

W.S. 1288

ORIGINAL

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| BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 |
| BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21 |
| No. W.S. 1288 |

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,288.....

Witness

Michael Gleeson,
Bodyke,
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Captain Bodyke Comp any;
Adjutant 5th Battalion East Clare Brigade.

Subject.

Bodyke Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Clare, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL GLEESON

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| BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 |
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Bodyke, Co. Clare.

(formerly Adjutant, 5th Battalion, East
Clare Brigade).

I was born on 16th April 1891, in the house which is now the Presbytery for the parish of Bodyke. My people originally came from Birdhill in the Co. Tipperary. A grand-uncle of mine, Father John Gleeson, became Parish Priest of Bodyke and, in accordance with the terms of his will, my father inherited the Parish Priest's house and a farm. Thus it happened that I was born a Clareman. Due to having fallen into arrears with the rent, my father was evicted from this place, but in subsequent negotiations part of the holding including the parochial house was sold by public auction. This enabled my people to settle with the landlord and they were reinstated as tenants of the balance of the holding on which they built a new house where I am now residing.

Beyond the fact that my father was a Parnellite and later on a member of the United Irish League, I do not think he had any other connections with Irish national organisations. My mother was a Herbert from Ballina, Co. Tipperary, and she used to tell us that her father was a member of the Fenian Brotherhood

There were eleven others in my family; I was the sixth to arrive. I went to Bodyke National School until I was about 17 years of age and there reached what was then known as the second stage of the 6th standard. On leaving school I went to work on my father's farm which contained 36 statute acres of fairly good land. Apart from a few terms in jail because of my connection with the Irish Republican movement, I have never been living away from home.

In the Home Rule days my people, like the vast majority

of the parishioners of Bodyke, were staunch supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party. We then had as local curate Father John O'Dea, a native of Quin, Co. Clare, a man who had advanced national views and on the inception of the Irish Volunteers he established a branch of that body in Bodyke. I am not now able to say who the officers of that unit were, but I am definite that Father O'Dea was the driving and guiding force behind it. He secured as an instructor an ex-British soldier named James Hogan, a local man, and also arranged to have made a number of timber rifles which were used for drill purposes. This Irish Volunteer unit got on well together until the Redmondite "split" in the autumn of 1914 and, though about 75% of the members remained loyal to the Irish Volunteer Executive under the leadership of Eoin MacNeill, things did not seem to go right after the "split" and in a short time the unit disintegrated.

We had neither Irish Volunteers nor any other kind of organisation in the parish of Bodyke after the collapse of the Volunteers until the East Clare by-election campaign opened in June 1917. In this election, myself and others of our family actively assisted the candidature of Eamon de Valera by canvassing and by collecting for his election fund.

Following de Valera's success in this election the Sinn Fein movement gained a good many adherents in the parish and this was soon seen when, on the formation of a Sinn Fein Club there, upwards of 60 members were enrolled. The chairman of this club was Mitchell Dinan of Aughaneel, Bodyke, and I was elected secretary. During September 1917, a collection on behalf of Sinn Fein was made one Sunday outside the gate of the Bodyke R.C. Church by myself and Denis Healy, Bodyke. While we were so engaged we were challenged by the local R.I.C. sergeant, named Mooney, to produce a permit authorising us to collect. Of course, we had no such permit and we were both summoned before

the Tuamgraney Petty Sessions Court on a charge of collecting monies without official approval or something of that nature. Fines of 10s.6d. each with costs were imposed. I refused to pay and, on or around 1st October 1917, I was arrested and detained for a fortnight in Limerick Jail where I was treated as an ordinary criminal. Healy paid the fine.

On being released from jail I at once sent off an affiliation fee of 10/- to Michael Collins, then adjutant general of the Irish Volunteers, in respect of a Volunteer company which I intended to establish in Bodyke. In a few days Michael Brennan, Meelick, afterwards O/C. East Clare Brigade, came to Bodyke and enrolled about 80 members in a new Volunteer company. The following officers were elected:-

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| Company captain | - | myself. |
| 1st Lieutenant | - | Denis Garvey, Ballydunahane. |
| 2nd Lieutenant | - | James Cox, Kilnoe. |

Though public drilling was an offence at the time, the Bodyke Company drilled in the open from the time it was reformed. I usually took charge of the parades which were held every Sunday. Not one single member was arrested for this drilling. I now think that this was due to the fact that the local R.I.C. sergeant, Mooney, had become less officious and did not wish to get into our "black books". Apart from these weekly mobilisations the Bodyke Company did not become involved in any other kind of activity until January 1918. In that month, and in pursuance of orders received from my superior officers, I took the Bodyke Company to the O'Callaghan's Mills district and, in conjunction with the local company, marched to the Derrymore Sawmills, then owned by James Regan, Sixmilebridge, and gave orders to those in control of the mill to export no more timber until a conference was held between the mill owners and representatives of the Co. Clare Sinn Fein Executive. At the time Britain was up to her neck in the first Great War and the timber,

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which was sawn in the Derrymore Mills, was all being sent to England to meet her war needs while the people of East Clare could get no timber for the requirements of the local tradesmen and farmers.

I was among the Volunteer officers who acted as spokesmen during the interview with the management of the sawmill. An R.I.C. man from Bodyke station had followed the marching Volunteers and he compiled a list for his authorities of those in charge. In the course of a week, myself and about 16 others were arrested and taken to Ennis where we were brought before a Resident Magistrate named McElroy on charges of illegal assembly. We were remanded in custody for a week during which we were lodged in Limerick jail. During the week we went on hunger-strike under the leadership of Tom McGrath, afterwards Vice O/C. East Clare Brigade. At the end of the week we were conveyed by train from Limerick to Ennis. Waiting at the latter station was a "Black Maria", but also there were hundreds of Volunteers and Sinn Fein supporters who attacked the "Black Maria" and broke it in pieces.

The R.I.C. quickly arranged for the provision of other motor vehicles in which the prisoners were brought to the Courthouse with the exception of myself and six others who, because of the condition of our health, were sent to the Ennis County Infirmary.

The proceedings at the Courthouse began to get lively once the prisoners landed there. At the entrance steps they were met by Fr. Quin, P.P. O'Callaghan's Mills, who shook hands with each prisoner. This action caused the crowd who had assembled to get excited and, on entering the Courtroom, they refused to remove their caps which was then the headcovering of every countryman, and commenced talking and smoking. This behaviour annoyed the presiding magistrate, Mr. McElroy, and he ordered the police to clear the Court. As this order was being enforced one of the prisoners, Dan Minogue, Loughboro', O'Callaghan's Mills, shouted to his fellow prisoners: "Come on,

lads. We'll take him (the magistrate) at his word and clear out". In the general confusion which existed in the Courtroom at the time the prisoners left the dock and, mixing with the spectators, got outside the building.

At this stage, Michael Brennan of Meelick suddenly appeared from nowhere and in a clear voice gave the order: "Fall in". Nearly everybody outside the Courthouse did so and in a minute or two an orderly body of men with Brennan at their head marched away into the town where they were "dismissed" on reaching the Square. Volunteer headquarters in Ennis at the time could be said to be McNamara's publichouse and restaurant in O'Connell St. and most of those who had marched from the Courthouse, including the prisoners, adjourned to these premises to partake of refreshments. Not many minutes had elapsed, however, until a friendly R.I.C. man sent in word to disperse as the house was about to be surrounded by a large force of police and military. Prompt heed was paid to the warning and when the raiding party arrived the premises were nearly empty.

After a couple of days in the County Infirmary, myself and the six others who were detained there for medical treatment were brought before a Special Court in Ennis and we were all given a sentence of one month's imprisonment. As soon as we arrived back in Limerick Jail we resumed the hunger strike, but after three days of this we were unconditionally released.

On my release from jail some time in about the middle of March 1918, I found that Co. Clare had been declared a "special military area". Military had occupied buildings all over the county, in some cases only five or six miles apart. Tulla Workhouse, about 7 or 8 miles from Bodyke, had become the

County Military Headquarters and, in fact, remained so until the British forces evacuated our part of Ireland. At times it was said that upwards of a thousand soldiers were stationed in Tulla during that period.

Under this new military regime the civilian population were the people who were hit most. Fairs and markets were prohibited; movement from one police sub-district to another was forbidden, except by permission of the local R.I.C. sergeant; barricades were erected on the main roads in the vicinity of each military post at which guards were posted night and day whose duty it was to search passing vehicles and pedestrians. Patrolling of the countryside by police and military forces was intensified and, of course, raiding and searching of the houses of persons suspected of being disloyal became a routine affair with some people.

The effect of all those forms of enemy activity on the Irish Volunteer movement was very little. It did not prevent drilling from taking place though we now had to meet for this purpose in out-of-the-way places and under the protection of scouts who were posted to warn the men engaged in drill of the approach of enemy forces.

In time - I would say after about six months - the military were withdrawn from all the outposts and with them went, at least for a while, the objectionable restrictions of the "Special Military Area".

The direct cause of Clare having been proclaimed a "Special Military Area" was the widespread outbreak of agrarian trouble in the county during the winter of 1917 and 1918. For a while the Volunteers backed up the people in their demands for the division of large ranches and helped in cattle-drives off such lands. During one cattle drive from the lands of Dr. Sampson

in Kilgorey in which the Bodyke Company participated, The R.I.C. were following up a party when one of the police, armed with a carbine, was attacked and disarmed by my brother, Willie, ... Stewart of Ogenelloe, and Martin Fitzgerald of Kilkishen. This gun was subsequently passed on to the Feakle Volunteers and no one was arrested over the incident as I believe the police could not identify the men involved.

By the time I was released from jail in March 1918, orders had come from headquarters forbidding Irish Volunteers to take part in cattle drives or any form of land trouble. I cannot remember any instance in our part of Clare where the order was disobeyed.

I think it was in the beginning of 1919 when I was appointed adjutant to the 5th Battalion, a rank which I held until my arrest in June 1921. When this appointment was made a general reorganisation of the Volunteer movement had taken place in Clare. Up to that time it was all in one brigade and it was now divided into three separate brigades. Our district became part of the East Clare Brigade under the leadership of Michael Brennan. In turn, the battalion and company areas were revised. The first O/C. of the newly created 5th Battalion was Michael Maloney (Goggins) and, later on, he was replaced by Michael O'Dea of Tulla. The following companies comprised the 5th Battalion:- A - Kilkishen; B - O'Callaghan's Mills; C - Bodyke; D - Tulla; E - Glendree; F - Knockjames.

I believe it was in the spring of 1919 that orders came from brigade headquarters to collect all guns from the civilian population. I also have an idea that inside information from friendly policemen gave warning of the intention of the British authorities to seize these guns, so it was decided by the brigade staff that the Volunteers should act in advance. From memory I cannot now give particulars of the number of guns which were collected in the battalion area, but in the Bodyke company area about a dozen serviceable shotguns were secured together

with some cartridges.

In the winter of 1919 or very early in the spring of 1920, the R.I.C. vacated Bodyke. This left enemy garrisons in the 5th Battalion area only in one place, Tulla, which, as I already have said, was the military headquarters for the whole county. It was also the R.I.C. District Headquarters for East Clare. Even with Bodyke evacuated, the R.I.C. were still on our doorstep so to speak, as there were strong garrisons in Feakle and Scariff, these places being only about three miles and six miles respectively from the village of Bodyke. To prevent the reoccupation of the barracks in Bodyke the building was knocked down on 3rd April 1920. The Battalion O/C., Michael Maloney, was in charge. He had with him a few men from Tulla. The Bodyke Company mobilised in full strength for the operation; a good number of the men were posted as scouts all along the roads leading to the village. To avoid damage to neighbouring houses pick and crowbar had to be used in the demolishing of the building.

I did not take part in any armed attack on British forces until September 1920, when, in a Brigade operation, an attempt was made to capture Scariff R.I.C. Barracks. The operation was under the personal control of the Brigade O/C. and he had men with him from all parts of East Clare.

On the eve of the attack a number of rifles arrived at my home from O'Callaghan's Mills in a donkey and cart which also brought a box containing about 30 bombs. I arranged that night to have all this stuff taken to an empty house in Coolreagh between Bodyke and Scariff and about two miles from the latter place. A guard drawn from the Bodyke company was mounted over this house until the following evening when the men who were to comprise the attacking party arrived and took over the guns.

The bombs, which had come from headquarters in Dublin, were brought into Scariff in a motor car which moved behind the attacking party. I'm now fairly certain that this was the first time that this type of bomb had been seen in Clare and a wonderful reputation had come with them. Some of us were led to believe that a couple of them would be sufficient to demolish the walls of any barracks, and I'm satisfied that the men who had planned this attack did so on the assumption that the destructive power of these bombs was equal to their reputation.

I went into Scariff with the attacking party but I was one of a number of others who were unarmed and kept in readiness to meet any sudden emergency which might arise. Some of us were used as runners between the different positions which the attacking party occupied.

The attack opened just about nightfall, 8.30 p.m. or so. Things went wrong from the beginning. The accidental discharge of a shot by a member of a party detailed to surprise a number of R.I.C. who were regular patrons of a pub adjoining the barracks alerted these policemen and enabled them to escape into the barracks. The bombs which were thrown into the barracks through a hole broken in the roof all failed to explode. Nevertheless, the attack was kept up by the riflemen until about 10.30 p.m. when it became obvious that the police were determined to fight it out rather than surrender. The order to withdraw was then given. There were no casualties on our side, but two policemen were wounded.

After the attack the unused bombs, about 20, were left at our place. Incidentally, by this time I had five other brothers in the I.R.A. and my only sister was a member of Cumann na mBan. Next day, as the unused bombs were being removed to a little dump which we had constructed, we examined them and found the

explanation of the failure of those which had been thrown into the barracks to explode. The detonators had not been inserted.

In the attack, the Bodyke Company were given the job of blocking the roads on the Tulla side of Scariff and of scouting along these roads.

Immediately after the attack on Scariff R.I.C. barracks, there was tremendous enemy activity in the entire area within a radius of 5 or 6 miles of that town. Our home became the object of almost daily raids and searches. My brothers and I were obliged to go on the run and so was every other Volunteer in the district who was suspected of being actively connected with the movement. However, even though the attempt to capture Scariff R.I.C. Barracks did not succeed, the operation was not altogether a failure as the R.I.C. were withdrawn from the town a short while afterwards. The withdrawal of the police from that station was a big thing for the I.R.A. in East Clare as it meant that in the stretch of country between Bodyke and the Galway border outside Whitegate there was not a single post held by the British.

Though there were R.I.C. in Feakle, six miles from Bodyke, they rarely moved outside that village. The nearest enemy posts to the Bodyke district from which raiding parties might be expected were at Tulla about 7 miles away, and Killaloe a dozen miles or so distant. All the roads capable of being used by enemy transport were trenched or blocked by fallen trees or stone barricades. The district came to be regarded by men 'on the run' as a safe one to sleep and rest in.

Most of the members of the staff of the East Clare Brigade were all much sought after by the British Government especially the Brennan brothers and the Vice O/C. Tom McGrath. Michael Brennan, the O/C., was wounded in O'Brien's Bridge towards the

end of September 1920, and he came to the Bodyke district to recover and rest. He remained about for a month or so, spending most of his time between Hogan's in Coolreagh, Scanlan's in Caherhurley and my house. During all this time the Bodyke Company kept an armed guard over him. After his recovery and onwards up to the Truce he came back to us frequently, especially when he needed rest after military operations or after being chased by one raiding party after another in other parts of the brigade area. Despite the fact that Bodyke was regarded by him as a secure place, this did not prevent him from having several narrow escapes. On one such occasion, he had no sooner arrived in my home than the Crown forces were in at his heels and he got out by the back door as they were entering the front.

In November or December 1920, I was one of a party of about 25 or 30 men who, under the command of Michael Brennan, occupied a position at Newgrove to ambush a lorry of enemy troops expected to travel from Ennis to Tulla. The party was composed of men from all parts of the brigade and were equipped with rifles and shotguns. The position was entered at daybreak and we remained there until midday after which we withdrew as it was obvious by then that the lorry would not travel.

On 13th January 1921, I reported at Cratloe for another attack. This time we wanted to get an enemy lorry going from Limerick to Ennis. Our party was about 30 strong and again were equipped with rifles and shotguns. I had a rifle and, with Michael Brennan and James Hogan, a native of Galway and now a Professor in Cork University, occupied a position in a gentleman's residence, about 30 yards or so from the road.

I cannot now recall clearly how the rest of our party were positioned. I am certain that as the enemy vehicle was expected about 10 o'clock in the morning, we were lying in wait from before

dawn. Nothing had happened until around midday and then a tender containing about a dozen policemen came unexpectedly from Ennis to Limerick. As the tender came into the ambush position, fire was opened. The driver accelerated speed and got his vehicle safely into Limerick which was only about four miles away. One of the R.I.C., Sergeant McCarthy, was shot dead in this encounter. He fell out of the tender and was lying on the road as we moved off from the scene of the attack.

The attacking party, realising that in a matter of a quarter of an hour or so enemy troops from Limerick would be scouring the country, made a rapid march towards Oatfield in the hilly country outside O'Callaghan's Mills. The military had parties scattered far and wide about the district and at one stage appeared as if they had us surrounded. However, the excellent topographical knowledge of the locality possessed by some of our party who were natives of the area came to our assistance and enabled us to get outside our pursuers into the hills for which we had set out.

I cannot remember having been in any armed conflict with British troops after the Cratloe ambush. I had a good deal of work to do, however, in connection with the collection of rates for the Clare Co. County when, after that body had come under the control of the Sinn Fein and I.R.A. nominees, an acute struggle ensued between itself and the British Local Government Board. The existing rate collectors, having been appointed under the British regime, had, under the terms of their contract, signed documents which obliged them to lodge all rate monies collected by them in a specified bank over which the Local Government Board exercised control. The continuation of this arrangement would have enabled the Board to have a stranglehold on the finances of the Co. Council.

The Co. Council decided to suspend collection of rates by the old collectors and called on the I.R.A. in the county to do this work instead. Each company captain became responsible for the collection of rates in his area and passed on the monies he received to his battalion headquarters where the position of the rate collection in the battalion area was kept under close observation and the amounts received were handed over to a person nominated by the brigade council. In our battalion area the monies were handed over to Pat Duggan, hotelier, Scariff, who was then brigade intelligence officer.

Generally speaking, the public co-operated excellently with the I.R.A. by paying rates promptly and fully. This applied even to ratepayers who were wellknown to be Unionists. So far as I know, there was no case in the county where the I.R.A. officers abused the trust and responsibility placed on them. All the rates collected were forwarded to the Councils' Trustees.

In those days some of the functions now discharged by County Councils were administered by lower bodies known as Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians. The members of these bodies were elected in much the same way as Co. Councillors and they exercised control over roads, outdoor relief, workhouses and public health, as well as the appointment of the staff of the Council including doctors and nurses.

In June 1920, elections for Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians were held throughout Ireland, and in Clare, like most other counties, Sinn Fein candidates secured overwhelming if not full control. I was returned unopposed as a member of the Scariff Rural District Council and Board of Guardians. The meetings were held in the Scariff Workhouse, usually once a fortnight. I do not recall anything other than routine matters to have been transacted at these meeting

On the floating of the Republican Loan by Dáil Éireann in 1920, I assisted my brother Willie in canvassing the Bodyke district for subscribers. We got a very good response, nearly every householder took one or more shares. The amount collected by us was £850 and the entire amount was handed by my brother to the Trustee for East Clare, Canon O'Kennedy.

During the end of the winter of 1920 and the spring of 1921, I was concerned with other members of the Bodyke Company in the hold-up of the mail car going from Limerick to Whitegate on three occasions, twice at Ballydunahane and once at Dromod. We seized all official letters and sent them to Brigade Headquarters as per orders.

From February 1921 onwards, though we had no conflict with British troops, the I.R.A. in our part of Clare were kept busy making road impassible for the enemy. The Bodyke company, having an area which was served by a network of roads of strategic importance, was out on this work two or three nights every week. The enemy forces were active, too, in trying to keep these roads open and frequently rounded up the local people to assist them. Sometimes it happened that I.R.A. men were compelled to clear a road that they had been engaged in blocking on the previous night, although most they managed to evade being rounded up.

Some big sweeps by hundreds of military, R.I.C. and Auxiliaries brought in from Tulla, Ennis, Limerick, Killaloe, Woodford and Gort were made in the area between Tulla and the Galway border during the Spring and summer of 1921. Mostly these operations did not pay much in the way of dividends until June 1921, when some prominent Volunteers were trapped in a widespread round-up. I was among those who were caught and others taken prisoner were Michael and Paddy Tuohy, James (Jamo) Rochford, Ned Doyle and Jack Considine, all from the Feakle area. We were all captured in Coolreagh Bog. In my case I was arrested first

by a military party and, on being recognised by an R.I.C. man stationed in Feakle, I was taken to a Field Headquarters which had been set up in Drumandóora.

On being brought to the Field H.Q. I was interrogated by a number of military officers. They all appeared to be Englishmen and it may be as well to put on record how the gentlemen, alleged to have been schooled with the highest military traditions, treated their prisoners. At first I was questioned about the I.R.A. and, when I refused to give any information, I was led away under a guard and ordered to a part of the field on which the troops were encamped. One of my legs was then tied to a stake driven deeply into the ground. I was compelled to extend my two arms straight past my head. The other prisoners were similarly treated. Darkness had by this time set in and sentries were mounted over us. Throughout the night these sentries kept walking hither and thither using our chests as stepping stones. According as the mood struck them they kicked us or beat us with the rifle butts. Frequently too, a soldier would bend down and commence twisting our necks from side to side. At dawn some of these troops collected cow dung from about the fields and rubbed it into our hair. Then a firing party came along and we were informed that we were all going to be shot. At this stage a cavalry officer arrived and when he saw our condition he said to some other officers who were about: "It's a good job the Press has not got hold of what's going on here". I turned my head to get a look at this man, but as soon as I did so, I received a blow of a rifle on the head which rendered me unconscious.

I have not much of an idea now of what happened after that except that I do remember having been marched across country all day until eventually I arrived in Renmore Barracks, Galway,

where, with the other prisoners, I was handed over to the Connaught Rangers, an Irish Regiment. We were well treated by the Connaught Rangers during our stay in Renmore, but after about a week, we were sent on to the Curragh where I was interned in Rath Camp until after the Truce.

On the withdrawal of the R.I.C. from Bodyke the job of maintaining law and order became the duty of the I.R.A., a section of the company, about a dozen men, were earmarked for this kind of work. Generally there was not much crime in the area and most of the police duties which had to be performed arose in the policing of the Sinn Fein Courts which were held about once a month, serving summonses and enforcing the decrees of the Courts. On one occasion, I do not remember the date, the local post office in Bodyke was robbed of about £40. The I.R.A. police got on the job. My brother Paddy was one of them and, while he was making inquiries into the robbery, he found a woman's hat beside a fence. This provided him with a clue as he was able to recognise the hat. It transpired that the owner was the mother of a boy who was one of the culprits. This boy admitted having broken into the post office along with a pal of his, both of whom were about 18 years of age. They still had the money and handed it over to my brother. He gave the money to the Battalion O/C., Michael Maloney (Goggins) and the latter gave it back to the sub-postmaster. Incidentally the hat had been used by the boys to put the money into and was thrown away after they had counted the amount. The boys were warned to be of good behaviour in the future and I'm glad to say they were not in trouble afterwards.

Signed: Michael Gleeson
(Michael Gleeson)

Date: 14th November 1955

14th November 1955.

Witness: D. Griffin
(D. Griffin)

