

1568 W.S. 951

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
No. W.S. 951

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 951

Witness

Robert Knightly,
Castlemaine,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer, 5th Battalion,
Kerry No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Intelligence Work,
5th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade,
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No .S. 2263.

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

W S 951

STATEMENT BY ROBERT KNIGHTLY,
Stationmaster, Castlemaine, Co. Kerry.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITIA 1913-21
No. W.S. 951

In 1919 I was stationmaster at Annascaul on the Tralee and Dingle Railway. I was unmarried at that time and I lived in the Station House. I was approached by An Seabhac and invited to work with the Volunteers. I agreed to become a member but, owing to my position on the railway, I was not expected to appear in public as a member of the Volunteers. When I joined, the Company O/C was P.J. O'Neill. He was a dentist and was married to an O'Shea.

In 1919 there were about twenty-five or thirty in the local Company and they were drilling and training. I was selected for intelligence duties with the Company and later I became Intelligence Officer for the 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade.

I was well suited for the intelligence work because of my position on the railway and of the fact that I had the use of the railway telephone system. The intelligence and communications in the Battalion were organised round the railway. The line ran from Tralee through Blennerville - Camp - Annascaul to Dingle.

The stationmaster at Tralee, James Bailey, was an Intelligence Officer, as were the signalman at Camp, P. O'Connor, and the stationmaster at Dingle. The procedure was that, when information was available in Tralee, the stationmaster passed it over the railway telephone to the stationmaster at Camp, who passed it to me at Annascaul. This saved the sending of men with despatches over long distances.

During part of 1920-1921 period the Battalion H.Q. was at Dingle but, during the later stage before July, 1921, H.Q. was shifted to the Annascaul area. The Brigade H.Q. was at Keel for most of the time, 1920 to 1921. Tadhg Brosnan was O/C of the Castlegregory area; he was always very active and kept in touch with me at Annascaul.

During the period 1919 and the summer of 1920, most of my work was in connection with keeping track of the police or military moving around the area, and about 18th August, 1920, word came through from Tralee (over the 'phone) that two British military lorries would be leaving Tralee for Dingle the next morning with stores. I think one of the lorries was to carry coal and the other general stores. I don't know how our lads in Tralee got the information. The message came to me from John O'Leary at Camp and I passed it on to Dingle. Tadhg Brosnan, O/C, Castlegregory, happened to be in the Annascaul area at the time and I sent a message to him about the lorries. He set about preparing to ambush the lorries on their return journey from Dingle to Tralee and, as there was only one road they could travel between Dingle and Annascaul, it was decided to carry out the ambush near Annascaul.

The plan was to explode a mine under the first lorry, but none of the local men were competent to fix up an electrically operated mine. Tadhg Brosnan arranged that I would 'phone through to Tralee for an electrician to come out and fix the mine. I did so, and Paddy Kelly came from Tralee. (Paddy is still alive.) He came out by road and he would have met Tadhg Brosnan at Tim Kennedy's or Paddy Walsh's of Annascaul.

The lorries left Tralee for Dingle as arranged, and I arranged with the Intelligence Officer at Dingle to 'phone

me and let me know the time the lorries left Dingle on their return. When I received his message, I sent word to Tadhg Brosnan who, by this time, had the mine laid and the men in position to attack. The lorries were attacked, the first one being blown up by the mine and the British soldiers surrendered. I wasn't at the ambush but I saw the prisoners being marched into Annascaul. There were about ten of them; two middle-aged, the remainder were quite young; they had been disarmed at the place of ambush.

Tadhg Brosnan was in charge of the job and the men were drawn from the local Company (Annascaul) with a few from Tadhg Brosnan's own unit (Castlegregory) and there may have been some from Dingle.

Of the Annascaul Company I remember seeing Paddy Walsh, Paddy Kennedy, Thomas Kennedy, and a second Paddy Kennedy. This second Paddy Kennedy was shot next day near the scene of the ambush. The British were out searching the area and Paddy Kennedy had gone out from Annascaul, where he lived, to visit an out-farm. The British saw him crossing the field and opened fire, killing him.

On the day following Paddy Kennedy being shot, I was "listening-in" on the 'phone and I heard a conversation between a British officer in Tralee and a British officer in Dingle. The officer speaking from Tralee said that Paddy Kennedy had been recognised as one of the attackers as he had been seen marching into Annascaul wearing a tin hat which he had taken off a British soldier. We never found out who had recognised Paddy Kennedy.

There was intense British military activity in the Annascaul area following the ambush, but I was never questioned

The Annascaul ambush was the only operation with which I was closely connected. The railway telephone system was used continuously, but there was nothing doing in my immediate area. Of course, some of the officers and members of the Column stayed with me at the Station House off and on.

Plans were made to attack a train at Camp Station which was carrying Black and Tans, but it was abandoned because our lads had not got enough arms or ammunition.

I was aware of the plans for the Lispole ambush in March, 1921. On the night before, our lads moved into Lispole; some of them assembled at Annascaul Station and they went to confession to a Father Slattery (now Ven. Archdeacon, P.P., V.G. I think he is now in Kenmare.). I didn't take any part in the ambush but, after the ambush, I got a message that a doctor was required for one of the men who had been wounded. He was Tommy Hawley and he had been taken to the house of Pat Sullivan of Acres, Annascaul.

I went to Dr. O'Kane of Annascaul and brought him to the wounded man. After being treated by Dr. O'Kane, Hawley was moved to the house of John Herlihy of Ballinahunt, on the Tralee side of Annascaul. He was carried in a horse cart and I accompanied him to Herlihy's. He was subsequently moved to Castlegregory where he died.

My memory of the period just before the Truce is confused and, although I was constantly in touch with the Battalion officers, nothing much took place in the area.

It must be remembered that there was no British post between Tralee and Dingle. In the early stages there was a garrison at the Coastguard Station at Brandon, but it was evacuated early on.

Just before the Truce, the Column was scattered about the Battalion area. I heard it said that G.H.Q. had ordered the evacuation of a hut which the Column had at Counduff, Annascaul, because they were inclined to lie up and become inactive. Some of the men stayed at the Station House at Annascaul right up to the Truce. Dan Sullivan, Eamonn O'Connor of Tralee and Nicholas Stack stayed for some time. The Battalion O/C (5th Battalion), Mick Moriarity, was in and out of the Station House frequently. Mick was continuously on the run, he was a marked man from 1916 on, and his home had been bombed out as a result of an abortive attack in Dingle. His brother, Jim Moriarity was also on the run. He is now living in Dingle. There was some trouble about the Brigade O/C, P.J. Cahill, at this time. It was said he was suspended and a man named Cooney appointed, but I never knew anything about Cooney before the Truce.

SIGNED Robert Knightly
DATE 10th May 1954.
(Robert Knightly)
10th May 1954.

WITNESS J. O'Connor
(J. O'Connor)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 951