

W. S. 1,123.
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,123

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,123

Witness

Cornelius Brosnan,
Newtownsandes,
Listowel,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Newtownsandes company Irish vol's.
Listowel Battalion 1917-1921.

Subject.

- (a) Newtownsandes Company Irish Volunteers
Listowel Batt'n. Co. Kerry 1917-1921;
- (b) Execution of D.I. O'Sullivan.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2437

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF CON BROSNAN,
Newtownsandes, Listowel, Co. Kerry.

I was born in Newtownsandes, Co. Kerry, in December, 1900, and was sent to the local National School until I was 15 years of age after which I went to St. Michael's College, Listowel, for a further year.

When a Sinn Féin Club was formed here in Newtownsandes in early 1917, I became a member. The Club was known as "The Thomas ~~Ash~~ *black* Club". We had only about fifteen members at first. A few months later a man named Tom O'Grady was instrumental in forming a small Company of the Volunteers. He became the first Company Captain and a man named Jack Ahern became 1st Lieutenant. Our strength at first was about 20 men. We had no arms at the time but we drilled and paraded all that year.

Early in 1918 during the conscription scare the membership of the Company increased to about 150 men, when elections for new officers took place. A man named William O'Sullivan became Company Captain while Jack Ahern remained ~~1st~~ Lieutenant. All of our new members remained with the Company when the scare was over and later became very good and loyal Volunteers. At the General Election at the end of the year our Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed with the result that the local Volunteers took no part in the election campaign as the Volunteers in other constituencies did at the time. During the year drilling and route marching was intensified.

During the year 1919, except for the drilling and route marching, there was very little doing. Near the end of the year the Company Captain received an order from James Sugrue, Battalion O/C. to collect

all shot guns in our area. I took part in collecting the shot guns from farmers in the neighbourhood and collected about thirty shot guns in all.

All through 1920 we continued to meet and drill secretly. As the R.I.C. became very active, we could not drill and parade so openly as before. In the month of March on the occasion of an I.R.A. attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks in charge of James Sugrue, Battalion O/C., and Thomas O'Donohue, Battalion Vice O/C., I took part with other members of this Company in blocking roads in the area. In the month of November, 1920, a member of our Company at one time, named Eddie Carmody, was shot dead by a party of Tans in Ballylongford. The Tans had reinforced the R.I.C. in Ballylongford and other areas in North Kerry some months before November. Carmody was living in Ballylongford at the time.

Shortly after the shooting of Carmody two R.I.C. were arrested by the Ballylongford I.R.A. and brought to Newtownsandes and imprisoned here for about a week. I with other members of the Company helped to guard them during the period. After a plea on their behalf by the Parish Priest of the time they were released. The R.I.C. and Tans became more active towards the end of the year. The homes of Volunteers were raided and searched for arms regularly, very often in the early morning before people would be out of their beds.

Around the month of November a District Inspector of the R.I.C. named O'Sullivan took charge of the R.I.C. in Listowel. He had been a Sergeant at Kilmallock previously and was in charge of the barracks there when it was attacked by the I.R.A. in the month of May. It appears that O'Sullivan was promoted to the rank of District Inspector for his defence of the barracks against

the I.R.A. During the attack an I.R.A. man named Liam Scully was shot dead. Scully, who was a teacher, was a Kerry man and was previously a member of the Ballylongford Company.

About the end of December or early in 1921, our Company Captain attended a Battalion Council meeting at which the Battalion O/C. read an order he had received from the Brigade O/C., Paddy Cahill, to the effect that District Inspector O'Sullivan was to be shot for his part in defending the barracks at Kilmallock and the shooting of Scully. The Battalion O/C. asked for Volunteers for the job from each Company Captain present. Some time elapsed before anyone volunteered. Eventually, I with three other members of this Company named Jack Ahern (1st Lieutenant), Daniel O'Grady and Jack Sheehan volunteered to carry out the job.

Having volunteered for the job we discussed the details and the best time and place to carry it out with William O'Sullivan, our Company Captain, and members of the Battalion Staff. It was agreed between us that the best place to shoot O'Sullivan was in the town of Listowel. We had been informed of his regular movements by a number of scouts in Listowel who had been put on his trail as soon as the order was received. Jack Ahern, Dan O'Grady and I were issued with a revolver and about seven rounds of ammunition each, while Jack Sheehan was detailed to act as scout for the occasion. We received the revolvers a couple of nights before the shooting and had a practice shot each the same night to test the effectiveness of the ammunition. Jack Ahern stayed at my house the night before. The following morning I cycled into Listowel and went into the public house of a Miss Stack, which was only a short distance from the R.I.C. barracks but on the opposite side of the street.

After a while I was joined by Jack Ahern and Dan O'Grady while Jack Sheehan remained outside on the opposite side of the street. Sheehan's instructions were to walk in a line with O'Sullivan when he (O'Sullivan) left the barracks and crossed the street to our side which he usually did. O'Sullivan would have to pass Stack's pub to reach his home which was alongside Stack's public house.

It was sometime after 12 noon when we met in Stack's pub. O'Sullivan usually left the barracks around half past twelve to one o'clock. We had a few drinks while we were waiting. We were behind the front window of the pub and kept a look-out for Sheehan to come to a point opposite the window. This was the signal we were waiting for. As soon as Sheehan appeared at this point we knew that O'Sullivan would be outside the window on our side.

Eventually the District Inspector left the barracks and crossed the street directly opposite as was his custom. Sheehan immediately proceeded to walk in a line with him on the other side or barracks side and arrived at the point opposite the window which was about 100 yards from the barracks. In the meantime O'Sullivan met someone on the path as soon as he had crossed over and stood for some moments in conversation with him, with the result that Sheehan had arrived opposite our window some time before O'Sullivan. Sheehan returned towards the barracks and once again returned to the spot opposite the window: this time O'Sullivan was outside the window.

We were sitting side by side inside the window. O'Grady and I immediately stood up and went into the street followed by Ahern.

O'Grady and I opened fire together and fired about four shots each while Ahern fired about six. O'Sullivan lay dead on the pavement.

Having carried out our job we escaped through the sportsfield. As we were crossing the sportsfield a local loyalist named Sweetman called on us to halt saying at the same time "Stand your ground and take your punishment". We replied "You should get the same as O'Sullivan". We would have shot him on the spot only for the fact that our ammunition was very low. The officers of the R.I.C. and Tans were usually entertained by Sweetman and his family around this period. Eventually the four of us reached Newtownsandes without any further trouble.

A day or two after the shooting of O'Sullivan, I gave a dispatch to an I.R.A. man named Thomas Mahony - I had signed this dispatch "Con" - to deliver to William O'Sullivan, our Company Captain. On the way Mahony was arrested by the Tans, the dispatch was found, after which four lorry loads of Tans arrived in Newtownsandes and burned down my house which was a public house.

A short time later a Flying Column for North Kerry was formed. A man by the name of Tom Kennelly became O/C., and a Denis Quille became Vice O/C. Kennelly was from Mooneen and Quille was from Listowel. The strength of the Column was about thirty men. They were mostly men who were 'on the run' at the time and belonged to each of the Battalion areas of Listowel and Lixnaw. Ahern, O'Grady, Sheehan and I were accepted on the Column from its formation.

Sometime later in the month of February a number of men of the Column, including Con Dee, Jack Ahern, Ned Joe Walsh, Dan O'Grady, Denis Quille and myself went into Ballylongford where we ambushed

two Tans. We took up positions in a side street. As the two Tans came along we opened fire. They fell to the ground wounded, after which we disarmed them of their revolvers. I had a rifle that night: the other men had either rifles or revolvers. I should explain that on the formation of the Column we obtained a number of rifles from the Tarbert Company. The rifles which were Martini Henrys had been purchased by the Tarbert Volunteers after the Howth gun running around 1914, and were retained by them in good condition up to 1921.

In the month of April I, with Jack Ahern, Dan O'Grady and about eight other members of the Newtownsandes Company, went into Tarbert to attack a Tan patrol there. Jack Ahern took charge. We had previously received details of the Tan's movements from members of the Tarbert Company. I was armed with a rifle and so was Jack Ahern. The other men had either rifles or shotguns.

We arrived in the village about 7 p.m. and took up positions about 400 yards from the barracks at a side street. A short time later a patrol of about ten Tans approached our positions. We had been warned of their approach by members of the local Company who were acting as scouts. When the Tans were within about forty yards of our position Ahern gave the order "Open fire". We fired three or four rounds each after which they turned and ran for the barracks. Two, at least, of the Tans were wounded but they managed to reach the barracks. When they reached the barracks they opened fire from within. As soon as we had opened fire a Company of Royal Marines, stationed at a place called 'the Island' which was about half a mile from our positions, opened fire. We decided to withdraw as we could not cope with the Marines if they decided to advance on our positions. We returned to Newtownsandes that night.

About a month later we returned to Tarbert and attacked a patrol of about six Tans again. Most of the men in the second attack again belonged to the Newtownsandus Company. Jack Ahern was again in charge. Having taken up positions at a side street we again waited for the patrol to appear. Eventually a number of Tans left a public house and were going towards the barracks. As they came within range we opened fire, firing a couple of rounds each. When they reached the barracks they opened fire. We fired a couple of shots each at the barracks after which we withdrew.

In the month of May, Jack Sheehan, who had been our scout at the shooting of District Inspector O'Sullivan, got permission from the O/C. of the Flying Column to return to his home for a couple of days to see about some family matters. A day or two later, while sitting on a low wall with a brother of his near his home, they saw a lorry load of Tans approaching. His brother ran across the road, jumped across a ditch and took cover behind it. He crossed the low wall and was running for cover when the Tans spotted him and opened fire. He was shot dead. We subsequently heard through an R.I.C. man that the Tan responsible for his death was a man named Farnlow, who was stationed in Tarbert.

From then to the Truce we were determined to shoot Farnlow. We received reports of him now and again from the Tarbert Volunteers. Eventually, on the night prior to the Truce, we decided to go into Tarbert and attack the Tans again in the hope that we might get Farnlow. We arrived in Tarbert around 10 o'clock. Jack Ahern was in charge. We had about twelve men; most of these were armed with rifles, the others had shot guns.

When we got within half a mile of the village, Jack Ahern, Dan O'Grady and I, left the other men there, and proceeded into the

village to ascertain the position. In the village we were told by a local Volunteer that four Tans, including Farnlow, were in a certain public house. Ahern sent O'Grady and I back to the men to bring them in for the attack. A few minutes after we had left Ahern, the Tans left the public house. Ahern on his own opened fire on them with a revolver. Two of the Tans, one of whom was Farnlow, were wounded. A short time after we were joined by Ahern and could hear the Tans shooting from their barracks. The time was 11 o'clock on the eve of the Truce.

During the Truce I went to a training camp at Fourhane, Listowel. I later joined the National Army with the rank of Lieutenant and retired with the rank of Captain.

Signed: Cornelius Brosnan
(Cornelius Brosnan)
Date: 15-3-55

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

