

W.S. 720

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 720

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 720

Witness

John Kelly,
Anratabeg,
Lanesboro,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Member of Clontuskert Company, 3rd Battalion,
South Roscommon Brigade, 1919 - .

Subject.

Traffic-blocking activities by I.R.A.
on Roscommon-Longford road,
- 10th-11th May, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S. 2034.....

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STATEMENT BY MR. JOHN KELLY,
Anratabeg, Lanesboro, Co. Roscommon.

The Trap Mine Disaster At Beechwood.

I belonged to the Clontuskert Company, 3rd Battalion, South Roscommon Brigade, from the early part of 1919. John O'Connor was the Company Commander and the strength of the Company was about twenty-five (25) all ranks. The Clontuskert Company had instructions from the Battalion Commander to keep the Roscommon-Lanesboro road permanently obstructed to traffic at all times. This road is the main artery between Roscommon and Longford or Roscommon and Mullingar, all of which had strong garrisons of enemy forces. To deny this road to the enemy would seriously impede their liberty of movement and furthermore it would compel them to use roads which were more suitable for ambushing them.

A trench was cut across the road at Beechwood on the Lanesboro side. There was another trench cut across the Mountcashel road, which is a side road to the main road. This side road, if not trenched, would have allowed the enemy to by-pass the trench on the main road at Beechwood. At the place where the trench was cut on the main road, the road is raised much higher than the land on either side of it and, as the soil here is all bog mould, once you had destroyed the surface layer, it was easy to cut a trench across the road and also to dispose of the soil from that trench. The trench was six (6) foot wide and about six (6) foot deep and extended across to the gripe on either side. The soil was scattered into the gripes on either side so that it could not be collected for easy filling. The road was quite impassable to any wheeled traffic.

The trench was opened on the night of the 10th-11th May, 1921, and the following morning the Black and Tans came to the area and rounded up all the local people and made them fill in the trench again. They had to draw material from some little distance in order to fill it. That night about eleven or twelve p.m. we started to re-open it again. The party working at the trench consisted of John O'Connor, our Captain, Jim Gannon, Lieutenant Scally and myself. There were other Volunteers keeping watch on the road to Lanesboro and Roscommon. It was intended that an equal number of this party would relieve us later on.

We started working and after about ten minutes we heard something "sizzling", just like a kettle when it starts to boil. I said, "What's that?", and immediately an explosion took place. All of us were hit. I received pieces of shrapnel in my legs, stomach, hands and face. Scally had been hit on the leg, and part of his boot was blown off. O'Connor was also wounded in the leg and Gannon was wounded in the arm. I was really the worst wounded, as parts of the shrapnel had penetrated to my stomach, but I remained conscious, however, and continued so for about a week afterwards when I lapsed.

On hearing the explosion, the men who were on outpost came running in and brought us to a house named Garraghan's nearby. There they got a horse and cart and, putting us on this, they took us to the edge of the Shannon where there was a boat. We had received no treatment so far. We were taken in the boat across to an island in the Shannon - Inchenagh Island. Some of our men who were on the run were staying in a vacant house on the island and we were all put up there. Doctor O'Halloran and a nurse, Miss Donellan, were sent for and both arrived about 3 or 4

a.m. in the morning and treated us. The nurse remained with us. Doctor Kelly of Roscommon also visited us that evening and from thenceforth he attended to us regularly. Lieutenant Scally died after about ten days' illness.

Information was now received that the area in the vicinity of our abode was going to be searched by the enemy. Captain O'Connor and Gannon were now much improved and were allowed to go home. I was taken to a place called Rennany, which is a piece of land jutting out into the Shannon. I remained there for about a fortnight, the nurse coming with me. I was now moved to Quaker Island and remained there until after the Truce was signed, when I was taken to Jervis Street Hospital, Dublin, where I was operated on.

I was in hospital then until the following Christmas when I was discharged to convalesce. I went back in March to Marlborough Hall, which was now used as a hospital by the State Forces. After some time there, I came home again but returned to George V., now St. Bricin's Military Hospital, which had now been taken over by the Free State Forces from the British. I was finally discharged from hospital in June, 1924.

We had received no intimation that the trench had been trap-mined. The local people, who had worked at the filling in of the trench, might have seen it being done but did not realise what it was. More likely, as it was close to the surface, the Tans put it in after they had sent the local people away. I understand that what was used by the Tans was a Mills Hand Grenade or Bomb, with the safety pin removed and a flat stone put on the lever to keep the striker spring

compressed. What we heard was the fuse burning which resembled the kettle boiling. A small flat stone would not be recognised as something unusual in a case like this.

SIGNED

John Kelly
(John Kelly)

DATE

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WITNESS

Matthew Barry Comd't
(Matthew Barry), Comd't.