

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 596

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 596

Witness

George Nolan,
206 Bangor Road,
Kimmage,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Company
4th Battalion Dublin Brigade 1916;
Member of A.S.U. 1920 - .

Subject.

- (a) Marrowbone Lane, Easter Week 1916;
- (b) The Active Service Unit 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B.S.M..2

STATEMENT OF GEORGE NOLAN.

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Statement of George Nolan,

206, Bangor Road, Kimmage, Dublin.

In January, 1916, I joined "A" Company of the 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade. Seamus Murphy was my Company Commander. The Battalion was commanded by Eamon Ceannt and its headquarters were at Larkfield, Kimmage.

Easter Week 1916:

I took part in the Rising of Easter Week, 1916. On Easter Saturday evening I was instructed to parade with my Company on the following morning at Larkfield, Kimmage. I think the time for mobilisation was 11 a.m. I paraded at Larkfield as instructed and after about an hour I was told to go home and to hold myself in readiness. The parade on a Sunday morning was about 200 strong. I was told on Easter Sunday evening that I was to again parade on the following morning, Easter Monday, at, I think, 11 a.m. and that in addition to my rifle and ammunition I was to take with me all the rations I possibly could. I fell in with my Company at Larkfield, as ordered. I think Seamus Murphy addressed us and as far as I can recollect he told us a Rising was to take place that day and that the 4th Battalion would occupy the South Dublin Union, Marrowbone Lane, Darcy's Brewery and Jameson's Brewery, and that "A" Company would march to Marrowbone Lane. After listening to this address the Company moved off under Seamus Murphy and proceeded to Marrowbone Lane Distillery. On taking over the Distillery Seamus Murphy issued orders to the various sections as to what their duties were to be. I remember my particular job was to clean out the water tanks and have them refilled with

fresh water in case the town supply would be cut off. We held that post until the following Sunday. My recollection is not clear as to what exactly happened throughout the week. I do know that we came under fire from the British military but that no casualties resulted. The only casualties I observed on the side of the British was one time I looked through a window and saw three British soldiers lying dead on the roadway. They must have been shot by the Marrowbone Lane garrison. On the last day of the Surrender Con Colbert came up to me and asked me would I take two letters to Fathers Kiernan and Eugene at Mount Argus and that when I had delivered these letters I need not return to my post. I did not know what the letters contained but I delivered them to the two priests concerned and then made my way home as best I could. I learned that evening that the Marrowbone Lane garrison had surrendered. That is my recollection of Easter Week, 1916.

Company re-organised 1917:

In the autumn of 1917 Harry Murray, one of my old Company officers of "A" Company, approached me and told me that it was again proposed to reorganise the Company and he asked me would I be willing to renew my association with it. To this I immediately agreed. At the first parade I attended, I think at 34 Camden Street, there were about 50 men on parade between old and new members. I think it was Harry Murray was in charge of the Company at the time. From then on I attended weekly parades and took part in Company tactical exercises. It was only some time in 1919 that the Company again became active. Its activities then were confined to raids for arms on private houses or any place that arms could be got.

Burning of Income Tax Documents:

Some time in April 1920 I was one of a party of five that took part in the destruction of Income Tax documents. These documents were located in the house of an Income Tax collector at Ormond Road, Rathmines. We entered the private residence of the collector concerned, confiscated all papers and documents relating to Income Tax and burned them in the kitchen fire. He protested very strongly but we told him that we were merely carrying out orders.

Active Service Unit:

Some time very near Christmas 1920 my Company Commander sent for me and told me that an Active Service Unit was being formed in Dublin and that it would be a full time job, adding that he had sent forward a recommendation that I would be a suitable man for it. I told him that I had no objections and then he asked me to suggest a second man and I named Paddy Collins.

On St. Stephen's Day, 1920, I was instructed to report to the O/C., Dublin Brigade, at St. Laurence O'Toole's hall, North Strand. On arriving there I found about fifty men present. Oscar Traynor addressed us, stating that we had been selected to form an Active Service Unit to operate against the Crown Forces in the streets of Dublin and that our duties would be full time which would mean that we were to leave our places of employment and so make ourselves available for Volunteer work at all time. Continuing, he said that if any of us felt that we were not fit for the work we could stand down and that it would not affect us in any. ^{was} He then introduced us to our O/C., Paddy Flanagan. Following that meeting we met in the same place on at least two occasions and we were then organised into four sections. I was allocated to No. 4 Section and my Sect. Commdr. was Michael Sweeney. Several meeting places were

/ arranged for No.4

Section and those mostly used were Mount Argus Brickworks, Keogh's of Dolphin's Barn and a place in Kevin Street. We were armed with revolvers and hand-grenades. Our particular dump was at Keogh's and whenever we were going out on a job our arms and ammunition were taken from there.

A.S.U. attack R.I.C. car Holles Street:

One of my first engagements as a member of the A.S.U. took place early in January, 1921. This was an attack on an Auxiliary R.I.C. motor car which usually travelled from Dublin Castle to Beggars Bush Barracks. We received instructions to attack this car on a certain morning. Three of us took up positions at Holles Street corner behind a Post Office Letterbox and four more took up a position in the vicinity of Messrs. Goughs' Sales Yard. One of our men, better known as 'Onion Quinn', was detailed to watch out for the car and signal to us when it was approaching our positions. We were about half an hour in position when Quinn walked straight across the road and took out his handkerchief which he waved to us. This was the prearranged signal. Almost immediately the private motor car came abreast of my position. We immediately opened fire with the revolvers and two hand-grenades. I cannot say if we caused any casualties although it was rumoured later that we did, but we didn't wait to see. I did see, however, when the car had passed through our fire it zigzagged in the direction of Gough's sale yard where it was again attacked by the remainder of the section. The men taking part in this engagement were Paddy Collins, Paddy Rigney, Paddy Mullins, Gus Murphy, Johnnie Dolan and myself. All of us got safely away and were none the worse of our first adventure.

A.S.U. attack on Colonel Winters' car - Thomas St.:

Our next engagement took place in March 1921. It was an attack on a Colonel Winters who, we were given to understand, was an important person in Dublin Castle. It was usual for him to travel each morning from Dublin Castle to, I think, Richmond barracks. About eight of the section were told off to intercept and ambush him one morning. We took up our positions at a point in Thomas Street in the vicinity of Francis Street corner. We were not long in position when a private car came along with, I think, four occupants one of whom was dressed in military uniform. We opened fire on the car immediately with revolver and grenade with the result that we wounded the military officer. I believe he lost an arm and it was strongly rumoured at the time that he was well compensated for his disability.

A.S.U. capture military ambulance:

The operation area of No. 4 Section of the Active Service Unit extended out to Clondalkin. The Crumlin road near Clondalkin was used extensively by British military transport travelling to and from Baldonnell. In May, 1921, we were told off to stage an ambush on this transport with a view to destroying the cars and capturing arms and ammunition from its occupants. Immediately we received the instructions we set about staging an ambush. On the first occasion that we lay in wait we remained out all night and nothing came our way. As we were about to disperse next morning a British military ambulance came along. We held up the driver and ordered him to take the car to Glencree. He drove it there for us. We searched him for arms and found a wallet on his person containing about £200. We asked him how he came by this money as we thought it was a very large sum for a private soldier to have. He

assured us that he was saving up to get married and that the money was his own. We gave him back his money and directed him the best way to get back to Baldonnel. For this he was most grateful. We handed the ambulance over to the Wicklow Volunteers.,

A.S.U. destroy military laundry:

On the following morning we intercepted a British horse-drawn van driven by soldiers from a military barracks to the Whitechurch laundry. We took the laundry from the van and destroyed it.

A.S.U. ambush British troops - Halfway House, Crumlin Road:

On the evening following that incident the complete section returned to Conway's, the Half-way House, and took up positions there to intercept and destroy a convoy of British lorries coming from Baldonnel. We knew that these lorries used to travel from Baldonnel to the city every evening conveying working-men back to their homes from the Aerodrome. About 5.30 p.m. five lorries and a touring car came towards our position. A steam-roller of the Dublin County Council was working in this particular spot at the time, so we ordered the driver to put it across the road before the lorries were due. When they came towards our position they had to pull up on account of the steam-roller obstruction, so we charged out from behind the fence and held up the drivers. No shots were fired and the drivers were not armed. We took the lorries to Glencree and ordered some of the drivers to come with us. We left the lorries in a quarry there and took the touring car for our own use. As we were driving back towards the city we observed an aeroplane flying very low. It immediately occurred to us that it had us under observation so it was decided there and then to destroy the touring car and make

our way back to the city as best we could.

As a result of the taking over of these lorries the British decided to provide an armed escort in future. Information to this effect reached us about a week later - instead of four cars travelling, now civilian employees and the armed escort travelled in a leyland lorry. For a few evenings we observed the movements of this lorry and learned that when it deposited the civilian employees in the city it returned to Baldonnel almost immediately conveying only armed soldiers. The section commander, Michael Sweeney, decided that it should be ambushed and intercepted. The position taken up for the ambush was at the Half-way House, better known as "Conways" on the Crumlin Road leading on to the main Naas Road. Three men, including the section commander, stationed themselves at an open lavatory near the gable end of the public-house. Seven men were placed behind a ditch on the same side as the public-house and three men on the opposite side behind a low wall on a private driveway to Drimnagh Castle. After about a quarter of an hour's wait we saw the lorry coming towards us - in fact we heard it before it came into view as the British Tommies were singing loudly. When the lorry came abreast of the open lavatory the three men there opened fire with revolver and grenades. Simultaneously the two other groups of the section opened fire. The lorry slowed and zig-zagged up the road. The driver must have been badly hit by our men who were detailed to put him out of action. I cannot say what the casualties on the British side were but we heard after they were fairly heavy. Immediately we opened fire on the lorry I distinctly remember one British soldier returning the fire very accurately. Whatever may have happened to the rest of his comrades he did not seem to lose his head and displayed great courage throughout. We had only one casualty, our Section

Commander, Michael Sweeney, who had three wounds in the leg. He was immediately taken to hospital for medical attention.

The burning of the Custom House:

Some days before the burning of the Custom House on the 25th May, 1921, rumour had it that a big attack was due to take place and that it was to be an attack on Beggars Bush Barracks, the headquarters of the Auxiliaries. On the morning of the 25th May, Nos. 3 and 4 Sections were by instruction mobilised at Stephen's tailor's shop in Strand Street. I think it was Paddy Flanagan addressed us telling us that the job on for that day was the destruction of the Custom House. He said it was to be a Brigade job and that in addition the entire Squad and the Active Service Unit would also take part. Michael Collins was also present on that occasion. I saw him talking to Paddy Flanagan and 'Onion' Quinn but he did not give us any instructions or address us in any way. The instructions issued for Nos. 3 and 4 Sections were that they were to take up positions on the North Quays in the vicinity of the Custom House and that in the event of enemy forces attacking the Custom House while the men inside were burning it we were to open fire on the attacking party. We were armed with grenades and revolvers. We took up positions allocated to us at about 12.45 p.m. Shortly after 1 p.m. an armoured car came from O'Connell Bridge direction and proceeded down by the Custom House. A short time later five or six tenders of Black and Tans followed it. Our instructions were that we were not to attack unless they opened fire on us. I don't know what instructions most of the men of the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade had, but I clearly remember that when the Tan lorries slowed down coming round by Liberty Hall they were fired on. The armoured car quickly switched round from the direction in which it was going. Immediately this happened we

opened fire on it. At this time we had taken cover on Butt Bridge. Fortunately for us the armoured car did not cross the bridge. It turned round again and speeded to the back gate of the Custom House on the Quays from which position its guns were trained on the windows of the Custom House. The Tans, on being fired on by the party at Liberty Hall corner, jumped from their lorries in a state of confusion. When we saw this we opened fire on them. One incident I would like to recall while we were firing from Butt Bridge - A priest was cycling across the bridge at the time and when he saw we were in action he dismounted and remained with us praying the whole time and when the firing had ceased he gave Paddy Mullins his bike to get away on. I travelled on the back step of that bicycle and Joe McGuinness, Paddy Collins and the rest of the men got away by a hackney car. This withdrawal, of course, did not take place until the whistle went which was the signal for us to retire. This would be about 1.30 and the Custom House was then well alight. As we were retiring up Hawkins Street members of the 'G' Division rushed out from their headquarters towards the Custom House. We thought we were sure to be captured and we could do nothing about it as we had not a round of ammunition left, but to our surprise they kept going on and took no notice of us.

A.S.U. attack R.I.C. car at Pleasants Street:

We were on patrol one morning in the vicinity between Camden Street and Aungier Street when we saw a touring car coming from Rathmines direction towards Dublin Castle. We recognised it in the distance as being an Auxiliary car as its occupants were in uniform, so when it came to the corner of Pleasants Street three members of our section opened fire on it with revolvers only. Three of the occupants fell forward in the car wounded. The driver,

evidently, was not injured in any way as the car proceeded on its way. I cannot say whether this incident took place before or after the Custom House burning but it was in or around that time.

A.S.U. attack Auxiliary Officers at Dolphin's Barn:

About the end of June, 1921, information reached us that a private touring car containing Auxiliary officers travelled one or two nights a week from Kilmainham direction to Dublin Castle and it was believed that the occupants of this car were high-ranking officers in the Auxiliary forces. As a result of this information the section was mobilised to wait for this car and attack it in Dolphin's Barn. We placed two men at the Church and two men at the Whiteheather Laundry and two at Cork Street corner. The remaining three men were placed at the turn of the road facing the laundry. At about 8.30 p.m. the car came into view. The first two men opened up on it. The car still kept going and the remainder of the section brought it under their fire. I could not see whether we had caused any casualties or not but rumour had it next morning that we had. Three of the occupants were supposed to have been hit. There were no casualties on our side.

A.S.U. attack troop train at Ballyfermot:

A few days before the Truce on the 11th July, 1921 orders were sent to the Section Commander that a troop train would be proceeding from Dublin to the Curragh on a certain morning and that it was to be attacked at Ballyfermot. The plan for attacking and destroying this train was a very simple one. Three men were to take tins of petrol from a pony and car, which would be provided, and bring them along together with a number of old pieces of sacking. The sacks were to be saturated with the petrol

and thrown on to the top of the carriages as the train passed under the bridge. While this was being done one man of our party, armed for the first time with a Thompson machinegun, was to spray the tops of the carriages with fire and light the saturated petrol sacks. On the morning that the attack was decided on we took up positions as ordered. Four of us were on the bridge and Jimmy McGuinness with the Thompson machine-gun which, incidentally, was the first time I had seen one. The remainder of the section were at both sides of the railway behind the embankment. After about a half-hour's delay the troop train passed through our positions. Almost immediately the men on both sides of the embankment opened fire on it and as the carriages passed under the bridge we threw the petrol sacks on to the tops of the carriages and Jimmy McGuinness with his machine-gun fired on to the carriages. Almost immediately he did so the carriages were set alight. The train proceeded on to the first station. I believe the casualties were very heavy as they were taken off there. The train was still burning when it reached the station. That was the last operation I took part in with the A.S.U. and the Truce followed in a few days.

Further activities with A Coy 4th Battalion:

While I was with the Active Service Unit I returned to my old Company - "A" Company of the 4th Battalion - and took part in three operations with them. One was the attack on British troops returning to Portobello barracks. The second was the burning of goods and military equipment in the Dublin and Blessington Steam Tram Yard and the third one was the hold-up of a British officer and the confiscation of his gun and bicycle.

Information reached the Company Commander that it was usual for a lorry of British troops to travel each night from the city to Portobello Barracks in or about the same time. He decided that this lorry should be attacked. Twelve men of the Company were selected, including myself, for this job. One night at between 8.30 and 9 o'clock we took positions inside the Catholic Church at Rathmines. We were not long there when the lorry came into view. It was signalled to us beforehand by one of our scouts. We opened fire on it with grenades and revolvers. We were told later that we had caused six casualties - four killed and two wounded. We had one casualty who only received a slight injury to his foot.

It was usual at that time for the steam tram which ran between Dublin and Wicklow to convey wines, cigarettes and provisions to British soldiers camping in Tallaght and Kilbride. The Company Commander ordered that these supplies and provisions were to be destroyed. Five of us were selected to proceed to the tram yard at Terenure at 10.30 one night during curfew hours. On reaching the yard one man took control of the telephone and the remainder of us first opened the loaded tram-waggon, took out the military supplies and destroyed them in the yard by pouring the petrol over them. The total value of supplies burned that night was estimated at £1,500.

A man of the name of Gaffney had a cycle shop. Although he was not a member of the Volunteer organisation at the time he was very friendly towards us. One evening he told me that a British officer had purchased a new three-speed bicycle from him and that he was coming in the following night to pay for it. Armed with this information I decided to hold him up on the following night and confiscate his bicycle and any arms that he might have on

him. About 8 p.m. on the night in question he came to the cycle shop and as he was about to enter I held him up, relieved him of his bicycle and a .38 revolver. He handed them over without any protest and at the same time paid Mr. Gaffney £20 for the bicycle.

Signed: George Nolan

Date: 15.10.51

Witness: William Ivory Lamdt

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