

ORIGINAL

W.S. 1,144

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,144

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,144

Witness

Padraig O Seaghdha (Patrick O'Shea), ex N.T.,
Castlegregory,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Vice O/C. 4th Battalion
Kerry No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Castlegregory Company Irish Volunteers
Co. Kerry, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK O'SHEA, N.T. (retired)

Castlegregory, Co. Kerry.

In 1913 I was friendly with the late Austin Stack whom I had met through my association with the Gaelic League and G.A.A. Austin Stack approached me about organising the Volunteers in Castlegregory where I resided. At that time the village of Castlegregory was poor as far as the national spirit was concerned. It was a recruiting ground for the R.I.C. and many of the families had some relative in that force. The people of the surrounding area had, however, strong national feelings. It should be understood that while the people of the village were not friendly they were not actively hostile.

We got the Volunteers started in Castlegregory although we had only the support of about six families in the village. Austin Stack, who lived in Tralee, came to us occasionally at week-ends, and Ernest Blythe, who was living in a neighbouring area, helped in the organisation.

There was no circle of the I.R.B. in our area before 1916.

After starting the Volunteers we spread the organisation in the area and in this work we were lucky to have one man who was a tower of strength to us; he was Tadhg Brosnan, who became O/C. of the Castlegregory Company and, later, O/C. of the 4th Battalion, (Castlegregory).

The Redmondite split had a serious effect on the organisation for a while, but the efforts to build the Redmondite Volunteers fell through and the men who had followed Redmond came back to us. We had formed the Irish Volunteers at the time of the split. We put a lot of work into the organisation during 1914 and 1915. The G.A.A. and Gaelic League organisation were used as recruiting grounds.

My first inkling of something serious being planned for

1916 came to me in January of that year. I had travelled from Dublin to Cork with the Munster team and on the return journey to Dublin I met P.H. Pearse and Austin Stack. I travelled to Dublin by train with P.H. Pearse and, after leaving the train, I went with him to O'Connell Bridge where he was met by Sean McDermott. About this time a man named Partridge, who was a Trades Union official, visited Tralee and he was in contact with Austin Stack.

Some time before Easter 1916, Austin Stack sent for me to meet him at the office of Dr. J.D. O'Connell, solicitor, Tralee, where he - Austin Stack - was employed as a clerk. He told me that one or possibly two small boats would be soon on their way from Germany with arms and they would put into Tralee Bay. He asked me to arrange for a pilot who knew the bay to be in readiness and he explained that the boat or boats would show a green light. The pilot was to bring the boat to Fenit and, in preparation, the Kerry Volunteers would be mobilised. It was planned that the military barracks in Tralee would be contained. The railways out of Kerry would be seized and drivers and firemen would be ready to drive special trains carrying the arms unloaded at Fenit to Cork and Dublin. I was to report to Austin Stack on Easter Eve (Saturday) to receive final instructions and obtain the signal lamp with which the pilot would contact the boat.

I returned to Castlegregory and consulted with Tadhg Brosnan, Battalion O/C., and James Kennedy, Battalion Q.M. It was decided to procure as pilots Murt O'Leary, who had a good knowledge of the bay, and Maurice Flynn, who was an uncle of Tadhg Brosnan. Tadhg contacted the pilots and had them in readiness.

I went to Tralee on Saturday (Easter Eve) with the intention of seeing Austin Stack and, when walking down

Nelson St. (now Ashe St.) I saw a tall stranger being escorted towards the railway station by about 50 or 60 R.I.C.

On the train into Tralee I had heard rumours of captured Germans. I went immediately to see P.J. Cahill, a Volunteer officer, and from him I learned of the sinking of the arms ship. A little later in the day Fr. Joe Breen informed me that the tall stranger was Roger Casement.

At this time Austin Stack had been arrested and, of course, I never collected the lamp. I returned to Castlegregory and remained there. None of the Castlegregory men went to Tralee for the mobilisation which had been called for Easter Sunday. The officers knew of the loss of the arms ship.

The Castlegregory Volunteers usually paraded in the village after Mass on Sundays and, on the Sunday after Easter, the usual parade was held. Tadhg Brosnan was in charge of the parade and the R.I.C. sergeant warned him that the parade should not be held. Tadhg ordered the sergeant off the road and went on with the parade. The R.I.C. did not interfere on that day.

On the next morning (Monday) the following were arrested: Tadhg Brosnan, Sean Brosnan, Michael Duhig, Abel Mahony, James Kennedy, Michael McKenna and Dan O'Shea.

The prisoners were brought to Tralee Jail and then to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. James Kennedy had a list of names on him when arrested and while in Tralee Jail he was approached by an R.I.C. man named Robert Darlington who asked him whether he had any documents which he wanted to get rid of. James Kennedy gave him the list and Darlington got it out of the jail and gave it to a Volunteer officer who had not been arrested. Darlington resigned from the R.I.C. in 1920.

When he was arrested, Tadhg Brosnan instructed the other prisoners to resist the Prison Authorities and not even

remove their caps. Seven of the prisoners were released after about three weeks, but Tadhg Brosnan was tried by courtmartial and sentenced to penal servitude. He refused to recognise the right of the Court to try him and he was held prisoner until June 1917.

The Irish Volunteers in our area, which had become disorganised in 1916, were reorganised in the winter of 1916. The Castlegregory Company at that time numbered about 15 or 16

The 4th Battalion, Kerry No. 1 Brigade, was organised around Castlegregory and consisted of six companies as follow:

- A. (Clahane) Company O/C. P. O'Neill
- B. (Ballyduff) " " P. Brick
- C. (Aughacasla " " John Crean
- D. (Maherees) " " Patrick Lynch
- E. (Camp) " " (P. O'Shea
(Dan Scannell
(J. O'Rourke
- F. (Castlegregory) " " Sean Brosnan

The battalion staff during the period 1917 to 1921 was as follows:-

- O/C. Tadhg Brosnan (who had been O/C. of the battalion prior to 1916).
- Vice O/C. Patk. O'Shea, N.T.
- Adjt. Dan Rohan
- Q.M. James Kennedy; P. O'Shea; Thomas Rohan
- I.O. Eusabius Somers

The British posts in the 4th Battalion area in 1917 were Camp R.I.C. Barracks; Castlegregory R.I.C. Barracks; Clahane R.I.C. Barracks; Brandon Coastguard Station and Maherees Coast-watching Point.

During 1918 some arrests were made for illegal drilling but there was nothing serious. We were organising to resist conscription and we got quite a number of recruits the majority of whom remained on after the conscription threat had passed.

In 1919 our main concern was the collection of arms. Most of the arms held by civilians were handed to us without any fuss.

It was the practice at that time for the R.I.C. to patrol the different roads in the area and it was noted that a sergeant and constable of the R.I.C. patrolled the main road between Aughacaslá and Camp. The Tralee-Dingle railway ran by the roadside.

On 24th June 1919, at about 8 p.m., John Crean O/C. Aughacaslá Company, took Michael Spillane, Michael Flynn, Michael Griffin and Martin Griffin to a spot on the route followed by the constable and sergeant. John Crean was armed with a revolver; the remainder had sticks. They lay in wait inside a gate and when the R.I.C. came along, the sergeant, who was unarmed, was cycling about 50 yards in front of the constable who was armed with a carbine. John Crean gave the signal and a couple of our lads rushed the sergeant. Martin Griffin rushed the constable and struck him with a stick on the side of the head. The constable fell, striking his head off the railway line and was stunned. Griffin took the carbine and also six rounds of ammunition which were in his pouch. The bicycles which the sergeant and constable had were smashed by the attackers. The sergeant (Barney Oates) had been held down while the constable was being disarmed. All our men got away, but Michael Spillane was arrested that night. All the others who were on the job were arrested within a couple of weeks and some others who were not on the job were also taken.

Michael Spillane, Michael Flynn and Michael Griffin, who were on the job, were tried together with Tim Spillane and Michael Maunsell who were not on the job. The five were convicted and imprisoned in Tralee, Cork, Mountjoy and Portlaois. They went on hunger-strike and Tim Spillane refused to wear prison clothes.

During the remainder of 1919 and early 1920, our battalion O/C. Tadhg Brosnan was continuously moving around

the battalion area keeping the different companies up to scratch and in February 1920 he planned the attack on Camp R.I.C. Barracks. The barracks was a two-storey slated building, the windows being protected by steel shutters. Tadhg Brosnan asked the battalion adjoining ours (Tralee) to take part in the attack. It was planned to blow a hole in the gable of the barracks and at the same time to surround the house of an R.I.C. man who was living out of barracks. The attacking party were armed with rifles and shotguns and the roads from Tralee, Castlegregory, Dingle and Inch were blocked.

The attack was opened on the barracks, but the charge which was to blow a hole in the gable failed to explode and, after an exchange of fire lasting about an hour, Tadhg Brosnan called off the attack. The R.I.C. had sent up flares and there was a chance that the R.I.C. might get reinforcements from Tralee. No reinforcements came out. A sergeant of the R.I.C. was wounded during the attack.

On 30th March 1920, Tadhg Brosnan led an attack on an R.I.C. cycle patrol at Stradbally, Castlegregory. The patrol consisted of three R.I.C. men and it was Tadhg's intention to disarm the patrol without shooting, if possible. The attacking party consisted of Tadhg Brosnan, Dan Jeffers, Pat O'Donnell, Jerry Dowling and Patrick Deen. They were armed with shotguns. The R.I.C. arrived where Tadhg's party were in position and Tadhg called on them to put up their hands. The R.I.C. halted and one of them moved to get away; a shot was fired and he was wounded in the leg. They then surrendered and were disarmed. Three Webley revolvers and three bicycles were captured.

Early in 1920, the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks in Castlegregory and, some time later, a holding party which was in the Coastguard station at Brandon were captured and the station was burned.

The R.I.C. still held the barracks in Clahane and they had it well protected with steel shutters and sandbags. They also had land mines laid at the approaches to the barracks. The land mines were of the electrically detonated type and were laid by British army sappers.

The boycott of the R.I.C. was rigidly enforced in Clahane and the R.I.C. found it necessary to carry in supplies to the garrison by motor lorry. An attack was planned on the lorry bringing the supplies to Clahane. The place selected for the attack was at Kilmore Cross where the Clahane road joins the main Tralee-Dingle (via Connor Pass) road. The Cross is, in fact, a T. junction. The plan was to have parties covering the road on both the Dingle and Tralee sides of the junction and another party on high ground commanding the Clahane road. The attack was planned for 27th July 1920, and on that day the supply lorry passed on to Clahane. The attacking parties got into position to await its return. When the lorry approached to Cross on its return, fire was opened by Tadhg and an R.I.C. officer jumped off the lorry and ran back towards Clahane. He was fired on and halted; he walked back with his hands up and the remainder of the party then surrendered. Some had been wounded. The wounded were removed to safety on the roadside and, after the party had been disarmed, one of Tadhg's party - Patrick Sullivan - who was a motor driver, attempted to drive the lorry away. He was unable to manage the lorry because he had no experience of that type. Tadhg Brosnan put the captured driver up in the lorry again with our driver, Sullivan, beside him and ordered him to drive towards Stradbally. During the drive to Stradbally Sullivan had been watching the captured driver and at that stage he was able to take over and drive the lorry.

Thomas Rohan of Stradbally had been ordered to cut the

the telegraph wires when the captured lorry passed, but, instead of the lorry passing, he saw the lorry approach Stradbally driven by a British driver. When the lorry stopped the British driver was put off and handed over to Thos. Rohan. The driver had been slightly wounded in the leg. The driver was sent off to Tralee and the lorry proceeded to Maherees where it was dismantled by a mechanic named Thomas Wrenne. The dismantling was done at Kilshanny and the lorry, in parts, was taken by boat from Kilshanny point to Leary's Island, where it was dumped.

Later, a letter was captured in the mails from an R.I.C. man to one of his officers reporting that the lorry was being held on Leary's Island. He appeared to know the exact spot. He suggested to the officer that the best way to reach the spot was by boat from Fenit. The lorry was removed from Leary's Island back to the mainland and it was shifted from place to place after that, but it was never recovered by the British.

It is thought that this was the first occasion on which a British lorry was captured and driven away.

As a result of the lorry being captured the R.I.C. evacuated Clahane Barracks but, in leaving, they left behind in position about 16 British type land mines. The mines were wired to a switchboard in the barracks. On the night after the R.I.C. left a group of our men under John Brick of Brandon disconnected the wires and, together with Patrick O'Neill, O/C of Clahane Company, removed the mines. John Brick disconnected the mines himself, although he had no previous experience of such mines. The British returned next day to collect the mines, but found them gone. The barracks was burned shortly afterwards.

In August 1920, it was reported to Tadhg Brosnan that a British lorry carrying supplies from Tralee to Dingle passed

at regular intervals between Tralee and Dingle on the main road. Tadhg decided to attack the British lorry and to try out the mines which had been got at Clahane.. He selected a spot on the Dingle side of Annascaul adjacent to that village and, although it was not a brigade job and the ambush position was outside Tadhg's battalion area, he asked for and got co-operation from the other battalions. The plan was to allow the British lorry to pass on to Dingle from Tralee and arrange for one of our men in Tralee to inform Robert Knightly, stationmaster at Annascaul, as to the time of departure of the lorry on the return journey. Robert Knightly was battalion intelligence officer in the area and the railway telephone system was used by him to maintain contact with Tralee on one side and Dingle on the other.

The attack was planned to take place on 18th August 1920, and the following members of the 4th Battalion took part:-

Castlegregory	Tadhg Brosnan, Dan Rohan, Ml. Duhig, Thos. Rohan, Jerry Dowling, Pat O'Donnell, Pat Sullivan, Tim Lynch, Jim Daly.
Aughacasla	Martin Griffin, John Creane, Michael Spillane, Michael Flynn, Pat Griffin, John Keane, Geo Bateman.
Naherees	Patk. Lynch, Jim Driscoll, Michael O'Connor, Jerry Flynn
Ballyduff	Tadhg Rohan, Ml. Flaherty, Paddy Dowd, Paddy Brick and Patrick Hennessy.
Clahane	Patrick O'Neill
Camp	Paddy Shea, Stephen Rourke, Ml. Moore.
Tralee	Dan Jeffers, John L. Sullivan, Paddy Kelly (electrician)

The lorry passed on to Dingle on the day of the attack and our men moved into position. The land mines were sunk in the road and were wired by Paddy Kelly whom Tadhg Brosnan had brought from Tralee for that part of the job.

The positions taken up were:- Shotgun men lining the ditch by the side of the road; about six riflemen back from the road on high ground, and a reserve party further back. The lorry arrived into the ambush position and Faddy Kelly fired the mine. The lorry was lifted off the road by the explosion and thrown partly against the ditch where the shotgun men were in position. The lorry was so near the ditch that the shotgun men were unable to fire into it. Tadhg Brosnan ordered the shotgun men back to give the riflemen a chance of a go at the lorry. The shotgun men mistook Tadhg's order to mean a complete retreat and they continued to move back. The riflemen opened fire but the lorry was not being captured and Tadhg stopped the retreat of the shotgun men and prepared to rush the lorry, at the same time calling on the British to surrender. The British officer then appeared with a white object tied to a rifle and it was all over. The British soldiers, about 12 to 14, were relieved of their rifles and ammunition. Some of the British who were wounded (2 or 3) were sent to a local doctor for medical treatment; the remainder of the British were released.

About October or November 1920, the British sent a mixed lot of Tans and R.I.C. in two lorries to hit up the Castlegregory area. They raided around Stradbally and Castlegregory and, after getting drunk, they burned out the house of the parents of Tadhg Brosnan and attempted to burn out the home of Michael Duhig. They also wrecked the publichouse owned by Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald in Castlegregory.

We had very few chances of getting at the enemy at the end of 1920 or early 1921. The R.I.C. had evacuated all their posts and had retired to Tralee and Dingle.

On 8th December 1920, a Sinn Fein Court was being held in Castlegregory. Members of the 4th Battalion were acting

as scouts over a wide area. Four of our men were proceeding towards Aughacasla by pony car and at Kelly's Height they saw a lorry of Tans approaching from Connor Hill. The men were Michael Griffin, Martin Griffin, Michael Flynn and Thomas Crean. Michael Griffin had documents on him relating to the Sinn Fein Court. He jumped out of the car and got over the roadside fence. The Tans saw him and called on him to halt, but Griffin kept going. The Tans opened fire and chased him across the field. Griffin had got ahead of the Tans and he hid the documents in a drain. The Tans overtook him and searched him. They said he must have something valuable on him to risk his life for it. They took him into the lorry and brought him to Castlegregory where two Tans were left guarding him in a house. Some shooting started outside and the two Tans ran out into the street and, as the Tans went out the front, Griffin went out the back. Griffin got clean away; he went back to the field where he had hidden the documents and recovered them.

Tadg Brosnan was anxious to keep hammering at the British and in February 1921, it was decided to try and lure the Tans or R.I.C. out of Dingle. Thomas Rohan of Stradbally prepared a letter which purported to come from a woman; it was addressed to the "D.I. Dingle" and stated that she had been summoned by "Jeffries" to come before a Sinn Fein Court to be held at the schoolhouse in Ballyduff on 26th February 1921. Ballyduff is midway between Dingle and Castlegregory on the road via Connor Pass.

The reference to Jeffries was deliberate in order to lead the R.I.C. to believe that the summons had been issued by Dan Jeffers who was known to the R.I.C. as an I.R.A. officer.

The R.I.C. fell for the ruse and on the 26th Feb. 1921, they sent a cycle patrol from Dingle over Connor Pass to

Ballyduff. Tadhg Brosnan and Paddy Paul Fitzgerald of Tralee, with a party armed with rifles and shotguns, took up position on the Dingle side of Ballyduff on Connor Hill. They expected the R.I.C. to travel in close formation in view of the dangerous nature of the road and Tadhg placed his party in close formation to meet the R.I.C., but they came in open formation extended over a good stretch of road, and Tadhg allowed them to pass on to Ballyduff. When they had passed on, the ambush party were changed from close to extended formation to await the return of the R.I.C. The plan of attack was put out again by the R.I.C. returning in close formation. It was now getting dark and the attack had to be carried out. Fire was opened on the R.I.C. who jumped the low fence on the side of the road and made down the mountain leaving nine bicycles behind. They made their way down the mountain side and crossed a river to Mullagh Eheal. The manner of their escape cannot be understood locally, because even people born and reared in the district would hardly risk travelling down the mountain side in daylight.

The next activity for the 4th Battalion was a prepared attack on Killorglin on 13th March 1921. The following took part:-

Castlegregory	Tadhg Brosnan, Ml. Duhig, Jerry Dowling, Pat O'Donnell, Ml. Moore.
Aughacasla	Patk. Griffin, Martin Griffin, John Keane.
Camp	John Knightly, Stephen Rourke.

The 4th Battalion men crossed from Castlegregory to Keel where the 1st Brigade (Kerry) had their H.Q. At Keel, the 4th Battalion group joined up with the brigade staff and members of other battalions. The whole party moved from Keel to the shore of Castlemaine Bay where boats were waiting to take the party across the bay. They landed at Ballykissane pier near Killorglin and from there moved into

the town. The 4th Battalion party was split into different sections being guided by men who knew the town.

It was the intention of the brigade officers to stage a full scale attack on a patrol which left the R.I.C. barracks each night. The R.I.C. must have noticed something out of the ordinary because when the patrol started to leave the barracks they paused and turned back. Fire was opened on the patrol and on the barracks. The firing lasted 15 or 20 minutes and the Brigade O/C. then gave orders to withdraw.

The 4th Battalion group retired from the town along the railway towards Miltown, and at Calinafercy, boats were waiting to take the party back across the bay to the Keel side.

About the 20th March 1921, Tadhg Brosnan, Battalion O/C., called in some men of the battalion for a job at Lispole. The plan was to attack a British party which travelled by lorry from Dingle. I understand that the operation has been described in other statements. The 4th Battalion men who took part in the fight at Lispole on 22nd March 1921, were:-

Castlegregory	Tadhg Brosnan, Michael Duhig, Thomas Rohan, Dan Rohan, Pat O'Donnell, Jerry Dowling, Patrick Sullivan, Tim Lynch
Maherees	Jim Driscoll, Paddy Lynch, Michael Connor, Jerry Flynn, Patrick Ashe, Edward Ashe
Clahane	Patrick O'Neill
Aughacasla	John Crean, Patrick Griffin
Ballyduff	Tadhg Rohan, Michael Flaherty, Paddy Brick, Paddy Dowd.
Camp	Stephen Rourke

There may have been one or two others.

During the fight at Lispole three of the I.R.A. were wounded and my statement of the events after Lispole deals with that matter. The wounded were Thomas Ashe, James Daly and Thomas Hawley.

When the fight at Lispole had ended and the wounded removed from the spot, Michael Duhig crossed the mountain from Lispole and contacted Dan Shea at Farlanton, Castlegregory, Dan Shea procured a pony trap and took Dr. Ferris of Castlegregory to the foot of the mountain where the doctor was met by a guide named Paddy Kennedy who guided him through a mountain pass to the Lispole area. Dr. Ferris had no motor that night because he had already lent his car to some of our men who were shifting land mines from a dump at Clahane and they had not returned.

Thomas Ashe died that same night. Thomas Hawley and James Daly were brought by road to the house of Mrs. Dan Cahillane at Glenlough where they were kept and nursed for about six weeks.

Mrs. Dan Cahillane's house was open at all times to men on the run and there is no knowing what the movement cost her family. Many years later, Mrs. Cahillane applied for compensation and, to the disgrace of Ireland, while the case was being investigated Judge McElligott described Mrs. Cahillane as a perjurer.

The two wounded men were removed to the house of Thomas O'Donnell at Glentenasig, Castlegregory, where Hawley died about three weeks later. Nurse O'Mahony of Tralee stayed with the wounded men all the time.

On the 26th April 1921, the following men of the 4th Battalion took part in the disarming of British troops at Glenbeigh Station:

Castlegregory	Tadhg Brosnan, Michael Duhig, Dan Rohan, Jerry Dowling, Patrick O'Donnell, Michael Moore.
Clahane	Patk. O'Neill

On 1st June 1921, the same group participated in an attack on an R.I.C. cycle patrol at Castlemaine.

There is one other thing I would like to record, but

as there is some confusion about the date I have left it to the end. It relates to the illness of Dan Jeffers. Dan Jeffers was a very active officer of the Tralee Battalion who was on the run in our area and was being sought for by the Tans. He got ill and was taken to the home of Mrs. Nora Dowling at Stradbally, Castlegregory. Dr. Ferris of Castlegregory attended him twice a day and it was discovered that Jeffers had developed double pneumonia. He was kept in Mrs. Dowling's house for about two weeks when word came from Tralee that the R.I.C. knew where Jeffers was and they might raid for him any minute. I don't know where the Tralee Battalion got the information.

Jeffers was moved to Deady's of Brandon where he remained for about three weeks, being attended all the time by Nurse Mahony of Tralee. He was just recovering from his illness when word came that the R.I.C. had definite information as to where he was. Word came that a raid on Deady's was being prepared and Jeffers was just an hour or two removed when Deady's was raided.

Tadhg Brosnan had got a party together to ambush the raiding party, but they came a different road to the one expected. The first action of the raiding party was to fire into Deady's house. They then burst in the door and got Eugene Deady out of bed. They questioned him regarding Jeffers; he refused to tell them anything. They put him on his knees in the presence of his wife and threatened to shoot; then they let him get to his feet and again questioned him about Jeffers and, as he still refused to answer, they took him outside the house. The Tans prepared to shoot him outside and again put the questions about Jeffers. Deady thought he was going to die and, not wishing to tell lies just before his death, he refused to speak. The Tans then

let him return to his house.

The raiding party went from Deady's to the house of Mrs. Deady's brother, William Fitzgerald, publican, and fired several shots into his house before they returned to Dingle.

Signed: Padraig O Seaghdha

Date: 22adh Abran '55

(Padraig O Seaghdha)
22adh Abran '55.

Witness: James J. O'Connor
(James J. O'Connor)

