ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 551

Witness

Very Rev. Thomas Canon Duggan, M.A., S.T.L.,
President,
St. Finbarr's College,
Farranferris,
Cork.

Identity.

(a) Residential Secretary to the Bishop of Cork - Most Rev. D. Cohalan, 1919.

(b) Chaplain in the British Army, 1918.

Subject.

1. The Casement Brigade in Germany.
2. The Bishop of Cork, Most Rev. Dr. D. Cohalan, and the I.R.A.
3. Experiences as Chaplain in Cork Jail, 1920.
4. Joseph Murphy, I.R.A.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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Original

STATEMENT OF THE VERY REV. THOMAS CANON DUGGAN, M.A., S.T.L., PRESIDENT, ST. FINBARR'S COLLEGE, FARRANFERRIS, CORK.

1. THE CASEMENT BRIGADE.

My generation in Maynooth embraced the ideals of Easter Week 1916 with a hundred per cent fervour. That did not prevent us from becoming Chaplains in the British Army. In the First World War there were well over 100,000 Irish Catholics in the fighting ranks. (The casualties alone were 50,000). Everyone admitted that these boys were spiritually intractable to amyone save to an Irish priest. Hence, when in 1917 Cardinal Logue issued a special appeal for Irish Chaplains, I volunteered. And I went off to France with the blessing and the encouragement of every friend I had in advanced Sinn Fein circles in Dublin.

My presence in the British Army is relevant to this narrative for the reason that I was captured in the German "Big Push" of 1918. After a certain amount of shifting around I found myself in the Kriegsgefangenlager of Mainz. The orderlies for our Camp were P.O.W's. from Geissen. And at Geissen were located in 1918 the men of Irish nationality taken prisoner at Mons., etc., in 1914. They had been collected together to be formed into Casement's Irish Brigade.

As I say, I met them in 1918. At that stage Casement was dead and the effort to capture their loyalty had long been abandoned. Their story of the incident was interesting. They were assembled at Münster and visited by Casement himself. Of Casement they had nothing but grateful memories. Right enough, he wanted them to join him but, apart from any such desire, his big heart went out to them in their desolation. He fought hard to secure food and clothing for them.

His first successes were paraded in rather gorgeous uniforms. And there never was a professional soldier to whom a smart uniform did not make an appeal. What might have happened if Casement had

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been allowed a free hand is a matter for speculation. I do not think that in any case he would have got far.

What actually did happen was simple. The Germans intervened. With characteristic Tuetonic tact they announced double rations for all who joined, and half rations for all who refused. An enterprise of possible high adventure straightaway became squalid souperism. From that day on, (according to my informants) the only recruits were Englishmen and very few of them. The nett dividend of the Casement Brigade to the Germans was embarrassment. It happened in this way. A Munster Fusilier (or a Dublin, or a Connaught Ranger) was a magnificent fighting soldier. But he was a soldier at all, not because the Empire call imperiously, but because he had an objection to routine work. Diluted with more docile breeds, something, — notmuch — might have been done with them. Assembled together they defied the Germans to get any work whatsoever out of them. An old-timer, who in his day had successfully malingered against his own Sergeant Major, found a German wax in his hands. By 1918, they had elevated this reluctance to toil into a positive moral virtue. The end of an unedifying narrative was always, "Thanks be to God, Father, we never did a bit for them damned Germans." And then in a tone of frightful contempt, "The bloody English are winning the war for them."

Speaking of sapping allegiance, a small effort was made on myself. About July, 1918, an Intelligence Officer from Frankfort came to see me. (Frankfort was Corps Hqrs.) He pointed out that Germany was obviously winning the war, but that owing to the obstinacy of Lloyd George and the "Daily Mail" that fact was not generally understood. Remember this was July, 1918. He wanted me to point out the desirability of peace by negotiation, and he guaranteed to get everything I said into the "Manchester Guardian" and the "Daily News". I had to point out to him, of course, that, whatever about allegiance, I had a positive and unexpired contract with England. He argued long and then he summed me up, uncharitably, one hopes. "To meet an Irish patriot, a long distance I have come. An Irish patriot, I have not met. An Irish humbug, I have met. Good morning."

11. BISHOP OF CORK AND THE I.R.A.

Back in Cork in 1919, I was appointed residential secretary to the Bishop of Cork, Most Rev.D.Cohalan. The vacillations in the utterances of Daniel of Cork are a matter of history. I should like to make an effort, not to reconcile them, (they cannot be reconciled) but to attempt to throw a little light on the conflict in his being.

And first of all, a story. The Battle of Kilmichael was fought on a Sunday, a dirty November afternoon in 1920. There was some mix up about the Black and Tan surrender, and, as we know, the thing ended in carnage. Tom Barry himself told me this. His men were cooling down and the horror of twenty four bleeding corpses was growing upon them. At that critical moment, an old man, in his clean Sunday flannel jacket, drove twelve cows down the road and over the bodies. The old patriarch stood in the middle of the corpses, he lifted his hat, and with the solemnity of an Old Testament prophet he intoned, "Jesus Christ be praised that I have lived to see this day." A vision of the mills of God grinding out retribution for the wrongs of fifty years before. Daniel of Cork was born within a couple of miles of the scene of the ambush and Daniel's out-look was little different from that of the old man, who drove the cows.

It is note-worthy, the fiercest fighting men at Kilmichael were of the Bishop's own blood and stock. If Daniel had not been sicklied o'er by the pale cast of (theological) thought, he could have been an I.R.A. man, as ardently patriotic as any (and more ruthless than most).

His difficulty was the pronouncements of the Irish Church. He sought for, but failed to find, a mandate for armed resistance. And not finding it, the theologian had, first intermittent and then final, victory over the Kilmichael farmer's son.

Even after the famous excommunication (Dec.1920), we did not despair of him. I remember well, in May,1921, four ardent young clerics (one of them now a Bishop) were estimating the chances of securing a declaration of recognition of the Republic from the Irish Hierarchy. One and all of us put Daniel on the list of firm supporters.

ADDENDUM.

EXPERIENCES AS CHAPLAIN OF THE CORK JAIL.

1. In August,1920, I ceased to be residential chaplain to the Bishop. I was appointed to the Bon Secours Hospital,which is adjacent to the Cork Jail. Occasionally, I had to do duty in the jail for the official chaplain. I was coming out on one such occasion and a man asked me how were the hunger strikers. In loquacious detail I told him, and, to my astonishment, next morning I saw the caption on the old Freeman's Journal, (dying but not yet dead) - "Exclusive Interview from Assistant Chaplain." The Cork Examiner, needless to say, was not going to be outdone in politeness. The Warders of the Jail joined in; henceforth I signed, not the Visitors' Book, but the Officials' Book. The irregularity of my appointment gave me a freedom of manoeuvre,which I am afraid I availed of 100%.

There was the affair of blowing the jail walls. What I chiefly remember is that I was made beast of burthen for the preparations. I went in one day with:- (a), a wooden mallet — to percuss warders; (b), a knuckle-duster with dagger — youth and instinct for melodrama; (c), two slabs of gun cotton. (Gun cotton worn as a chest protector gives an indescribable feeling of levitation. I can still remember it after 30 years)

In Barry's book that attempt gets mention. There was an inner wall which was to have been blown out and a parallel wall in U.C.C. to have been blown in. The gun cotton was available, gelignite was not. Afterwards I had to bring out the gun cotton unused.

THE BRAVEST MAN I EVER MET.

11. I was in three wars in my day, Red Cross in two, and combatant (more or less) against the Black and Tans. I met brave men in my time but the bravest man I ever met was Joe Murphy.

In 1918 and 1919 Joe was Commandant of one of the City Battalions. Joe was wild and had to be demoted. Somewhere around the early spring of 1921 there was an ambush in Barrack Street off Catford. It was Mick Murphy who was O.in C. Enterprise. In some

public house Joe was accused of it and, needless to say, he did not deny it. Some rumour of this reached the purblind substitute for Intelligence that the British authorities had. They arrested Joe and I found Joe in the condemned cell of the Jail. He was condemned to death but the execution was held up by High Court Proceedings. Joe said to me, "You know, Father, I was not in it. I am sorry but I wasn't." As a condemned man, part of Joe's menu was a glass of whiskey a day. As a free man outside, Joe would not have refused whiskey - and that is putting it mildly. "If they think that Iwant Dutch courage they are bloody well mistaken." And, to my certain knowledge, for a whole fortnight, while his life was hanging on a Court decision, Joe steadfastly refused the whiskey. The sentence was changed to Penal Servitude for life. The night of the reprieve Joe was remorseful, "Heavens, Father, look at all the whiskey I refused."

Signed: T. Canon Duggan

Witnesses : [redacted], Retd.

Date: 2nd July 1951