

W.S. 603

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 603

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 603.....

Witness

Stephen O'Brien,
11 Main Street,
Skibbereen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Skibbereen Company, Irish Volunteers,
1919 - ;

Adjutant, Skibbereen Battalion, later.

Subject.

Fourth (Skibbereen) Battalion, Cork Brigade,
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness:

Nil

File No.S.1883.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 603

STEPHEN O'BRIEN, 11, MAIN ST., SKIBBEREEN,
CO., CORK. ADJUTANT, 4TH (SKIBBEREEN)
BATTALION, CORK III BRIGADE.

I joined the Volunteers in April, 1919. I joined the Skibbereen Company and the Sinn Fein Club at the same time. I was nineteen years of age then. I spent some time collecting for the arms fund in the town. I attended all parades, principally on Sunday evenings. With regard to the arms fund, I had only two refusals in that portion of the town (three streets) for which I was responsible. The refusals were by a Protestant Loyalist and a Roman Catholic. I told each of them if they did not give voluntarily their contribution would have to be given another way. They just scoffed and laughed at me. Shortly after, a horse was taken from the Catholic by Dan O'Brien, O.C., Lisheen Company.

I was working in Daly's Wholesale Wine and Spirit Merchants at the time and I was lodging at Miss Fitzgerald's. Hers was a marked house. One Sunday evening I was out and two Black and Tans had been shot at Hollybrook, one being killed and the other wounded and after the dead man had been brought into the Protestant Church in the town four Tans visited my lodgings and asked for O'Brien. I came in about an hour afterwards and the landlady told me to get out as my room had been searched and military text-books taken. I went to another house to sleep that night and I went to work as usual next morning. I observed four or five Tans coming and standing opposite, so I went "on the run".

One Sunday afternoon - about two months before the Truce - I came into the town and I went into the back-yard of the Protestant who had refused the contribution to the arms fund and I took away a fine racehorse which was afterwards presented to Liam Deasy, then O.C., Cork III Brigade. Thus, both the Protestant and Catholic who had refused to subscribe did eventually contribute in a different way just as I had told them.

I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Liam Deasy about six weeks before the Truce at Clounkeen in the parish of Leap. The Column had arrived at Maultrahane and there was to be a Battalion Council there which was to be attended by Brigade Headquarters staff who were part of the Column. They were put up at the house of the teacher, Charles O'Sullivan, and a bed-sittingroom was fitted up for Liam Deasy, O.C. Brigade, Tom Barry, O.C. Column, Tadgh O'Sullivan, Brigade Quartermaster, Denis Lordan and Sean Buckley. The meeting lasted the whole day. That night Barry put me on sentry duty on the boreen running from the house to the main road. I was armed with a rifle. About 3 a.m. just at dawn I heard lorries on my left and bicycles on my right - about 200 yards away. Luckily they took another road and I ran back to the house and gave the alarm and the Brigade Staff got out and crossed the road and remained inside the fence while the house was being raided. All the Brigade papers, Barry's coat, waistcoat and watch were taken. The day after he wrote a letter to Colonel Hudson in Skibbereen demanding them back. The Brigade Staff was then at Gurteenduig. Decently

enough Colonel Hudson handed them over to Richard Connolly, Manager of "The Southern Star" and brother of Neilus Connolly, O.C. Battalion. An account of this, written by Seán Buckley, now T.D., was published in "The Southern Star" for 12th December, 1936. Had the British come directly my way that night I should have had to stand and try to delay them and at the same time give the alarm by using my rifle, but, however, when I found that the cycle party had taken another road I felt that the best action on my part was to get back to the house and quietly warn the Brigade Staff, which was what I had done and which had resulted in their getting away that morning.

Colonel Hudson, O.C. King's (Liverpool) Regiment, stationed in Skibbereen, was a gentleman and was regarded as such by the I.R.A. His Second-in-Command - Major Wyatt - was a gentleman, also. They did not care for their work and never wanted any trouble. They were very different to Major Percival and his Column from the Essex Regiment which for a couple of weeks about the end of May, 1921, came to Skibbereen and was stationed in the Town Park.

The Battalion organisation then was :-

Headquarters: Skibbereen - 10 Companies.

<u>Company.</u>	<u>O.C.</u>	<u>Strength.</u>
Baltimore.	Denis O'Neill.	40-50.
Castlehaven:	Cornelius Buckley.	60
Myross:	Pat Sheehy) 80
	Pat O'Driscoll.	
Glandore.	John Keane:	80
Leap:	Dan O'Donovan:	70
Corran:	Patrick Crosbie:	50
Breadagh:	Patrick Hourihan:	70-80.
Drinagh:	John Hurley) 80
	James O'Donovan:	
	Andrew McCarthy:	
Lisheen:	Dan O'Brien.	90
Skibbereen:	Tadgh O'Sullivan.) 100
	John Leonard:	
	Patrick Fehily.	

Denis O'Neill of Baltimore and Dan O'Brien of Lisheen both fought at Kilmichael.

The Battalion armament approximated about 7 rifles with very little ammunition; also about 200 single and double-barrelled shot-guns with no ammunition. Attempts were made to manufacture ammunition for the shot-guns. Grenades were practically absent. In view of so little armament the main activities of the Skibbereen Battalion were in furnishing security patrols of sentries for the Column when it came into the area; also supplying transport and billets for the Column and in cutting road trenches and blocking roads to impede enemy movements. Of course the Battalion furnished from time to time its quota of men to the Column: Jerh. O'Leary of the Corran Company was one of those killed at Crossbarry; Dan O'Donovan, O.C. Leap Company; Pat Crosbie, O.C. Corran Company; John Keane, O.C. Glandore Company; Pat Sheehy, O.C. Myross Company; Pat Hourihan, O.C., Breadagh Company and Con Buckley, O.C., Castlehaven Company - all were with the Column from time to time, but there is no reference to them in Tom Barry's book.

I remember when three Marines were kidnapped in Castle-townsend. A rather amusing thing happened. There were half a dozen of us had one of them and when we retired for the night, which was to lie down under a boat sail, the Marine was put in the middle of us. Despite a scout we had standing nearby the Marine managed to slip out while we were asleep and got away. This was at Milleenahorna. This meant that we had of course to clear away at once from this neighbourhood. Paddy O'Sullivan, the Battalion Quartermaster, did better. He tied the Marine prisoner entrusted to him to his wrist and ankle in the bed he occupied in the billet.

Edwin Swanton, a loyalist friend of Jasper Wolfe, always carried a small automatic. He was a draper in Skibbereen and though a civilian was one of the enemy's murder gang. He was kidnapped by three Section Commanders of the Skibbereen Company though when he saw himself in danger he threw his automatic away into a clump of briars instead of using it but it was got afterwards. He was taken around from house to house in the Company area but finally escaped during the Truce period.

Daniel M.J. O'Connell, Clerk of the Crown and Peace and grandson of the Liberator, was another loyalist and no friend of ours. He, also, was kidnapped. Perhaps due to his family associations he was ordered to be released before the Truce. This was sent down in writing by Michael Collins, the condition being that he signed an undertaking that he would interfere no further with the I.R.A. He was a prisoner in the house of Kiely, the National Teacher at Skeagh. The Battalion C.O. sent Paddy O'Sullivan, Battalion Quartermaster, and myself in a pony and trap with the form to where O'Connell was held. He refused point blank to sign it and said he would remain a prisoner. The teacher pleaded strongly with him but to no effect, so the Quartermaster pulled out a revolver and told O'Connell he would blow his brains out if he did not sign the form, but O'Connell told him to carry on. Paddy O'Sullivan then came out to the trap where I was waiting and asked me to have a try with him. After another twenty minutes of explaining that we had to return the form indicating that he had been released he at length agreed to sign. When he had done so we

brought him in the trap as far as the Abbey School house and released him there to walk home. Neilus Connolly and Paddy O'Sullivan took a horse of this man once. They were galloping this horse with others towards Skibbereen and met the owner in his pony and trap and passed him by without his recognising his own horse among the others. When he got home he told his man there that the I.R.A. had some very fine horses and the man told him one of them was his own.

I took part in the burning of the Skibbereen Workhouse in 1921. Pat O'Driscoll, the Vice O.C., and myself were the last to leave the burning building on the orders of the Brigade Commandant, Liam Deasy, who was in charge of part of the Column on this occasion. The Column returned to Maultrahane in the early hours of the morning. There was no military activities by the Crown forces.

Signed: Stephen O'Brien

Witnessed: J. J. O'Brien, Lt Col.

Date: 30th October 1951

