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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 235

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Very Rev. James Canon O'Daly, P.P.,
Clogher,

Co. Tyrone.

Identity

Member of I.R.B.;

Was consulted on all important I.V. matters.

Subject

History of Irish Volunteers, Co. Tyrone 1914-16;
Activities during Holy Week and Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

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Form B.S.M. 2.

STATEMENT BY REV. CANON JAMES O'DALY, P.P.,

CLOGHER, CO. TYRONE.

The history of the Irish Volunteers in Co. Tyrone can be best told by Dr. Patrick MacCartan. He was the mainspring of the movement and worked night and day to bring the youth of the country into the organisation. People unacquainted with the state of affairs in the North cannot realise the difficulties. The Orange Order was fiercely opposed though they had given many examples of their determination to use physical force against Home Rule. The A.O.H. were not far behind in their opposition.

Dr. MacCartan organised meetings in various parts of Tyrone which were addressed by Eoin MacNeill, Roger Casement and other prominent leaders in the movement. Mr. Denis McCullough visited Tyrone on many occasions and gave great assistance and encouragement.

The people - even the leaders - were so long accustomed to parliamentary agitation and the promise of Home Rule "at no far distant date" that they could not bring themselves to think that whatever measure of freedom could be obtained must be fought for in blood and tears.

The great lesson of history is, that people do not learn the lesson and the lesson of Irish history is - do not trust the Saxon and do not pay for the goods until they are delivered.

Before the split in the Volunteers Mr. MacNeill addressed a meeting organised by Dr. MacCartan at Carrickmore. On the platform were Father Short, C.C., a great Irishman and priest, Denis McCullough and myself. MacNeill said that, being an historian, he was well acquainted with the history of Grattan's Volunteers. He stated that John Redmond should not have touched the Volunteers and that when the Volunteers became strong and when Mr. Redmond failed in his parliamentary efforts on the question of Home Rule, with England wavering on the question, Redmond could say to England "I am finished. You can now deal with the Volunteers". This appeared to me as sound policy.

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After Mr. Redmond got his nominees on the Central Committee of the Volunteers they assumed some amount of control which extended down to country districts in the North. The Redmondites were not sincere in their attitude to the Volunteers, but locally they had a desire to procure arms as a safeguard against the Ulster Unionist Volunteers who were well equipped with serviceable weapons. Mr. Joseph Devlin pandered to this desire of his followers in the Volunteers by importing into the North a large quantity of dud Italian rifles. Those rifles were useless for military purposes and the British allowed them through. About 200 of them came to Co. Tyrone.

MacNeill's primary intention in organising the Volunteers seems to have been as a support to the Irish Parliamentary Party to obtain Home Rule - Home Rule or else - and the else was, deal with the Volunteers; but when the British got Mr. Redmond to take control of the movement, the Volunteers shortly afterwards split - the physical force element, who alone were in earnest, reorganised under MacNeill. They called themselves The Irish Volunteers. All Tyrone companies joined this force.

The Volunteers were split in Tyrone as elsewhere and organisation became more difficult. Meetings for the county were held at Omagh, but never twice in the same Hall or room. Pressure was brought to bear on landlords to lock them out. Nevertheless a number of companies were organised and small supplies of arms and ammunition were procured. There was an idea that they might be used some day but there was nothing definite about the date until early in 1916.

A meeting was held early in 1916 in Fintona, which Dr. Mac Cartan, Denis McCullough, Father Coyle and myself attended. There was a vague hint given at this meeting that an early Rising was being planned and that the exact time depended on Roger Casement's efforts in Germany.

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Early in Holy Week 1916, Monday or Tuesday, a message came to the writer of those notes from Mr. Burke of Carrickmacross giving the time and place of a German landing. The message was to be delivered to Dr. McCartan. The writer duly delivered the message and found that the Doctor had previous knowledge of it.

On the Friday or Saturday of the same week three young men, P. Ryan, P. Boyd and Eimar Duffy, arrived in Fintona, Co. Tyrone, from Dublin. They called on Father Coyle, stated they had been in close communication with MacNeill who was opposed to the Rising. They said that he - MacNeill - advised them to come to Tyrone where there would be fighting in the open as distinct from the method to be adopted in Dublin.

On Saturday night a meeting was held at Beragh which was attended by Dr. McCartan, Denis McCullough, Father Coyle and Fr. O'Daly. The Plan of Campaign ordered from headquarters was that the Northern Volunteers - including Belfast - would concentrate somewhere in Tyrone, march across the Shannon and form up with the Connaught forces and await the arrival of the Germans. Without casting any reflection on headquarters, this seemed impossible. That a few hundred volunteers, poorly armed and without any means of transport, could pass the British Garrison at Enniskillen and reach the Western seaboard was truly heroic. However, it was decided to carry out the instructions.

Mr. McCullough must have ordered his men to come to County Tyrone before he left Belfast as a number of them had arrived in Coalisland on Saturday night.

Easter Sunday in Tyrone was spent in getting arms and men at different points. Early on Easter Monday we got to know that MacNeill's countermanding order had been issued on Sunday.

On Tuesday at 5 a.m. Dr. McCartan arrived in Clogher with a note from P.H. Pearse stating that the fight had started and to carry out our instructions. I gave orders to the Clogher Company

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to assemble on the nearby mountain taking with them their arms and equipment. Dr. MacCartan then went home as he had to go to Derry for a consignment of ammunition. Dr. MacCartan had been up and busy all Monday night. He came to see me in Clogher, returned to Carrickmore, then journeyed to Derry, and was due back in Clogher on Tuesday night for a meeting. He was not physically fit for all this running about, without proper rest, and he was not present at the meeting. Father Coyle, myself and the 3 men from Dublin (Ryan, Boyd and Duffy) were at the place of meeting. The position of affairs was that there were large gaps in Co. Tyrone where no Volunteer organisation existed. There were no Volunteers on the road from Clogher to Omagh - 16 miles - and no Volunteers west of this line. There were no Volunteers in the districts between Clogher and Armagh City. On the route of our proposed march to cross the Shannon there were no Volunteers and the districts to be crossed were actively hostile, it being predominantly Unionist country.

Wednesday - I sent Eimar Duffy by cycle to Carrickmacross to get in touch with Mr. Burke. When he arrived there he failed to contact Burke. On Duffy's journey to Carrickmacross - a distance of 40 miles - there were no Volunteers. When he was passing thro' Castleblayney on his way to Carrickmacross he went into an hotel for a ^{meal} ~~feed~~ and he heard men there saying that Jim Larkin had called a strike in Dublin which was causing trouble. That was apparently the local knowledge of events in Dublin. Wednesday - On this night Mr. Hackett drove me to Dr. MacCartan's house. It was a terribly wet night and on our way there we passed through Beragh and there met Father McNillis, C.C., who told me that the Sixmilecross Volunteers were ready to march to Clogher. At Dr. MacCartan's were the Doctor, Denis McCullough, Father Coyle and, I think, Herbert Moore Pim. It was reported at that meeting that the Pomeroy Volunteers were on the march, also Donaghmore and Dungannon towards Carrickmore. This meeting dragged on to Thursday morning.

On account of the inclement weather and the lateness of the

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hour, it was decided to cancel any definite action for that day.

Thursday - Military arrived in Co. Tyrone from Belfast, raided Dr. MacCartan's house at Carrickmore and arrested Doctor McCartan. They also captured all or part of the ammunition stored at the house. Dr. MacCartan later, by a trick, escaped from military custody.

Friday - Archie Heron arrived in Clogher and we held a meeting that night to see if we could reorganise the men and attempt to march to Dublin. On Saturday we heard of the surrender in Dublin.

Before I finish I wish to pay a tribute to the Tyrone Vols. who, from 1914 to 1916, devoted their time to organising, training and equipping day in and day out up to the Rising. Those men made themselves available and were willing to carry out any orders they might have got. Considering the hostility of a large Unionist population in the areas where they lived, the Volunteers deserve great credit for the sacrifices of time and effort made. Mr. Kackett for instance, was one of the few men in Co. Tyrone who had a motor car. He placed the car and himself at the Volunteers' disposal and worked both day and night. He carried on this work over a considerable time and never got, or expected, payment for his work. Mr. Hackett was a poor man in those days and his activities in the National cause imposed a great strain which was willingly undertaken.

Signed: James O'Daly

Date: 9th April 1949

Witness: John McBoy
9/4/49.

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