

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURU STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

835

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 835

Witness

Michael Knightly,
65 St. Laurence Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'F' Company,
1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, 1916;
Press Intelligence Officer to Michael Collins.

Subject.

Capture of Kevin Barry
in North King Street, Dublin, 20th
September, 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No .S.404...

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL KNIGHTLY

Chief Reporter to Dáil Éireann - residing
at 65 St. Lawrence's Road, Clontarf, Dublin

The Capture of Kevin Barry

Captain Seamus Kavanagh, who had charge of "the job" in which Kevin Barry was captured, was a fellow lodger of mine at 11 Great Denmark Street. Also in the "digs" was Tom Kissane, a brother of Dr. Kissane of Maynooth, and a member of the Active Service Unit in Dublin from its formation. They set out with their comrades on the morning of the 20th September 1920, from 11 Great Denmark St. to disarm a British ration party in North King St. I had arranged with Tom Kissane that he was to come to the "Herald" office after the event and supply me with particulars of the attack. I was not long in the office when I heard of the affray in North King St., that two of the British troops were dead, two wounded and that one of the attackers was captured. A colleague of mine - Paddy Quinn - saw the captured youth being conveyed in a lorry to the North Dublin Union, a British headquarters. He gave me a perfect description of him. As Tom Kissane did not turn up, I repaired to 11 Great Denmark St. and found him lying on a sofa, a very disappointed man. "I told Seamus Kavanagh" he said, on the way to North King St. "that the job would not be as easy as he thought, but he was of a different opinion". They had loitered around the bakery where the British troops were to collect bread, he said, and on the arrival of the lorry they ordered the Tommies to drop their rifles and put their hands up. This they did, but one man picked up his rifle again and was fired on. Some more then joined in the firing and the few Volunteers had to retreat. Tom was chased into Smithfield with bullets whizzing by his ears.

I described the man who had been caught. He said: "It is Kevin Barry". I asked him could he stand torture and, after a

little hesitation, he replied: "Yes, he can. Why?" I said if he broke down it might be serious for all of them. "In any case you had better take precautions" I said. "Change your clothes and get out". He said he had only the one suit. "Then" I said, "remove your glasses". He had rather remarkable glasses, one glass being cracked down the middle. This he did, but as we walked towards Findlater's Church he said: "To hell with it, I can't see", and again put his glasses on. As a matter of fact, one of the Tommies gave quite a good description of one of the men involved. Quite a number of redheads were arrested subsequently on suspicion, but the right man eluded arrest.

On the evening of the attack, Kevin Barry's sister was looking for information about her brother. She was directed to me. I explained that her brother was a prisoner and unhurt. She seemed relieved. I said: "Of course you understand the position is serious. Two Tommies are dead and he is likely to be tried for his life". She said she understood that, but she did not mind as long as he was all right for the moment.

A few weeks later I found myself a prisoner in Mountjoy. I became friendly with a warder and inquired if Kevin Barry was uninjured when brought to Mountjoy. He said that his arm was in a sling. I asked him was he sure of that. He said yes and that there was a record of it in the books. So it was apparent that Kevin Barry was subjected to some torture to get him to disclose information about his comrades, without result.

As to how I came to be in Mountjoy at that time, Mick Collins sent for me one day and informed me that the Castle crowd had got a letter addressed to me to which they attached some importance. The I.R.A. had been procuring some valuable information through raids on the post. The British apparently retaliated by similar raids. They seized the mail at Kingsbridge and the officer who opened the letter addressed to me said:

"Oh, gee! Look at this". That was all the information Mick had and wondered what it was. I said it might have been something about Austin Stack. He said: "Damn them. Why should they use your address as a covering address?" I remarked: "That means a raid". He said: "They will not raid immediately. They will watch for you sometime". I said: "I would not be much use to you on the run, so I will stand my ground and try a bluff". He left it to myself to decide. I got Seamus Kavanagh and Tom Kissane to leave the lodgings, bringing all arms, ammunition and incriminating matter with them. I did not inform Joe Griffin, who was then a company intelligence officer - later Brigade Intelligence Officer - and who shared a room with me, as I did not want it to appear to the British if the nest was empty that I had information about what had taken place. Terence McSwiney was on hunger strike at the time and I was sent to London to report the strike. I returned a fortnight later and the second night back the anticipated raid took place. Every man in the house was arrested, the raid lasting nearly six hours. Three weeks later I was sentenced to a month's imprisonment for refusing to allow the British to photograph me. They had wanted to take my finger prints, but I said that they would have to do it by force. They did not try force and confined the charge to a breach of the Defence of the Realm Regulations. My reply was brief. It was that I denied the right of a foreign government to make regulations governing my actions in my own country.

Signed: Michael Knightly
(Michael Knightly)

Date: 27/4/53
27/4/53

Witness: M.F. Ryan Comd't.
(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.

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