

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 620

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 620

Witness

Samuel Kingston,
Drinagh,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Caheragh Company (Co. Cork) Irish Vol's.
1915 - ;

O/C. Skibbereen Battalion, Cork III Brigade, later.

Subject.

National activities, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1895

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STATEMENT OF

SAMUEL KINGSTON, DRINAGH, CO. CORK.
O.C. 4TH (SKIBBEREEN) BATTALION,
CORK III BRIGADE.

Previous to the first World War and, in fact, before the Volunteers were ever started my interest in the Irish-Ireland movement was in being a member of the A.O.H. (Irish-American Alliance). There was a branch formed in Skibbereen and though it did not number many it was an organisation which had an Irish-Ireland outlook and prepared the way, at least for some of us, for what was to follow. The idea was to support home manufacture and home industry and keep before our minds that we were ruled by a foreign power. With that in view it was but a step to the objects of the Irish Volunteers once they were started.

When I first joined the Volunteers it was in November, 1915 - the Caheragh Company. There were about 60 (sixty) in the Company at that time and the first parade the Company had was to Drimoleague for the purpose of organising a Company there. The next was in Cork - in commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs. A number of the Company went to Cork for that parade.

The above Company was formed and organised by Terence Mac Swiney who died on hunger strike in an English jail afterwards and by Tadgh Barry of Cork who was shot in Ballykinlar Camp by a British Tommy at the time of some releases of prisoners in November, 1921.

There was another parade in Cork on St. Patrick's Day, 1916. I was there with a number of the Caheragh Company. They were both armed parades for those who had them, but the Caheragh Company being newly formed had no arms at the time.

There was a period then - during Easter Week - there was nothing done beyond despatch carrying. There was no active service. There was conveying of news just.

From the 30th April, 1916, until 1st May, 1917, there were just Company parades. The Caheragh Company went down and went out of existence at that time, but was reorganised later - in 1917, I think. However, I joined a newly formed Company at Breadagh Cross at the junction of three parishes - Drimoleague, Drinagh and Caheragh. This Company was in the Skibbereen Battalion. I was a Volunteer at the time. While parades were being carried on, the R.I.C. used come out and watch for activity. They arrested a Company member but he was released again though he refused to give his name. The two constables then decided to give us friendly advice about the illegal nature of our activities, but their attitude was not taken in the spirit they expected and they troubled us no more.

There was continuous activity on our ^{part} during all 1917 and up to March, 1918. There was a cavalry parade of Volunteers at a monster meeting held in August, 1917, and at which Count Plunkett attended. I was on horseback that day.

On St. Patrick's Day, 1918, there was a monster meeting at

Isap. I was O.C. Breadagh Company then and I took the Company to this meeting. From that meeting an important despatch was taken in by me for Michael Collins to Bantry. It was given me by Gearoid O'Sullivan.

During the period April, 1918, to March, 1919, I was still O.C. Breadagh Company and attended Battalion Council meetings. We had rifle practice and also laid ambushes for the R.I.C.

During the Conscription period the Company made canister bombs and collected what shot-guns they could in the district. We had no rifles but had a few revolvers. The ambushes we laid for the R.I.C. were for the purpose of disarming them and adding to the Company armament. We had no success, however. Our Company area was centred about five miles from where any R.I.C. night patrols were carried out and as the Volunteers were becoming more active these patrols were less and less in evidence.

From April, 1919, to March, 1920, there was continuous active service. During the Summer I became O.C. Skibbereen Battalion - about May or June. I was principally engaged in organising the Battalion area. There was a training camp held at Glandore and Dick McKee and Leo Henderson were there. I attended this Camp and so did Bernie O'Driscoll who was Vice O.C. Battalion. He was arrested along with Gearoid O'Sullivan and a couple of local men. R.I.C. were there from all over the county to identify men from their localities but only four were arrested altogether.

A Brigade Convention was held at Caheragh and presided over by Tom Hales in November, 1919. The III Brigade was formed previous to this - earlier in the year.

The Battalion consisted of ten Companies and each numbered about 50 (fifty) men, though the Skibbereen Company numbered up to about 100. During the Conscription period in 1918, of course, the Companies became very swollen in strength but a lot fell away again. Those who remained, while they were shy at first about participating, as time went on the success of ambushes and other activities in the county aroused them and they became very good at acting as scouts and security patrols for the Column, trenching and blocking roads, providing transport for munitions and members of the Column when passing through the Battalion area. In various Company areas they took part in local ambushes, mostly of R.I.C. and Black and Tans, but the stumbling block all the time was lack of arms. Any arms there were were transferred to the Column as members of the Battalion joined it and participated in its activities.

From 1st April, 1920, to 31st March, 1921, the burning of evacuated R.I.C. Barracks was carried out and I gave orders for any such which took place in our Battalion area. We took an active part in the County Council Elections. The Volunteers manned the booths and escorted the ballot boxes to their destination for the count. The burning of Drimoleague Courthouse was carried out under my direction. Armed parties were put out at three points to cover the demolition party and scouts were out to warn them by the blast of a whistle. This was sounded on the approach of R.I.C. who made themselves scarce when they heard it and the burning was carried through without interference.

We were now the I.R.A. An ambush was laid at Brade for R.I.C. and Tans. This failed through faulty ammunition. One R.I.C. man only was slightly wounded and the ambush party had to evacuate the position which was done without casualties.

The burning of Baltimore R.I.C. Barracks was carried out late in 1920. It was empty at the time. The approach to this was made by water from Lisheen to avoid arousing suspicion by coming from Skibbereen along the peninsula.

My father's house at Tooreen was the call-house for all Volunteers and despatches. Brigade and Battalion Council meetings were frequently held there, it being reckoned safe for a considerable time from any enemy activity, being a reasonable distance from enemy strongholds. Brigade and Battalion C.O.s. called there regularly, also wanted men who needed rest.

My sister, Mona Kingston, was head of the Cumann na mBan in the Skibbereen Battalion area and organised the Cumann na mBan for that area. First Aid dressings were prepared, changes of clothes were kept in stock for the Column and a certain amount of despatch work was carried out by the Cumann na mBan also.

In December, 1920, those who did not subscribe to the Arms Fund had cattle seized to the value of the levy put on them and which they had refused to pay. On that occasion there were six or seven of the men engaged on this job, for the seizure and the driving of the cattle. They were held up and searched by Auxiliaries in a public-house in Dunmanway. That day was the wildest day the Auxies had in the town. They arrested every useless individual in the town and took them to their Barracks at the Workhouse. None of the useful men was taken. They were just searched and let go. In the bunch held up in the public-house there were the most wanted men in the Skibbereen Battalion - Neilus Connolly, Paddy O'Sullivan, myself, Florence McCarthy, Mick Cummins, O'Donovan from Mohonagh and a few others. It was a fair day and we were in a taproom off the bar having a drink. I could see the approach of the Auxiliaries and gave warning so that when they entered to all appearances we were harmless farmers discussing the fair.

About a week after my home was raided and was torn asunder. I was being sought for but I was away and my father and brother, William, were taken instead and brought to Dunmanway and thence to Bandon where my father was fined £5 (five pounds) for not having the names of the occupants of his house up on the door. He was then released. My brother was brought to Spike Island and then to Bere Island where he was held until the general release before the Christmas following the Truce. While my father and brother were held in Dunmanway they were taken out as hostages in the Auxiliaries' lorries.

I attended an Officer's Training Camp at Kealkil in October, 1920, and brought there two Officers from each Company. Those attending the Camp were armed with rifles. Tom Barry was in charge of the Camp. After that there was a training camp in Schull. I was with Seán Lehane, O.C. Schull Battalion, and some more of his men to convey the rifles by lorry from Schull to Kealkil for the start of the Flying Column. We commandeered a lorry in Ballydehob for this purpose. The next Camp was held in the neighbourhood of Kilmichael for the purpose of organising

the Column. Its first activity was the Kilmichael ambush on 28th November.

I joined the Flying Column at Granure the night following the Kilmichael Ambush. They had retired to Granure to rest. We stood to arms for over an hour in teeming rain on a warning of the approach of military.

The next activity was the destroying of enemy communications. This was being done by degrees during the early part of 1921. The more important routes were dealt with first and then secondary routes were destroyed. The work done was principally trenching and blocking roads, breaking bridges, cutting trees and dropping them across roadways and generally making it as difficult and impossible as we could for enemy transport to travel their accustomed roads or roundabout ways either.

I resigned my appointment as Battalion C.O. in January or February, 1921, giving as my reason that my health was breaking down but really so that I could join the Flying Column. I was succeeded by Neilus Connolly, then Vice O.C. Battalion, and Pat O'Driscoll, O.C. Myross Company, took his place. After spending a term travelling with the Column I was asked to take up the job of organising the Republican Police for the Brigade.

I should have mentioned I was with the Column for the Gloundaw Ambush near Dunmanway to engage the Auxiliaries stationed in the latter place. We had word sent in that we were there but the enemy only came out part of the way and then retired. Even though there were two lorry loads of them they declined to come any further. One of them said later they were being enticed into a death-trap.

Percival's Column from Bandon was out near Skibbereen during this time, but never came in contact with our Column. This was after Crossbarry and it seemed as if Percival had been entrusted with the work of knocking out the I.R.A. in West Cork. The enemy troops in Skibbereen and Bantry did not seem to want to come to close quarters with the I.R.A. at all. Percival's scheme was apparently an ambitious one as he had a mule convoy for cross-country work but he did not do all that was expected of him.

The organisation of the Republican Police was a great success. I had two men from each Company in the Brigade and, in the absence of the R.I.C. who had ceased to be civil police, served summonses, attended Sinn Fein Courts and generally assisted to maintain law and order. There was a Battalion Police C.O. to receive instructions from the Brigade Police Officer who got his orders from the Chief of Police, Simon Donnelly, in Dublin. Complaints made to the Company Police were forwarded to the Battalion Police Officer who dealt with them, or if he thought them outside his jurisdiction forwarded them to the Brigade Police Officer to be dealt with. If they were matters for the Court they were brought up through the Police at the first convenient sitting and there dealt with. The Court Clerk issued the summons, which was served by the Company police on the interested parties. The Court decisions

had to be carried out by the police afterwards who saw that effect was given to them and duly reported their compliance.

Anyone who wished to emigrate had to apply through the local police officer who forwarded the application through the proper channels to the Minister for Home Affairs. If permission was granted it was sent back in writing, a certificate or permit to travel bearing the stamp and seal of the Irish Republic. I tried hard to get one of these years afterwards but never succeeded: it would have been proof that this country's government was then recognised by foreign governments.

I was one of the first members of the I.R.B. in the Skibbereen locality. I found out that in pre-Truce times the really dependable genuine members of the Volunteers were those who were members of the I.R.B. and knew they belonged to the organisation for one object and one only and that was the country's freedom.

Signed: Samuel Kingston
(Samuel Kingston)

Witnessed: C. Saurin, Lt. Col.
(C. Saurin, Lt. Col.)

Date: 29th November 1951
29th November 1951.

