

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1477

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1477.

Witness

Thomas Reidy,
Newtown,
Bantry,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Battalion I.O., Bantry Battalion, Cork III Brigade,
I.R.A.

Brigade I.O., Cork V Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Cork V. Brigade, I.R.A.
1921-1924.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2743.

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS REIDY,
Newtown, Bantry, County Cork.

I have already furnished a statement covering my activities up to the Truce on July 11th., 1921. Following the Truce, Cork III. Brigade was divided into two Brigades. The Western battalions - Bantry, Castletownbere, Schull, Skibbereen and a newly organised battalion (Drimoleague) - were formed into a new Brigade - Cork V. The officers of the Brigade were :-

| | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| O/C. | Gibbs Ross, |
| Vice O/C. | Ted O'Sullivan, |
| Adjutant | Mick Crowley, |
| Quartermaster | Michael O'Callaghan, |
| I. O. | Tom Reily (Witness). |

I was appointed Brigade I.O. and continued in my employment with Messrs. Murphy & O'Connor. I continued to attend to my Intelligence work - the organisation which I had established prior to the Truce was operating as usual.

Normal military routine was followed by all units throughout the new Brigade during the summer and autumn of 1921. Training camps were held in each Battalion area and practically every member of the I.R.A. in the area underwent a course of training in one aspect or another of military activities during this period. All were preparing to continue the fight against the British should the negotiations, which were taking place in London, break down.

When the news that a treaty had been signed reached the area early in December 1921, our first reaction was one of rejoicing at what we were led to believe was the successful culmination of seven centuries of fighting against England. However, within a day or two, when the

actual terms of the Treaty were published in the Press, the views of the men in the Brigade underwent a change. The vast majority saw in the Treaty not a victory for the Irish Republic, but the beginning of the march into the Empire with our heads up. They realised that the terms now offered differed only in minor details from the Home Rule offered to John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party and they realised too that the Irish Republic, established in 1916, which they had been fighting to uphold, was to be disestablished. It was to be replaced by two States - Northern Ireland (six counties) and Southern Ireland (twenty-six counties). However, the overwhelming majority of the members of the I.R.A. in the Brigade decided to oppose the Treaty and upheld the Republican position. Similar views were held by the Army - both officers and men - throughout the 1st Southern Division which embraced the counties of Cork, Kerry and Waterford.

The Treaty was accepted by Dáil Éireann. The voting was pro-Treaty 64, against 57. A Provisional Government was then set up in accordance with the terms of the Treaty and the British handed over to this body military and police posts, army stores and equipment. The posts taken over in our area were occupied by our forces (I.R.A.) who were opposed to the Treaty. This was the general position throughout most of the South. However, the Provisional Government began to organise a new Army - The Free State Army - mainly in Dublin and in the North. There were in addition small numbers of Free State supporters in some areas and, as their organisation grew in strength, they began to assert themselves. The anti-Treaty I.R.A. forces now set up an Executive to control their activities as the Government was supporting the Pro-Treaty forces (Free State). This was the position prior to the establishment of the Government of the Irish Republic, Dáil Éireann in 1919 - the Army was controlled by an Executive. However, every effort was being made by both sides to prevent an actual

division and it was not until a party of anti-Treaty (I.R.A.) occupying the Four Courts in Dublin was attacked by Free State forces that the Army was really split for the first time.

When the I.R.A. garrison in the Four Courts was attacked I, with the remainder of the men serving the Republic in Cork V. Brigade, adhered to the Republican side. As there were certain defections from my underground intelligence staff to the Free State side, I was forced to reorganise a new intelligence system throughout Cork V. Brigade area. This necessitated the selection of new agents as well as the reorganisation of methods of transmission and lines of communication.

The first operation in the area following the attack on the Four Courts resulted in the capture of Skibbereen R.I.C. barrack which had been occupied by a section of Provisional Government forces (Free State). The decision to attack this post was taken at a meeting of the joint staffs of Cork III. and Cork V. Brigades. A strong column - to the number of about 80 - drawn from the various battalions in the two Brigades moved into Skibbereen on a Saturday night in early August, 1922. We moved round the town next day and on Sunday evening a number of houses in the vicinity of the barrack were occupied by our forces. About a dozen houses in all were taken over, including the Masonic Hall. I was posted to the house of Miss Collins, Windmill, Skibbereen, and was accompanied by John Murphy ("spud") - McCarthy (Kilmallock) and two others from Castletownbers. This house was within a short distance of the barrack occupied by Free State forces and overlooked same. We had only gained entrance to the house when the Free State forces in the R.I.C. barracks opened fire on our position. Following the opening burst of fire one of our men - McCarthy - was wounded. We had to remove him to the First Aid dressing station at the Masonic Hall. He was later removed to Dr. Whelpsley's house at Bandon, where he died.

I accompanied the wounded man to Bandon. Intermittent fire and counter fire was carried on between the garrison in the R.I.C. barracks and our attacking forces over a period of about twenty-four hours. The garrison eventually surrendered on Monday evening after the water supply to the besieged garrison had been cut off for the greater portion of the siege period.

When the Free State forces landed in Bantry on or about 15th August, 1922, several attacks were made on the town by our forces. Several Free State posts were captured and a quantity of rifles and ammunition were seized.

As well as working in the organisation of Intelligence, and attending Brigade Council meetings, I took part in several engagements against Free State forces throughout the Brigade area until I was captured in a round-up near Carrigboy Castle in January, 1923. For some time prior to my capture I was attached to the Divisional staff, 1st Southern Division, as Assistant Divisional Intelligence Officer.

Amongst those taken prisoner with me during the round-up were:- Seán Culhane (Divisional I.O.), Seán McCarthy, Joe Kearney and Raymond Kennedy.

We were removed to Macroom and later to Cork Gaol. After a series of abortive Courts-martial we were removed to Mountjoy Prison, Dublin after the Cease Fire order in May, 1923. We were detained there until Christmas 1923 when I was removed to Hare Park Internment Camp. I was released from Hare Park in April, 1924.

My next connection with Army activities was during the 1939-1945 Emergency period when I served as an Intelligence Officer for

Bantry area under Major Florence O'Donoghue who was in charge of Intelligence work in Cork area. During this period we were engaged on tracing the activities of several British agents operating in the area.

Signed: Thomas P. Dwyer

Date: 1st August 1956

Witness: P. Lonnell

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