

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**.....506.....

Witness

Patrick Collins,
10 Elm Park Cottages,
Terenure, Dublin.

Identity

Member of "A" Company, 4th Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1918 - ;

Member of Active Service Unit
December 1920 - 1921.

Subject

Activities of the Active Service Unit
Dublin City Area and suburbs,
December 1920-1921;

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. **S.1639**.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

Statement of Patrick Collins,

10, Elm Park Cottages, Terenure, Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers in June 1918 - "A" Company of the 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade. Ted Kelly was Battalion Commandant and Peadar Ó Broin was the Vice-Commandant. Harry Murray was Captain of "A" Company. The Lieutenants were James Morrissey, deceased, and Louis McDermott.

My first parade took place on Whit Saturday, 1918, for twenty-four hours manoeuvres at Glencree, and during the week-end we were engaged in drilling, grenade practices and lectures in the use of arms generally.

During the remainder of that year there was very little activity in the Battalion except drilling and parades.

About April, 1919, my Company was engaged principally in raiding for arms to equip the Company.

I joined the Active Service Unit on the 26th December, 1920. The O/C. of "A" Company (A.T. Walsh) approached me and told me that it was proposed to form an Active Service Unit which would be employed full time; that men were being selected from each Company of the Battalion and from each Battalion of the Dublin Brigade. I agreed to join this unit straight away. I was mobilised for a meeting in Oriel Hall, Oriel Street, which was addressed by Mr. Oscar Traynor. About fifty men from the four Battalions were present and I distinctly remember that thirteen men of the 4th Battalion were there. Their names were - Michael Sweeney (deceased), Patrick Rigney, Alec O'Toole, Augustus Murphy (deceased), George Nolan, Patrick Mullins, Tom Lillis,

Simon MacInerney, Jimmy McGuinness, Joseph McGuinness, Padraig O'Connor, Jim Harpur and myself.

Oscar Traynor, in addressing us, told us that the Unit was being formed solely for the purpose of carrying out active operations against British Forces in Dublin, and that these operations, as far as we were concerned, would be carried on at any time of the night or day and that for this reason we were to be available and to hold ourselves in readiness at all times. He added that if any man felt that the work now or in the future would cause him too great a strain he was free to withdraw at any time without any reflection on him. At that meeting Paddy Flanagan was appointed Captain of the Active Service Unit. The Unit was divided up there and then into four Sections to operate in each of their respective Battalion areas. A man was appointed in charge of each Section. Gus Murphy was given command of No. 4 Section. The Section had a number of places for mobilisation. We regarded the old Brick Works at Mount Argus as our headquarters. Other meeting places were the back of Moggy Keogh's in Cork Street. Each man in the Section was armed with a webley .45 revolver and twelve rounds of ammunition together with a number of hand-grenades. Arms and ammunition were not stored in any particular place. We always carried them around with us. Up to March 1921 there was very little activity in No. 4 Section area, with the result that six of us were transferred to No. 3 Section during that month. The man in charge of No. 3 Section was Phil Quinn (deceased). The Headquarters was at Bass Place.

Our first engagement was an attack on a Ford saloon car in the vicinity of Holles Street. We were given to

understand that this car contained four British Intelligence Officers in civilian attire who were on their way to Beggars Bush. We knew beforehand that this car would be in the vicinity of Holles Street at a certain time, namely 11 a.m. Nine of us, G. Nolan, A. Murphy, P. Rigney, J. Dolan, P. Mullins, P. Bruntin, W. Phillips, P. Quinn and myself, took up positions before 11 a.m. from Holles Street to Powerscourt. After about twenty minutes of a wait Phillip Quinn gave us the signal that the car that we were to ambush was coming to our position. As it passed through I fired a hand-grenade at it. The others opened revolver fire. The car passed through and we believed that one of the occupants was seriously wounded. We withdrew in safety. From then on we were continually on the move but due to a number of false alarms no serious activities occurred. I remember one morning travelling in a captured Crossley touring car to intercept Igoe and his gang who were believed to be in the vicinity of Smithfield Market. When we got there Igoe and his gang had left. We were then instructed to head on to Thomas Street as there might be a chance of intercepting him there but when we got to that area we were also disappointed.

On another occasion we were hurriedly instructed to meet at 100 Seville Place at 12 noon, and we were told then around 2 o'clock or thereabout that we were to get as quickly as we could to Blackrock Park area. We were to be on the Dublin side of the Park to intercept and ambush some important person who would be travelling in convoy from Dún Laoghaire direction to the Castle. We all met at the city side of Blackrock Park, as instructed, and took up our positions. We remained there for about an

hour and we were dismissed then as the convoy did not come our way. We later learned it was General Dwyer that we were to ambush.

Some time in April 1921 we were again returned to our old Section of the 4th Battalion. Four of us, M. Sweeney, G. Nolan, S. MacInerney and myself, were scouting the roads one day when we saw a British ambulance approach. Michael Sweeney, our new Commander, decided to take this ambulance as it might come in useful to us later on. We held up the driver and told him that we were taking over the ambulance. We brought the driver with us to Kilakee and then ordered him to return to the city. We brought the ambulance to the back of the Lamb Doyles - Ticknock. I believe it was taken over by the 2nd Brigade later.

During scouting operations in the vicinity of Half-way House, it came to our notice that the British Military were in the habit of conveying a civilian working party from Baldonnell Aerodrome to the city in military cars, so we decided to hold up this party and seize the transport. We considered that the Half-Way House, where the County Council were carrying out repairs on the road, would be a suitable place for the hold-up, so one evening about 5.20 o'clock six of us - Patrick Collins, George Nolan, Michael Sweeney, Simon MacInerney, Tom Lillis, James McGuinness - took up positions. We ordered the man in charge of the County Council steam roller to move the steam roller across the road and block the passage of the cars. As the first car came along one of our party stopped it and held up the driver while the remainder kept him covered. We told the whole party to remain seated and not to give any signals to the cars following. As the other cars came along we followed the same procedure and without

firing any shots the three cars came into our possession. We searched the drivers and occupants for arms but found none. We took two drivers with us to drive two of the cars and Sweeney drove the third car to Glencree. The cars were disposed of there. Sweeney returned with the touring car to pick us up and take us back to the city. An aircraft was flying overhead pretty low at this time and we considered that the quicker we got back to the city the better it would be for ourselves. The two cars that we had disposed of at Glencree were later recovered by the British as evidently Andy McDonnell did not get there in time to take them over. As a result of the loss of this transport the British evidently decided that convoys of civilian/^{employees}would in future be escorted by an armed party in each car. The procedure adopted was that a number of armed soldiers would travel with the civilian employees in their respective cars. When the cars reached the city, the escorting party would travel back to Baldonnel in one car which was a leyland lorry, so we decided to stage an ambush on this party on its way to Baldonnel. On the 5th May, 1921, ten of us - Michael Sweeney, James McGuinness, Jim Harpur, Patrick Collins, Joe McGuinness, Simon MacInerney, Patrick Mullin, George Nolan, Alec O'Toole and Tom Lillis - took up positions on both sides of the road just above Conways, the half-way house. As the lorry came through our position, Sweeney and McGuinness fired hand-grenades at it from the left-hand side of the road. Three men on the right-hand side of the road under good cover fired revolver shots at the driver to put him out of action and the man beside him. Almost immediately the lorry got out of control and seemed to swerve in to our position on the left-hand side. Jim Harpur and I dropped two hand-grenades into the lorry

and the other three men kept on firing revolver shots. When we disposed of the hand-grenades we all simultaneously opened fire on the lorry. The British party was about eighteen strong. Of this number about sixteen were killed. The driver, who evidently was only slightly wounded and lost control momentarily, immediately recovered and drove on the lorry with its dead and wounded. The whole engagement only lasted about from ten to twenty minutes. We were unable to stop the progress of the lorry to capture the arms and equipment from it. So we withdrew and as we were withdrawing I saw that the Officer Commanding our Section, Michael Sweeney, was seriously wounded. A couple of our party took him to a Doctor at a dressing station in St. Paul's Terrace, ~~Williamstown~~ ^{Flinnagh} Road, and the remainder of us made our way back to the city.

On the morning of the burning of the Custom House we assembled as per instructions at a unit dump in Strand Street. On arriving there I judged from the number present that the entire Active Service Unit had been mobilised. We were addressed there by, I think, Paddy Flanagan, who told us we were going on a serious job, that we were to act strictly on the orders we would receive from our Section Commanders and that we were not, under any circumstances, to act on our own, and that when we would take up our positions in the place we were going to we were not to fire on the enemy, at any cost, until they opened fire on us or any other units that might be working with us. We left Strand Street about 12.30 under the command of Paddy O'Connor, and the following :- Padraig O'Connor, Jim McGuinness, George Nolan, Patrick Mullin, Patrick Collins, Joe McGuinness and Tom Lillis, took up a position.

at the south side of Butt Bridge. At this time, I think, Paddy O'Connor told us that the operation in mind for the day was the destruction of the Custom House by fire. As we looked towards the Custom House at about ten minutes past one we saw a double-turreted armoured car taking up a position under the loop-line bridge near the Custom House. At twenty or twenty-three minutes past one we saw two tenders of Black & Tans come down on the North side of the Quay from O'Connell Bridge direction. They turned around by Liberty Hall and immediately opened fire on the Custom House. Padraig O'Connor then told us to advance ^{over} ~~for~~ Butt Bridge, firing at the same time on the enemy. As we were half way over Butt Bridge the double-turreted armoured car directed its fire towards us. Padraig O'Connor told us to retreat and take up our positions at the Liffey Wall, again. He told us then at different periods to fire to attract them with a view to drawing off the fire from the Custom House. The next order we received was that we were to be on the alert in case that the enemy would approach down the South Quay with a view to reinforcing the Auxiliaries already in action at the Custom House. Should they come down the Quay our orders were to engage them. We waited there until twenty or fifteen minutes to 2 o'clock and as no enemy came in our direction we got the final order to disperse and get safely away.

Some time towards the end of June, 1921, we had instructions to proceed to Thomas Street to intercept and ambush a private car which was believed to be conveying Inspector Winters from Dublin Castle. Eight of us - Paddy Mullin, Joe McGuinness, George Nolan, Patrick Collins, Paddy Rigney, Paddy O'Connor, Simon MacInerney

and Alex O'Toole - took up positions at Vicker Street and Meath Street. We were not long in position when two of our men at Vickers Street fired at the approaching car. As it came into our positions we opened fire with hand-grenades and revolvers. The men in Meath Street did likewise. I believe the Inspector was wounded but the car got away.

I have related, to the best of my ability, the chief ambushes that I took part in. Apart from these the Active Service Unit, as a whole, was continually active and took part in many other engagements and ambushes against the British Crown Forces.

Signed:

Patrick Collins

Date:

22 April 1951

Witness:

William Ivory Bond

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 506