

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,590

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1590.

Witness

Daniel C. Kelly ,
3 Townsend St.,
Skibbereen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C Transport, Skibbereen Battalion,
Cork 111 Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Skibbereen Battalion,
Cork 111 Brigade, I.R.A., 1917-21,
and Brigade Flying Column, 1920-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2915.

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STATEMENT BY DANIEL C. KELLY,
3, Townsend Street, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.

I was born in Bantry on 24rd December, 1902. My father was an oil salesman. I was educated at Bantry and Skibbereen National Schools.

When the Irish Volunteers were organised in Skibbereen in the summer of 1917 I joined the local unit. The strength of the Company at this time was 14/16. The prime movers in the organisation were :- Denis O'Shea, who was O/C., John Leonard and Tim Sullivan. I was mainly engaged in carrying despatches to neighbouring Companies. The only type of training carried on at this time, was close order foot drill under our own officers, but occasionally on Sundays we went on route marches to units in the district. During the initial stages also new recruits were being invited to join and by the end of 1917 the strength of Skibbereen unit was about 25. There was no change in the officers.

The threat of the British to enforce Conscription in the spring of 1918 led to a small increase in membership and to increased activity for all members. All arms held by other than Volunteers, or the members of their families, were collected. The houses in which the arms were held were raided by the members of the unit and, as far as I can recollect, the guns were surrendered voluntarily. Amongst the houses raided was that of Dan O'Sullivan, Yokane, Skibbereen, where two revolvers, a miniature rifle and 250 rounds of ammunition were obtained. The remainder of the arms obtained in the raids were mainly shotguns. The armament of the Company at this time consisted, I would say, of about 15 shotguns, in addition to the two

revolvers and miniature rifles referred to above.

During the Conscription period all members of the unit were engaged in organising the general public, collecting subscriptions for Anti-Conscription Fund, making buckshot and improvising weapons such as pikes. When the Conscription scare passed there was a reduction in the Company strength to about 25 - the membership at the end of 1917.

I think that the area was organised on a battalion basis about this time. Skibbereen became a Battalion Headquarters. The Companies in Skibbereen Battalion, at this time, were, as far as I can recollect :- Skibbereen "A", Castlehaven "B", Myross "C", Leap "D", Corran "E". Companies were later organised at Baltimore "G" and Lisheen "F". The first officers of the battalion were, I think :-

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|---------------|-----------------------|
| O/C. | Sam Kingston, |
| Vice O/C. | John B. O'Driscoll, |
| Adjutant | Terence O'Donoghue, |
| Quartermaster | Patrick J. Cullinane. |

The organisation of the Battalion led to increased activity for me in my position as despatch rider. I was more or less regularly engaged during my spare time on travelling between the various Company areas and Battalion Headquarters - mainly by bicycle.

The organisation of Sinn Féin was proceeding apace at this time. All Volunteers were actively associated with the work of this organisation, which was mainly composed of themselves and the members of their families. I cannot recollect the names of the leading Sinn Féiners in the area at the time. We were all, however, engaged in preparing for the General Election in

December 1918, but there was no contest as Michael Collins, the Sinn Féin candidate, was returned unopposed.

Early in 1919 Cork Brigade, which controlled the whole county, was divided into three Brigades. Our Battalion (Skibbereen) became a unit of the new West Cork Brigade (Cork 111. Brigade). The Battalions in this Brigade were :- Bandon 1st, Clonakilty 2nd, Dunmanway 3rd, Skibbereen 4th, Bantry 5th, Castletownbere 6th. Another Battalion was organised in Schull, 7th area, in the spring of 1920. Tom Hales, O/C., Bandon Battalion, was the first O/C. of Cork 111. Brigade, but I cannot recollect the names of the other officers on the Brigade staff when it was established. There were, however, a number of changes in the personnel during 1919 and at the end of the year the officers were, as far as I can recollect :-

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|---------------|----------------|
| O/C. | Tom Hales, |
| Vice O/C. | Hugh Thornton, |
| Adjutant | Liam Deasy and |
| Quartermaster | Pat Harte. |

Normal training continued throughout 1919 and the early part of 1920. I took part in the normal activities of the local unit (Skibbereen) in addition to attending to my duties as despatch rider,

When the general order for the destruction of evacuated enemy posts was received at Easter 1920, the R.I.C. post at Castletownsend was destroyed by fire. This operation was carried out by the members of Skibbereen and Castlehaven Companies. The Battalion Vice O/C. (Con Connolly) was in charge. The officers of the Battalion at this time were :-

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|---------------|-------------------------|
| O/C. | Sam Kingston, |
| Vice O/C. | Cornelius Connolly, |
| Adjutant | Florence O'Donoghue and |
| Quartermaster | Patrick O'Sullivan. |

During the summer of 1920 all arms in the area, which were not already under the control of the Company, were collected in a number of raids. We now had about twenty shotguns with a supply of ammunition. The local mails were also raided on a number of occasions, but no information of value came to light. With the other members of the unit I took part in these operations.

When a training camp was set up at Kealkil in Bantry area for the officers of Skibbereen and Bantry battalions in October, 1920, the officers of Skibbereen Company attended. The Camp, which was in charge of Tom Barry (Brigade O/C. Training) was carried on for about one week or ten days. All men present at the camp were trained in the use of the rifle, small arms, the selection of ambush positions and the use of cover. I was not present at this camp as the representatives were selected from the Company officers.

The Brigade Flying Column was established about this time and in order to raise funds to keep it "in the field" it was decided by the Brigade Council to impose a levy on all business people and landholders in the Brigade area. In the case of the farmers the levy was based on the number of cows "carried" on the holding - I think the rate was 4/- per cow. The levy in the case of merchants and others was based on the Poor Law Valuation of their premises. The responsibility for the collection of this levy and the transmission of the proceeds to Brigade Headquarters devolved on the Battalion officers in each area. They, in turn, made the Company officers responsible for the collection in their own areas. With several other members of the unit I took part of the collection of the levy in Skibbereen area during the months of October and November, 1920.

When a spy, named James Mahoney, alias Hawkes, who had come into the area from, I think, Clonakilty Battalion, was shot on 13th October, 1920, I was engaged for some days prior to this operation on intelligence work in connection with this job - timing and reporting on the movements of enemy patrols to Battalion Headquarters. I cannot recollect the names of the men who shot this spy.

There was very little activity in the area up to the end of 1920 or early 1921. At this time, while still continuing my despatch carrying, I was engaged on intelligence work.

When the Brigade Flying Column under Tom Barry invaded Skibbereen on the night of 9th February, 1921, I acted as scout for the party of a dozen or so who came into the town - the other members of the Column were lying in ambush on the Clonakilty road. This operation is described in detail in "Guerilla Days in Ireland" pages 90-92, chapter 14, and is, as far as I can recollect, correct.

When the Brigade Column under Tom Barry attacked Roscarbery R.I.C. barracks on the night of 31st March, 1921, I was in charge of an armed guard engaged on the protection of a road-cutting party on the main Skibbereen-Roscarbery road at Smorane. We remained on duty until daybreak when we withdrew to our home areas.

About this time there was a change in the members of the battalion staff. The members now were :-

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|---------------|----------------------|
| O/C. | Cornelius Connolly, |
| Vice O/C. | Pat O'Driscoll, |
| Adjutant | William McCarthy and |
| Quartermaster | Patrick O'Sullivan. |

I was now appointed Battalion O/C., Transport and within a short time William McCarthy was replaced as Adjutant by Cornelius Bohane.

During the spring of 1921 the members of the Skibbereen Company, in conjunction with the members of all the other units in the Battalion, were engaged practically every night on the blocking of roads, disrupting rail services and cutting enemy lines of communication. This work, which was part of a general operation throughout the South, required the full time attention of a large number of men right up to the Truce on 11th July, 1921.

Early in April, 1921, Skibbereen Courthouse was burned by a party from the local Company, which included John Leonard (O/C), Con McCarthy, Jeremiah Coughlan, John and William Kelly (my brothers), William Bohane, Pat Sullivan, Charles Coughlan, Tom Connell and myself. I smashed in the door of the building with a sledge. We then sprinkled petrol throughout the various rooms and set the place on fire. While the abovenamed were engaged on the destruction of the building the other members of the Company were engaged on scouting and outpost duties.

All cycles in the area were collected at this time and dumped for use by the members of the Brigade Column and despatch riders.

On the night of 30th April, 1921, all available members of Skibbereen Company were engaged either as scouts, on outpost duty or in the main attacking party on a patrol of R.I.C. at the junction of Bridge Street - Island Street about 9.30 p.m. The enemy patrol consisted of 12/14 men moving in extended order on both sides of the street. They were armed with carbines. As the patrol approached the junction of Bridge Street - Island Street, fire was opened on

them by a party of about a dozen in our main attacking party who were in position in the doorways on the street and behind a cart which had been pushed into the roadway at the junction. The attacking party's arms consisted of shotguns, two or three carbines and a couple of revolvers. After an exchange of fire lasting about five minutes our party withdrew. The R.I.C. - one of whom was wounded - retired to their barracks. Amongst those who took part in this operation were :- John Leonard (O/C.), Paddy Fehilly, Pat Sullivan, Paddy Cooney, Paddy Harnedy, William Kelly, John Kelly, Rory O'Connor and Daniel C. Kelly (witness).

Early in May, 1921, instructions were received from Brigade Headquarters to seize all available motor cars in the area to be held ready for the transport of the Brigade Column. Arrangements were made to send some members of Cumann na mBan into Skibbereen to hire cars for a funeral which was supposed to take place at Derryleigh, on 10th May, 1921, - about three miles from Skibbereen. The members of Cumann na mBan carried out their instructions and a strong party of our men were awaiting the cars at Derryleigh. However, before the cars arrived three lorries of military moved into the area and took our party by surprise. When the military opened fire the armed men in our force returned the fire and then withdrew.

I had been with the main party in company with John Collins. We were to drive the cars when they were taken over. We were unarmed so we moved along the road towards Skibbereen and, as the firing continued, we took cover in the ditch beside the roadside fence. Within a few minutes District Inspector Foster, R.I.C., approached our position along the road. He carried two drawn

revolvers and as he advanced we left our cover. As we did so a soldier ~~to the rear~~ on our left opened fire and shot John Collins in the hip. We were taken into Skibbereen and interrogated. We stated that we had been out for a walk and eventually I was released that night while Collins was removed to hospital.

I continued to carry out my duties as O/C., Transport - moving around the area and ensuring that suitable means of transport were available at all key points. About mid-June three British Marines were taken prisoners near Castletownsend by Steve O'Brien (Battalion Adjutant), Paddy Harnedy and three or four others. The prisoners were removed to accommodation in the area north of Leap where they were detained for a couple of weeks. During this period I acted as guard on these prisoners on a few occasions. They eventually escaped.

Within a few days of this incident arrangements were made to burn Skibbereen Workhouse to prevent its occupation by Major Percival's Column which was moving into the area from the east. This job was undertaken by the members of the men of Skibbereen battalion in co-operation with a section of the Column under Liam Deasy. All patients and inmates in the building had to be removed before the place was prepared for burning. The area was sealed off about 9 p.m. - all roads in the area being held by armed parties. When the occupants had been removed to safety the building was sprinkled with paraffin and petrol and then set on fire. It was completely destroyed. All men engaged on the operation withdrew about 4 a.m. on the morning of 23rd June, 1921.

On 3rd July, 1921 Edward Swanton, Draper, Skibbereen, was taken prisoner at Kilderry in the neighbourhood of the town. He was

suspected of co-operating with the enemy and was taken to Battalion Headquarters at Moultrahane where he was detained until after the Truce. On the same occasion a motor car to be used for the transport of the battalion staff was commandeered by me from Donnellan's, Skibbereen.

It was now decided to divide Cork III. Brigade into two Brigades. The Western Battalions - Bantry, Castletownbere, Schull, Skibbereen and a new battalion based on Drimoleague were to form a new Brigade - Cork V. The Battalions based on Bandon, Dunmanway, Clonakilty, with a new Battalion based on Kinsale, were to form the new Cork III. Brigade. I think that this arrangement did not come into operation until after the Truce.

The officers of the new Cork V. Brigade were :-

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|---------------|----------------------|
| O/C. | Gibbs Ross, |
| Vice-O/C. | Ted O'Sullivan, |
| Adjutant | Mick Crowley, and |
| Quartermaster | Michael O'Callaghan. |

My rank at the Truce .. O/C., Transport, Skibbereen Battalion, Cork III. Brigade.

The strength of the Battalion .. About 600.

SIGNED: Daniel O'Kelly

DATE: 8¹⁵ March 1954

WITNESS: P. Donnell

