

Stringybark

Stringybark Creek is where the Kelly Gang crossed the line from horse and cattle stealing and became police murderers.

Ned would claim he shot the police in self-defence in a fair fight.

He would also say; the police persecuted his family; --- and threatened to shoot him down and then call surrender.

The police did not persecute the Kellys; --- but paid attention to them because they were the ones committing crime.

The Kelly's shanty at Greta was the resort of the district's criminals; ---- the focus of horse and cattle stealing and a host of other crimes.

In a newspaper comment --- made on the day before Ned was hanged.

Ned's police informer uncle Pat Quinn, --- alleged that Greta policeman Anthony Strahan said in a heated argument, --- 'He would shoot Ned first and then cry surrender'.

Quinn lied on many occasions and the strategy here, --- was to exert pressure for his nephew's reprieve.

Even if true, --- it was no more than a frustrated policeman's angry words directed at an argumentative Kelly relative.

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The police went out to arrest Ned and Dan, --- not to shoot them down.

There was no official or unofficial police policy to shoot rather than arrest the Kelly brothers.

Nor as some writers claim, ---- were specially made leather body straps carried by the police, ---- to transport the dead bodies of the Kellys into Mansfield.

Ned accused the police of carrying excess weaponry in their alleged plot to kill him.

The police carried their Webley service revolvers, --- an old borrowed shotgun ---- and a borrowed gold escort state-of-the-art Spencer repeating rifle, --- which none of them knew how to use.

They had to borrow a canvas tent from within the Mansfield Community.

Hardly, a well provisioned Police 'Hit Squad' --- primed to kill rather than arrest their quarry!

Constable McIntyre would later comment; --- 'The police should have been armed with Rifles, --- as Revolvers were relatively useless in a running gunfight'.

The Kellys were each armed with a rifle and Ned carried the small pocket revolver, --- he had 6 months earlier used to wound Constable Fitzpatrick ---- a young, inexperienced policeman sowing his wild oats. ----

Constable Alexander Fitzpatrick was Ned's drinking buddy, and he was romancing Ned's sister Kate. ---- The Kellys never objected. --- They all fell out over Fitzpatrick's attempted arrest of Dan for horse stealing.

By the time Kennedy and Scanlan returned to the police camp, ---- The Kellys had Lonigan and McIntyre's Webley revolvers -- - and the old shotgun.

Prior to the confrontation with police, Ned and his gang practiced their marksmanship; --- as the bullet marked trees at their Bullock Creek Hideout demonstrates.

It was the Kellys themselves, ---- and not the surprised Stringybark Creek policemen, ---- who were trigger happy and ready to take lives.

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Ned's Jerilderie Letter account of the police murders --- is a self-serving apologist's account.

---- Similar in nature to the 'police bashing' excuses, --- today's criminals put forward to deny responsibility for their crimes.

After many hours of surveillance, ---- Ned and his mates Joe Byrne, Dan Kelly and Steve Hart ---- attacked the police camp from ambush dressed as Greta Mob larrikins.

They wore the chinstraps of their bush hatbands tucked under their noses --- and Ned wore a red silk sash around his waist. - --- These were the larrikin gang 'colours' of the day.

The initial plan may not have been to murder the police.

But there was a recklessness and an arrogance associated with the Kelly Gang's actions, --- that once set in motion ensured murder would occur.

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‘Bail Up! Throw Up Your Hands!’ Ned said.

Constable Thomas McIntyre who had no weapons, --- threw his hands out in front of him in surrender.

Without a weapon and knowing Ned would leave no witnesses behind. ---- McIntyre, ---- under fire from the Gang, ---- would later escape on Sergeant Kennedy’s bolting horse and raise the alarm in Mansfield.

Constable Thomas Lonigan the first to die --- did not ‘run to a log, draw his revolver’ and was ‘coming up from behind a log to fire’. ---

When as Ned said, --- ‘I shot him or he would have shot me’.

This was Ned’s story and gave him a chance to claim self-defense.

When challenged, --- Lonigan turned and ran a few steps with Ned’s gun trained on him all the way.

Lonigan was trying to remove his revolver from its buttoned-down holster. ---

When Kelly fired and shot him through the right eye, killing him almost instantly; ---- ‘Oh Christ! I’m Shot!’ --- he said.

Twenty minutes passed and Kennedy and Scanlan --- on horseback returned to the police camp --- with Kennedy in the lead.

Again, from the safety of ambush, ---- Kelly shouted ‘Bail Up! Throw Up Your Hands!’ ----

McIntyre went forward to ask Kennedy to surrender. ----

The Sergeant thought he was joking and playfully placed his hand on his holster case. ----

Kelly immediately fired his weapon at Sergeant Kennedy and missed. ----

Kennedy managed to dismount from his horse, ---- get behind a tree, --- draw his revolver and fire back.

Ned would later call Michael Kennedy a brave man.

Scanlan --- a few horse lengths behind was less fortunate;

He saw Lonigan's dead body lying in the open.

A volley of shots rang out. -----

Scanlan fumbled for the Spencer rifle slung across his back.

Possibly Wounded, ---- he fell from his horse to the ground.

Michael Scanlan was on his hands and knees; ----

When Ned fired, --- Fatally shooting him under the right armpit.

Like Lonigan, Scanlan had no weapon in his hand ---- and he died almost immediately.

Ned would say --- Scanlan fired the Spencer rifle --- and he returned fire. ---- McIntyre's eyewitness testimony refutes this.

He saw Kelly fire --- and a blood patch immediately form under Scanlan's right armpit.

Sergeant Kennedy engaged in a running gunfight with the gang for the best part of a quarter of a mile, ---- before he too was brought down by a bullet from Ned's gun.

Ned said he shot and killed all three policemen; ---- and He did. He would say, --- 'I could not have been more sorry for them had they been my own brothers'. ---- He ambushed and shot the policemen anyway!

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Ned tells us he interrogated the wounded Sergeant Kennedy for two hours--- Yes, two hours! ---- before placing a shotgun against the policeman's breast and pulling the trigger.

This was no mercy killing as Ned would later claim.

Kennedy had lived for two hours, --- he may have lived longer.

Ned claims that two additional police search parties ---- Comprised of 9 Constables ---- were at that moment on their way to Stringybark Creek.

If such had been the case; ---- Kennedy might have got medical treatment and survived his wounds.

Instead of allowing Michael Kennedy the chance to live --- 'for the sake of my wife and children'.

---- Ned chose to take Kennedy's life. ----

Not as a compassionate act; ---- but to flee the scene of three ugly murders before more police arrived.

The Mansfield and Colonial Community was devastated by these brutal murders, ---- which were equivalent in shock value to the 9/11 Catastrophe.

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Some 20 months later at Glenrowan, ---- Ned would attempt to murder more policemen.

His grisly plan was to derail a passenger train, ---- as it rounded a sweeping bend on the Wangaratta side of Glenrowan. ----

---- Sending it plummeting down a deep ravine to destruction below.

From on top of the ravine, ---- the Kelly Gang dressed in their ploughshare armour, ---- would rake the wrecked train with gunfire.

Slaughtering any survivors; --- 2 of whom would be Women, 6 Journalists, a Benalla Townsman and a Train crew of 3. ----

A dozen policemen and 17 horses were also travelling on the train.

The gang made no secret of their bloody intention.

Telling their Glenrowan hostages on several occasions, --- They were going to 'Send the Police to Hell!' ----

'And if any Civilians were on board, --- they deserved to share the same fate'.

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Ned is remembered today because of his famous last stand fight with the police ---- and, of course, for his quirky ploughshare armour.

Ned's Glenrowan last stand --- was not the heroic two-gun shootout depicted by most writers and film directors.

Badly wounded, ---- facing a hopeless situation --- and fed up with his life on run; --- Ned sought a 'Death by Cop'.

Earlier in frustration, he had said ---- 'I'm Tired of Running! We'll Stand and Fight!'

Wounded, lying on the ground surrounded by policemen, --- Ned --- more than once --- pleaded for his life to be spared, ---
- Something he denied Sergeant Kennedy. ----

Ned showed cowardice; ---- Where Michael Kennedy died bravely thinking of his family.

Ned was taken to the Melbourne Gaol and nursed back to health.

He was tried for the murder of Constable Lonigan, --- found guilty and executed by the hangman's rope.

He spoke no last words of apology or regret for his crimes.

---- He said nothing at all.

'Such is Life' is a later addition to the Kelly tale.

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In Conclusion, I would like to say ---- that after 50 years of researching and writing about Ned and his Community.

What a privilege and a pleasure; ---- it has been to work with Leo Kennedy and Ben Head on their respective projects.

---- Leo, in bringing long overdue evenhandedness and fairness, to the Stringybark Creek policemen and their families.

---- Ben, in bringing to the screen a rare movie event. ---- A True and Accurate film portrayal of Ned Kelly.

This is no mean feat; ---- even for a veteran moviemaker.

Congratulations Ben and Tim, --- on a job well done!

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