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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,192

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,192

Witness

Jeremiah Kennedy,
Brewsterfield House,
Headford,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Glenflesk Company;
Vice O/C 5th Battalion, Kerry II Bgde.

Subject.

Glenflesk Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Kerry, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY JEREMIAH KENNEDY,

Brewsterfield House, Headford, Co. Kerry.

The Volunteers were organised in my area in 1913 or early 191⁴7. The organisers came from Killarney. They were: Ml. Spillane, Maurice Horgan and Ml. J. O'Sullivan. Ned Spillane was the local leader and he became the first Captain of the Glenflesk Company. We had little to do except march and drill until the Redmondite split. At the split the majority of our company left but they did not form a company of Redmond's Volunteers. They just fell away. The few of us who were left continued to meet and some who had left came back to us.

Before Easter 1916 we were called to a meeting and the Captain told us that some men would be required to be in readiness to go to Clahane Cross. A further message was to be received about it but it did not come, and the next we knew was that the rising was on and Casement was arrested. We did hear later that we were to be at Clahane Cross to receive some of the arms when they were landed and take them into the hills.

No arrests were made in our area in 1916.

The Volunteers were reorganised in 1917 and the companies were formed in Glenflesk, Rathmore, Barraduff, Bealnadeaga, Anablatha and Turreenamult (Greeveguilla).

The first Battalion O/C was Dan Dennehy and he was followed as O/C by Humphrey (Freedy) Sullivan. Dominic Spillane was Vice O/C. He was arrested after the Waterford election and sentenced to three months',

which he served. He was arrested again in November or December, 1920, and I was appointed Vice O/C of the 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 2 Brigade.

When I was appointed Vice O/C the Battalion Staff was as follows:

O/C - Humphrey (Freedy) O'Sullivan (decd.)
 Vice O/C - Jeremiah Kennedy (witness)
 Adjt.- Con Moynihan
 Q/M - Ml. Daly (Nohoval).

This staff served until the Truce.

The battalion consisted of seven companies, as follows:

'A' - Anablatha	-	O/C - Jack Scannell
'B' - Barraduff	-	O/C - Ed. Moynihan
'C' - Bealnadeaga	-	O/C - James Daly
'D' - Glenflesk	-	O/C - James (Tod) Healy
'E' - Rathmore	-	O/C - Manus Moynihan
'F' - Tureenamult	-	O/C - Dan Cronin.

After the reorganisation in 1917 the companies were engaged in routine parades and this lasted until 1918 when the threat of conscription livened things up. Our membership increased; nearly every able-bodied man joined up. When the threat passed many fell away, but a number remained and turned out to be good soldiers.

In 1919 we were anxious to procure arms. We collected some shotguns and some houses were raided where the guns were not given to us willingly. Every company in the battalion had a few shotguns, and the battalion had one rifle which was passed round the

companies for training. We had no firing practice. Most Volunteers had knowledge of shotguns from their experience of shooting birds and rabbits.

The British posts in our battalion area were: Headford R.I.C. barracks - evacuated in the spring of 1920. We burned it the night after the evacuation. Rathmore R.I.C. barracks, held by the Tans and R.I.C. up to the truce.

In the spring of 1920, owing to the activities of the R.I.C. and British military, some men in the battalion had to go on the run to avoid arrest. They tended to move round together, and as the Glenflesk-Loo Bridge area was considered safe they spent a lot of their time in that area.

The first real activity directed against the R.I.C. in our area was an attempt to disarm the garrison at Rathmore barracks. We had planned to attack Headford R.I.C. barracks and Knocknagree R.I.C. barracks (Co. Cork), but they were evacuated before our plans were completed.

The plan at Rathmore was to rush the garrison on a Sunday evening when some of the garrison were loitering in front of the barracks. There was a mission in the local church and it was intended that a party of our men would mingle with the people passing the barracks from the mission and rush the garrison when they were off their guard. On the evening selected, however, the garrison remained indoors and the attack was called off.

A full-scale attack was planned for the 11th;

July, 1920. The plan was as follows: large bombs were to be dropped from builders' hods, fitted with long handles, over the steel shutters protecting the windows, and at the same time an old cannon which had been taken from Ross Castle and loaded with a projectile was to be fired at the front of the barrack from a railway which ran opposite. This was a battalion job. About twenty men armed with shotguns were brought from Glenflesk Company and I went with this party.

Our party were assembled at the Co-op. Stores and we had orders to move into Keeffe's house, about 30 yards to the west of the barracks. We were to ensure that the Tans could not break out on that side. The idea was that all parties would move at the same time. The party with the hods (four) would drop their bombs and at the same time the gun, which was mounted on a railway truck, would be pushed along the line and fire. As I was in position at the Co-op. ready to move to Keeffe's, one of the bombs exploded in the barracks and the garrison opened fire. The truck fouled the railway points so that the gun could not get into action. There was confusion all round. The premature explosion of the bomb had disarranged the whole attack. We could not get to Keeffe's and moved back to Hassett's.

Con Morley of Rathmore had an oil barrel loaded on a cart with a hose attached preparing to spray oil on the barracks, but when the firing started he was exposed to the fire of the R.I.C. and his own men. Some of the men helping Morley had gone back to cover and I went forward to help him. Con O'Leary, the Brigade Q/M, who was present, ordered us back to cover.

Fire was maintained on the barracks for some hours while we lay in cover. Our shotguns were of no use at the range. We got no orders to move against the barracks. The attack was called off at the approach of daybreak.

The companies were training at this time and cartridge cases were being collected and refilled. We prepared charcoal for making black powder by burning black alder, of which there was a plentiful supply in our area.

Raids were carried out on the mails in order to catch anyone sending information to the enemy and also to capture enemy documents. The mails were taken at Headford P.O. The horse drawn mail car was held up at Danny Carey's of Glenflesk, Drumcarbin, and at Knockane school. The train was held up between Headford and Rathmore and the mails taken. The mails were taken from the train on several occasions.

On one occasion I travelled on the train with a Volunteer named Michael Buckley. The train was travelling from Headford to Kenmare, and when the train stopped at LooBridge we seized the mails. The guard on the train was a Volunteer named James Donoghue and he delayed the train for us. To my knowledge there was no information of military value got in any of the raids. When mails were seized they were taken some miles from the point of seizure and after examination were left either at the station at Loo Bridge or the P.O. Headford. The British had a garrison in Kenmare, which was outside our area, but military parties travelled occasionally between Kenmare and Killarney, changing

trains at Headford Junction, which was the terminus of the Kenmare line, and joining the Mallow-Killarney train which passed through.

In November, 1920, Dominic Spillane, who was Vice O/C of the battalion, was managing the Co-op. Stores at Headford. He had not gone on the run and was continuing in his job. We had raided the mails one night and the next morning the military came out from Killarney and arrested Dominic Spillane. I got word that they were searching the stores, and, thinking they would return to Killarney by a by-road, I collected a few Volunteers and prepared to ambush the military. We felled a tree on a turn of the road and took up position behind the fence. I warned the men to make sure they did not shoot the prisoner, and I took up position to shoot the driver of the first car. My information was that the military were travelling in one lorry and a touring car. The military did not take the by-road direct back to Killarney; instead they went to Glenflesk chapel and turned over the road from there to raid Dominic Spillane's house, where they arrested his brother Eugene.

Just before Christmas 1920 we received word from John Kehoe, porter in the International Hotel, Killarney, who was an I.R.A. intelligence officer, that three British intelligence officers would travel on the afternoon train from Killarney to Cork. I gathered some men from Glenflesk, Barraduff and Bealnadeage Companies. We were armed with shotguns. I posted a man in the signal cabin at Headford, with instructions to signal the location of the officers on the train to a couple of my men stationed along the line. I brought the remainder of my party into position about a mile

from the station on the side of the line high enough to fire into the carriages. The train came on but we got a signal indicating that the officers were not on the train.

Later the same day another message arrived from John Kehoe stating that the officers would leave Killarney after nightfall and travel to Cork by car, going via Macroom, which would bring them along the Glenflesk road. I sent word to Ml. Murphy, Lieutenant in charge of the right half of Glenflesk Company, to get as many men as he could together. We selected a position at Drumnaharee and although we waited all night the officers did not come our way.

On the next day, however, the officers travelled with an escort of 12 lorries and two armoured cars.

During the early days of 1921 we kept the roads in our area blocked to impede the enemy. Where it was not feasible to block the road we dug over spots on the road to lead the British to believe that mines had been laid. This tended to slow up their movements.

Early in March, 1921, we got orders to assemble some of our men at "The Bower", between Barraduff and Rathmore on the Mallow road. The orders came from the Brigade O/C. Information had been received by the brigade that some senior British Army officers were on a tour of inspection in Cork and Kerry. It was thought that the party included General Strickland. The Brigade prepared a large-scale ambush and officers and men were drawn from all battalions, together with the North Cork Column under Seán Moylan. Andy Cooney, a G.H.Q. officer, was also present. We lay in ambush

at "The Bower" for two days, and on the second day some of the Kerry men were picked out and the remainder were sent back to their own areas. The men picked out were men who had brought rifles to "The Bower". The picked men, with the North Cork Column, moved over the county boundary to Clonbannin in North Cork where they took up new positions. I was not allowed to go to Clonbannin.

When I returned to my own area I stayed near Glenflesk. We had a dug-out at Drumcarbin which we used for sleeping. We were anxious about the military parties which travelled by train between Kenmare and Killarney. They did not quite follow a regular time-table and, although they travelled every week, they did not keep to the same day. We assembled on a couple of occasions with the intention of attacking the train but we were late each time. In order to be ready for an attack we had got all the shotguns in the battalion into a dump in our area.

After Clonbannin a Brigade Column had been formed and they went into training at the Gap of Dunloe.

On the 20th March, we had arranged to hold a Battalion Council meeting at Kilquane near Barraduff. One of the items for the meeting was to arrange an attack on the military train party. When I got to Kilquane I found that the Brigade Column had arrived there. The Battalion O/C, Humphrey O'Sullivan, had brought in a prisoner named Sandy Nagle suspected of being a British spy. He had been arrested in the Barraduff area. Sandy Nagle was questioned that night. The column moved out of Kilquane that night and went to

Gortarrig at the foot of the Paps Mountain.

We carried on with our Battalion Council meeting. I remember giving the Battalion O/C £56 which had been collected in the Glenflesk area for the arms' fund. We discussed an attack on the British military and it was decided that we would require accurate information as to the time at which the British might be expected at Headford junction. If the British military passed on the train at 10.30 a.m. they would be back at Headford at 3 p.m., but if they did not pass until 3 p.m. they would not return until 7 or 7.30 p.m.

The Battalion O/C appointed a man to go to Headford on the next morning to observe the passing of the train to ascertain whether the British were on it. In the meantime I was to arrange for some men from the Glenflesk half of the battalion to be ready for immediate call, and I was to meet the O/C at John Reardon's house at Knockanes where he would sleep that night. The scout was to report back from Headford at 10.30 a.m. and I was to be with the O/C when he reported.

I was with the Battalion O/C on time and although we waited until 12.30 or 1 p.m. the scout did not return and the O/C presumed that the military had not travelled on the early train. The O/C instructed me to let the men stand down until later in the day and he arranged to meet me at Reardon's at 3.30 p.m. I warned the men to be in readiness for a call early in the evening.

I was living near where the O/C was staying and from my own place I saw the 3 o'clock train coming from Kenmare. I heard firing starting at Headford; the column were attacking the British military.

What had happened was, the scout was late getting to Headford station that morning. The train had gone on and he did not know whether the military had travelled. He was slow to ask too many questions and when he finally got the information that the military had travelled on the early train, instead of reporting back to the Battalion O/C he went straight to the column at Gortarrig. When the Column O/C, Dan Allman, received the report he decided to attack the military. Before moving off for Headford the Column O/C sent word to my Battalion O/C of his intention. It was about 10 minutes before the attack opened that the Battalion O/C received the information, and instead of calling his men together in support of the column he rushed to Headford station.

When I heard the firing I had a couple of Volunteers with me and, arming ourselves, we moved towards Headford. As we approached I saw the column retreating in two sections in different directions. I sent one of my men (my brother James) to pick up one of the sections and guide them to safety at Maurice O'Donoghue's of Drumcarbin and then on to Annies. I picked up the other party and took them to Drumcarbin, from where they went to join up with the remainder of the column at Annies.

Amongst the party who had come from Headford was a cattle dealer who had been on the train. He was getting away from the firing. He told me that his brother who had been with him had fallen on the platform and he did not know if he had been killed. He asked me to find out what happened to his brother.

After dark I took a Volunteer with me. I crept

up to Headford station. I contacted a lad named John Healy who lived beside the station. He had found a revolver and some ammunition, which he gave to me. I went creeping round looking for any stuff which might have been left behind and I crept into another figure. It turned out to be James Daly, O/C Bealnadeaga Company, bent on the same errand.

I crossed the mountain to Looney's of Leabawnane and next day I went to meet the column at Annies. The column had lost their O/C, Dan Allman, at Headford and Thos. McEllistrim was now in charge. The column were preparing to move towards Kilgarvan to attempt to bring off an attack in that area. Dick Roger O'Sullivan, who was O/C Kilgarvan Company, was there. The O/C of the column was considering an attack on the Kenmare train between Kilgarvan and Loo Bridge.

I was requested to collect all the shotgun men I could muster round Glenflesk. I assembled about 18 and we lay up in houses between Loo Bridge and Morley's Bridge. We had orders to avoid the roads and on the following day we crossed the fields to a house where we were to meet a scout. The scout did not arrive but some local people told me that a group of armed men had gone along the road towards Loo Bridge. From the description of how they were dressed I assumed that it was the column and followed on. When we got to the railway cottage at Morley's Bridge I thought I should enquire again, and the woman there told me that the party were military. She was confused as to how the party were dressed, and as some of our men had belts on I decided that it was the column

and I still followed on.

I stopped at the next house (Brien's) and the people of the house assured me that the party in front were British military because they had enquired who was living in the house and examined the list of occupants which every householder was compelled to affix to the inside of the door. I had been trailing a British party of 60 or 80 strong and I lost no time in taking my party into the hills.

When we got off the road I cut across the hills in an effort to get to Glenflesk Chapel Cross before the military, with the intention of having a crack at them from the high ground, but they beat us to it. They had passed the cross before we got there.

When moving to Glenflesk Cross I posted two men some distance to my rear in case the British had sighted us and were lying in wait to come in behind us. When I found that the British had gone on I looked for my rear-guard and saw one of them legging it across a hill. I led my party along the mountain to a small townland named Shronaboy. I thought we might sight the British column again on the Loughatane road. When I got to Hegarty's of Shronaboy I went in. I found my rear-guard who had legged over the hill sitting down with two blue duck eggs before him. I laced him with my tongue and took his gun and the blue duck eggs away from him. I courtmartialled him for leaving his post. He was dismissed from the I.R.A. and fined £5. His name was Danny Donoghue.

I learned afterwards that the column had sighted

the British military and had moved to evade them. They were unable to get a messenger over to warn me.

The column moved out of my battalion area over to the Blackvalley area. Shortly afterwards the column was disbanded and the men sent back to their battalions to form Battalion Columns.

A battalion camp for the training of a column was set up at Clydagh, where it was held for a week and then at Loo Bridge for a further week. As Vice O/C of the battalion I was made responsible for organising the camp and arranging the training. The camp was attended by the Captain and Lieutenants of each company. I attended both camps.

We established a centre at Loo Bridge, making black powder and filling mines. Mr. Buckley, a native of Cork, understood all about mines and he was in charge. He trained the other men on the work.

We had one accident when we were preparing to blow up a bridge on the Cork-Killarney road near Killarney. We had assembled at Hegarty's of Shronaboy. Hegarty was an Assistant Company Q/M and he had some gelignite and detonators stored at his house. The detonators were stored outside and when we assembled he brought them in. Someone suggested that they might be damp and the way to test them was to pinch the end of one and throw it in the fire. Mr. Lynch (who now had a pub in Tralee) was pinching the detonator when it exploded and ripped the flesh off his hands. I sent Mr. Buckley in charge of the party to blow the bridge while I took Mr. Lynch to a nurse for treatment and then to a doctor. The doctor thought that the

hand would have to come off but he eventually saved it.

On the 3rd May, 1921, I got a despatch from the Battalion O/C, Humphrey (Freedy) O'Sullivan, to have three or four men at Headford station the next morning. I brought four men with me and we approached Headford with care. The Battalion O/C came along accompanied by Denis O'Sullivan and another man. Con Moynihan, the Battalion Adjutant, may have been there. There was a train due at Headford with the mails at 4 a.m. We held up the train. The train crew were friendly. We searched the train and found a wagon of military stores (boots, shirts, tinned fruit, figs, towels, blankets). We unloaded the wagon and got horse carts to remove the stuff. When we were leaving we got to the bottom of the road, where the Battalion O/C told me I could leave and he would look after the stuff. This happened on the morning of the bog road ambush. None of the Battalion Staff was on the ambush.

The next move in our area came from the British side. Reports came to me of British troop movements on all sides of our brigade area. The British were moving large bodies of troops with full field equipment from different directions. They were moving in from Millstreet, Co. Cork, and from Kenmare to Kilgarvan, where they halted and formed a line, from Killarney by Muckross to Gurtacois and from Castleisland by Scartaglin to Barraduff. They moved slowly, driving towards the hills, and in the final close-in they moved through the Clydagh Valley.

I was at a place known as the Robbers' Den where we had a headquarters. I had about 10 Volunteers

with me and the other Volunteers in the area were 'standing-to' awaiting orders. We had scouts posted on the high ground keeping track of the British troop movements. Our position was on the outer flank of the round-up area and I thought that if things got too tight we would have a chance of breaking through if we attacked one of the advance columns coming against us.

I crossed over into Ballyvourney with James (Tod) Healy and Ml. Murphy (Captain and 1st Lieutenant of Glenflesk Company), where I contacted Patk. O'Sullivan (now Dr.), Battalion O/C in Cork No. 1 Brigade. Along with Ml. Murphy and Paddy Donnchadha Owen he came with us to Glenflesk to examine the position. Ml. Murphy gave orders to knock Drumcarbin Bridge to hold the British coming to Glenflesk from Barraduff and Garries Bridge in an attempt to drive the British up the by-road at the Robbers' Den. Ml. Murphy was prepared to bring 35 riflemen and 2 or 3 machine guns from Cork No. 1 Brigade to our assistance.

I sent parties out to knock the bridges. Garries Bridge was knocked, but when the party were knocking Drumcarbin Bridge some of our battalion officers came along and stopped them, saying that the priest would be unable to get through to say Mass at Barraduff. They ordered the men to cut the road further down, which they did.

Ml. Murphy and his officers returned to Ballyvourney to get their men and I arranged to meet them next morning. I called in the Volunteers who were standing-to and went to a house with two others to sleep. We were not long asleep when the woman of the

house roused us and told us that the house was surrounded. The British had raided the next house and arrested the man there (Maurice Healy). When Maurice Healy was taken out, his wife, knowing we were near, got out of her house and came along the bed of a stream to warn us. We grabbed what clothes we could and made up the hill. I left my coat behind and there were papers about I.R.A. work in my pocket. The boy of the house had run with us and he went back and got my coat. The British did not raid the house that night. Their programme was so set that they posted sentries 20 yards away and came no further.

Mr. Murphy had told me that he might get some of his men over that night and I had arranged for a house for them stay at. While I was dressing on the hillside I heard talk below me. The British sentries were near and I thought the talk I heard was from our own men who had been breaking the bridges and had taken to the hill. I advanced towards the voices. It was getting light and as I moved I picked out men in uniform, one of whom was using field glasses. I was about 60 yards away but in good cover. I retreated under cover until I got to a narrow piece of ground which gave me no cover. If I could cross this I was safe. I made a dash and was just across when 5 or 6 bullets whistled by. I kept going towards Leary's house above Loo Bridge. I found no sign of life there but while examining the house I heard noise of running in the breen nearby. A figure appeared and I recognised Timothy Donoghue, a Volunteer. He could hardly speak except to tell me that the British military were coming. I ran with him but we were spotted and fire was opened on us. We

got into a wood and buried ourselves in heather, where we remained from 4 a.m. to 2 p.m. We were eaten by midges. Firing was going on all round and a plane was flying overhead.

When things got quiet we crept out towards Leary's house and I saw the old man of the house nearby. I called him over and asked him how things were. He told me the British had a cattle train at Loo Bridge station and were loading it with prisoners. The British had finished the round-up and were withdrawing. The party who had cut the road near Drumcarbin Bridge were captured coming from it with tools on their shoulders.

During the round-up John Cahalane, Jimmy Donoghue and Florrie Con Ruadh were wounded. A civilian had been killed at Shrone. A large number of prisoners were taken out but the majority were not Volunteers.

The British captured no arms or documents and after examination most of the prisoners were released. There was no one to identify the Volunteers. All our principal men were released, including officers who had been picked up.

When I got to Loo Bridge I found that there was no doctor to attend the wounded. I got two Volunteers and we went in a pony car to Kilgarvan. I saw Dr. Moore (who was hostile to us) and told him my mission. He refused to come, saying that if we met the Tans we might be shot. I told him that if he did not come I wouldn't wait for the Tans to shoot him and ordered him out to the car. He came quietly.

About a week before the Truce I got word from Tim Shea, O/C Muckross Company, Killarney Battalion, that British Intelligence Officers were coming out from Killarney to Muckross Hotel and after drinking there returning to Killarney. There was nothing being done about it and he asked for help. I gathered some of my men and we went in to the Muckross road during the night. We lay in ambush all day on Sunday until 3 or 4 p.m. There was no sign of the officers so we decided to search the hotel. We posted a man in the Post Office to prevent anyone using the phone and other men held the road going towards Killarney and held up anyone moving towards the town. We couldn't find any trace of the officers and withdrew.

On the night before the Truce the brigade had arranged to attack Killorglin barracks and the military in Castleisland. We were ordered to snipe Rathmore R.I.C. barracks to hold the garrison. We brought a party of about 20 and sniped the barracks for some time.

Signed: Jeremiah Kennedy
(Jeremiah Kennedy)

Date: 16th June 1955

Witness: James J. O'Connor
(James J. O'Connor)

