

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,481

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1481.

Witness

Patrick O'Sullivan,  
Garryspillane,  
Knocklong,  
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Quartermaster, Skibbereen Battalion, Cork III Brigade,  
I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Skibbereen Battalion,  
Cork III Brigade, I.R.A., 1917-1921,  
and Brigade Flying Column, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No ..... S. 2800.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK O'SULLIVAN,

Garryspillane, Knocklong, Co. Limerick.

I was born at Coolnagrane, Skibbereen, in May, 1900. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Skibbereen National School and at Ross Diocesan Seminary, which I left in 1918, having obtained Senior Grade Intermediate and Matriculation Certificates.

My brother Gearóid, who was later to become Adjutant General, Irish Republican Army, took part in the Easter Week Rising and, following same, was deported to Frongoch. As a result I was keenly interested at an early age in the National movement. My home was raided on several occasions following Easter Week. While on my school holidays during the years 1916 and 1917, I assisted in the collection of funds for the National Aid Fund which was being raised to help the relatives of those on the Republican side who had been killed, imprisoned or wounded during the Rebellion.

When the Irish Volunteers were reorganised in Skibbereen in the summer of 1917, I joined the local Company although I was still at school. I took part in all activities of the unit while I was in the area during my holidays. At this time, we were mainly engaged on close order foot drill, and on route marches to neighbouring areas on Sunday evenings. The pioneer members of the Company were, as far as I can recollect, Denis O'Shea and Florence O'Donoghue, who were respectively O/C., and 1st Lieutenant of Skibbereen Company. The strength of the unit was about forty.

The first public parade of the Company took place in June 1917 when Count Plunkett and Michael Collins came to Skibbereen to address a public meeting on behalf of Sinn Féin. Companies from all the surrounding

districts took part in this parade and there must have been close on 3,000 Volunteers on parade. A section of the parade was mounted. As far as I can remember Sam Kingston was in charge on the occasion of this parade, and also on the occasion of a big parade, which took place in December 1917 when De Valera visited Skibbereen.

I think that during the summer of 1917, the area was organised on a battalion basis. Skibbereen was made the headquarters of a battalion. The Companies in the Battalion were :- Skibbereen (A), Castlehaven (B), Myross (C), Leap (D), Corran (E). Companies were later organised at Lisheen (F) and Baltimore (G). The first officers of Skibbereen Battalion were :-

O/C.	Sam Kingston,
Vice O/C.	John B. O'Driscoll ("Bernie" O'Driscoll),
Adjutant	Florence O'Donoghue,
Quartermaster	Patrick J. Cullinane.

Early in 1918 the plant of "Skibbereen Eagle" - a local newspaper was destroyed by the Volunteers. I cannot recollect why this action was taken, but the general policy of the paper was anti-National and pro-British. About the same time "The Southern Star" - another local newspaper - was purchased by the supporters of Sinn Féin in the area. It was utilised to propagate the Sinn Féin policy throughout the area and the province of Munster. As far as I can recollect this paper was edited, at one time or another, by Seán Hayes, Ernest Blythe and Peadar O'Hourihane. The former pair had taken part in Easter Week, while Peadar O'Hourihane was a Gaelic League organiser and a native of the district.

When the British threatened to enforce Conscription in the spring and summer of 1918, there was a big increase in the membership of the Volunteers. The Company must have had about 100 members. There was

no change in the officers of the Company or Battalion at this period. All arms in the area were collected. These were mainly shotguns, but we also had four rifles in the Company. The rifles were Martini Henrys and had been brought from Dublin by my brother - Gearóid. They had been purchased by individual members of the Company. These rifles were used to instruct the Volunteers in their use - not alone in the Company but throughout the Skibbereen Battalion. During the Conscription period the Volunteers were engaged in various activities of a military nature - training, raiding for arms, improvising weapons. The normal parades were carried on twice weekly. However, when the British decided not to proceed with their plans there was a big reduction in the strength of the Company (Skibbereen) and the membership fell to about fifty.

There was nothing unusual during the latter portion of the year 1918. All Volunteers were, of course, engaged in organising Sinn Féin - the political side of the Movement. This organisation was steadily gaining strength throughout the country during the years 1917 and 1918. The members were mainly Volunteers and the members of their families. Despite the fact that the younger element in the Volunteers were mainly concerned with the military side they, nevertheless, co-operated wholeheartedly with the political side - Sinn Féin. I cannot recollect who the leaders of Sinn Féin in the area were at this time. There was no great activity in connection with the General Election in December 1918 as the Sinn Féin candidate - Michael Collins - was returned unopposed.

Early in 1919 Cork Brigade, Irish Volunteers, which embraced the whole of Cork County, was divided into three Brigades. Our Battalion (Skibbereen) became a unit of the new West Cork Brigade (Cork III.). The other Battalions in this Brigade were :- Bandon, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Bantry, Castletownbere. A new Battalion was later organised in Schull area. The first officers of Cork III. Brigade were, I think :-

O/C. Tom Hales,  
 Vice O/C. Seán Hayes,  
 Adjutant Denis O'Connell,  
 Quartermaster Denis O'Shea.

There were a number of changes in this staff within a period of about six months and at the end of that time the officers, as far as I can recollect, were :-

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

Normal training continued throughout the summer of 1919. However, the holding of a training camp in Glandore in August of that year led to increased interest throughout the Brigade. This Camp was attended by selected officers and men from the various Battalions. I was not present at the Camp. My brother Gearoid was in the area for some days prior to the assembly of the camp checking up on the organisation. Dick McKee, O/C., Dublin Brigade, was in charge of the Camp. He was assisted by other officers from the same Brigade. I recollect that Dick McKee called to my house on his way to the Camp.

The Camp had been in progress about four or five days when information was received that the British proposed to raid the camp at Glandore. I cycled to Glandore to notify them of the raid. The enemy had, however, surrounded the Camp. They arrested my brother Gearóid, Bernie O'Driscoll (Skibbereen), Seán Murphy (Dunmanway) and Denis O'Brien (Kilbrittain). They were later sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

After the Glandore Camp there was no activity beyond normal training until about Easter 1920. A meeting of Skibbereen Battalion Council was held on Holy Thursday 1920. It was attended by

Liam Deasy (Brigade Adjutant) and Charlie Hurley (Vice O/C. Bandon Battalion). At this meeting it was decided to attack Ballydehob R.I.C. barracks on the following Saturday night (Easter Saturday). All arrangements were made for the attack, but the barrack was evacuated by the garrison on Good Friday.

At Easter 1920, Castletownsend evacuated R.I.C. post was destroyed by fire. This operation was carried out by the members of Skibbereen and Castlehaven Companies to the number of about thirty. Cornelius Connolly (Battalion Vice O/C. Skibbereen) was in charge.

There was a change in the staff of the battalion (Skibbereen) early in 1920, when the officers were :-

O/C.	Sam Kingston,
Vice O/C.	Cornelius Connolly,
Adjutant	Florence O'Donoghue,
Quartermaster	Patrick O'Sullivan (Witness).

The Brigade Quartermaster (Pat Harte) was in the area in the early part of July, 1920, when he arranged to ambush a patrol of R.I.C. near ~~Barrade~~ <sup>BRADE</sup> - about one mile from Leap - on the Skibbereen-Clonakilty road. About twenty men armed with shotguns and drawn mainly from Skibbereen and Leap Companies took up a position behind the roadside fence. They were extended over a distance of about eighty yards. Positions were taken up in the early morning. A patrol of R.I.C. to the number of nine entered the ambush position about 11 a.m. They were cycling in pairs and in extended order. They were armed with rifles. Fire was opened on the patrol and there was an exchange of shots lasting about five minutes. However, due to the failure of our ammunition - much of which did not explode at all - we were forced to withdraw. Two members of Leap Company - Patrick and John Dineen - were arrested

following this incident and were sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In addition to Pat Harte, who was in charge, the following were the only ones whose names I can remember who took part in this operation :- Sam Kingston (Battalion O/C), Cornelius Connolly (Battalion Vice O/C), Owen O'Sullivan, Patrick O'Sullivan (Witness). The date of this engagement was, I think, 4th July, 1920.

The Brigade O/C. (Tom Hales) and Brigade Quartermaster (Pat Harte) were arrested towards the end of July, 1920, and the officers of the Brigade (Cork III.) now became :-

O/C. Charlie Hurley,  
 Vice O/C. Ted O'Sullivan,  
 Adjutant Liam Deasy,  
 Quartermaster Dick Barrett.

A training camp was established in Kealkil - in Bantry Battalion area - in October 1920, to train selected officers and men from Bantry and Skibbereen Battalions. All Company and Battalion officers were in attendance. The Brigade Vice O/C. (Ted O'Sullivan) was in charge of the Camp. Tom Barry was training officer. The men present underwent a thorough course of training in the use of arms, cover, bomb throwing, selection of ambush positions. The camp was carried on for about ten days. On his way to his home area after this camp the Skibbereen Battalion Adjutant (Florence O'Donoghue) was arrested. He was replaced by Dermot McCarthy.

About this time it was decided to form a Brigade Flying Column, and orders were issued to send representatives to the Column from each battalion. Members of the Battalion Staff or officers of Companies were advised not to volunteer for service with the Column as it was essential that the local organisation should be kept in good order if the Column was to be a success. The men from

Skibbereen Battalion, who reported for duty with the first Column, were :- Denis O'Neill (Baltimore), Michael Donovan (Leap), Dan O'Brien (Lisheen) and Jack McCarthy. These men took part in Kilmichael ambush on 28th November, 1920.

A patrol of R.I.C. was ambushed by members of the Leap Company on 20th October, 1920. Three of the enemy were wounded. The I.R.A. had no casualties. Following this attack enemy forces burned the house of Jeremiah Crowley - a farmer living about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Leap. A party under Patrick J. Crosbie (O/C. Corrin Company) attacked a patrol of R.I.C. in Leap on 21st November, 1920. One of the patrol was killed and one wounded. The I.R.A. parties engaged on these activities had no casualties. I did not take part in these operations being engaged on other activities throughout the battalion (Skibbereen).

During the autumn of 1920 and up to Christmas of that year, I was engaged in organising and arranging for the collection of the Arms Fund Levy throughout the battalion. A levy of 4/- per cow was fixed on all farmers. About twenty Protestant farmers in the area refused to pay the levy. In the circumstances we were forced to seize stock to the value of the amount of the levy from each defaulter. It was decided to seize all such stock on the night prior to Dunmanway Fair and to drive the stock to Dunmanway where arrangements had been made to dispose of the stock to a friendly dealer. The cattle were seized and driven through the night to Dunmanway - a distance in some cases of close on 15 miles. They were sold by me for approximately £200 and the money was lodged in the Bank to the credit of the accounts of Sinn Féin supporters in the area. The friendly cattle dealer, who co-operated in the disposal of the stock, was James Duggan.

Several abortive ambushes were undertaken in various districts in the Battalion in the spring of 1921, but we failed to make contact with the enemy.

Early in February, 1921, orders were received from Brigade Headquarters that two Protestant farmers in the Skibbereen area - Connell and Sweetman - should be executed and their lands forfeited. These farmers had informed the British of the names of the men who had called on them to collect the Arms Fund Levy. About this time the Column, under the O/C. (Tom Barry), arrived in the area. It was decided to make arrangements to carry out the Brigade order in the hope that the enemy forces in Skibbereen would move out into the area to investigate the shooting of the two men, and so enable the Column to ambush them. The Column moved into billets. Some local men were selected to take up duty as guards on the homes of Connell and Sweetman until the ambush position had been selected. Amongst the men selected was Patrick O'Driscoll (Mohanna Company). When being detailed for duty, with another I.R.A. man, Patrick O'Driscoll was shot accidentally. As a result the Column withdrew from the area, and next night Tom Barry moved into Skibbereen with the Column. The attack on Skibbereen is described in "Guerilla Days in Ireland" (Tom Barry) - chapter 14 - pages 87-95. Patrick O'Driscoll was shot on the night of 8th February, 1921.

Sometime early in March, 1921, Connell and Sweetman were executed. Following their execution my father's house, together with those of Cernelius Connolly (now Battalion O/C) and John McCarthy, Mohanna, were burned as reprisals by enemy forces.

I should have mentioned earlier that in February, 1921, there had been some changes in the Battalion Staff. The officers now were:-

O/C. Cornelius Connolly,  
 Vice O/C. Patrick O'Driscoll,  
 Adjutant, William McCarthy,  
 Quartermaster, Patrick O'Sullivan (Witness).

A short time later William McCarthy (Adjutant) was replaced by Cornelius Bohane. He was later replaced about a month prior to the Truce by Steve O'Brien.

I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Liam Deasy in February, 1921. Selected men from the various Companies in the Battalion were also sworn into the Circle. In our Circle, Cornelius Connolly (Battalion O/C.) was appointed Centre and I was his deputy.

During the spring of 1921 and on to the Truce all Companies in the area were engaged on blocking roads, cutting lines of communication and such activities on practically a full time basis.

As a result of a fall from a commandeered horse I was laid up for some weeks and was moving around the area as occasion demanded. Owing to my injuries I was unable to take part in the attack on Roscarberry on 31st March, 1921.

The Brigade O/C. (Liam Deasy) with Tadg O'Sullivan (Quartermaster), Tom Barry (<sup>Column</sup>~~Colonel~~, O/C.) and Denis Lordan (<sup>Column</sup>~~Colonel~~, Adjutant) were in our area near Maultrehane about mid-April, 1921. They were engaged on making arrangements for the landing of a cargo of arms in the Union Hall area. Large enemy forces were carrying out a round-up in the district, and the house in which they were billeted was raided, but the effective protection arrangements in operation enabled them to escape. Scouts advised them of the approach of the enemy raiding party immediately the raiders entered the area. On this occasion I was rounded up in a house about a half mile from the Brigade O/C's billet, but managed to get away.

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 a number of members of Cumann na mBan into Skibbereen to hire cars for an alleged funeral which was supposed to take place at Derryleigh - about three miles from Skibbereen town. The members of Cumann na mBan carried out their instructions and a strong party of I.R.A. awaited the arrival of the cars at Derryleigh. However, before the cars arrived a strong force of military moved into this area and took us by surprise. There was an exchange of fire in which I was wounded, but I managed to escape as did all the others. I was again laid up for some time as a result of this wound, but was again operating when, with about six others, including Steven O'Brien (Battalion Adjutant), we kidnapped three British Marines near Castletownsand about mid-June, 1921. One of the prisoners escaped during the night so we were forced to move out of the area. However, I had made assurance doubly sure that the prisoner for which I was responsible would not get away as I tied his wrist and ankle to my own when we went to sleep in the billet.

Within a few days of this incident arrangements were made to burn Skibbereen Workhouse to prevent its occupation by enemy forces. The Column was in the area at the time. It was divided into two sections - one under Liam Deasy (Brigade O/C.) and the second under Tom Barry (Column O/C). Liam Deasy's section, in co-operation with several men from Skibbereen Battalion, moved into Skibbereen on the night of 23rd June, 1921. As Battalion Quartermaster, I was made responsible for supplying the paraffin oil to set the building on fire and the preparation of the building for burning. I seized three barrels of paraffin at the Oil Depot at the Railway Station and had

them transported to the Workhouse. All rooms in the building were then sprinkled with the paraffin and the building set on fire. While we had been operating in Skibbereen, Tom Barry, with his section of the Column and the men of Bandon Battalion, had been carrying out a similar operation on Bandon Workhouse.

On the night following the destruction of Skibbereen Workhouse, a Brigade Council meeting was held in the area at which the main subject for discussion was the final plan for the landing of arms in Union Hall district.

Beyond normal scouting, protection duties for the Column and the destruction of enemy lines of communication, there was no further activity in the area up to the Truce on 11th July, 1921.

My rank at the Truce - Quartermaster, Skibbereen Battalion,  
Cork III. Brigade, I.R.A.

The strength of the Battalion was about 600.

Signed: Paddy O'Tuohy  
Date: 23rd August 1956.

Witness: P. Donnell

