

War of Independence Protestant killings were 'not ethnic cleansing'.

The notorious killing of 17 Protestants in west Cork during a War of Independence truce was not a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing, a new book claims.

Author Barry Keene says that documents now indicate the bulk of the killings were in retaliation for the killing of the IRA's Commandant Michael O'Neill outside Dunmanway in April 1922.

'Massacre in West Cork' is claims that some IRA units were so infuriated they struck out at individuals they suspected of being pro-British.

In the four days after O'Neill's killing 10 civilians were shot dead in Dunmanway, Ballineen, Clonakilty, Murragh and Bandon - all Protestant males aged from 16 to 82.

Despite claims that the killings had a major impact on west Cork's ethnic profile, with the local Protestant population dropping by almost 30 pc between 1911 in 1926, recent research has shown that the majority of these were British military and that most native Protestants remained.

"The online publication of the Bureau of Military History (BMH) files provides startling new evidence about the murders," Mr Keane said.

He cites statements from Michael O'Donoghue, who worked closely with O'Neill in Bandon, and who later became GAA president. In one of the statements he names Herbert Woods is the man who fired the fatal shot.

"Several prominent loyalists - all active members of the anti-Sinn Fein Society in west Cork and blacklisted as such in IRA intelligence records in Bandon, Clonakilty, Ballineen and Dunmanway were seized at night by armed men, taken out and killed in retaliation," the IRA man said.

Irish Independent, 23 Jan 2014, Ralph Riegel.