

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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NO. W.S. 573

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 573

Witness

Robert Purcell,
26 Swilly Road,
Cabra,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Company Fianna Eireann, 1917 - ;
Member of A.S.U. 1921.

Subject.

The Active Service Unit, Dublin City,
1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1814

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF ROBERT PURCELL,

26, SWILLY ROAD, CABRA, DUBLIN.

I joined A/Company, Fianna Eireann, on 17th September 1917, in Skippers Alley, and transferred to H/Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, on 1st April 1918. Seamus Kavanagh was then Company Captain and Sean O'Neill was Company Lieut. The first engagement I took part in was an attack on British military at North Frederick St. This took place early in March 1921. Around about that time it was usual for me to take out a street patrol of four men to patrol along North Frederick St. and then fire on any military or Black and Tan lorries that would come our way. We were armed with hand grenades only. Some time in the forenoon of a day in March 1921, I saw a British military lorry approaching Frederick St. from the direction of O'Connell St. At the time the lorry was approaching us we were in a position in a laneway in the vicinity of Findlater's Church. As the lorry passed we threw three grenades at it. The grenades exploded but we did not wait to see what the results were. I cannot say if any casualties amongst the British troops resulted. Following that ambush the street patrols continued, but we had no opportunity to carry out any further ambushes.

I joined the Active Service Unit on 27th May 1921 to fill a vacancy created by the death of Frank Flood, who was executed in Mountjoy Prison the previous March. When casualties occurred in the A.S.U. it was usual to have replacements provided by the unit from which the men who were casualties were originally drawn. I was consulted and was instructed to report to Paddy Daly at the Plaza on a certain date. I was posted to either No. 2 or No. 3 Section, and the section commander was Jim Cahill.

While I was with the Active Service Unit I took part in

two engagements. The first was an attack on a troop train at Killester. The A.S.U. turned out in strength for this operation of which Paddy Daly was in charge. I cannot remember what time of the year this ambush took place. A troop train was expected to arrive from Howth direction. We took up positions on both sides of the embankment some distance from Killester station. We were armed with hand grenades. A man with a Thompson gun took up position on the bridge crossing the railway. Our instructions were that we were not to attack the train until the Thompson gun first went into action. This was to be our signal for the attack. As the train approached, a member of the A.S.U. got a bit excited and, without waiting for a signal from the man on the bridge, with the Thompson gun, he fired his grenade. However, the remainder of the A.S.U. withheld their fire. Paddy Daly came along and ordered us out of our positions immediately, saying that a mistake had been made, that the wrong train was fired at. He seemed very annoyed about the man firing his grenade before the signal was given. We got safely away and dumped our grenades at a pre-arranged stop.

On an evening in June 1921, the entire A.S.U., as far as I can remember, were detailed to attack British military and Auxiliaries who might be in the vicinity of Grafton St. at that particular time. My particular part in this operation was to enter Kidd's Buffet (now Jammet's Restaurant) and to open fire on any Auxiliary officers that would be pointed out to me there. Joe Dolan accompanied me. He was then a member of G.H.Q. staff and his job was to point out the individuals I was to fire on. The operation was so timed that on the stroke of clock striking 6 p.m. all members of the A.S.U. detailed in this operation were to enter cafes in the Grafton St. area and likewise shoot down British military and Auxiliaries who might be in them. The operation miscarried as somebody fired before the appointed time.

At that particular time Joe Dolan and myself were at the corner of Grafton St. awaiting the stroke of the clock to enter Kidd's Restaurant. On hearing the shooting, Joe Dolan said to me and four or five men who were with me that the whole thing was now off, so we rushed round to Dawson St. and dumped our guns in a car driven by Joe Leonard.

Other activities I was associated with were an attempt to rescue Kevin Barry from Mountjoy Prison and the passing on of information regarding shotgun cartridges at Keegan's gun shop.

Signed: Robert Purcell

Date: 18-9-1951

Witness: William Ivory Connel

