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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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No. W.S. 1216

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,216

Witness

Very Rev. Canon Patrick Murphy, P.P.,
"St. Laurence",
Glynn,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Member of the House of Missions,
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, 1900-1935.

Subject.

The Easter Week Ribing, ¹⁹¹⁶ Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2488'

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY THE VERY REV. PATRICK CANON MURPHY,
"St. Laurence", Glynn, Co. Wexford.

An Account of the 1916 Rising in Enniscorthy.

I was born at Whitehill, Kilmore, County Wexford, on 25th January, 1877. I studied for the Priesthood at Rome and Clonliffe College, Dublin, and was ordained Priest on Trinity Saturday 1900.

I was a Member of the House of Missions, Enniscorthy, from 1900 to 1935. In that year I was appointed Parish Priest, Glynn, where I am now. I had a big share in starting the Gaelic League and the County Feis etc. in the county. I was for some years a member of the Coisde Gnotha, Dublin. I was associated with Sinn Féin, Volunteers and every National Movement.

Easter Sunday, 1916.

Knowing the plan of operations allotted to them, the Enniscorthy Battalion of the Irish Volunteers were at noon on Easter Sunday 'standing at arms' at their headquarters in "Antwerp". Officers and men were greatly disturbed on the arrival of "The Sunday Independent" which contained John McNeill's countermanding of the Rising. As I was standing on the bridge, many of the townspeople passing by and seeing the Volunteers lined up, asked me was there anything doing. In reply I said they were going on a route march. About 2 o'clock on the same afternoon a motor car came along and the occupants seeing me, they got out and handed me John McNeill's Countermanding of the Rising. The lady who brought the Order was Miss Min Ryan now Mrs. Mulcahy. •

Captain Seamus Doble, Captain Rafter, Dr. Dundon, J.J ("Ginger") O'Connell and others were soon on the bridge and it was decided to call a Council of War at once to discuss the situation. We assembled at the residence of Mrs. William Murphy on the Mill-Park Road. There were present the above mentioned and also Miss Ryan and myself. After a long deliberation it was decided to obey McNeill's Orders and to await developments.

On the following day rumours of the Rising in Dublin had reached Enniscorthy, and on receipt of which officers and men, impatient at their inactivity, were anxious to come to the aid of their comrades in Dublin. Yet no mobilisation orders were issued. Commandant Galligan, who was to take command of the field forces of the Battalion, was in Dublin. Finally the Volunteers decided to take action on their own.

On Wednesday afternoon all the officers of the Battalion, with two exceptions, assembled in the Athenaeum and decided to mobilise. Commandant Galligan arrived from Dublin with instructions from James Connolly that the Enniscorthy Volunteers were to take over the Railway so as to prevent reinforcements reaching Dublin through Rosslare. They were, also, to capture all points of advantage at all costs, but not to waste their ammunition on stone buildings such as the R.I.C. Barracks.

Thursday.

The Rising in Enniscorthy began about 2 o'clock on Thursday morning. About 200 Volunteers in full war-kit assembled in the Athenaeum which was taken over and made the headquarters of the staff. The Republican Flag was hoisted over the building there to remain

until the morning of the surrender, when it was taken down and handed to the writer in whose possession it still remains.

A Proclamation signed by Captain Seamus Doyle, Adjutant, was posted on the Market House stating that the town was in the possession of the Volunteers. Early on Thursday morning an order was issued closing all public houses with the result that during the four days of Republican rule not a single person was under the influence of drink. On the same morning the Railway Station was taken over and a train on the way to Arklow was held to be used in case of emergencies. A party of men were sent to loosen the metals on the railway line over the Boro River. They were fired on by the police who captured one man and wounded another. No attempt was made to capture the R.I.C. barracks. A few shots were fired from the Turret rock wounding Constable Grace who was lying in bed close to a window in the line of fire.

The first day's events are described by Captain J.R. Etchingham in his account of the Rising in Enniscorthy written at the headquarters in the Athenaeum:

"We have had at least one day of blissful freedom. We have had Enniscorthy under the laws of the Irish Republic for at least one day and it pleases me to learn that the citizens are appreciably surprised. We closed the public houses. We established a force of Irish Republican police, comprising some of Enniscorthy's most respectable citizens, and a more orderly town could not be imagined. Some may attribute this to the dread of our arms. Yet, strange to state, it is not true. True, we commandeered much needed goods from citizens who were not in the past very friendly to our extreme views. The wonder to me is how quickly a shock changes the minds of people "

" . . . How Enniscorthy mobilised on this morning makes me feel optimistic. We never intended to attack the police barracks or Post Office of Enniscorthy, or elsewhere. The action of Constable Grace in firing the first shot resulted in a desultory fire. It brought about a casualty to a little girl and a wound to himself. We hold all the town and approaches. We have cut the wires, blown up the Boro bridge and so assured that the men of Dublin will not have added to their foes further reinforcements through Rosslare.

April 30th: I did not get time to scrawl anything yesterday but 'permits' to residents of Enniscorthy and visitors to pass through our lines. We ARE working like steam engines, the staff has been 23 of the 24 hands on duty. Bob Brennan presides at the staff headquarters, his desk being the billiard table of the Athenaeum on which is all the commandeered stuff.

The police are in a bad way in this isolated barrack by the Quay. We have some difficulty in keeping the fighting heroes of our little army from capturing the building. We refuse to allow this, though we know the beseiged would welcome even an attack by rotten egg-throwers to give them an excuse for surrendering. Indeed this is confirmed by the result of an interview arranged by us between the beseiged and the members of the Enniscorthy Urban Council.

The District Inspector Hegarty assured the deputation that he regretted he could not accede to their terms to lay down arms and don the ordinary clothes of citizens of the Irish Republic. We will not waste ammunition on this little force which will come out to satisfy the searching demand of the stomach.

The town is very quiet and orderly. We ARE commandeering all we require and we have set up different departments. The people of

the town are great. Our order to close up the public houses shows to what an extent these buildings are in disorder. We all discussing the bright prospect and even our most bitter enemies give to us unstinted praise. The manhood of Enniscorthy is worthy of its manhood. They are working for us like the brave hearts they are. God bless you all brave people of this historic old town.

It is 5.45 a.m. and Captain Dick King and myself get to bed. Dick is great! Of the day's doings I may note occupation of the National Bank and the Institute for strategical reasons. We also occupied Ferns. Bravo Ferns! You hold the remains of Dermot MacMurrough but you boys of today are true as steel".

Rumours of an attack on Enniscorthy. By the end of the week about 2,000 English troops from the Curragh and elsewhere had assembled in Wexford town. They were under the command of Colonel French, a Wexford man, who happened to be on furlough at the time. In addition to the regular forces, many of the Redmond Volunteers and sworn-in Specials offered their services.

Rumours of an attack on Enniscorthy reached town. Fearful of loss of life and destruction of property a number of leading citizens formed themselves into a Peace Committee. Rev. R. Fitzhenry, Administrator, and Rev. John Rossiter visited the Republican Headquarters. What transpired is thus recorded by Captain Etchingham :-

"We discuss things and ultimately agree to recognise an armistice. We discuss terms of peace conditionally on the English Military Authorities issuing a proclamation in the four towns of Wexford of this action and that we will not compromise in one comma our principles. We are not averse if an almost bloodless blow wins Independence".

A meeting of the members of the Peace Committee is held and Father Fitzhenry, Citizens P. O'Neill and S. Buttle go to Wexford.

Next comes the return of the Wexford deputation and we know by the face of Father Fitzhenry that he considers he has had bad news. We assemble and listen to the result of the interview. It is unconditional surrender. A copy of a special edition of the "Free Press" is produced which announces the unconditional surrender of our noble Commandant Pearse. Copies of the telegrams purporting to have come to the County Inspector of Police were given to Father Fitzhenry. One asks all units of Irish Volunteers to surrender. Seamus Doyle is the first to wonder at this strange method adopted by P. H. Pearse of communicating the position of his followers and proposes that if he receives a corroboration from Commandant Pearse in his own handwriting, signed in a manner only known to them both, we would consider the situation. Commandant Brennan will not agree to that. He feels England equal to the trick of deceiving us by a knowledge of this gained through the Postal Telegraph Service. I agree with Bob and express wonder why, if Colonel French is the leading authority under Martial Law, the message did not come to him and not to the C.I. of R.I.C.

Eventually we agree to stand by our determination not to lay down our arms unless we are granted a personal interview with P.H. Pearse. The members of the deputation agree that our view is^a reasonable one. Seamus Doyle offering to go up in the custody of two military men, obtainable at Wexford, to interview Pearse. We all ask to put this statement in writing and we keep a copy which runs:

"I.R. Headquarters,
April 29th., 1916.

"With regard to the communication laid before the Staff by the Peace Committee we have to state that in view of the affirmation contained therein, to prevent useless bloodshed and destruction of

property, we are prepared to obey Commandant Pearse's Order to lay down our arms if we can be assured that Order has been issued. This assurance we can only accept from Commandant Pearse himself, and in order to satisfy ourselves entirely on this point, we ask that a pass through the English lines to Commandant Pearse be issued to Captain Seamus Doyle who will, if necessary, travel under military escort.

Captain Robert Brennan.

Captain Seamus Doyle.

Lieutenant Michael de Lassaigh.

Seamus Rafter, Captain.

Captain J.R. Etchingham.

Captain R. F. King."

There you see the names of the leaders of the "Wexford Revolt" of 1916. Lieutenant M. de Lacy, who joined us and worked like half a dozen men as Civil Minister, did not hesitate a moment in signing the document although he could easily have avoided it. He is a married man in a good position. That is the spirit which proves to the world that Ireland has, as the Professor puts it, the germ of rebellion against foreign rule.

Well we have had a few days' Republic in Enniscorthy".

The communication signed by the Republican Officers was conveyed to Colonel French by the above-mentioned citizens of the Peace Committee. Colonel French agreed to the request and addressed a letter to Captain Brennan, stating that if Captains Doyle and Etchingham went to Ferrycarrig they would be taken through the English picquet lines and conveyed under safe conduct to Dublin to interview Commandant Pearse:

"We were brought to the British Headquarters which, as well as I remember, were at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham; thence we were brought to Arbour Hill Barracks, attended by quite a number of staff

officers. We were escorted into the Main Hall, and the cell door was unlocked and flung open, the officers remaining in the hall.

As we entered, Pearse was rising from a mattress in the far end of the cell, upon which he had been lying covered with his great coat. He wore the uniform of the Irish Volunteers, which was complete, except for the Sam Browne belt. The rank-badges were still on the collar of his tunic. I wrote in another place that he seemed to be physically exhausted, but spiritually exultant, and that description must stand.

He told us that the Dublin Brigade had done splendidly - five days and five nights of almost continuous fighting - of The O'Rahilly's heroic death in Moore Street, and of the no less heroic death of our country-man, Captain Tom Weafer, at his position in the Hibernian Bank in O'Connell Street. The surrender was ordered, he told us, to save the lives of the people of Dublin, who were being shot by the British in the streets, adding that he saw them being shot himself.

We asked him to give us a written order to bring back with us. The military warder, who was present during the interview, produced writing materials and, when the order was written, brought it outside to have it examined by some of his officers. While he was absent, Pearse said in a whisper, "Hide your arms, they'll be needed later", and so we said farewell. The memory of the hand-clasp and the smile remains with me".

Whilst Captains Doyle and Etchingham were away, D.I. McGovern, R.I.C., Arklow, and Rev. Owen Kehoe, C.C., Camolin, arrived in a motor car carrying a white flag and bearing the surrender order of Commandant Pearse.

He was told of the events on the spot and returned to Arklow. Captains Doyle and Etchingham returned late on Sunday night and gave an account of their interview with Commandant Pearse. With regret the officers and men agreed to obey the order from Pearse - to surrender - which they did on Monday morning to Colonel French.

The military took the six officers who were conveyed under escort to Wexford. They were later tried by Courtmartial and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to Penal Servitude for five years.

Signed: Patrick Murphy P.P.
 Date: 22nd July 1955
 (Patrick Murphy) P.P.

Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

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