

W. S. 958

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913 21
No. W.S. 958

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 958

Witness

Denis J. O'Sullivan,
Sneem.
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Sneem Coy. Irish Vol's. 1917 - ;
Adjutant Sneem Coy. 1918 - ;
Battalion Adjutant Kenmare, 1921 - .

Subject.

Kenmare Battalion, Co. Kerry,
1917-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No., S. 2271

Form B S M 2

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Statement by Denis J. O'Sullivan,
Sneem, Co. Kerry.

I was born in the year 1901 and attended the local national school. My father was a shopkeeper and farmer.

I joined the National Volunteers in 1914; I marched wearing a green sash. We broke up at the time of the Redmondite split and didn't reform until 1917.

In 1917 we heard a lot about Sinn Féin from some of the local boys when they were home on holidays from college and we were interested. Michael Cahalane (R.I.P.) who was older than most of us, knew some Sinn Féiners in Kenmare and we got him interested in forming a club. Michael Cahalane wrote to Kenmare and Thady Cronin and some others came from Kenmare to Sneem one Sunday to get things going. I was a member of a local band and we got the band out to parade the village carrying Sinn Féin colours.

We got the Volunteers started just after Sinn Féin and Michael Cahalane became our first Captain. Jack Teehan was next in command. We had some opposition locally from the Nationalists. They split the band and got some of them out against us. But they picked a bad night - it was the time Bishop O'Dwyer died and it looked like a slur on the bishop to parade against Sinn Féin and the opposition collapsed.

My father was part owner of a butter store and he gave us the use of the store for our Volunteer and Sinn

Féin meetings. I remember Denis O'Connor of Sneem was President of the Sinn Féin Club and Michael Cahalane was Secretary as well as being Captain of the Volunteers.

Michael Cahalane and Denis O'Connor died in 1918 and the Volunteers took over the Sinn Féin Club. I was appointed Secretary of the Sinn Féin Club. Jack Teehan became Captain of the Volunteers. At the time (1918) the Sneem Company of Volunteers was attached to the Kenmare Battalion Kerry 11 Brigade and continued in that position until shortly before the truce when Kerry 111 Brigade was formed. Sneem was then joined with other Companies - Castlecove, Glenlough, Brocaragh and Derrynane - and made into a separate Battalion (4th Battalion Kerry 111). I was Company Adjutant from August, 1918, until the formation of the new Battalion when I became Battalion Adjutant.

During 1918 we were drilling and training and we got orders from the Battalion to have pikes made. We sent the stuff for the pikes to a smith named Connor at Blackwater, but the whole business fell through before the pikes were made. I was engaged on the 1918 election and we brought the Sneem Company to Kenmare where we paraded the town under John Joe ^{Rice} ~~Redd~~. I was also engaged on the County Council and Rural District Election and we got Jack Teehan, our Company Captain, and Michael (Big Mick) Sullivan, a Lieutenant in the Company, elected to the Sneem Rural District Council.

In 1919 we started the collection of arms and I was on most of the raids which were carried out on the houses of persons who did not give their guns to the Volunteers.

I know that the house of the Parish Priest was raided and his gun taken. I remember the gun, the keeper was missing. I was on a raid on the house of Colonel Hartney and we got some old rifles and a lot of stuff for making cartridges. They were only four or five raids for arms in the Sneem area. A number of Volunteers had guns of their own. I had a revolver which I bought off an insurance agent. I bought the gun myself because the Company had no funds. It was the best weapon we had in the Company.

My revolver was taken by the Brigade when No. 2 Brigade Flying Column was formed but I got it back when the Brigade Column was disbanded and the Battalion Columns were formed.

We applied a boycott to the R.I.C. They had some friends in Sneem amongst the shopkeepers and we went round the shops carrying arms and warned them to stop supplying the R.I.C.

In June, 1920, the local Volunteer Company made preparations for an attack on Sneem R.I.C. barracks. I was in charge of a section of men for the attack. We had heard that the R.I.C. were going to leave the barracks and we sent Jeremiah Neill, who was an insurance agent, to Kenmare to ask John Joe Rice (Vice O/C Kerry 11 Brigade) for assistance in attacking the barracks. Jeremiah Neill took too much drink before he saw John Joe Rice and made such a fuss that John Joe Rice ignored him. Neill came back to Sneem with Paddy Egan, one of the Kenmare officers, and another man named Mahony. We decided to go on with the job but we had no knowledge of what was going on round the barracks. When we got to the barracks the R.I.C. had left

so we set fire to the barracks and the courthouse adjoining. We poured petrol and paraffin over the building and when we were getting ready to set it alight one of the fellows who had come from Kenmare (the worse for drink) struck a match to light a cigarette and the whole place took fire. Two of our men - John Fitzgerald and John J. O'Sullivan, were burned. O'Sullivan was so badly burned that he had to be brought to hospital in Kenmare about a week later. When the barracks took fire all the doors slammed shut and we were in danger of being trapped.

When the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks they went to a private house at Oyster Beds, about 2 miles nearer Kenmare. Some nights after they had left the barracks some of the R.I.C. came into Sneem and after taking drink at Sullivan's publichouse they spoke of burning my father's shop and stores. Mrs. Sullivan, the owner of the publichouse, was the mother of the Sullivan boy who had been burned at the barracks. She overheard their conversation and succeeded in her plea to them not to burn us out.

The police (R.I.C.) left Oyster Beds after a short while and we had no garrison nearer to Sneem than Blackwater, about eight miles away on the Kenmare side.

I stayed in my own house because it was not necessary to go on the run. We had no British garrison near and the only danger was at night when we had to be on the look-out for raids. I was required in Sneem because any messages coming to the area came to me.

I was on a couple of raids on the mails and we held up a few commercial travellers who we had heard were carrying messages for the R.I.C. We got nothing but we

warned the travellers. I didn't believe in raiding the mails too often because it would serve no purpose.

Although the R.I.C. had left we still had a lot of loyalist houses in the area, which included - Parknasilla, Col. Walden's, Col. Hartley's, Lord Dunraven's and Fraser's, so we had to be careful. There were no attacks made on the British forces by the Sneem Company after the R.I.C. had left Oyster Beds.

After the Headford ambush in March, 1921, I got word that some of the Brigade Column were coming to our area and we made preparations to receive them. We arranged escorts and a billet. The men who came were Thos. O'Connor (Scarteen), Paddy Lynch, Thos. Randles and Denis Hegarty. While they were in the billet we had scouts posted but on the morning after they had arrived I heard the noise of a lorry. Someone said it was a lorry being started in a garage but I made out to the road and I saw about seven British lorries coming. The high road from Killarney to Kenmare had been blocked. The British troops jumped off their lorries, spread out and came to the lower side of the village of Sneem. I went back to the four Column men and told them to leave the billet the back way. They picked up their stuff but in his hurry Paddy Lynch forgot his rifle. I took the rifle and guided them out to the country. When we got out of the village we were joined by some members of the Sneem Company and we intended moving across the road, but when we got to within a few fields of the road we saw the lorries moving off towards Waterville.

About June, 1921, a Battalion camp was organised at

Kilgarvan. I wasn't on the camp but I know it was intended to train a Battalion Column. The camp was under Denis Hegarty, Commandant of the Kenmare Battalion, and Jack Flynn of Bonane was one of the training officers. We carried shotguns and ammunition to the camp over Moll's Gap, and we had just gone off the road at Two-mile-Bridge when three lorries of Tans passed. A short time before the Truce about twenty British soldiers came to the house of Col. Walden outside Sneem. We kept them under observation but they moved on towards Waterville.

During May and June 1921 the work of organising the new Battalion ~~Column~~ was being carried out. It was slow work because we had to keep our own Companies going. The Truce came just as the new Battalion ~~Column~~ was organised.

During the Truce my work got really heavy. I was Battalion Adjutant. The training camps were being organised. A camp for Company officers was held at Caherdaniel and separate camps were organised for signalling and engineering. After the Battalion camp each Company held their own training camps.

In February, 1922, the Battalion took over Albina Broderick's house at Castlecove as headquarters and remained there until the end of July, 1922. When I got home my mother was dying and she died on the 19th August, 1922. On the day of the funeral Free State troops under Thomas O'Connor (Scarteen) surrounded Sneem looking for men who were on the run, some of whom he thought might be at my mother's funeral. He raided my house while my mother was waking and my father had a row with him. They seized a lorry of

ours and parts of a motor car and took them away.

I kept out of the way for a while but I came into my house at the end of March, 1923, and was arrested. I was held for about a month. I signed an undertaking to refrain from any acts against the Free State and was released. I had to come out of jail because my father had no one to assist him in looking after the business. The Free State troops came after me again. I think my name had been confused with another man named Denis Sullivan who was active with the Irish Republican Army.

I did all the organising work for the election of 1923 on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidates as all the other men in the area were either on the run or in jail.

Signed:

Denis J. Sullivan

Date:

23rd June 1954

(Denis J. O'Sullivan)

23rd June 1954.

Witness:

James J. O'Connor
James J. O'Connor

