

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTAIRÉ
No. W.S. 970

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 970.....

Witness

John (Jack) Ahern,
Leitrim Middle,
Newtownsandess,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Lieut. Newtownsandess Coy. Irish Vol's.
Co. Kerry, 1917 - .

Subject.

- (a) Newtownsandess Coy. Irish Vol's. Co. Kerry,
1917 - ;
- (b) Shooting of D.I. O'Sullivan, Listowel,
January 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2282.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

Statement of John (Jack) Ahern,
Middle,
Leitrim [redacted], Newtownsandee, Co. Kerry.

I was born in April, 1899. My father was a small farmer. He sent me to the local national school. I left school at about fifteen years of age and went to work on my father's farm.

In early 1917 a Sinn Féin Club was formed here in Newtownsandee; it was called the Thomas Clarke Club. I was one of the first members. There were only ten or eleven members at first.

From the members of the Sinn Féin Club the Volunteers were formed here about the summer of 1917. It was a man named Tom O'Grady who was principally responsible for the formation of the Volunteers. He became the first Captain and I became 1st Lieutenant. The strength of the Company at this time was 17 or 18 men. We drilled and paraded all that year. We had no arms that year.

In the spring of 1918 the Company was reorganised. The reason for the reorganisation was the threat of conscription at the time. The strength of the Company increased from about 18 men to about 150. Conscription was the cause of bringing in men who would never have joined. They got protection by being in the Company. All of the men who joined up remained faithful to the Company and none of them left after the conscription scare was over. A man named William O'Sullivan of Derry, Listowel, was, I think, made Company Captain when the Company was reorganised and I was 1st Lieutenant. There was a general election at

the end of the year but the Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed and the Company took no part in the election.

In 1919 there was very little doing until coming on to winter when I, with the other men of the Company, took part in collecting shot guns from the farmers around.

In 1920 I, with others, continued the collection of the shot guns in the area. The people around were now wholeheartedly behind the Volunteers and the Sinn Féin movement. In November of this year a man named Eddie Carmody who used to live here in Newtownsandess and was originally a member of this Company, was shot dead by Tans in Ballylongford. He was living in Ballylongford for some time before he was shot. The shooting of Carmody put new life into the Company here and the men of the Company were very anxious to avenge his death.

About a month or so after the shooting of Carmody two R.I.C. men were captured in Ballylongford by men of that Company. They were sent over to our Company and were imprisoned here in Newtownsandess. I with other men of the Company helped to guard them for about seven days when they were released on a plea from the Parish Priest ^{of Ballylongford} (at the time.

At the end of the year the police were very active searching and raiding Volunteer's homes. With all this and the shooting of Carmody, the Company were anxious to do something to hit back. At this time an R.I.C. man named O'Sullivan was transferred to Listowel from Kilmallock. He was a Sergeant in Kilmallock and had been promoted to the rank of District Inspector. He had taken charge of the

R.I.C. barracks in Kilmallock earlier in the year when the barracks was attacked by the I.R.A. In the attack on Kilmallock a Kerryman - a member of the I.R.A. and a Gaelic League organiser - was shot dead. This man to prove his sincerity disregarded normal protective measures for his safety and came out into the open during the attack on the barracks. His name was Liam Scully and he felt he was not being wholeheartedly trusted by his comrades, and it appears that this was the reason for his action when he was shot.

In January 1921 an order came from Humphrey Murphy, Brigade O/C Kerry No. 1 Brigade, to the Battalion Staff of which Jim Sugrue was O/C, that District Inspector O'Sullivan was to be executed. It seems the Battalion Staff discussed the order for some time and tried unsuccessfully to form a plan to carry out the order. They then called for Volunteers from the Companies in the Battalion area. The Volunteers for the job were slow in coming forward and it was a month at least before the order was carried out. Jack Sheehan, Con Brosnan, Daniel O'Grady and myself from the Newtownsandus Company volunteered for the job. Sheehan lived at Coillwee, Listowel, and belonged to the part of the Company there which was included in the Newtownsandus Company. We then received our instructions from William O'Sullivan, the Company O/C. Having accepted the job myself and the other three men discussed the possibility of carrying it out with the Battalion Staff, Con Brosnan, O'Grady and myself obtained a revolver each and seven or eight rounds of ammunition each. We suspected that the ammunition was not up to standard. We got the revolvers and ammunition two nights before the job and on the night

before we had a practice shot each and we were satisfied that the ammunition was more or less O.K. I came up to Con Brosnan's house and stayed with him the night before. Daniel O'Grady stayed at home and Jack Sheehan stayed at his own home in Colliswee, Listowel. At 10 o'clock on the morning, I left Con Brosnan's and met Dan O'Grady as arranged the night before and the two of us walked to Listowel. Con Brosnan cycled into the town. We all met in Miss Stack's public-house in Listowel. Miss Stack's was always a friendly place for the boys and was sometimes frequented by them. She supplied us with a couple of drinks while we were waiting.

It was about 12 noon when we met in the pub. I was in charge and we all felt somewhat nervous. I said to Con Brosnan and Dan O'Grady: "We have a duty to perform and must do it". Our scout, Jack Sheehan, who was not armed, had not come into the pub. He was on duty outside between the police barracks and a point opposite Stack's pub on the other side of the street. The distance between the barracks and this point was about 100 yards. District Inspector O'Sullivan lived in a private house alongside Stack's pub. He usually left the barracks and crossed the street almost in front of the barracks to get to his home. The signal arranged was that Sheehan would walk parallel with the D.I., that is that as the D.I. came towards the pub on the pub side Sheehan would keep in line with him on the far side. It so happened that when the D.I. came out of the barracks and crossed over to our side of the street he stopped to speak for a few minutes to someone on the path. The result was that Sheehan appeared opposite the pub without the D.I. being outside the pub. The scout then retraced his steps but returned in about three minutes, the D.I. being in line

with him and just outside the pub door. This was the signal we were waiting for. The three of us were sitting side by side inside the front window. Brosnan and O'Grady took the lead going out into the street. I followed on their heels. Brosnan and O'Grady opened fire together and fired about four shots each while I fired six in all, making sure that the execution was complete.

It had been arranged that the four of us would escape through the sports' field. After going through the sports' field we were called on to halt by a man named Sweetman - this man's house was always used as a meeting place for the loyalists of the time. Sweetman said to us: "Stand your ground, take your punishment". Our reply was: "You should get the same as O'Sullivan". I would have shot him there and then only our ammunition was limited. This man actually deserved to be shot for his part in helping the R.I.C. It was in his house that the Tans, R.I.C. and military were entertained while in Listowel. I and the other three went on about our business. I arrived home that evening and attended a section meeting of the Company that same evening. The men of the Company were not aware of my part in the shooting.

Just after the shooting of O'Sullivan the Column for Kerry No. 1 Brigade was formed. Myself, D. O'Grady and Con Brosnan of the Newtownsandes Company were selected for it. Tom Kennelly of Mooneen became the O/C of the Column and Denis Quille of Listowel became Vice O/C. Shortly after, in February, myself, Con Brosnan, Ned Joe Walsh, Con Dee, Daniel O'Grady and Denis Quille ambushed two R.I.C. men in Ballylongford. They were wounded and we disarmed them and got two revolvers. I had a rifle that night. The other

men had either a rifle or a shot gun. The Column after being formed managed to get a number of rifles from Tarbert. The Redmondite Volunteers there had got them after the Howth gun-running and willingly handed them over to the Column.

During the attack by the I.R.A. in March, 1921, on the Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks I with the other men of the Newtownsandus Company helped to block the roads and fell trees to prevent the passage of help to Ballybunion R.I.C.

The Black and Tans had arrived in Tarbert by this time so I, Con Brosnan and D. O'Grady, though attached to the Column, took with us from the Newtownsandus Company about six or eight men to Tarbert for an attack on an R.I.C. patrol there in the month of April. The Tarbert Company had supplied us with details of their (R.I.C. and Tans) movements. I was in charge and arrived with the men in the town at about 7 o'clock in the evening. I was armed with a rifle and revolver, the other men had either rifles, revolvers or shot guns. We took up positions about 400 yards from the barracks near Miss McCarthy's and waited for the Tans to come out. About half an hour after taking up positions the Tans came out. I gave the order to open fire. They replied immediately, but we broke off the action and returned to Newtownsandus. The action had lasted 20 minutes.

About a month later we decided to go back to Tarbert to make another attack. The men in the second attack were the same as took part in the first one, with a couple of exceptions. I was in charge again. We just fired a few shots each at the patrol again and also fired a few shots at the barracks. The Tans and R.I.C. returned the fire. We left almost at once but the Tans kept firing for some time after.

The last night before the truce I and the most of the other men from Newtownsandes who had taken part in previous attacks in Tarbert went into Tarbert armed with rifles and revolvers. Our object was to get a Tan named Farnloe who had shot one of our men - Jack Sheehan, our scout in the shooting of D.I. O'Sullivan. Sheehan was shot dead in a bog near his home. He was a member of the Column and came home one day to attend to some business matter. He was sitting on a low wall near his home when he saw a lorry load of Tans approaching. He immediately got behind the wall and took cover in some long grass. As the Tans approached he was under the impression that he could be seen from the road so he started to run. The Tans opened fire and he fell dead. We arrived in Tarbert about 10.30 p.m. I left about 8 men outside the town but brought Con Brosnan and D. O'Grady into the town with me. When we got into the town a scout there informed us that Farnloe, the Tan, was in Mulcahy's pub with three or four other Tans. I sent Con Brosnan and D. O'Grady back to collect the men we had left about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile outside the town. I was now on my own. In the meantime the Tans started to leave the pub. I was in the open street near the pub on the opposite corner and had to think quickly what to do. There were four of them so I opened fire with the revolver on the four Tans. They did not return the fire but ran for the barracks and opened fire from there, but by this time I was on my way to join my friends. This action took place one hour before midnight on the ^{eve} ~~night~~ of the truce.

During the truce I went to a training camp at Ballyheigue. The instructor was named Kissane, known locally as Captain Hand. I joined the National Army in 1922 and remained in it until 1929. I had a serious illness during this time.

Signed: John Ahern
Date: 10th July 1954

Witness: John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

(John Ahern)

10th July 1954.

