

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 547

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 547

Witness

Colonel Joe Leonard,
"St. Anthony's",
Fortfield Road,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 2nd Battalion Dublin Brigade 1916 - ;

Member of 'The Squad' 1919 - .

Subject.

- (a) Formation of The Squad, September 1919,
and its activities 1919-1920;
- (b) Arrival of the Black-and-Tans in Ireland,
January 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. CS. 1477

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Statement by Colonel Joseph Leonard,

"St. Anthony's", Fortfield Road, Dublin.

The "Party" or our representatives at Westminster, the Clergy of all denominations, the Metropolitan Police or D.M.P. and The Royal Irish Constabulary had thundered at us :- Be law-abiding, decent, respectable citizens and don't have your name mixed up with scoundrels, corner boys, cranks or sore-heads.

The Castle Authority saw to it that a policeman lived in every street in Dublin and they were very capable of knowing disaffected persons and with their arrogant domineering authority, plus their Gospel, to a very large extent, left the people in abject abysmal apathy towards Irish National Right to Freedom and in fact led the man in the street to think it only natural virtue to impede the Irish Volunteer in the course of his duties, and hand him over to the police.

"Squad" formed.

1919 came and the Volunteers had gained momentum from increased success in action, assurance from the warm trust engendered in one another and the knowledge that the enemy was not invincible.

In September Dick Mulcahy, Chief of Staff, summoned a number of Volunteers to a meeting in 44 Parnell Square with Mick Collins, D.I., Brigadier D. McKee, Peadar Clancy, Director of Munitions; Mick McDonald, Brigade Quartermaster, to tell the men of the urgent need of vigorous action against the British executives and political Detectives who were harrassing Dáil Éireann and the members of our Headquarters Staff.

Prior to this date the G. Men had all been rounded up and specifically warned that they would, in future, be taking their lives in their own hands if they continued to spy on our members.

Dáil Eireann appointed Mick Collins to be Director of Intelligence with authority to form a unit for the execution of all condemned enemy spies or others at his discretion, and consequently we were informed and asked by our leaders if we were prepared to give our whole time and thought to this arduous task, as well as co-operating with the Brigade on occasions when they would need us. All of us present on that day agreed to take up this special commission and Captain Paddy O'Daly was given command with Joe Leonard, Ben Barrett and Seán Doyle to form the "Squad"; also the four Tipperary men fresh from the Knocklong job, Seán Tracey, Dan Breen, J.J. Hogan and Seamus Robinson to be attached for a time. Mick McDonald, Tom Keogh, Jim Slattery and Vincent Byrne wanted to join us but would not be allowed on that occasion as they were required elsewhere on their own work.

It very soon became apparent that if we were to survive to carry out our work, we would have to become nigh invisible - with only eyes, ears, legs and hands at any particular place in daylight, as the City seemed to shrink in size and Detectives grew on railings, with their attendant touts and spies sprouting in the channels.

The "Squad" under Paddy O'Daly took on a new complexion as to actions by Volunteers against the enemy.

We would not naturally take personal action against an enemy who had molested us, but would take our turns in strict rotation for the most dangerous place, always with an eye to a means of avoiding trouble, if anything untoward turned up that we could not successfully deal with.

September, 1919:

In our small beginnings we patrolled the streets all day long until we were fagged out, as we had to do our own intelligence work, finding out where enemy could be located, talking to them and finding out their latest devilment, but eventually we pointed out to Mick Collins that if we were to continue through the whole day in the city, we could not be of use for very long, as we would be picked up by the G. Division Men and hanged by the neck while it would be good for us.

In July 1919 Mr. Lovat Frazer, writing in the "Daily Mail", said; "The Irish Question is slowly poisoning relations with the Dominions and the United States - Ireland cannot wait - across the water Irishmen are beginning to perceive that this is Ireland's hour of Destiny".

Lord Henry Bentricks, in the British House of Commons, in the same month, stated that there were 120,000 troops available for action in Ireland, and Mr. Forester in the same House, replying to Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy, stated that the cost of the British Army in Ireland was £900,000 per month, and then there was the mere handful of about 60,000 Police to guide our faltering steps back to Mother England's kindly bosom, to be cherished for evermore.

Wharton 10/11/1919:

In the light of more experience and better knowledge it seems ridiculous to have armed us with .38 revolvers and automatics, for a "Stop Press" would have it, that a violent attack had been made on four G. Men, one of whom was wounded, from across the width of Harcourt Street, by such a gun. This action was carried out by two men with only one weapon between them and this wonderful machine got

jammed on the first shot, when it became evident that hasty leg movement would be called for and a few blocks away from there would make a wonderful difference.

Barton 29/11/1919:

Then there was the genial Kerryman Detective, Sergeant Johnny Barton, who was even known to hob-nob with Fly Boys from England and who would not scorn to engage in pleasantries with our Staff Officers or even common Volunteers and who went down by our gunfire - he returning our fire - in a busy thoroughfare on his way back to report at his Headquarters. We experienced a grave shock when there was a heavy fusilade of firing at us from an unexpected place in the opposite direction from us, but it was qualified and explained later when we all had decamped and on meeting Mick McDonald he told us that he had an independent squad out to do this same job.

Lord Lieutenant Ffrench 19th December, 1919. Ashtown:

Lord Ffrench was a gallant gentleman and he conducted his British affairs in Ireland to the very best of his ability but he fell very short of our idea as to how we could run our own country ourselves, consequently it was thought best to remove him from office by gunfire. We had much information about his movements but no knowledge, in fact he was so erratic that we and any other Volunteers present on any occasion when we heard he would be attending a function, gathered together, with any available arms and sailed out to intercept him but without any success, for he had just gone the other way.

On Saturday, 19th December, 1920, the "Press" had a fair sale on account of the sensational attack on the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Ffrench. The "Squad" with the addition of Mick McDonald, Tom Keogh, Jim Slattery, Vinny Byrne and

Martin Savage were ordered to do this job. Paddy O'Daly divided this unit into two sections, one under himself, the other under Mick McDonald. The duty of number one section was to ambush Lord Ffrench's car which would be the leading one of three cars, the others would comprise of an escort of soldiers and a luggage car. Number two section, under Mick McDonald, were to block the roads leading into the Phoenix Park, with a full dung-cart that lay in a hollow in the yard of Kelly's public-house.

We had knowledge of this fact that Lord Ffrench was returning from his country seat at Drumdoe, Boyle, and that he would leave the train at the little wayside station of Ashtown, be met by a guard of fifty soldiers and drive the half mile from the station across the Blanchardstown Road and enter the Ashtown gate of the Park and so on to the Vice Regal Lodge.

A problem of how to dispose ourselves in such a quiet little village, while waiting for the train and not create a disturbance or raise suspicion about our members, was faced this way.

The majority of the Volunteers present did not take a drink at that time, but there were a few who would and it was decided amongst us before entering Kelly's public-house that we would split up into three sections and that the man who could take a drink would order any soft drinks for his section, and as the place was a hand-ball house, we would be rival hand-ballers and challenge one another to games to be played off on the next Sunday, which kept us going until we heard the train whistle, and knew that the time had come for action. We all cleared out and went to our respective places behind the hedge bordering the road of approach. Another section went to block the road.

There was a uniformed policeman stationed at the Blanchardstown - Ashtown cross-roads and when he saw the men trying to get the dung-cart into position he warned them of Ffrench's approach and became very angry with them when they persisted in attempting to maul and haul the cart on to the road. However, a bomb thrown over the ditch landed beside him and he was blown to the side of the main road. In the meantime the cart could not be shifted and the road was never blocked.

The job was on. Number one car approached from the Station, which was supposed to contain Lord Ffrench, when it was bombed to a halt; number two car, actually containing Ffrench, friends and Detective Sergeant Halley beside the driver, drove furiously by and only Halley was wounded. Number three car containing Ffrench's military Escort came by, blazing gunfire, killing Martin Savage and wounding Dan Breen in the leg and acquainting the rest of us with knowledge of hot lead.

We had not much time to spare, remembering the fifty soldiers advancing on us, so all we could do for Martin Savage was to whisper a prayer, search him for guns and papers and lay him outside Kelly's public-house; tow Dan Breen on his bicycle and guide the Tipperary men to safe places in town. We parked Dan Breen in Jack Toomey's house on Phibsboro' Road for the time being, and later took him to Áine Malone's house in Grantham Street, where he survived to marry her sister.

Tans first arrived on 8th January, 1920:

To relieve the tedium of our placid days Mr. Lloyd George decided to recruit all the ex-jail birds, adventurers and murderers that he could round up in England and by the offer of generous terms, induce them to come to

Ireland - with no questions asked - for the purpose of stiffening up our poor spineless Police. They arrived in January, 1920, were dubbed Black & Tans by the people, and so began a more savagely, intense warfare.

The weekly summary, quoted by the Irish Independent on 18th December, 1920, and headed R.I.C. and I.R.A.

"There are only two choices to-day in Ireland for the men of the R.I.C.. Either they must fight or they will be killed. Either they must go out with all force at their command and track down these pests of our social life, The Irish Republican Army."

21st January, 1920:

There came a Knight in shining armour - concealed beneath his coat - a New Broom - W.M.C. Redmond, D.I., from Belfast promoted Assistant Commissioner at the Castle - to sweep all before him - and mind you we thought a lot of him; but one day he forgot to don his vizor and fell a victim, in Harcourt Street, to his own neglect.

Attempted rescue, Robert Barton, 12/2/1920.

We got word that Robert Barton, T.D., was being sent to Ship Street Barracks for courtmartial under escort and were ordered to rescue him. We knew a friendly builder who had a friendly sixty foot ladder and a handcart. It had to run across the main road at the junction of the road at Blessington - and Berkeley Street - stop the military car approaching and so it did. We met a very jolly Major in charge and looked out for our friend. He was not in that car: we had drawn a blank: we never mentioned guns at the time and were not instructed to capture the car, so our jolly Major rode home and we walked.

J. C. Byrne alias Jameson, 2nd March, 1920:

Mick Collins, about this time, met a real nice sociable agent from Russia - passed on to him by Art O'Brien, who could supply us with oodles of guns or, in fact, anything that would further our revolutionary plans. This Mr. Jameson carried jewels as a side line and was stopping at the Granville Hotel, and it was noticed that Mick Collins's office was raided immediately on the exit of our friend. Another meeting being satisfactorily arranged - this man could easily do what no other policeman or spy in Ireland could even attempt he'd show them, but he took the wrong tram to Ballymun and there was no more showing anyone.

1st March, 1920: Mr. Alan Bell:

Mr. Alan Bell of Lurgan, Resident Magistrate for County Dublin, had been on the "Times, Parnell Commission". Later he could not keep away from the Sinn Féin Bank, and wanted it - money, ledgers and men - transferred to the Crimes Court in Dublin, when he would be able to tell who put a bob on Cathleen Ní Houlihan, or where the German Gold was being shipped to. Well you know he jumped off at Donnybrook, and the Sinn Fein Bank sat on its foundation till later days.

I.O. Depot formed:

Mick Collins, through necessity, had taken on three Dáil Departments and as Director of Intelligence had, some time since, started our Intelligence Department with brilliant success and had been affectionately named the "Big Fellow". We now had first-hand knowledge of enemy movements, documents, photographs, which helped us a lot to counter their brutal assaults, shootings and reprisals on harmless, inoffensive people. "The Squad" lost the Tipperary Volunteers when they returned to their units,

consequently it was built up to twelve men; Captain Paddy O'Daly, Joe Leonard, Ben Barrett, Seán Doyle, Tom Kehoe, Jim Slattery, Vincent Byrne, Frank Bolster, Eddie Byrne, Ben Byrne, Mick O'Reilly and Mick Kennedy. In 1921 the number was brought up to twenty-one and remained so until after the Custom House job, when "The Squad" was brought up to fifty members recruited from the A.S.U. and was then known as "The Guard".

McCready arrived 29th March, 1920:

Sir Nevil McCready, Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, arrived and took command in March 1920, making activity and speed the order of the day. Activity eventually let him down but speed left him alive to nurse his grandchildren on his knee.

Tax Offices, 2nd April, 1920:

Then, of course, we had to go and raid the Income Tax Offices just for the sake of being mulish, and because we liked our Imperial Industrialists only too well.

Kells, 14th April, 1920:

Detective Dalton, 20th April, 1920:

Detective Sergeant Revell, 8th April, 1920:

Mr. Roberts, Assistant Inspector-General, R.I.C. 22/6/'20.

Constable Henry Kells left off all earthly worries about this time - not lost but gone before - Detective Dalton and Detective Sergeant Revell got a dusting down in Connaught Street. The Assistant Inspector-General, R.I.C., Mr. Roberts, was driving smartly along in front of the Custom House when he was attacked and there was only time for rapid fire when he was gone but not altogether, as he and his driver had been wounded. The driver, with great pluck, going at crazy speed from Beresford Place to the Castle, saved his life.

F. Brook, 30th July, 1920:

Privy Councillor, the Right Honourable Frank Brook, P.C.D.L., did not give any more trouble after the 30th July, when John Kehoe mentioned that he couldn't brook any more annoyance from that man.

Drumcondra Bridge, 3rd October, 1920:

Two of us gave the military a fine scare on a Sunday morning when they were just settling down to surround the city at 7.30 a.m. Three of us escaped through their lines at Newcommon Bridge and Captain Paddy O'Daly decided to re-enter the invested area, go to our Headquarters and dismiss "The Squad". We continued on and got on the railway and were going in the direction of Drumcondra when we decided to loose off any ammunition we had. From Drumcondra Railway Bridge that spans the road and covers the canal bridge, having fired on the police and military and caused a commotion, we hurried along the track and got down on to the road near Glasnevin, and on going down the town we heard that the military imagined they were being counter-attacked by superior forces and had "upped" tools and departed..

October, 1920:

The competent Military Authority, Major General Boyd, had proclaimed martial law between the hours of 12 o'clock p.m. and 5 o'clock a.m. on 12th February, 1921, and on 4th March from 9 o'clock p.m. to 6 o'clock a.m. and further ordered intensive patrolling of armoured cars with their attendant crossley tenders, having their beautiful machine-guns mounted in front, the armoured cars with their lowering, menacing, fire-spitting eye, levelled at the people, the tenders filled with tipsy Black & Tans well armed with rifles and revolvers at 'the ready' and only waiting to pounce on any harmless person that they did not

like the look of; drag him in among them and interrogate him at the Castle.

No. 9 Bombs:

We had a partial cure for their greater activity in the No. 9 Bomb manufactured at our National Munition Factory in Denzil Lane, and which some of our "Littlers" were very deft at introducing into their Tenders, causing the Tans to leave same in a state of undress.

Canteen supplies commandeered:

We thought that the Auxiliaries and Tans seemed to have enough spirits on them already and on occasion curtailed their supplies en route to their canteens and passed them along for the sick people in the city hospitals.

Then again we had to examine their letters, to see that tender words would not affect their work.

About 100 picked Volunteers were assembled in Parnell Square on the 20th November, 1920. Brigadier McKee warned all those present of the gravity of the action to be taken on the next morning, Sunday. He explained that it was of vital importance to exterminate enemy Intelligence Officers who were residing in hotels and boarding-houses in the centre of the city and who had become a terrible menace to our organisation and said further that he was conscious of the enormous dangers the men would encounter in dealing such a crushing blow to the enemy, and that the effect produced would be worth any sacrifice sustained by us.

Bloody Sunday, 20th November, 1920:

It was arranged that groups of five or six men, led by a "Squad" member or an Intelligence Officer, would meet at a

convenient place on Sunday morning and arrive at their appointed destination at 9 o'clock and carry out their orders. Captain Kilcoyne had commandeered the ferry boat well below Butt Bridge and all men were to converge on this point when their duty was done. He rowed across the Liffey to the North side and so escaped enemy action.

Byrne's house, North Richmond Street, was to be our First Aid Post and Reporting Place.

In a certain house an Auxiliary Intelligence Officer was staying that morning in the hall flat. There were others living above this flat, but they did not concern us. Seven men were admitted by the landlady who, by dumb show, pointed out the officer's quarters. The Volunteers were posted to various positions, and on entering the living-room and crossing to the bedroom door and trying to push it open, it was found to be jammed. There was nothing to do but shoot through this door and force it open. The enemy officer was coming to the attack and was killed by our fire. The men retired outside and slammed the hall door, and on counting the men, one was found to be missing. The O.C. had to knock at the hall door again, have it opened by the same lady and go upstairs to fetch the missing man and retire.

Bloody Sunday:

There were two dispatch riders on a motor-cycle combination coming along the street. They had to be held up, disarmed, and their bicycle driven off to a safe place.

There were fourteen engagements that morning, all the like results, and the English spy system was shattered, never to be of service in Ireland again. As a reprisal the Auxiliaries broke bounds and vented their spleen on the unfortunate spectators and players at the Gaelic Football

Match being played at Croke Park, when they surrounded the ground and machine-gunned the players and spectators, killing many and wounding more.

There were many occasions when we dispensed vouchers for Angel's wings that kept us engaged our whole working hours, for months on end.

The Mountjoy Square investment deprived us of a good dump, two very useful motor cars, motor bicycles, short arms and ammunition - a grievous loss.

O'Sullivan, D.I. 17/12/1920:

District Inspector J. O'Sullivan of the Inspector General's Office was too good at decoding, so our Intelligence Officer pointed him out in company with his girl. There were two Volunteers present, one of whom was reading the Evening paper; the other shot O'Sullivan - when his girl grappled with this man, who shook her off. There was present an old flower-seller sitting in the angle of a hoarding and a shop front, who lifted O'Sullivan's head on her lap and was saying, "My poor boy, they have shot you", and then sensed there was a strange atmosphere around her - dropping his head on the pavement she waddled away, nor praying. The Volunteer reading the paper had to be chucked by the sleeve to remind him it was time to be going, he said he never heard the shots.

Bryan Fergus Molloy:

Bryan Fergus Molloy was staying in an hotel in Wicklow Street and we were informed he was stationed in the British Army Pay Office, Parkgate, and that Mick Collins had granted him a hearing, and having found this man to be an English spy out to trap our Director of Intelligence we were ordered to execute this man on sight. Well, Brian never acted the same way twice, which caused us a lot of risk by

having to go after him for three or four weeks and each day we had to run the gauntlet of snap raids and patrols to get to Wicklow Street area, until despair would drive us away for the time being. Yet it happened that we met him one day before noon in Wicklow Street and he ceased to be our headache.

Arrested by Bobby:

Captain Paddy O'Daly relieved me of my gun and sent me to warn members of the "Squad" that the area they were going to operate in was cordoned off and surrounded by Auxiliaries. I jumped on a bike and in my hurry cut across on the wrong side of the Pillar where there was a policeman stationed. He stopped me and I gave out cheek, so he grabbed me and my bike and arrested me for crossing on the wrong side, and as I did not want to have a scene at such a prominent place, made a bargain with him that I would go quietly with him and wheel the bike as well if he did not lay a hand on me. He agreed and we were walking down Talbot Street when I caught the eye of a Fianna Boy, Derry McNeill, standing in the doorway of Collins, the drapers. He displayed a four-pound brass weight and flashed - will I hit him - I answered in the negative and strolled on with my guardian to Store Street Station. I gave a wrong name, but Mrs. Byrne's address and she came and claimed me as her lodger. That all took two hours and when released went home to Rathmines and was surprised to hear that I had been arrested with a bomb in my hand, which I had to deny.

The Armoured Car Job:

When the Ballinalea ambush took place, Sean MacKeon had been arrested, Mick Collins was greatly concerned, and when he was courtmartialled and sentenced to death the "Big Fellow" decided to take desperate steps to wrest this great soldier from the British gaol where he was awaiting the day on which he was to hang.

Our Intelligence Department had noticed that an armoured car accompanied military lorries which drew meat rations for the various barracks from the Abattoir two or three times a day. The D.I. detailed Charlie Dalton, I.O., to take up his quarters in the Abattoir Superintendent's house and watch through a window, the movements of the armoured car crew. Charlie noticed that, on some days at 6 a.m. the car crew got restless and eventually the last soldier would get out to stretch his legs, and, locking the car, would ramble about the place. This was a cheery sight and led to the conclusion that it might happen again. Mick Collins took immediate action and had a consultation in Jim Kirwin's public-house with the senior warder of Mountjoy Prison, Emmet Dalton and myself and got all the local information about warders, position of Military guards, police and auxiliary relief times. Seán McKeon had been instructed to get an interview on any complaint pretext, every morning at 10 a.m. with the Governor, and so be on the outside of three obstructing gates when an attempted rescue would be made.

Charlie Dalton noticed at 6 a.m. this morning that the crew were in jaupy mood and made a shrewd guess that the last soldier would probably leave the car on the next visit and hastened to report - The job was on.

Paddy O'Daly organised the parties, one to capture the armoured car, another to mank and drive it, a third party to force an entry through the main gate after the car had driven in, re-open this gate, and keep it so until the armoured car came out. Áine Malone headed this party with a faked parcel to have the wicket gate opened, Emmet Dalton and myself masquerading as British Officers in uniform to join the car en route. Emmet, having

served as an officer in the British Army knew how to serve a prisoner removal order to the authorities, and I had served six months in Mountjoy Prison and had stood-to for the escape of twenty prisoners over the wall, and so knew the prison fairly well, and besides Emmet's second uniform fitted me to perfection.

Charlie Dalton returned to his watch-out post. The armoured car with the same crew returned on its second journey and behaved as Charlie had predicted, the last British Tommy got out and locked it and went for a stroll. Volunteers wearing Corporation uniform caps and waiting about the Abattoir picked up the pre-arranged signal, closed in and held up the Tommies, shooting some who resisted, secured the keys of the car, which became our property - a peerless, twin-turret, whippet.

Pat McCrea had never seen the inside of a car like this in his life, but in his own quiet way used his native wits, stepped on the gas and accompanied by Tom Keogh, Paddy McCaffery and Bill Stepleton - machine-gunners - proceeded down the North Circular Road and picked up Emmet Dalton and myself, already dressed and armed as two British officers, McCrea drove to Mountjoy Prison and seeing the narrow driveway wondered how the devil he would get the car out and away. On approaching the main gate Emmet Dalton waved an official-looking paper at the lock-out warder - the gate opened wide and shut-to with a clang after us. Two more iron gates were opened for us but McCrea used his long head, driving the car in one long sweep around by the main entrance and back through the two iron gates he had just entered, carelessly jamming both open and so leaving the main gate only to be negotiated. Emmet Dalton and myself

jumped smartly out of the car, posted Tom Keogh, dressed in British dungarees and a Tommy's uniform cap, outside the main entrance door to cover our rear, or give the alarm on occasion.

Dalton and I entered the main door at 10.30 as the Warders were coming from their quarters on duty and Warder Kelly was so surprised at seeing me that he said; "O Jesus, look at Leonard", and then clapping his hand over his mouth, dashed back upstairs, knocking down all the warders descending.

We proceeded to the Governor's Office, after being refused entry to McKeon's wing by Warder Condron, as it was not possible for us to break down two massive iron gates and finally McKeon's cell door.

We knew what the situation at 10 o'clock should be, that there would be one Warder only on duty, and we felt that he ought not to cause us much trouble, but at 10.30 all the day-duty warders, thirty police, including auxiliaries, were in the wing - a horse of another colour.

We entered the Governor's Office and received a shock, for instead of finding Governor Munroe alone, there were seven of his staff present and then the blasted door had to slam behind us. Munroe was receiving us very nicely until he mentioned that he must ring up the Castle for confirmation of the order to remove McKeon. I sprang up for the telephone and smashed it while Dalton held the staff at bay and then began tying the staff up with the hope of securing the master keys, when a cannonade of shots met our ears -

it was now or never - we forced the door open - good-byes were said quickly - we left the building with all haste.

McKeon was not in the Governor's office as we had arrived a half-hour too late for that appointment.

The main gate party, headed by Áine Malone with her dummy parcel, had succeeded in rushing the wicket gate after a good scuffle, and when the main gate was forcibly opened by our Volunteers for us they drew the roof-top sentry's fire, which wounded one of our men, raising the general alarm, but the ever alert Tom Keogh shot this sentry dead from the court-yard, his rifle falling to the pavement. On Dalton and myself rushing through the main door I spotted the rifle, picking it up I ordered the British military back, and on their refusal to obey knelt down and threatened to fire on them - they seeing an officer kneeling in the firing position, broke and retired to their quarters, but the Police advanced from another position. It was time to jump on the back of the whippet and go, taking the rifle with us. We shouted to Pat to let her rip, and Pat McCrea drove down that drive and on to the North Circular Road at a speed that was very satisfactory, seeing that we were exposed to a rather heavy fire from the Prison. Emmet Dalton and myself had no plan of action agreed on, but there was a taxi at our disposal near the end of the street which we transferred into, and not knowing what the British reaction would be, decided to drive to Howth to consider what our next move should be, recollecting that we were two English officers with no home to go to.

Pat McCrea had instructions to drive the whippet to the Fingal Brigade area, but on account of the engine over-heating badly he decided to abandon the car at Marino and, having stripped it of its guns and ammunition, set it on fire and went back to his brother's shop to continue on the daily grind.

Emmet and I arrived in Howth and dismissed our taxi. It then dawned upon me that my sister Daisy had good friends among the Sisters of Charity, so we decided to go and see them. We were very nicely received by a very lively little Sister who listened to our tale of woe, and having produced a lovely cup of tea and set out the best china, went to see the Reverend Mother. Yes, a messenger had been despatched to Cassidy's public house on the top of the Head, and had returned with two suits borrowed for the occasion. Our uniforms were packed away for despatch and we emerged less showy, perhaps, but more pleased, and returned to town by tram.

Armoured Car:

On arrival in Dublin we learned that the English military had confined all armoured cars to Barracks, having got a scare at the loss of their baby whippet.

Igoe:

Igoe and his thirty plain-clothes murderers from the Castle were to be shot down in a pitched battle by an equal number of the "Squad" and Intelligence Officers. We waited an hour. Our I.O. informed us they had left the Phoenix Depot, boarded a tram, but Igoe and his Lieutenant had disappeared by the time the tram reached Kingsbridge, a distance of three hundred yards. We were later compelled to run before a foot patrol of military to James' Street. After a time a parallel patrol made us move down to the South Quays, and when travelling

along outside Guinness's, two Auxie tenders met us, stopped, and considered riddling us with their machine guns. We ordered a zig-zag movement across the road in front of them of ones and twos, half drew our guns and were going to sell dear, when they seemed to multiply our thirty Volunteers by six and left us their dust. We took a deep breath and went on.

Custom House job:

With curfew at 8 o'clock p.m., double military street patrols, circular patrols of Auxiliaries and Tans in machine-gun mounted tenders and armoured cars, investment of areas, with the consequent capture of our arms and dumps, Igoe's mob of thirty plain-clothes murderers to look after the soul of our nation, the Executive Council called for a magnificent action on the part of the Volunteers that would leave the enemy standing on one foot.

Mick Collins, with one bold gesture of power and defiance decided to end the English claim to Civil Administration in Ireland. Orders were transmitted through the Brigade Staff to destroy the Custom House with contents and this vital building lying in the 2nd Battalion area of operations, the Brigadier, Oscar Traynor, gave "The Manager" or Comdt. Tom Ennis this task in co-operation with Capt. Paddy O'Daly, "The Squad", and Capt. Paddy Flanagan, "The A.S.U." The Battn. supplied about 50 Volunteers, The Squad 20, the A.S.U. 50.

Capt. Tom Kilcoyne made a flying start by commandeering a White Rose Paraffin tank a day or two before it was required and transferred the oil to 2 gallon petrol tins at Spring Garden Lane, and induced the Typographical Society to loan him a quantity of cotton waste, that would come in handy later on, and with the addition of some nice looking sledge hammers and bolt cutters, all this

material had to be removed to D. Coy's Dump at St. Anthony's Place to be convenient to the job.

On the day in question Tom wanted more paraffin and persuaded Hampton & Leedon to lend their lorry for him to collect their supply of paraffin at the goods section of The Great Northern and had only just arrived and torn down the office telephone when he read in his companions' eyes - Danger. On looking around him he saw the Tans beside him and made the remark that he had better get a new telephone. They skipped, and making for a wall dropped down twenty-five feet to the street below.

Terry Downes was thinking of playing golf and was leaving his business place when Paddy Swansey asked him to come along and dig up a lorry, so with Peter Farrell they went off and commandeered Findlater's 3-ton Austin lorry and had to bye-pass H.Q. on account of Kilcoyne's Tans, and await further instruction. Farrell scouted and the Commandant told him to proceed to Anthony's Place, load up and arrive at Beresford Place entrance by the time the Volunteers would be there.

All sections were paraded at the Seán Connolly Club on the 25th May and given their final instructions, and commanded to converge on the Custom House. At 12.55 p.m. the action started with Volunteers grabbing the oil tins, cotton waste and tools and making a concerted rush on all doors to take up their allotted tasks; "The Squad" and A.S.U. manning all entrances; Battalion Volunteers proceeding to round up the various staffs and fire the gigantic building. Jim Conroy had to shoot Davis, the Caretaker, as he insisted on trying to give the alarm to the Castle, with the telephone in his hand. It was

reckoned that the job could be completed by 120 Volunteers in a half-hour, but the martialling of an English staff, the thorough firing, room by room of this vast structure must take longer. The flame bursting through the windows and roof announced a good job well done.

All city fire brigades had been taken over by our men to prevent their cooling effect on our project. This operation had been going nicely until an armoured car and tender of Auxies arrived on the scene, were attacked and bombed by a party of our outside force, Dan Head being riddled, Brigadier Oscar Traynor and Capt. Paddy O'Daly escaping from under the Auxies and armoured car Vickers and maxim machine-gun fire - running round by the back and clearing off among the sightseers to join their comrades on the far side.

Seán Doyle was badly wounded, escaped, and died the next day. Commandant Tom Ennis, and Jim Slattery made a dash through the terrible fusilade, were wounded, but won, through and escaped. The O'Reilly brothers sent into the Custom House on a special mission, were shot dead in cold blood by the Auxies.

Reinforcements of armoured cars and crossley tenders, with their loads, arrived and completely surrounded the remains of the building, with our men in fearful danger of being roasted alive and still fighting with brave and desperate fury to keep the enemy at bay until all their ammunition was exhausted when they had to give in to vastly superior enemy forces.

The Auxies made the mistake of rounding up all persons near hand, the whole staff as well as the Volunteers inside, who by now had disposed of their guns and carried an

innocent look, parading them in front of Authority to be identified as staff or otherwise, and the sightseers, bless them, confused the auxies so much that they could not separate our sheep from their goats. A big number of people were arrested, including most of our men, and after a grueling were lodged in Kilmainham. We had lost all our guns and a lot of our finest men.

A.S.U. Active Service Unit:

Capt. Paddy Flanagan, A.S.U., Mick Reilly and Jimmy Conroy of the Squad managed to escape by the Port & Docks wall, Mick Stephenson went a little further and arrived in the Lock and had to be fished out by a friendly donkey reins thrown to him. One of the 'littlers' Jackie Foy escaped through the warehouse window dropping 20 feet to earth and did not wait to count missing bones. Brains beat the Auxies in one case, when the Volunteers were rounded up on the Quay and on parade one of the Volunteers saw a horse and dray unattended and walking over to it caught the bridle and was ordered by the Auxies to take himself, the horse and dray to hell out of that. That horse knew it was not its usual driver and went.

Paddy O'Daly and I went to Byrne's house, North Richmond Street and told Mrs. Byrne, a very motherly woman and a great friend to the "Squad" to pack a few things and be ready in half an hour to go to the Mater Hospital to be the "dying" mother of Tom Kilcoyne, to remain there until she was inspected by the Prison Doctor of Mountjoy, where Tom was locked up and who was required outside on parole by H.Q. Mrs. Byrne agreed and left one of the elder girls in charge of the family. We then hurried her away to the private ward held in readiness for her. This lady being rather stout and having been hustled and fussed in such a short time that she was flurried and distinctly heated by the time she was put

"dying" to bed, and so an hour or two after was visited by the Prison Doctor and certified as ready to collapse at any moment, which he reported to the authorities. Tom Kilcoyne was released on the strength of this report, on parole, Mrs. Byrne's husband, Peter, only found out late that night where we had spirited her away to, and dashed to the spot, rescuing his now completely recovered wife, and restored her to her children.

The Custom House destruction clearly indicated to the British Cabinet the extent of our moral victory and Lloyd George, seeing the "Writing on the Wall", decided to come to terms with our leaders. He used "Red Cap" herrings, "Wool Sack" herrings, "Digger" herrings and a few "Bristlings" to get in touch with our President to this end.

In the meantime Capt. Paddy O'Daly rounded up any members of the "Squad" and A.S.U. who had escaped arrest and formed a new unit named the "Guard" with the addition of selected members, and then we became very like Nelly Ely's Fly, let out to do a job and recalled before any action had taken place, reflecting the strange and weird happenings of Peace moves at the time.

Had the British known that on our last job to mow down all the Auxiliaries in the Grafton Street area at 7 o'clock p.m. we had not enough ammunition to fill our guns and would of necessity have all been wiped out by their fire, but for the job being called off at the last minute - there would have been no Truce.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 547

Joseph Leonard Colonel.

Date: *4th June 1951*

Witness:

J. Kearns Comdt.