

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 635

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 635

Witness

Frank King,
Oughterard,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Constable, R.I.C., Fermoy,
1904-1922.

Subject.

Arrest of the Kent family at
Castlelyons, Co. Cork, 2nd May 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 1073.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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CO. GALWAY.

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21/12/1951.

SC KING

STATEMENT BY MR. FRANK KEANE, EX-R.I.C.

RE

ARREST OF KENT FAMILY, CASTLE LYONS.

2nd sub
16th MAY, 1916.

"I served in the R.I.C. as a constable, from 1899-1922. My number was 58054. I was stationed in Fermoy and the surrounding district for 18 years, from 1904 to 1922.

At the time of the raid on the Kent family's house I was stationed in Fermoy. We received orders at the R.I.C. Barracks at 12 midnight approximately, on the ^{15th sub.} ~~15th~~ May, 1916, to arrest all the prominent "Sinn Feiners" in the district. These orders came from British Military Headquarters, at that time in Queenstown. We left the barracks at 2.30a.m. on the ^{2nd sub.} ~~16th~~ May, 1916. There were eight of us all told in the raiding party. A Head Constable in charge, 2 Sergeants and 5 Constables. Each of us was armed with a rifle, a bayonet and 30 rounds of ammunition. We travelled in two small trucks. These were very uncomfortable and very shakey as they had solid tyres.

On the way out the main road from Fermoy towards Castle Lyons we made two arrests. The first man was living alone in a cottage on the side of the road. It took us a long time to wake him up. His name was Savage. About a half-mile further on we arrested another man who was also living alone on the side of the road. His name was Spillane.

After this we travelled to the Kent house near Castle Lyons. This house was called "Bunnard", and was situated on a piece of high ground about 300 yds. up from the main road. We dismounted from the two trucks on the side of the main road. The two drivers who were

British soldiers were left in charge of the trucks and constable ~~Donoghue~~ Donoghue was left guarding the two prisoners we had already taken. They were hand-cuffed together. When we came near the house the Head Constable pointed out the positions we were to take up around the house so that we could cover all exits and allow no one to escape. Sgt. Sullivan, Constable Walsh and I went to the west side of the house. Head Constable Rowe, Sgt. Caldbeck and constables Dolan and Norris went to the east side of the house. The house was a large two-storey house, with a wing containing a back kitchen jutting out at the rear. There was a door in the front and a door in the east side of the rear wing. At that time in this part of the country the front door was rarely used in houses, and you normally went to the back door on any type of business. The Head Constable and his men approached the kitchen door and knocked. They stated their business and also who they were and almost immediately there was a very loud and defiant answer. I believe the words spoken were "We will not surrender until we leave some of you dead". This answer was followed almost immediately by a shot. The answer and the shot came so quickly that the occupants of the house could not have been in bed or asleep. I heard afterwards that some friends of theirs had stayed in the house with them several nights before this, so it looked as if they were expecting a raid at any time.

There was no door on the west side of the house where the Sgt., the other Constable and I were watching. There were eight windows and we could see them all and had them all covered. It was daylight by this time as it was now 4.30 a.m. When we heard the shot we decided that standing in the open near these windows was very dangerous so we retreated back in the direction of some shrubbery to take up position where we would have some cover from any fire. There were several more shots as we moved back. When I got back some distance from the house I could see the head Constable crouching behind a low wall on the far side of the house. Several shots rang out and I saw him fall back on the ground. His head was almost completely blown off by a shotgun blast. It was about the fourth shot I heard that killed the Head Constable. We moved back into the shrubbery. I

signalled down to the main road to the drivers and waved but they did not understand what I meant. I then went down to the road myself and told them that the Head Constable had been shot dead and that they had better go back to Fermoy immediately for reinforcements. I then returned to my position on the east side of the house, watching the windows. It was a fine, clear morning and we lay down on the ground and fired an occasional shot at the house. We did not fire very often as we had to spare our ammunition, we had only 30 rounds per man. I could hear shots from the other side of the house. We had no contact at this time with our men on the west side, and we did not know whether it was they who were firing in at the house or whether the Kents were firing out at them, or both. About 5 o'clock the Kents offered to surrender to the men at the west side of the house. Sgt. Caldbeck and his men told them to throw out their arms first. They threw out three shotguns. Nothing happened after that, and those of us on the east side of the house kept firing an occasional shot until the military arrived at 6.15 a.m. There was about from 50 to 100 men in the military party that arrived. They had five trucks and were armed with machine-guns and rifles. They also had a doctor with them and appeared to be prepared for a big battle.. They were all Commissioned Officers and Cadets from the Cadet Training School which the British Army had at Moore Park, near Fermoy. They set up a machine-gun on the side of the road. Sgt. Sullivan, Constable Walsh and myself were in the line of fire of this gun so we came back out of the way. At this stage the four Kent brothers opened a window on the ground floor in the front of the house and came out with their hands up to surrender to the military. One of them, Dick, attempted to run away and escape. Two of the British Cadets fired at him and he fell on the ground badly wounded. The bullet went in through his back and out through his chest and he died the following day in hospital. Another brother, David, was wounded in the side. All the brothers were arrested and taken to Fermoy. The three brothers were removed to Cork. After the brothers were arrested the military searched and looted the house. When Dick Kent was shot while trying to escape, I left my position without permission and went down to one of the trucks on the road and told the driver to take me into

Castle Lyons for the priest. Canon Peter O'Leary was waiting at the Prysbery for a car to take him to say 7 o'clock Mass. He came away with me immediately in the truck instead. When we got to the Kent house the military were still searching the house and old Mrs. Kent who was 86 years of age had been placed under arrest. I saw one soldier leave the house with a biscuit tin full of shotgun ammunition. I heard several months afterwards, that the three shotguns which the Kent brothers threw out of the window of the house were jammed and they could not extract the empty cartridges. This probably accounts for all the shotgun ammunition that was left over. The shotguns were of German pattern and were not much good. They would be worth about 25 shillings each at the time. In their search the military also found a military rifle in the house. David Must have been using this as he was wounded in the hand and there was blood on the butt of the rifle. About 7.30 a.m. Mrs. Kent, Canon O'Leary and I went into Fermoy in another truck. It was later reported that I had arrested both the Canon and Mrs. Kent. Several other arrests were made in the locality that day, but I did not take part in these.

On the ^{3rd} ~~19th~~ May, the following day, a statement of evidence was taken from me and all others who were members of the R.I.C. party who raided Kents' house. Tom and William Kent were courtmartialled in Cork on the ^{4th} ~~19th~~ May. David was in hospital and not well enough to stand trial. Tom was found guilty and was executed by the British. William was acquitted. I gave evidence at the courtmartial that William was a quiet, inoffensive type who had no "Sinn Fein" activities. About six weeks later David was courtmartialled at Richmond Barracks, Dublin. I gave evidence at this trial also. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. This sentence was later commuted to five years penal servitude.

I was stationed in Fermoy and the district for about 12 years at this time and I knew the Kent family very well. All their relatives and themselves were very respectable people. At this time, Tom, who was executed was 50 years of age. William who was acquitted at the courtmartial in Cork was 47. David who was courtmartialled in Dublin was 55, and Dick who was shot was 44. Dick was a great athlete,

and had a lot of medals in the house. Many of them were stolen by the military who searched the house on the day of the arrest. David Kent was a T.D. for a number of years afterwards and when he died William was elected a T.D. also.

I was stationed in Fermoy Barracks until 1922 when we were all transferred to Gormanstown for disbandment.

Signed *Francis King*.....

Witness

Simon Sturcuband
Reamporee

8/1/52

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