

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITAIRA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1206

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,206

Witness

Very Rev. Thomas Canon Wall, P.P.,
(Tomas de Bhall, S.P.)
Ballingarry,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Member of Coiste Gnotha of Gaelic League,
1913 - ;

Member of West Limerick Governing Committee,
1913-1916.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Drumcollogher,
Co. Limerick, 1913-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1563

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRS INLEATA 1913-21

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Statement of

Very Rev. Canon Hall, Dallingarry, Co. Limerick.

I was a curate of the parish of Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick, for some years before and up to the rising of 1916. Father Michael Dwyer, ~~a fellow curate~~, and I, with Father Sean O'Kelly, the curate of Newcastle West, were keenly interested in the national movement, and were active Gaelic Leaguers before the start of the Volunteer Movement in 1915.

When the organisation of Volunteer Companies began in West Limerick, we entered enthusiastically into this and gave what help we could towards the establishment of the companies. We had a sort of committee of which I was a member, that was set up for the purpose of governing and directing the activities of the Volunteers in the area. Besides the organisation and training of the companies, such activities were concerned with the procurement of arms, reloading shotgun cartridges with buckshot, and so on. Monteith came out from Limerick occasionally when he was there in 1915 to help and advise us on the training.

Sometime about the early part of 1916, P.L. Pearce

addressed a meeting in St. Ita's Hall in Limerick City at which I was present. I did not know Pearce very well, although I had met him at St. Enda's when I went there some time before that in connection with a status ^{as the Master} that his brother Willie was doing for a neighbouring ^{Parish} priest. ^{P. M. / Ryan} But I was impressed on this occasion by his power as an orator, and his words, though he made no definite statement to that effect, seemed to indicate the rapid approach of a climax of some kind, or that some action by the Volunteers was expected in the near future. He said something like - "we have been arming and training for the past three years, and surely we must now be ready to fulfil our mission". He also quoted a poem that had been published sometime before that in Connolly's paper "The Irish Worker". This poem had originally been written about the Volunteers of 1792, defining the expiency of that body which had allowed itself to be disbanded without firing a shot, but Connolly's publication had applied the words of the poem to the present-day Volunteers. Pearce posed the question in his speech - "were the Volunteers to accept this as true of them, or would they show by their readiness to

take the field in areas that they were of different
mettle?.

It was about this time, probably soon after the
meeting in Limerick, that Michael Galivet of Limerick
came out to see us one day at Newcastle West. He
and I with Father Hayes and Father O'Kelly discussed
the general situation and were agreed that everything
seemed to indicate a gathering crisis of some kind, and
that it was desirable to get some kind of authentic
direction. Galivet also wanted our advice on the
question of how the Volunteers of West Limerick would
respond to a call to arms, and wanted to get our
personal views on such a situation. I intended to go
to Dublin to attend a meeting of the Gaelic Gúthas of
the Gaelic League about a fortnight or three weeks
before Easter, so I told Galivet I would make it my
business while I was there, to see Eoin McNeill and try
to find out what was going on. Galivet told me before
I left for Dublin that he had definite orders and
plans regarding military action to be taken by the
Limerick Volunteers when word was given to put these
into effect.

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We knew that these plans centred around a shipment of arms that was expected to arrive somewhere on the Kerry coast, but we wanted to be assured that whatever action was contemplated, that was likely to involve the Limerick Volunteers, was the considered plan of the Volunteer Executive, and not the action of any individual or group. We placed our faith in Eoin McNeill as the official head of the Volunteer Organisation, but such information as we had about impending volunteer action did not seem to emanate from him, or at least, we did not know whether or not it was authorized by him. Palmer Hobson also held our confidence as McNeill's Chief Executive Officer on the Volunteer Executive, and neither had we any intimation from him that ^{anything} ~~something~~ unusual was afoot.

Having arrived in Dublin (some two or three weeks before Easter, 1916) and got through my business with the Gaelic League, I looked for Eoin McNeill at his home in Herbert Park, but found that he had gone to stay with his brother James at Woodtown Park, Rathfarham. I hired a horse and car to take me up there, but found when I arrived that there was some sort

of a meeting in progress in the house, and I had to wait quite a long time before McNeill could see me. John McNeill's wife and some of his children were there and tea was being got ready for the party engaged at the meeting in another room. I was beginning to get anxious about my return to the city in order to catch my train for Limerick, but Mrs. McNeill pressed me to wait for tea, and just then the meeting finished and those present at it came into the dining room.

Besides John McNeill, those I can remember as being present were, J. H. Fears, Simon Geant, Thomas McDonagh, and the O'Shilly. It was evident from the demeanour of Fears and Geant in particular that something of serious moment had been under discussion. They were serious and silent, with little more than a monosyllabic reply to a question now and then, while McDonagh and O'Shilly tried to impart a casual air to the party by joking remarks to the hostess and to McNeill. Clearly, however, there was a serious undercurrent of feeling amongst them, and as I was becoming more anxious than about catching my

train I said something about this. James McNeill offered to drive me to the station in his motor car, but I pointed out that I had a Jarvey with a side-car waiting for me outside, and having something over an hour till train time I could just get there in time. At this point Eoin McNeill, with a joking remark in Gaelic, stood up to see me off, and I, having bid goodbye to the hostess and the others, accompanied him out to the hall, where I explained briefly what I had come to see him about. I said that we in Limerick felt that events were approaching a crisis of some sort, and requested him to tell me if action of a military nature was contemplated by the Volunteer Executive in the immediate future. I added that if action was to be taken we would need the services of a capable officer to command the Volunteers in West Limerick. We had numbers of good men in West Limerick, of course, but I felt that none of them had sufficient training or experience for the higher command in any serious military action.

McNeill replied to the effect: "If any action is to be taken in your area I'll see to it that a

competent man is sent down to take charge". He then went on to say that he thought that no action should be taken now that might have the effect of delaying the achievement of national freedom for another hundred years.

As I had great faith in the honour and sincerity of McNeill, I felt reassured by his words, and though I knew there were others who might urge the Volunteers to action without regard to the consequences of such action. I had confidence in McNeill's ability to guide and direct the Volunteer policy.

Before going to McNeill on that occasion I had called to the office of "an tóglaigh" in D'Olier Street where I met Seán McDermott, Tom Clarke and others. I spoke to McDermott and mentioned to him that I was going to see McNeill. I don't remember much of my discussion with him except that somehow we got on to the topic of the action of the general body of the clergy in the rebellion of 1798. He remarked in correction with this, that he "would not expect priests to take up arms, but that he would expect them to refrain from advising their flocks to surrender their arms".

When I returned to Limerick I met Colivet and told him what had transpired, and these matters rested until about Good Friday when someone sent a message to Drumbollogher warning the Volunteers for a full mobilisation on Easter Sunday at Glenguin of all the West Limerick Volunteers. The message also stated that full arms and equipments would be carried by each Volunteer. It was James Connaughton who brought the message from Limerick to Drumbollogher.

On Easter Sunday morning a Volunteer officer in uniform (I cannot remember his name at the moment) arrived at Glenguin to take charge. This was in fulfilment of McNeill's promise to me to send a man down to us. This officer brought with him a copy of McNeill's cancellation order of the mobilisation, which he had been given by the O'Rehilly.

P. S. Jimmy Mac Linnery came to Glenguin Castle on East/Sunday morning 1916.

SIGNED

Tomas de Bhall
(Tomas de Bhall) S.P.

DATE

7.VII.1955

7.VII.55

WITNESS

Mary Pierce
(Mary Pierce)

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