

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREO STAIRE MILE1TA 1913-21
No. W.S. 299.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 299.

Witness

Mr. Patrick Ronan,
Ferns,
Co. Wexford.
Identity

Member of I.R.B. Ferns 1912 -
2nd Lieut. Ferns Coy. Irish Volunteers;
Acting Commander Ferns Company Easter Week 1916.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1912-1916;
- (b) Preparations for Easter Week Rising -
Ferns, Co. Wexford;
- (c) Imprisonment and release.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No .. S.1347....

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK RONAN, FERNS, CO. WEXFORD.

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I was interested in the Irish Language from my earliest schooldays and I joined the Gaelic League in 1910. Some of my ancestors were in the '98 Rebellion. In 1912 I joined the Ferns Circle of the I.R.B. Thomas Roche was the Centre in Ferns at the time. It was Myles Breen who initiated me into the I.R.B. Other members of the Circle that I remember were Joe Brien, Martin Dunbar John Sunderland, Thomas Whelan. Micheal Gettings, Jem Douglas, Patrick Boland and Matthew Murphy. On joining, we took the oath of the I.R.B. We paid a subscription, I think it was one shilling per month towards expenses and the purchase of arms. The only training of a military nature we did was rifle practice with a .22 rifle. We also had a Mauser Service rifle and some ammunition. In 1910, on the occasion of King Edward's visit, we posted up literature of an anti-British nature extensively throughout the area.

On the start of the Volunteer Force in Ferns all the members of the I.R.B. joined the Volunteers. We had instructions from I.R.B. H.Qrs. to do so and get control of the organisation. We took no oath on joining the Volunteers; each man just made a declaration. We had a strength now of about 50. Brennan-Whitmore was our instructor. Whitmore was appointed Coy. Commander. Patrick Doyle was appointed 1st Lieut. and I was appointed 2nd Lt. In the Volunteers we paid a small subscription, about 3d per week, towards the purchase of arms, equipment, uniforms and so forth. When we had received some training in drill and arms drill we had some tactical exercises with other Volunteer Coys. in outside areas. Our strength had increased to about 80 or more by now.

We got some Service rifles and shotguns. The rifles were purchased in Lawlor's of Fownes St. Dublin, and were paid for out of our funds. When the split in the Volunteers took place, Whitmore, who was not a member of the I.R.B., took the side of the Irish Volunteers. The other officers also remained loyal to the Irish Volunteers. Only a dozen men went to the Redmond Volunteers.

leaving our company about 60 strong.

A Battalion was now formed to include Enniscorthy and Ferns. We were known as the Ferns Coy. Our officers remained the same. Seamus Rafter was appointed O/C. the Battalion; Seamus Doyle was appointed Adjutant of the Battn. and I think Bob Brennan was Q.M. The usual training was continued with ^{Whitmore} Brennan as instructor. We did not lose any arms we had when the split took place. We had one big field exercise up towards Carnew. Our strength continued pretty effective until Easter 1916.

Early in 1916 Pearse held a review of the Wexford Volunteers on Vinegar Hill. Some time towards the end of 1915, I think it was, Paul Galligan took up an appointment in Bolger's of Enniscorthy and he was made Vice-Commandant of the Battn. On the 9th April 1916, Patrick Doyle and Joseph Kenny proceeded to Dublin to collect rifles from O'Hanrahan. They got 14 rifles and some revolvers, but were held up by the R.I.C. in Dublin and the arms were seized and Doyle and Kenny were arrested. They were in Mountjoy Jail for the Rising.

I never knew that there was going to be a Rebellion, but I had made my calculations that there would be. In Holy Week we received orders to parade on Easter Sunday carrying all arms, ammunition and equipment and two days' rations. We were to assemble and await orders. We paraded in Easter Sunday at 3 p.m. A messenger arrived from Battn. H.Qrs. in Enniscorthy to say we were to dismiss and await further orders. We disbanded and returned home. On Monday evening we learned that the Rising had started in Dublin. We had no orders what to do. There was great excitement, but we were in the air regarding instructions or plans. Early on Tuesday morning we received a message to proceed to Enniscorthy. We had about 20 men at the time; this was the number who had stayed on at Ferns all night. On the way into Enniscorthy we got a further message to say that we were not to go to Enniscorthy. We decided not to go back and we stated that day in a wood near Enniscorthy.

That night we were told by Batt'n. Hqrs. to return home and we came back to Ferns and went to our homes very disappointed men... I was O/C. the Company now, as Whitmore had gone to Dublin previous to Easter Week and had not returned. Doyle was in Mountjoy Jail. We arranged to mobilise again on Wednesday night. At about 10 a.m. on Wednesday morning I received a message to mobilise and proceed to Enniscorthy. This was again cancelled and renewed several times. We finally got a message some time early on Thursday morning to proceed to Enniscorthy. I decided we would not go until we were certain. During the day we ascertained that they had started in Enniscorthy. That night, with about twenty men, I marched into Enniscorthy. This number was increased to about fifty later. We reported to the Hqrs. which had been established in the Athenaeum. Bob Brennan, Sean Etchingham, Seamus Rafter, Paul Galligan, Dick King, Seamus Doyle, Pat Keegan were there. Rafter was in charge here. We were billeted here and provided with food and sleeping accommodation. I was given the task of commandeering all the bicycles in the shops in the town. We collected a large number of bicycles for which we issued a receipt to the owners. This was on Friday.

The town was taken over completely. All roads into the town were blocked with trees. All motor cycles and motor cars were also commandeered. All public houses were closed and guards were placed on the banks. The R.I.C. were confined to their barracks. One policeman came out of the barracks and was fired on. All roads were guarded as well as blocked and sentries and patrols kept on them. The people of the town and surrounding districts were generally sympathetic towards us. Recruits came in so fast that they constituted a problem to arm, equip and feed as well as billet.

On Saturday morning, with John Murphy of Enniscorthy, we took over the town of Ferns - my home place. This party was about 150 approximately, and was to act as a buffer outpost of Enniscorthy, as it was expected that the British troops would advance on Enniscorthy through Ferns. We made the R.I.C. Bks. which had been

evacuated, our Hqrs. We also took over the local Post Office. We took up the railway line and felled trees on all roads leading into Ferns, keeping the one to Enniscorthy open. The area towards Arklow was particularly barricaded and numerous trenches were dug. There were plenty of volunteers from civilian sources to do this. We commandeered tools and supplies locally , a receipt being given in each case. No one was allowed out of the area without a pass. All telephone communication with outside areas was destroyed.

Things went on normally on Saturday and on Saturday night. On Sunday morning all the men were allowed to go to Mass. In the afternoon a motor car carrying a white flag and containing Father Owen Keogh of Camolin and Constable O'Brien of the R.I.C. who had been stationed locally came into the town. The car was escorted by men from one of our outposts on the Arklow Road. They were brought to Hqrs. in the Bks. and they were interviewed there by Murphy and Paul Galligan. I was also present during this interview. They stated that Pearse had surrendered in Dublin and that he had ordered all Volunteers to surrender also. We sent them on to Enniscorthy.

That night we got orders to evacuate Ferns and go back to Enniscorthy. We packed up, leaving everything in as good an order at least as we had found it and proceeded to Enniscorthy. I was in the last car to leave. Paul Galligan was on the one in front of me. At Strahart, Galligan's car went over the fence at a bad bend on the road and one of the two Cumann na mBan girls who were in the car and the driver were injured. The girl was badly injured. We went to Bunclody for a doctor and got him to come out and attend to the injured. Galligan now told us to go home and to hide our arms. We arrived home on Monday morning.

On Tuesday we were arrested by the R.I.C. who had come back to the town and conveyed by car to Gorey R.I.C. Bks. That night we were brought to Arklow and handed over to the Military there. There were 36 of us prisoners by now. The following day we were put on His . Majesty's armed trawler "Urania" and brought to the

North Wall, Dublin. From there we were conveyed to Richmond Bks. We arrived at the North Wall some time during the night. A British officer came on board and gave us some loaves of bread and some buckets of water. In Richmond Bks. we were put into a barrack room. This was crowded with prisoners. There were no beds and no sanitation, only an old zinc bath. There was hardly room to lie down; the cold was intense and the only method of keeping warm was to keep walking around and around the room. We were issued with a 12 oz. tin of bully beef and three hard biscuits for a few days' rations. After a few days we were moved down to the North Wall and put on a cattle boat. About 200 of us were paraded on the square and the detectives picked out Sean McDermott and some other leaders. The people of Dublin showed great hostility to us when being brought from Richmond Bks. to the North Wall.

The cattle boat was crowded with prisoners and was in a filthy condition. We were taken to Holyhead and from there to Wandsworth Prison. Here we were put in cells in solitary confinement. We were issued with bedding but no mattress until later. We had exercise for only half an hour per day. No intercourse between prisoners was allowed. No letters were allowed to be either sent or received. Food was the ordinary prison fare and was very inadequate. We were very hungry.

Alfred Byrne, who was then an M.P., came in one day bringing some food which was very welcome. After some time we were allowed to converse during exercise which was extended. Food parcels were also allowed in to us. About the end of May we were shifted to Frongoch Camp in Wales. Frongoch was much better and conditions there improved as the camp enlarged. Here we had complete freedom inside the wire. We were allowed to receive parcels and letters. We had our own canteen where extras could be purchased. I was in the South Camp which was an old distillery. There were plenty of facilities for recreation, there being plenty of organised games. There were also language and educational classes.

On the 23rd December I was released and arrived home on Xmas Eve. We travelled via Holyhead to Dunlaoghaire. There was already a marked change in the people now and we were given a good reception in Dublin on our arrival there. We were well received in Ferns also. The R.I.C. did not interfere with us in any way.

Signed: Patrick Ronan
Date: 14 - 10 - 49

Witness: Matthew Barry

The following were the members of the Ferns Central S.R.B prior to Easter Week 1916

Thomas Roche. Matthew Murphy. John Moynahan.
 John Murphy. Patrick Ronan. Edward Ronan.
 Myles Breen. Joseph Breen. Jack Conroy.
 Bob. Kinsella. John Kelly. John Sennott.
 George Butler. Pat Doyle. James Doyle. Martin
 Dunbar. Pat Dunbar. John Roche. John
 Kavanagh. Michael Barnes. Thomas Barnes.
 Barney Maguire. Thomas Whelan. Patrick Kenny
 Mat Kent. Pat Hench. James Roche. Michael
 Gethins. Joseph Killeen. James Brown.

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