

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-91

BURO STAIRE MILITAIRA 1913-91

No. W.S. 959

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Patrick Houlihan,
Annascaul,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Section Commander, Annascaul Coy.
5th Batt'n. Kerry No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Annascaul Coy. 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Bde.
1913-1921.

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK HOULIHAN

Annascaul, Co. Kerry.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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No. W.S. 959

I was born in Castletownbere in the year 1895. My Parents died when I was young and I was sent to St. Joseph's Industrial School, Tralee. I remained in St. Joseph's until I was sixteen years old and then I went as an apprentice shoemaker to Mr. E. Crean of Annascaul. While employed at Crean's I got to know and made friends with the boys of my own age round the village and in 1913, when the National Volunteers started, I joined up. I remained with the National Volunteers until about August 1914. The Great War had just started and we had a parade of Volunteers. We were addressed by Thomas O'Donnell, M.P. and the McGillicuddy of the Reeks. The McGillicuddy was a sort of officer in the Volunteers. They spoke to us about joining up in the British army and told us we were fine fellows.

We had joined the Volunteers to fight for Ireland and when we heard the recruiting speech a group of us walked out. The group consisted of myself, Thomas and Patrick Walsh, Denis Brosnan, Denis J. O'Sullivan, John Costigan and John J. O'Sullivan. There may have been some others but I cannot remember them. When we left the National Volunteers we held together and some of the others who had been at the meeting started to come over to us. After a short time, the split came and we were all out in the open as a company of the Irish Volunteers.

I was a section commander, but we knew little about drill at first. A man named Foley came from Tralee to drill us and after a while we were knocked into shape. We had a few shotguns and we had to take turns drilling with the rifle. We were all very anxious to become good soldiers and, although some people sneered, we kept on. Britain was at war and our chance might come to strike a blow for freedom.

The year 1915 passed and when 1916 dawned we were still marching, drilling and training. We got instructions to make pikes and we were being watched by the police. Coming to Easter Week, there was a feeling that something was going to happen and on Good Friday or Easter Eve we got orders to parade on the Easter Eve with all arms we could muster and three days' rations. Thomas Walsh of Annascaul was our captain and we met at his house about 2 o'clock on Easter Sunday morning. There were ten of us and we started on a march to Tralee. We were careful to try and avoid being arrested because there were orders to avoid trouble. We knew that Austin Stack had been arrested along with some other man who had been taken at Banna. We got the information about Stack from Tadhg Kennedy who lived at Annascaul and worked in Tralee. Tadhg Kennedy came home on Easter Eve and he had all the news from Tralee. The thing was not spoken of openly, but the word was passed round for every man to be careful. I have heard many things about preparations which were being made, but I didn't know anything about them at the time.

Our group marched to the village of Camp which is on the road between Annascaul and Tralee. While we rested at Camp we were joined by Volunteers from Ballyferriter, Lispole and Dingle and we all marched into Tralee together. When we got to Tralee we were just in time for Mass and after Mass we went to the Rink. P.J. Cahill of Tralee appeared to be in charge of everything and we were served with food by the Cumann na mBan. In the afternoon we marched to the sports field and after some drill we marched back to the Rink. Later that evening we went for another march and came back to the Rink again where we slept that night. On the Monday morning we got orders to return to Annascaul and we left Tralee by train. We were to hold ourselves in readiness for further orders. We heard that the boys in Dublin were out and we were all anxious to do something but no orders came.

On the Wednesday of Easter Week a dispatch arrived from Dingle addressed to some of the officers in Tralee and Patrick Kennedy and myself took over the dispatch and cycled to Tralee and gave it to some officer in the Rink. After resting for awhile we got a reply to take back and arrived back at Annascaul before dawn on the Thursday. The messengers who had brought the dispatch from Dingle were waiting at Annascaul for the reply and when we arrived they took the reply on to Dingle. I'll never forget that night. Patrick Kennedy and I had cycled 40 miles in the dark over rough roads.

When the Rising was over the British military came out from Tralee to Annascaul; they arrested Jim Coughlan and they were looking for our company captain, Thomas Walsh. Walsh was away from his home. Jim Coughlan was released in about a week.

The lads who had gone to Tralee for the Rising kept together and met in Patrick Walshe's workshop at night. We were all very sorry that things had gone so badly but we were proud that we had at least been ready for the call when it came. Any failure to fight was not our fault.

About the end of 1916 a change had taken place in the attitude of the people towards us. Before the Rising they looked upon us as if we were playing soldiers, but after the Rising, when they realised that some of us had gone out prepared to fight, and they knew that we were re-organising, they appeared to respect us although some of them did not agree with us. There was still a certain pro-Redmondite element who thought we should help John Bull in his troubles.

The release of the Republican prisoners gave us an opportunity to show that the 1916 Rising was not another '67 failure and we determined to make good use of the occasion. One of the officers of the Rising who had shown what could be

done and had fought at Ashbourne was a Kerryman, Thomas Ashe. He was a native of Kinard near Lispole and it was at his home Ernest Blythe had stayed while in the area organising the Volunteers. Thomas was released and when he came to Annascaul we met him with a great crowd and a torchlight procession.

After the release of the prisoners we were organising the Volunteers in the district around Annascaul and we were in touch with Lispole and Dingle. The battalions were being re-formed and we were attached to the 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade. The battalion headquarters was in Dingle and the brigade headquarters was in Tralee.

The conscription threat brought many recruits to the Volunteers and some who had been followers of the Redmondite party came over to us. The Redmondite party M.P.s. had disgusted many of their own friends by their action in trying to get young Irishmen to join the British army. Thomas O'Donnell M.P., along with some of the local Catholic clergy had been recruiting for the British army even after the Rising.

The threat of conscription brought everyone together but the people looked to the Volunteers for a lead. We organised the anti-conscription fund and made a very good collection. We also collected food supplies and made ready to resist conscription. The threat passed and we were left with a very strong company of Volunteers.

Patrick Walsh, the brother of our company captain, was arrested with his father, mother and brother when he resisted arrest over some poster he put in his window. This was in November 1918. The mother was fined and the father and two sons were courtmartialled. The father and Thomas were released, but Patrick got six months in jail.

There was nothing much doing in the area until sometime near the end of 1919 we got orders to take up any shotguns which were held by civilians in our area. We collected about six or seven guns in raids and some guns were handed to us without having to raid for them.

The R.I.C. evacuated the local barracks before Easter 1920 and we got orders to destroy it. We had no difficulty in doing the job. The evacuation of the barracks left us fairly free of police interference. The only danger would come from some of our own people acting as spies for the British and we had to be careful.

I should mention here that I was employed during the day at my trade and as I worked for an employer I could not be available during the day for important jobs, but I was able to be out at night blocking roads.

We had a good intelligence service in our area. Robert Knightly, who was stationmaster in the Tralee-Dingle Railway at Annascaul, was our Battalion Intelligence Officer and he was in touch with all the other stations on the line by telephone. In August 1920, Robert Knightly got word from Tralee about a British lorry which was to travel from Tralee to Dingle and return. 0

On 17th August 1920, I got orders to go with Paddy T. Kennedy to Castlegregory where we met Tadhg Brosnan O/C. 4th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade. He sent me to Aughasala to instruct some men to come to Annascaul early the next morning. I got a bicycle from a man named Crean and cycled to the village of Camp where I saw Gregory Ashe and gave him an order from Tadhg Brosnan to bring some men to Annascaul the following morning. I had been on the move all night and when I got back to Annascaul the men were collecting at John Connor's house.

I then learned of the plan to ambush the British lorry on its way back to Tralee from Dingle. I waited with the others at John Connor's until they were moving off, and then Tadhg Brosnan told me to go to the railway station and stand to there. The arrangements were that an intelligence officer at the railway station in Dingle would 'phone Robert Knightly at Annascaul when the British party were leaving Dingle. The man at Dingle would give the time of departure and strength of the British party.

I waited with Robert Knightly and when the message came I went to Tadhg Brosnan who had his men in position to the west of Annascaul village on the north side of the Annascaul-Dingle road. I found Tadhg Brosnan inside the ditch bordering the road. He was with Paddy Kelly of Tralee who had a mine laid in the road opposite where himself and Tadhg were in cover. When I delivered my message to Tadhg he sent me to wait in a field behind some of his party who were armed with rifles and were behind a hedge some distance back from the road. I was unarmed, but Tadhg said I might be wanted. We were all anxious to be in the ambush and have a crack at the British.

After being in the field for some time I heard the lorry coming. I took cover and looked to the spot where I thought the mine should be. Suddenly there was an explosion and I saw the lorry lifting. The firing started and I kept down until it had finished and the British had surrendered.

When the British surrendered I went down to the road and Tadhg Brosnan told me to collect the wounded. There were five or six British soldiers wounded and we got a motor car which had been held up during the fight and took the wounded to Doctor Kane at Bunnear. I was accompanied by Patrick T. Kennedy and some other Volunteer whose name I have forgotten. When we got to Dr. Kane's he told me that I should have worn some disguise

so that he could not recognise me if questioned by the British.

When the wounded had been attended to by Dr. Kane we instructed the driver of the car to drive them back to Dingle. They had already been disarmed at the scene of the ambush..

The night after the ambush I stood-to with the Annascaul Company in case the British came out for reprisals. Lispole and Castlegregory Companies were with us and as the lads who had been on the ambush had tasted blood I am quite sure that if the British had started anything that night we would have slaughtered them. The village of Annascaul had been evacuated by the residents. They knew we were waiting for the British and we were given a clear field. Many British ex-servicemen who were living in the area came to us asking for arms, but our own lads had first claim and we had not got enough arms even for our own.

The British came out next day and made a few arrests. One of the men who had been on the ambush was shot, but I think he was recognised. He was in hiding and the soldier who saw him hiding with a group fired one shot which killed Patrick Kennedy.

We kept the roads in our area blocked to hamper the movement of the British and every time they wanted to move on the roads they had to fill in trenches and lift trees and stones.

About the middle of March 1921, word came to Annascaul that the Brigade column were going to carry out an ambush at Lispole. Ten members of Annascaul Company were sent to Lispole to take part. I was not sent because I was employed during the day. We were instructed to post sentries at Annascaul Courthouse, one during the day and two during the night. Bicycles were to be ready and the sentries were to warn the ambush party at Lispole if any British forces made an attempt

to move from Tralee towards Dingle. The ambush party were waiting for British forces moving in the opposite direction.

The sentries took up duty on the Sunday and we were on duty until the Tuesday evening before word came that there was a fight on at Lispole and that the Tans had surrounded our lads. I cannot speak of what happened at Lispole. I was not there.

On the Tuesday night I was sent to Acres outside Annascaul where two of the men wounded at the Lispole fight had been taken. When I got to Acres, Tommy Hawley and Thomas Ashe, two wounded men, had just been brought in. I was sent for a priest and I went to Rev. Fr. T.J. Lyne who was then Administrator at Annascaul and who is now Canon in Dingle. He went to Acres and attended to the wounded men. When I got back to Acres the priest had just left and Nurse Nance Scully had arrived to care for them. I was having a cup of tea in the kitchen when the nurse came into the kitchen and said she thought Thomas Ashe was dying. We went up to the room and Thomas Ashe could not answer when we spoke. We knelt down and started the rosary but he died before it was finished.

When Thomas Ashe died it was decided to move Thomas Hawley to Ballinahunt, about six miles from Acres. We carried him on a horse cart and the journey was made over rough boreens. Thomas Hawley was roaring with pain; he had been wounded in the head; We took Hawley to John Herlihy's of Ballinahunt. There were some armed Volunteers out in front to act as guard and myself and a man named Mick Ashe held Hawley on the cart. I remained at Herlihy's until the next morning along with Mick Ashe and we were relieved by two other Volunteers.

Miss Bridget O'Connor (now Mrs. John Falvey of Counduff, Annascaul) met us when we got to Herlihy's and she was with Hawley when I left. Before we left Ballinahunt Dr. Ferris (R.I.P.) of Castlegregory, had come across the hills and

stitched the wound in Haeley's head. He came over the hills in the middle of the night.

I returned to Annascaul and resumed my normal duties, but there was nothing else of importance occurred in the area before the truce. The British had no garrisons nearer than Dingle to the west, or Tralee to the east, and they did not trouble us very much after the Lispole attack.

Signed: Patrick Houlihan

Date: 22nd June 1954.

Patrick Houlihan

22nd June 1954.

Witness: James J. O'Connor.
James J. O'Connor.

