

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 75



ÉIRE

Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 75

Statement by: William Kent,
Bawnard House,
Castlelyons,
Co. Cork.

Dated: 9th November, 1947.

On: Fight at Bawnard House,
May 2nd, 1916.

3 pp. typescript - foolscap.

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ORIGINAL

Barnard House

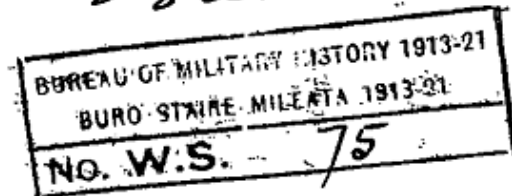
9-11-47

Dear Mr. O'Donoghue

I find
you have the wrong date typed
for the trial at Fermoy it
should be 1889 not 1899 which
you can easily rectify I have
much pleasure in signing the
copy & returning same to you
best wishes

Yours faithfully

William R. Kent



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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM KENT, BAWNARD HOUSE,
CASTLELYONS, CO. CORK.

PERIOD: 1899 to MAY, 1916.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITAIRES 1913-21
NO. W.S. 75

I am now the last survivor of the band of local Land League fighters against tyrannical landlordism who underwent imprisonment under the Balfour Coercion Acts. I am also the last survivor of the family who put up a fight in this house against police and military forces on the night of the 1st May, 1916.

see attached letter For generations our family had farmed 200 acres at Bawnard. In 1899 my brothers, Edmond, Richard and David, the local Curate, Revd. Father O'Dwyer, and myself were arrested. Owing to his youth, the younger brother, Richard, was acquitted by the resident magistrates, Colonels Gardiner and Caddell. David received six months' hard labour; Edmond and I were each sentenced to four months' hard labour. The charge was conspiracy with others to evade payment of rents. The sentences were served in Cork County Jail. For refusing to enter into bail for our future good behaviour we served an additional three months' imprisonment. A short time after our release, my other brother, Thomas, who had been in America, returned and threw his lot into the fight. Both he and I were arrested under the Balfour Coercion Acts. Another trumped-up charge of conspiracy was brought against us. I was sentenced to six months' hard labour and Thomas was sentenced to two months. These sentences were served in Cork Jail. On our release we were met by thousands of people in Fermoy who escorted us all the way home to Bawnard.

After the Parnell split we ceased to take any active part in politics until the formation of the Volunteers. On the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, organised to defeat Home Rule, we, following discussion amongst ourselves, decided that if the Ulster Volunteers were to carry out their threat of marching from Belfast to Cork, means should be devised to prevent them. We collected rifles and shot guns. Thomas, who was later closely associated with the leaders in Dublin, knew that Ireland's opportunity would come and would be availed of when England was engaged in a European War.

In 1914 and 1915 Thomas and David took an active part with Terence MacSwiney in the enrolment of the Irish Volunteers. They called a meeting at Clonmult and got the famous Clonmult hurlers to march to the village of Dungourney where a British recruiting meeting was being held. Thomas and David led the men through this meeting, and, halting a short distance away from it, addressed the crowd, advising them to join the Volunteers and have nothing whatever to do with the British Army. Early in January, 1916, Thomas and Terence MacSwiney were arrested and charged before a bench of magistrates in Cork with making seditious speeches at Ballynoe. They were acquitted. Within a week or two Thomas was again arrested and sentenced to two months' imprisonment because arms and ammunition were found in the house.

At Easter, 1916, Thomas was a Commandant in the Galtee Battalion. He was to have been informed by Headquarters in Dublin as to what his position would be in the South. No official communication reached him. It was afterwards learned that the man who was entrusted to deliver the message never did so. The first news of the Rising that reached Bawnard was contained in the newspapers. Ammunition was immediately got ready for rifles, revolvers and shot guns, in anticipation of being called upon to join other Volunteers in a fight. Days passed and no order came.

Notwithstanding the news that the Rising was over in Dublin, we still remained alert, and did not remain at home at night. The night of the 1st May was the first that we returned to sleep at home. Early on the following morning we were awakened by loud knocking on the hall

door. The house was surrounded by British Crown Forces. I was sleeping in the Eastern side of the house. I jumped out of bed, put my head out of the window and asked "Who's there?". The answer was "Police; come down". I immediately awakened Tom, who was sleeping in the Western side of the house, and said, "The whole place is surrounded. We are caught like rats in a trap." Tom put some clothes on, armed himself with a rifle, and, without showing himself, called to those below, "What do you want?". As expected, the answer came, "We are police and have orders to arrest the whole family." The reply was given definitely by the whole family, "We are soldiers of the Irish Republic, and there is no surrender". Our mother, then over eighty years of age, dressed herself, and all during the ensuing fight assisted by loading weapons and with words of encouragement.

The police fired a volley to which we replied and a fierce conflict began. We were armed with three shot guns and a rifle. The fight lasted about three hours. Head Constable Rowe was shot dead, while other members of the R.I.C. were wounded. David was also badly wounded, having lost two fingers and received a gaping wound in his side. Military reinforcements arrived and when the last shot was fired from the house we had no alternative but to surrender. Our ammunition was exhausted. The house was wrecked. Not a pane of glass was left unbroken. The interior was tattooed with marks of rifle bullets. The altar and statues in the Oratory alone escaped destruction. All around the altar plaster was knocked off the walls but not one of the statues was struck. At one time the fire of the attackers was attracted to the window of the Oratory where they thought a girl was firing at them. Strange to say, it was the statue of our Lady of Lourdes they saw from outside. The same statue was bought by my brother Tom at the sake of Father Ferris's household effects. Father Ferris had brought it from Lourdes and I attribute to it the fact that our lives and home were saved from complete destruction. The greatest safeguard of all is to have a statue in the house.

Following the surrender we were taken out through a window assisted by the military. Thomas was not permitted time to put on his boots. Thomas and I were immediately handcuffed. Richard, a famous athlete, was not immediately handcuffed and in the confusion he attempted to escape by bounding over a hedge nearby. He was fired on and fell, mortally wounded. We were then lined up against a wall of the house by the R.I.C. who prepared to shoot us, when a military officer interposed himself between us and the firing party. Ordering the police to desist, he said, "I am in command here. Enough lives have been lost, and I take these men prisoners of war."

Under heavy military escort the four of us and our mother were taken to Fermoy Military Barracks. Our mother was subsequently released. Thomas and I were taken to Cork Detention Barracks. David and Richard, being wounded, were taken to Fermoy Military Hospital, where Richard died of his wounds two days later. The remains were handed over to relatives on condition that the funeral would leave the town as quickly as possible. The small cortege came down Barrack Hill and was halted by a barrier on the bridge which was patrolled by military. The general public was not allowed to attend the funeral, but women knelt on the sidewalks in Fermoy as it passed and some young men from Cork Road escorted the remains to Castlelyons in defiance of the British order. At the burial service at the family vault in Castlelyons, a light, which appeared to have followed the cortege from Fermoy, shone on the vault, and by this light the officiating clergyman read the burial service.

But for the kindness of Dr. Brody, David would have been immediately courtmartialled and probably shot. Dr. Brody kept him under medical treatment in the hospital and refused to certify him fit

for removal until things had calmed down somewhat. There was a lapse of over two weeks before he was transferred to Cork Detention Barracks.

Meanwhile, on the 4th May, two days after the fight at Bawnard, Thomas and I were Courtmartialled. I was acquitted, but Thomas was sentenced to death and executed on the 9th May by a British firing squad in the Detention Barracks at Cork. When asked by the British Officer in Command if he had any last request to make, Thomas asked that no Irishman should be ordered to shoot him. He was shot by a firing squad of the Scottish Borderers. He also asked the priest who was in attendance to have his grave consecrated. When offered a stimulant before being led to his execution he haughtily refused it, and added that in a short time he would be before his God. He was buried where he fell, and his remains are still in the Detention Barracks, notwithstanding several requests by me to have them removed and interred in the family vault at Castlelyons with his brothers, Richard and David, who fought beside him at Bawnard.

Arrangements were made for David's trial at Cork Detention Barracks, but an order came from the British Government that the trial be transferred to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. He was tried there on 14th June by a British Military Courtmartial, presided over by Lord Chelmsore. He was ably defended by Mr. Patrick Lynch, K.C. After a prolonged hearing he was found guilty and sentenced to death, the sentence being subsequently commuted to penal servitude for life. He was sent to Dartmoor Prison and later transferred to Pentonville, from which he was released with other I.R.A. prisoners on the general amnesty. While he was in prison his mother died, and on his return home his health was greatly impaired. At three elections he was elected T.D. on the Sinn Fein ticket for the East Cork Constituency. He never took his seat in the Dáil as he refused to take the Oath of Allegiance. He thus forfeited his deposit, which was never returned. He was sent to America on a mission of propaganda on behalf of the I.R.A.. He returned home after some months far poorer in health, and, after a life of struggle for the freedom of his country, this brave soldier and patriot died at his home at Bawnard on the 16th November, 1930. His work for the nation he never relinquished until he died, and he died as he had lived, uncompromised and uncompromising, a faithful soldier of the Irish Republic.

It was written of the Kent family then,

"No threat could bend them, no force could break them,
No wiles could lure them from the road of right;
True men loyal to the cause of Eireann,
Soldiers fearless in the fiercest fight.
From early boyhood through the years of manhood
On the march to liberty their lives were spent;
God grant to Erin in her day of danger
Guards unwavering as the brothers Kent."

SIGNED: William R. Kent

DATE: 9th November 1947

WITNESS: Florence O'Donoghue

