

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1490

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1490.

Witness

Roger Rabbitte,
Lissyconnor,
Dunmore,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

1st Lieutenant.

Company Captain.

Subject.

Activities of Kilterna Company,
Co. Galway, Irish Volunteers,
1917-1921, and Brigade Flying
Column, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2774.

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,490

STATEMENT BY ROGER RABBITTE,

Lissyconnor, Dunmore, Co. Galway.

I was born on the 8th March, 1896, at Kilnalappa, Dunmore, Co. Galway, and was educated at Gortaleam N.S.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in the year 1917. I cannot remember the month. My company was Kiltевна. The Company Captain was John Higgins; I was 1st Lieutenant, and the 2nd Lieutenant was Michael Mannion. The strength was about sixteen men, except during the conscription time when it rose to about forty. Simple drill exercises were carried out twice a week. These exercises consisted mainly of foot drill. About 1919 arms drill was practised with shotguns. There were half a dozen good shotguns in the company, but each man had some kind of a shotgun for arms drill. I took charge of the drilling, having learned something about it from an ex-British soldier named Fleming. In 1920 we took some shotguns from farmers in the company area. We did not actually raid for the guns ourselves but asked men of the Williamstown and Polredmond Companies to do it for us. They were not known to the local farmers and in that way we avoided trouble. Members of the Kiltевна Company obliged in the same way in the Williamstown and Polredmond areas. Our company got only a few guns as a result of the raids, as there were only a few guns in the area apart from those owned by the members of the company.

I remember the protest made against conscription in our neighbourhood. On two or three occasions Williamstown and Glenamaddy Companies met the Kiltевна Company at Gortaleam Cross, and all three companies

marched together from there to the town of Dunmore, where on each occasion a big public meeting was held in the Square. The Volunteers were drilled publicly on those occasions by ex-British soldier named Fleming, who taught drill to our company in Kiltcvna. Having been marched through the town by Fleming, the Volunteers attended the meetings. The speakers I remember on these occasions were: Very Rev. Canon Macken and Rev. Fr. Neary, both from the parish of Dunmore. The only other person I remember on the platform was a Mr. Geraghty, who was then Chairman of the Williamstown Sinn Féin Club. The two priests made vigorous protests in their speeches, which were well received by the people and Volunteers. I remember that the R.I.C. stationed in Dunmore were present at the meetings. Similar protest meetings were held in Williamstown and addressed by Rev. Fr. Rattigan and Mr. Geraghty. Fr. Rattigan was a strong supporter of the Irish Volunteers and I.R.A. up to the Truce. I remember him addressing a meeting at Kilnalag Cross near Williamstown at conscription time. One remark he made is clear in my memory. He said that the majority of the men listening to him would not miss a snipe and surely a British soldier was a far easier target.

There was an active Sinn Féin Club in the Kiltcvna Company area, with a membership of from thirty to forty. Meetings were held every Sunday in Kiltcvna Sinn Féin Hall, which had been built by the members in the year 1917, as far as I remember. Actually it was an old building which was reconstructed and newly roofed. The Chairman of the Club was John McHugh. Sinn Féin literature was sold by members of the Club every week, and the late Mr. George Nicholls of Galway City came occasionally and gave talks. I remember a special meeting before the

general election of 1918 at which members were selected to canvass the company area on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidate - Dr. Brian Cusack. The work of canvassing was done by members in pairs, one pair being assigned to do the work in a townland. All the members of the Kiltvna Company of the Volunteers were members of the Sinn Féin Club and took a very active part in the canvassing and in getting the people to the polling booths at Gortaleam and Polredmond National Schools.

I can remember little of the year 1919 except the usual parades and drilling twice weekly. It was towards the end of that year, as far as I remember, that I took part in collecting the Dáil Éireann Loan. Most families in the area gave £1, an odd family subscribing more than the minimum amount.

Shortly before the R.I.C. left the town of Glenamaddy in the spring of 1920, I remember going with Captain John Higgins, Lieutenant Michael Mannion and three or four Volunteers from our company into the town on a Sunday evening. Some of us were armed with revolvers. I remember distinctly that I had one. I cannot now recall whether Captain Higgins told us what was coming off. When we arrived in Glenamaddy we were ordered into a publichouse called "The Welcome Inn". There were officers and Volunteers from other companies of the battalion there also. We remained in the publichouse for about an hour and then were told that we were not wanted and to return home immediately. I learned afterwards that the R.I.C. barrack was to be rushed and captured that evening. I heard also that there were only one or two men in it at the time it was to be rushed, the remainder of the garrison of about half

a dozen men being out on patrol. I cannot remember what happened to prevent the attempt to capture the barrack taking place.

I think it was towards the end of the year 1920 that Republican Police were first appointed in the Kiltelva Company area. They were selected from members of the company. Their names were Volunteer Michael McGuire and Volunteer Patrick Glennon. They served summonses for the Republican Courts and looked after prisoners arrested by the Volunteers. I can only remember two cases of arrest. One was a case of assault and the other a case of theft. The man arrested for assault was fined, as far as I can remember, and I cannot remember the punishment in the other case. The police collected fines when imposed by the Sinn Féin Court, and in some areas collected dog licences. Sometimes our company police did duty in Williamstown, from where the R.I.C. had been evacuated in the early part of 1920. Their duties there were mainly in connection with the closing of publichouses.

I remember attending a Sinn Féin Court held in an unoccupied house belonging to a man named Freaney in Clonbern. The Justices were John McHugh of Chequer Hill, Dunmore; Michael Donnellan of Cloonmore, Dunmore, and John Stephens of Ballaghduff, Kilkerrin. Several cases came before the court that day, but, except for one case, I have no recollection of them. This one, I remember, was a breach of contract. The parties to it tried to have it heard by the British court, or foreign court as it was then called, but they were prevented by the Volunteers from doing this. I heard when the case

was over that the contending parties were fully satisfied with the decision. I remember that some time in 1920 a large quantity of timber was stolen from a saw mill at Springfield, Williamstown, and that Volunteers from the Kiltевна, Glenamaddy and Polredmond Companies went to help the local company at Williamstown to locate the missing timber. The search was made by night and most of the missing timber was found. The party responsible for the stealing of the timber was also found, but beyond being warned to leave back all the stolen timber there was no punishment in the case. All the stolen timber was put back in the mill at Springfield.

It was very close to the end of the year 1920 that the formation of an active service unit was first discussed. I remember clearly that a meeting of all officers of the battalion (Glenamaddy) was held in Ballinastack Hall in the Glenamaddy Company area. I cannot remember who said so, but we were ordered to make a list of all the men in our own companies who would be ready and willing to go on full-time active service if and when called upon. Company officers were to have full information on the matter for a meeting at the same place a week or so later. I reported back on behalf of the Kiltевна Company that no member of the company, except myself, was ready and willing to go on full-time active service. About a week after I was appointed Company Captain, 2nd Lieutenant Michael Mannion then becoming 1st Lieutenant and Volunteer John Costello becoming 2nd Lieutenant. When the Flying Column was formed a little later, I was not allowed to go on active service but ordered to stay at home in my own area and keep the company going as a unit. I was told that it was

most important that the routine duties should be carefully carried out, especially in the matter of dispatches. From that time parades of the company were discontinued, but we organised dances and raffles in the Sinn Féin Hall, Kiltcvna, and handed over any money we made to the Battalion Q/M towards the upkeep of the Flying Column, which was formed in January or February, 1921.

I think it was about February, 1921, that I went to Dunmore with five or six other officers of the Glenamaddy Battalion to attack the R.I.C. in the town. Patrick Dunleavy, Brigade Commandant, was in charge. The R.I.C. in Dunmore usually were to be found in publichouses where they consumed a good deal of intoxicating drink. Our intention was to enter the publichouses and attack them there with revolvers. On one occasion we remained about a hundred yards outside the town, but our scouts in the town brought word that the R.I.C. had not left the barrack and we withdrew. On another occasion the scouts brought word that three or four Black and Tans were talking to young girls in the fair green. We approached the place but the Tans were not there. The officers whom I can remember on those two occasions are Martin Mannion, Adjutant, Glenamaddy Battalion; his brother, Thomas Mannion, Captain of Dunmore Company, and Patrick Treacy, Captain of Glenamaddy Company. Patrick Dunleavy, Brigade Commandant, was in charge on both occasions. They were all members of the Flying Column except myself.

I was with the Brigade Flying Column on three occasions when they lay in ambush for R.I.C. The

first occasion was at a place called Chequer Hill, quite close to my own home. It is on the main Dunmore/Williamstown road about three hundred yards on the Williamstown side of Gortaleam Cross. About ten men armed with rifles and about twenty men armed with shotguns took up positions there on each side of the road at daybreak in the month of February, 1921. All were under the command of Patrick Dunleavy, Brigade O/C. There was a bend in the road at the place and there was good cover. The range would be short from all our positions to the place where we intended opening fire on the one lorry of R.I.C. which was expected to pass the position going from Dunmore in the Williamstown direction. The longest range would be only about 150 yards. I remember that Thomas Tarmay, the Brigade Adjutant, was lying quite close to the road with hand grenades. He had good cover from the fence of the road and he was concealed from view by thick, high furze. We waited there all day, but the R.I.C. did not come.

I heard afterwards that a priest in Dunmore learned from a person living in the neighbourhood of the ambush position and that we were lying in ambush. I heard that the priest was at the time attending a sick daughter of D.I. Healy in Dunmore, and that he went to see the child when he heard the news of the ambush. I heard also that when he arrived at the R.I.C. barrack, D.I. Healy was ready to go in charge of a party of R.I.C. towards Williamstown and that the priest persuaded him to postpone his journey as the child was much worse than he (the D.I.) thought she was.

In the late spring of 1921 the R.I.C. burned the home of the Mee family at Knickanes near Glenamaddy.

I remember distinctly hearing a lorry pass on the Dunmore/Williamstown road. Some of the Brigade Flying Column were in my house at the time and others were in the house of Martin Concagh at Boyounagh. I told the column about the lorry and we all remained listening and looking at the lights to find out its destination. After a while we saw a blaze in the sky and we thought it was the Ballinastack Sinn Féin Hall being burned by the R.I.C. It turned out to be the home of Jeremiah Mee, one of the R.I.C. mutineers at Listowel. I went to Concagh's of Boyounagh and informed the members of the column there. All the members of the column then took up positions to ambush the R.I.C. on their way back to Dunmore. The position chosen was at Chequer Hill, the Dunmore/Williamstown road beside Gortaleam Cross. From that position the R.I.C. could be effectively attacked whether they returned by the Williamstown/Dunmore road or the Glenamaddy/Dunmore road. There were about fourteen of the column under the command of either Brigade O/C Patrick Dunleavy or Commandant Seamus Moloney, Glenamaddy Battalion. We waited there until daybreak, but the R.I.C. did not return by either road. We learned later that they turned left at Glenamaddy and returned to Dunmore via Clonbern and threw a bomb into the house of Patrick Finnegan of Gurteen, two miles from Dunmore.

The third occasion on which I was with the Flying Column in an ambush position was about the end of May. This time positions were again taken up on the main Dunmore/Williamstown road about a mile to the Dunmore side of Williamstown and near Kilnalag in the Polredmond Company area. We were again expecting a lorry of R.I.C.

travelling between Dunmore and Williamstown. The ambush position was only about three miles from Chequer Hill where the ambush was laid in February. There were about thirty men under the command of Brigade O/C Patrick Dunleavy. The position was occupied at daybreak and occupied all day. When it got dark the men went in small parties to different houses in the neighbourhood for food. I brought a section of men across the bogs to my own house, where we had a meal. We were not long after the meal when we returned to take up the same positions before daylight. We remained in ambush all the second day. I cannot be sure whether we remained the third day or not, but I think we only stayed two days. Before we left the ambush position we got people to dig trenches in the roads in the neighbourhood. I heard that the R.I.C. and Tans made the same people fill the trenches in a day or two afterwards.

I took part in the burning of Glenamaddy Workhouse in the month of June, 1921. I remember that when I arrived home from Glenamaddy I heard that the R.I.C. had been attacked in the village of Milltown in the Tuam Battalion area and that two or three of them had been killed, and I think the attack in Milltown was at the end of June. The burning of the workhouse was a big job, as inmates had to be removed from it to adjoining buildings. The chapel was part of the Workhouse and it had to be saved by stripping the roof and isolating it from the Workhouse. A very big number of Volunteers took part in this job. They were under the command of Martin Ryan, Vice Commandant of the Glenamaddy Battalion. I heard that the building was destroyed to prevent its

occupation by British forces. Protection parties of Volunteers, armed with rifles and shotguns, occupied positions on all roads leading to the Workhouse.

There were ten companies in the Glenamaddy Battalion. The names of the companies and the company captains are as follows:

- "A" (Dunmore) - Michael Ronan, followed by Thomas Mannion.
- "B" (Kiltevena) - John Higgins to the end of 1920 and Roger Rabbitte (myself) from then to the Truce.
- "C" (Williamstown) - Patrick Noonan.
- "D" (Kilcroan) - John Hanly.
- "E" (Glynsk) - Thomas Burke.
- "F" (Kilbegnet) - John McDonagh.
- "G" (Kilkerrin) - John Stephens, followed by Brian Cunniffe.
- "H" (Clonbern) - John Mahon.
- "I" (Glenamaddy) - Patrick Treacy.
- "J" (Polredmond) - John Glennon.

The Battalion Staff was as follows: -

Comdt. - Seamus Moloney.

Vice Comdt. - Martin Ryan

Adjt. - Martin Mannion and Patrick Treacy for a short while.

Q/M - Jack Knight.

Signals - Martin Concagh.

Pol. Officer - Thomas Concannon.

Signed: Roger Rabbitte

Date: 5 Sept. 1956

Witness: Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.

(Investigator)

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