

W.S. 1,277  
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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
DURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,277

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,277

*Original Returned to witness at his request  
on 2/10/61 - see correspondence herewith.  
Original replaced by Duplicate herein.*

Very Rev. Michael, Canon Murphy, P.P.,  
Cloughbawn,  
Clonroche,  
Co. Wexford.  
Identity.

Parish Priest

Cloughbawn, Clonroche, Co. Wexford, 1955.

Subject.

National activities,  
New Ross, Co. Wexford, 1904-1921.

Conditions, if any. Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S, 2581

Form B S M 2

# DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1277

N S 1,277

STATEMENT BY VERY REV. MICHAEL CANON MURPHY, P.P.,

Cloughbawn, Clonroche, Co. Wexford.

I have been asked by a number of people to write what I know about the Rising in Easter Week, 1916, and the part I took in the events that led up to it, in the hope that, as far as possible, every item of information concerning that great event may be preserved for the future historian.

I will begin with a resumé of my own life.

I was born in Quay Street, New Ross, on June 9th, 1877. My parents were Michael Murphy and Anastatia Murphy (née Murphy). I was their third child - Maurice, born 1875; Mary (afterwards Mrs. Michael O'Byrne) in 1873; my younger brother, Ned, born 1880. In passing, I might mention my father's mother was born in Priory Street, New Ross, on the day of the Battle of Ross, 1798. Her people were Molloy's and came from somewhere under Slievekeilha.

I went to school to the Sisters of Mercy when very young - about three. Then to the Christian Brothers - then to the Augustinian College, and from there to St. Peter's College, Wexford, in 1895.

In 1898 (September) I was sent to Maynooth with John Murphy, John Hogan, Simon Cullen, Michael Murphy (from Ross also) and James Redmond. John Murphy and I took 2nd Philosophy; John Hogan - the best man of the lot - got 1st Philosophy; Simon Cullen wasn't allowed to enter.

In 1903 when we had finished our class work and were about to begin revision for ordination exams., James Wall of Limerick diocese and I were called out by Dr. Foley of Kildare and Loughlin and ordained in Carlow College - Pentecost Sunday, May 31st, 1903. I was appointed to the parish of Rathvilly, Co. Carlow, where I had Fr. John Delaney - afterwards Monsignor - as my P.P. We lived together. Father Wall was appointed to Baltinglass.

Father, or Canon, Corish, P.P., Ballymore, died suddenly, and I was called home and appointed Chaplain to the Good Shepherd Convent, New Ross, where I took up duty on September 3rd, 1904. Later in that year, there was a meeting called to appoint a Committee to prepare for the County Féis which was to be held in New Ross on Whit Sunday and Monday, 1905. I attended, and it was suggested to hold an Exhibition of Irish Goods in connection with the Féis - the Féis Committee to be responsible and to take the profits, if any, or sustain the losses if it were a failure. I was appointed Honorary Secretary of this Exhibition - the first to be held in connection with the County Féis. Fr. Coakley, O.S.A., Dungarvan, had held such an exhibition in Dungarvan that summer, and Mr. Kirkham, Manager of the New Ross Gas Company, and I were appointed to visit Fr. Coakley and get all the information about it - we did, and he was a great help to us. We canvassed every Irish manufacturer we could hear of, and they supported us splendidly - sent splendid exhibits. We held the Exhibition in the old Show Grounds, Priory Place. It was a wonderful success and gave a great stimulus to sale of Irish goods. I would like to pay a special tribute to Mr. Kirkham. He was a Protestant,

and I would never ask for a better partner in such work.

I cannot remember when exactly I joined the Sinn Féin movement. I remained Chaplain until March, 1907, when I was transferred to Ferns. It was sometime during these dates and, I venture to say, early. I wasn't long in Ferns until the boys asked me to form a Branch of the Gaelic League and have an Irish Class. I asked Canon John Doyle's permission. He gave it on a Sunday. I asked him to preside at the opening meeting. He said he would not like to go as far as that, but could I not get one of the Bolger's (John or Thady). I arranged for a meeting for the following Sunday. Previous to that meeting, I went to Ross, had posters printed to summon the meeting, sent them to Ferns to have put up, and returned myself on Thursday evening by mail train at 5., just in time to go to the confessional for Confessions for the First Friday next day. On the way up, I noticed no posters. After the first rush of Confessions, I went into my room. Canon Doyle came in after me and said, "I have been thinking over the Gaelic League since, and I have come to the conclusion you should not start it". I said, "You gave your permission last Sunday. I got posters printed, calling the meeting, and now your refusal will put me in an awkward position". "Don't mind the posters", he said. He had got them taken down during the week. I had to obey, and the meeting was abandoned.

I don't want to make a charge against anyone without proof, but I could make a good guess who influenced the Canon to prevent the Gaelic League from being started. Time passed, and the young men were after me to make a

start, and we did in the end (I cannot remember the date) without asking the Canon's permission. Our teacher was the district organiser and teacher, Mr. Kiely, a native speaker from Ring. Here again, our enemies showed their teeth. They picked a quarrel with Mr. Kiely and one of their roughs struck him. I should mention that Mrs. Kehoe, N.T., was a tower of strength to the class. We had a dramatic class and produced Anglo-Irish plays; the receipts helped to pay our way.

When the classes for boys were well under way, the girls decided they should get a chance of learning the language, and I was as anxious as they, and I arranged a class for them, to take place on a Friday evening and be finished to allow them to go to their homes in daylight, so that - as I thought - no one could object. But, I reckoned without my friends or enemies. On that Friday morning, I had a letter from the Bishop, Dr. Browne, telling me if I did not obey my P.P., he would have to suspend me. That shook me a bit - and the class too. Dean Kavanagh, P.P., New Ross, was the Bishop's right-hand man. I always looked on him as a friend of mine also. I brought the letter to him. He told me to go and see the Bishop. I did. I told him I came about the letter. To my surprise, he told me to sit down, and started off as follows: "When I was a younger Bishop than I am now, a P.P. reported his C.C. to me. The C.C. came to me as you have done to-day, and I was foolish enough to tell him to beard the lion in his den. The rascal went and told the P.P., and I was going to be killed". The meaning I put on his words was: "Go thou and do likewise". The girls' class did not get going.

All this time, the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin,

although distinct organisations, were being run by the same people. Sinn Féin, like the Gaelic League, had the language a principal plank in its platform, and by this time - about 1910 - I was Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of both in the County.

Our first trial of strength was with the National Bank, to be allowed to use Irish on our cheques. At our meetings, private and public, we harped on the point. This got into the press, and a great many people got panicky, afraid we would close the bank. At the time, the National Bank was the bank in Co. Wexford and doing nearly all the business of the County, especially for the clergy and convents. The Reverend Mothers got especially nervy and went to the Bishop, and he spoke of it at the Conferences and advised moderation. The upshot was the Bank thought they should move, and a conference was arranged between Sir Thomas Esmonde - as Director of the Bank - and representatives of the Gaelic League in the County - Father Pat Murphy, M.S.S., House of Missions, Enniscorthy, and Paddy Kehoe, Riversdale were to meet in the Council Chamber of the Enniscorthy District Council, with the members of the Council present. At the last moment, Fr. Pat Murphy said he could not go - I don't know why, probably prevented by his Superior - and, without a moment to prepare myself, I had to take his place along with Paddy Kehoe, and do the best I could under the circumstances. Thady Bolger was Chairman of the Board and presided and made a long speech, full of Faith and Fatherland. Sir Thomas, who was well prepared, tried to answer our charges. Result - nothing, beyond arousing the people to the fact that they had a language of their own and that some young people were determined to revive

it. Another result followed - those of us in the language movement, who had bank accounts, approached the Munster & Leinster Bank and asked if they would accept our cheques in Irish - or, rather, accept our cheques if we signed them with our Irish signatures. They would, and a number of us transferred our accounts from the National to the Munster & Leinster Bank - and I, for one, have never taken it from the Munster & Leinster since. I think I am right in saying the Munster & Leinster Bank owes its existence and success in County Wexford to that action of us Gaelic Leaguers.

Our next trial of strength was the getting of rifles. Volunteer corps had been formed all over the country and were practising drilling, and were told from Headquarters to collect and buy rifles. We had a fine corps in Ferns. We collected and held a meeting for the purpose of deciding about buying rifles. The same people that always opposed us, the Bolger's - John and Thady - supported by their sons, and Paddy Lett, who afterwards married John Bolger's daughter, Margaret Mary, came in strength to the Committee meeting, although neither their sons nor Lett had any right to be present because they were not appointed to the Committee, and did their best to prevent us from getting rifles, but we defeated them and bought a dozen or so serviceable rifles and revolvers, and some .303 ammunition for the rifles. We paraded with them, we had rifle practice and some of our men were good marksmen.

That brings me to 1916.

Some months before Easter Week, word came from Headquarters that the rifles were wanted in Dublin.

They weren't much use to us in Ferns - we had no ammunition for them - and Headquarters were to give us shotguns to use for parade and practice. Some of the lads came to me to know would I give them my car to bring the rifles to Dublin and bring back the shotguns. I said, "Yes". They then wrote to Headquarters, telling them my car was bringing up the rifles on such a Sunday. At that particular time, every letter going to such people was opened and its contents noted. Of course, Headquarters did not answer, and our fools - I can call them nothing else - wrote again, abusing and confirming the going up on that Sunday. To show the English knew all about it - there was an R.I.C. man at my yard gate that morning when the rifles were being loaded in my car; when the car left, the Sergeant (Torney) motor biked to Wexford or Enniscorthy and phoned up to Dublin that it was gone, and gave the number and boys' names that went with it. Result: there was a policeman from every barrack on the way up, where it passed, checking it off. It reached its destination. They delivered the rifles and got shotguns instead to bring back.

Now, the strange thing about the whole affair is - why did not the policeman at my gate that morning stop it and seize the rifles, or, stranger still, why was the car allowed to deliver the rifles to the Headquarters of the Volunteers and, only when it was returning with useless shotguns, hold it up and arrest it? I am not able to answer.

I have heard since, on good authority, that my car was told to go to St. Enda's with the guns but went instead to O'Hanrahan's place in the North Circular Road, and delivered the genuine rifles there, got the old



shotguns and started for home - and that it was by the merest accident that, when passing through College Green on the way home, a detective saw the Wexford letters and number on it, stopped it and arrested it.

The whole affair appeared next morning in the daily papers. I can never forget Fr. (now Canon) Pierce Power, then C.C. in Castledockrill. He brought Edmond Kehoe, a layman, who lived in Kilbride, above Kildavan, above Bunclody, who had a motor car, to me and said we should go and see the Bishop - Browne. We did, and he treated me very decently. When I told him my car was seized, carrying guns, he said, "Did you know it was carrying guns? I said I did. "Well, then", he said, "All you can do is go to gaol and do something for your country like your namesake of '98". When in Wexford, we saw Michael O'Connor, solicitor, who gave us a letter to his brother - James - who was Solicitor General, or some big position under the English government in Dublin. The three of us motored to Dublin next day and went first to see this James O'Connor. He was on a case in the Four Courts and, at the break for luncheon, he came to Fr. Power and me, and, catching us each by an arm, said, "I have no time now - I am going to luncheon and then back to this case - but I may tell you, Father Murphy, you won't be arrested and you will get your car". We then went to another James O'Connor, solicitor, to have the two boys defended, and got the magistrate who was to try them approached - I think his name was McInerney, or some such name - and whom I heard had been an old Fenian himself. He gave them the lowest sentence he could - three (3) months. Now, I must put on record the shrewdness of Fr. Power. He never took any part in

such things but, when he heard the solicitor, James O'Connor, who defended the boys, talk - and he did talk mighty big; one would think he was the principal man in the whole movement - he said to me, "There is going to be some trouble in this country". Now, as closely as I was connected with the movement and the men that made it, it never occurred to me there was going to be an Easter Week Rising.

On Thursday of that week, Fr. Power said to me, "Go over to James O'Connor - Solicitor General - and get your car, and we shall go home." I did. I was ushered into his study, and he was a different man to me from what he was on Tuesday. "I am sorry, Fr. Murphy", he said, "I cannot hold out to you as much hope as I did on Tuesday. I cannot now promise you you won't be arrested or that you will get your car. The Government have been considering the case and they take a very serious view of it. All this "gasconading" with arms that has been going on must be put down. Now, I am not giving you this officially but, if you would take a friend's advice and apologise for your part, you won't be interfered with and you will get your car."

One thing I never intended doing - shirking the responsibilities of my conduct. I knew I took a risk. I was prepared to take the responsibility of my action. I wasn't going to show the White Flag to him. I was prepared to take what might come. I said to him, "Wouldn't it be strange on my part to apologise before any charge is made against me?". "That's all I can say", he said - and we parted.

When I came home, I went to my Bishop again and

told him of my interview with the Solicitor General. His answer gave me such courage that I didn't care what happened me after. Here are his words: "Isn't Nathan a Jew?" (Nathan was Under-Secretary in Government). "Yes." "Don't attempt to apologise! He would have your apology in every paper and placard in the world. If they arrest you, you will be only doing something for your country like your namesake of '98." That was the second time he had said these words to me, and they gave me great encouragement. Naturally, I thought I would never see my car again.

Then the Rising took place on Easter Monday, 1916, and was squelched in blood - the leaders executed, and thousands of men and women all over the country, who had been even suspected of sympathy with it, arrested and thrown into prison.

All this time, Colonel French, who was in charge of the English soldiers in Wexford, was constantly up to the Bishop about the rebel priests he had in his diocese - Father Pat Walsh, C.C. Rathangan, and me especially. He called on the Bishop to punish us in some way. He even wrote in his report there were only four (4) such priests in the diocese. I could assure him I could name at least a dozen such priests in the diocese, not one of them one whit less rebel than we.

He evidently influenced the Bishop to change us, and I got the following letter from the Bishop, dated May 10th, 1916:-

Dear Father Murphy,

I have been commanded by Sir John Maxwell, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's forces in Ireland, to remove you out of Ferns to a place "where he will have no intercourse with the people". "If he had been a layman, he would have already been placed under arrest."

I suppose I cannot put you in a place where you will have no intercourse with the people, unless I suspend you. I, therefore, change you to Taghmon where you will take up duty on Sunday, May 21st. Should you resume the practices you have of late been engaged in, I fear I shall have to suspend you. Let your motto in future be - *attende tibi et doctrinae*, and keep out of politics.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES BROWNE.

At the same time, he wrote to Canon Doyle of Ferns:

Dear Canon Doyle,

The Rev. Michael Murphy, C.C., Ferns, has given such a shake to the British Government that the authorities consider his continued sojourn in Ferns would ruin that institution. To prevent disaster, I have removed him to Taghmon, and am sending you the Rev. Richard Gaul, C.C., Anacurra, who is a staunch

loyalist, as he was educated in a Good Seminary and escaped the rebel atmosphere of Maynooth.

I would like to state that, in fairness to my Bishop at this time - Dr. Browne - the letter he wrote me, changing me to Taghmon, and the one to my P.P., Canon Doyle, Ferns, should not be taken too seriously - they were pure sarcasm. He was an old man, Colonel French had him stuffed with lies, and he was afraid Fr. Pat Walsh would arrive in Wexford at the head of five hundred Cleriestown men, fully armed and there would be bloodshed.

When I was a student in St. Peter's College in Wexford from 1895 to 1898, a very large number of priests died in this diocese, and Dr. Browne was afraid he would not have enough for the different parishes. He started a Philosophy Class in St. Peter's College but, after one year, I and three others were sent to Maynooth. I should mention that Canon Doyle (afterwards my P.P. in Ferns) was the one member of the chapter that objected to having students taught Philosophy or Theology in St. Peter's College.

The Bishop never forgot that and when, - after years, he got the opportunity, he hit back on Canon Doyle by drawing a comparison between St. Peter's College, where Fr. Gaul, who succeeded me in Ferns, completed his ecclesiastical studies, and Maynooth where I did.

As a matter of fact, Fr. Gaul was, I believe, a Sinn Féiner at the time. And although Colonel French stated in his report that there were only four Sinn Féin

priests in this diocese, I could state there were at least twelve.

Fr. Gaul never left Wexford College. I was sent to Maynooth. The priests of the diocese will understand the reference and the comparison drawn between the Good Seminary (St. Peter's) and Rebel Maynooth.

In 1918 the general election took place at which the Sinn Féin party completely routed the old Parliamentary party. Dr. James Ryan, Tomcool, defeated Peter French. Then the real trial of strength began between England and the Irish people. I supported Dr. Ryan with all my strength. Canon Fortune, P.P., Taghmon, supported Mr. French, and could never tolerate me afterwards. Things got very hot all over the country and the county. The Black and Tans were let loose on the people and they did every kind of devilment that humans could do. We had a number of them in Taghmon, but there was a Sergeant Kelly of the R.I.C. there who kept them in check by keeping them in barracks at night, and so there was no dirty work in or near Taghmon. In fact, there was never a shot fired to do any harm while I was there, and yet Canon Fortune reported me to the Bishop - Dr. Codd - in 1922 and got me removed from Taghmon. I was sent to Kilaveney parish in Co. Wicklow. When I asked the Canon what he was reporting me for, he said, "Your political views".

You have full liberty to publish all, or any, or none of this document. I'll be satisfied, whatever you decide.

I am enclosing Dr. Browne's letter of May 10th, 1916, transferring me to Taghmon. Canon Doyle would not

give me his letter to him, telling him he was changing me, so I had to take it down hurriedly in pencil from Fr. Matt Keating, M.S.S., who was giving a mission in Ferns at the time and who heard Canon Doyle read it.

I had quite forgotten - until I was revising my own story - that someone must have been with me, or enquiring from me before on this matter. I had quite forgotten all about it until I came across the following questions which I had written in a copy-book at some time:-

1. When, and in what circumstances, did you first hear of the intended Rising (1916)?
2. If at a meeting, who convened it?
3. Where did it take place?
4. Who were present?
5. Who gave the information, and in what capacity?
6. Did he show you, or read from, a document?
7. If so, can you say if a copy can be obtained?
8. If not, can you reconstruct its text from memory or otherwise?

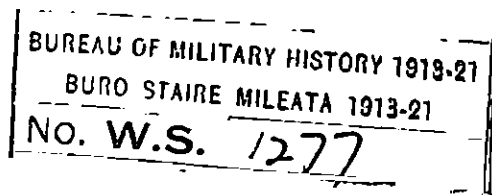
I would answer the eight questions there with this one answer: I never even suspected a Rising until it actually took place.

That may seem strange for one like me who knew so many of the participants so intimately. It is as true as it is strange. They kept their secret perfectly - and rightly so.

I would like to have in my possession somekind of a copy of my story, please.

SIGNED: Michael Canon Murphv. P.P.

DATE: . October 19th, 1955.



WITNESS: Sean Brennan, Lieut.-Col.