise, he said, I could not have found the money to educate my family. Needless to remark, I stoutly denied this. After some more questions I was permitted to return to my home.

At this time my eldest son, Augustine, was a student in Louvain University, Belgium, where he was studying for the priesthood in the Diocese of Los Angeles, then under the jurisdiction of a Tipperary man, Most Reverend Dr. Cantwell. Augustine managed to secure some parabellum revolvers and ammunition in Belgium, which he sent to me. His method was to cut the centre out of a large book, dismantle the guns and place the parts and the ammunition in the cavity in the book, then parcel it up and post it to me. In this way I obtained at least 10 or 12 parabellums for the South Tipperary Brigade. He generally sent one or two at a time. On one occasion the parcel burst in Fethard Post Office and the ammunition fell on to the floor. The Post Office official sent for me and allowed me to take the broken parcel and the ammunition.

This action of Augustine's in sending home the parabellums had a sequel. Either some of my enemies in Fethard or his fellow students in Louvain found out what

he was doing. At any rate, it reached the ears of Dr. Cantwell, and when Augustine next came home on a holiday he received a letter from Dr. Cantwell instructing him not to return to Louvain but to report to the college in Thurles. He did not complete his studies for the priesthood. He is now a Counsellor in New York.

Speaking about arms reminds me of an occasion when D.P. Walsh, then Assistant Quartermaster General of the I.R.A., forwarded from Dublin by rail a crate containing arms and ammunition for the brigade. The crate was labelled "Stationery" and was addressed to O'Shea's stationery shop, which is next door to me. I received a communication advising me that the crate was on its way and instructing me to have it collected at Fethard railway station and to have it brought to Whelan's of Clampscastle, from where the Brigade Staff would arrange to have it collected. By the time this communication reached me the railway carter had already delivered the crate to O'Shea's. I got one of the Whelans to come along with an ass and cart. While we were getting the crate out of O'Shea's two R.I.C. men passed along the street going in the direction of the barracks. Before we had finished loading the crate a party of ten or twelve R.I.C. men and Black and Tans came into the street. For the moment we thought all was up, but we continued with the job and the R.I.C. and Black and Tans passed on. We put the crate lying flat in the bottom of the cart, the Whelan boy covered it over with farmyard manure and eventually it reached its destination without further incident.

One morning about three weeks before the Truce in 1921 a messenger came to my premises from the military

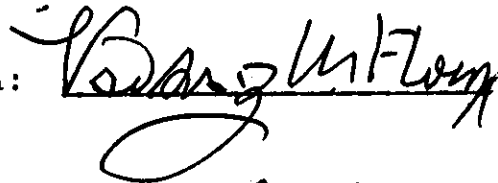
barracks in Fethard and told me that Major King, the officer commanding the British forces in Fethard at the time, wished to see me in the barracks immediately. King was a reasonable, fair-minded man who, I knew, was always anxious to have as little trouble as possible. He received me alone and told me that three of their chaps, as he put it, had been found shot at Woodruffe that morning. This was not news to me as I had heard earlier that morning that three British officers found spying in the Rosegreen district had been executed the night before. King told me that a party of military had gone out to bring in the bodies. He expected them back within the hour, and he said that when they came back he feared reprisals would be carried out and that he might not be able to control the forces under his command. He stated that he could no longer be responsible for my safety or that of my premises and he advised me to get out of the town at once. I took his advice. I went to Clonmel and attended a meeting of the County Council there that day, after which I went by train to Dublin and stayed in the Clarence Hotel.

Next day a party of military arrived at my premises and proceeded to close them up. A good friend named Thomas Sayers procured a horse and cart from the creamery and before the military finally sealed up the premises he managed to bring all my furniture and belongings to the Augustinian Priory in Fethard, where the good Fathers stored them safely for me. At this time my eldest son, James, was on the run and my next boy was also away from home. My wife had to take our other

six children and my father, then a very old man, to her sister's place in Tullamaine. Leaving my father and the children under her sister's care, she joined me in Dublin.

We remained in Dublin until a short time after the Truce was signed, and then returned to Fethard to resume our normal life and business again.

Signed:



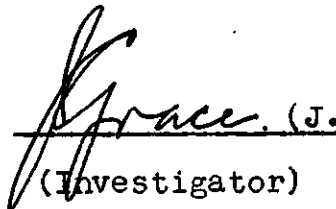
Date:



(Padraig Ua Eoinn)

2nd August 1955

Witness:



(J. Grace)
(Investigator)

