

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1469

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1469.

Witness

Denis Keohane,
New Street,
Bantry,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Vice O/C, Bantry Battalion, Cork III Brigade, I.R.A.

O/C, Drimoleague Battalion, Cork V. Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of 3rd Battalion,
Cork V. Brigade. 1921-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2739.

Form B.S.M. 2

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No. W.S. 1,469

STATEMENT BY DENIS KECHANE,

New St., Bantry, Co. Cork.

I have already made a statement covering the period to the Truce on July 11th 1921. I now desire to furnish particulars of my activities in the subsequent period.

For a few days following the declaration of the Truce there was a general air of rejoicing and relaxation both amongst the men of the I.R.A. and the general public. However, within a week arrangements were being made to organise training camps in which those who had not already seen active service would be trained. Before proceeding with this aspect of the work, Battalion H.Q. was established in Bantry and all officers on the Battalion Staff set about organising the services for which they were responsible throughout the battalion area. By the end of July, 1921, the work of organisation had been completed.

Early in August the first training camp was set up at Ahakista. This camp was attended by members of the Brigade and Battalion Staffs. Denis Lordan, who had been Adjutant of the Brigade Column, was in charge. About sixty officers were in attendance. The camp was continued for a week, during which all present were put through a thorough course of training. All officers then returned to their home areas to establish camps in the various battalions and also in many company areas. This work went on until the end of August, 1921, when a re-organisation of Cork 111 Brigade took place.

At this time it was decided to re-organise the area into two brigades. A new brigade was organised at the western end of the area. This brigade embraced Bantry, Castletownbere, Schull and Skibbereen Battalions, together with Knockbuie Company of Dunmanway Battalion of Cork 111 Brigade. It was numbered Cork V Brigade. The area of the new brigade was now reorganised into five battalions as follows: Bantry, Castletownbere, Skibbereen, Schull and Drimoleague. The latter battalion was composed of three companies of the old Bantry Battalion (Caheragh, Inchingeragh, Drimoleague), Bredagh Company (Skibbereen Battalion) and Knockbuie (Dunmanway Battalion). A new company was organised at Castledonovan and included in this battalion also. This was now 3rd Battalion, Cork V Brigade. At this stage I was appointed O/C of this battalion (Drimoleague) by the Brigade O/C. The officers of the battalion were:

O/C - Denis Keohane (witness)
 Vice O/C - Jerh. McCarthy
 Adjt. - Dan Mahoney
 Q/M - Patk. J. Hourihane.

The H.Q. of this battalion was set up at Drimoleague.

Organisation went on throughout the area. Company training camps were held in each district and a number of new recruits joined up. These men were put through their paces in the company camps. Training went on throughout the area up to Christmas, 1921, and when Drimoleague R.I.C. Barracks was evacuated in January, 1922, Battalion H.Q. was established there.

The officers of the new brigade (Cork V) were:

O/C - Gibbs Ross
 Vice O/C - Ted O'Sullivan
 Adjt. - Mick Crowley
 Q/M - Michael O'Callaghan
 I/O - Tom Reidy.

When the news came to hand that an agreement had been reached in London between the Irish and British negotiators there was general rejoicing at the prospect of victory. However, when the details were published in the newspapers we were not so pleased, as we saw that the Treaty did not give us control of the whole of Ireland as we had envisaged. The British held the ports at Cobh, Castletownbere and Lough Swilly and, in addition, it had been agreed to divide the country into two states - Northern and Southern Ireland. There was a diversity of views amongst the politicians and amongst the members of the army. In general, the men of Cork III and Cork V Brigades together with the men of the other brigades in the Southern Divisions, were dissatisfied with the agreement signed in London. They were prepared to stand by the Irish Republic established at Easter, 1916, and confirmed by the people in the General Election in December, 1918.

The Articles of Agreement were debated in Dáil Éireann in January, 1922. They were approved on a vote - for acceptance 64 against 57 - on January 7th 1922.

Some days later the pro-Treaty members of the Dáil met as the Parliament of Southern Ireland. They approved the Treaty and elected a Provisional Government to which the British handed over control. Dáil Éireann, which was the Government of the Republic, still existed, although all its members, following the Treaty debate, were pro Treaty. Within a short time the new Government

began to recruit a new army. Many of the officers and men of this army had been members of the I.R.A. The strength of the new army was mainly concentrated in Dublin and the Midlands, while the men in the South, with few exceptions, stood by the Republic.

As both the new Dáil Éireann Government and the Provisional Government were prepared to accept and operate the Treaty, the I.R.A. decided to revert to the old method of Army Control which existed prior to the establishment of Dáil Éireann in January, 1919, i.e. to return to the control of an Army Executive. There were now two armies, while the politicians were endeavouring to find a way of preventing a split and the division of the army and the people.

The I.R.A., under the control of their Executive, established their H.Q. in the Four Courts in Dublin, while the Provisional Government forces had their H.Q. in Beggars Bush Barracks. Talks between the H.Q. officers of the I.R.A. and the Minister for Defence and his representatives were going on for some months in an endeavour to come to an agreement on army policy. During this period a few clashes of a minor nature took place between the opposing forces, but everything was proceeding reasonably well until the Provisional Government - later known as Free State - forces attacked the I.R.A. H.Q. in the Four Courts on June 28th 1922.

A Brigade Council meeting for Cork V Brigade was held in Bantry on June 29th or 30th 1922, and the news of the attack on the Four Courts had come to hand. At this meeting it was decided to attack the only garrison of Provisional Government forces in the brigade area -

at Skibbereen. The approval of Divisional H.Q. was sought for this operation and was received.

On the evening of July 1st 1922 a force of about 80 men drawn from a number of battalions in Cork III and V Brigades entered Skibbereen and took up billets in a number of houses in the town. Next day was spent in negotiating with the garrison in an endeavour to get them to evacuate the post without opening hostilities. However, the garrison of Provisional Government forces refused to surrender, so positions surrounding the post were occupied by I.R.A. forces. Fire was opened on the post about 8 p.m. and continued intermittently throughout the night and until 8 p.m. next evening when the garrison surrendered.

There was little activity in the area beyond normal training until Free State forces landed in Union Hall during the first days of August, 1922. A strong section of this force occupied Bantry. On August 30th 1922 we decided to endeavour to recapture the town. We succeeded in driving in the outposts from the eastern end, but in the absence of suitable armament we were unable to push the attack to a successful conclusion. In this engagement the Brigade O/C (Gibbs Ross) was killed.

Several minor engagements against Free State forces took place in the area up to December 8th 1922. On this date a large Free State force advanced on Bantry area in an endeavour to round up one of our columns of about 60 men which was billeted in Gortroe area. This force encircled a large area and closed in on our column, but after an engagement lasting from about 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. we broke through the encircling ^{RING} ~~ring~~ without casualties.

Between December, 1922, and the date of the Cease Fire order from I.R.A. H.Q. on April 30th 1923, our columns operating in Cork V Brigade area continued to harass all Free State garrisons in the area.

Following the Cease Fire order all arms were dumped in accordance with instructions. I continued to move around the brigade until June 7th 1923, when I was arrested in a round-up at Goulanes with Dan O'Driscoll and Charley O'Brien. We were taken to Bantry and later to Cork Military Barracks. Eventually we reached Tintown No. 2 Camp at the Curragh, where I was detained until I was released in October, 1923.

Signed:

Dennis Keane

Date:

July 27th 1952

Witness:

P. Lonnell

(Investigator).

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