

ORIGINAL

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 607

Witness

Joseph McGuinness,  
Evergreen Cottage,  
New Road,  
Clondalkin,  
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'F' Company, 4th Battalion Dublin Brigade,  
1917 - ;

Member of I.R.B. Dublin, 1918 - ;  
" A.S.U. Dublin, 1920 - .  
Subject.

- (a) National activities 1917-1921;
- (b) The A.S.U., Dublin, 1920-1921;
- (c) Burning of Custom House, Dublin, 25/5/1921;
- (d) Escape of Teeling, Donnelly and O'Malley  
from Kilmainham Gaol, 14/2/1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BKs Rathmines Dublin 6

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NO. W.S. 607

STATEMENT OF MR. JOSEPH McGUINNESS,  
Evergreen Cottage, New Road, Clondalkin,  
Co. Dublin.

I joined "F" Company of the 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade, in February, 1917. Seán Dowling was Commandant of the Battalion at the time, and my Company officer was Christy Byrne.

I. R. B.:

I was sworn into the I.R.B. in 1918 in Con Colbert's Circle. Our meeting place was the Engineers' Hall, Parnell Square, now known as the Plaza Hotel. At one of the meetings that I attended a man named James Butler, who was also a 4th Battalion man, proposed that Post Offices should be raided to raise funds for the procurement of arms. This was not agreed to.

Activities of F. Company, 4th Battalion:

The first year of my service with the 4th Battalion was mainly devoted to drilling, parades and lectures.

Early in 1919 the Company became very active in raiding for arms. I remember my section, which was No. 4, was regarded as being the most prominent section in the Company on this work. As a result of these raids on private houses and on serving officers of the British Army who were home on leave, we must have mustered twenty-one revolvers and some ammunition, and about twenty-five shotguns and sporting revolvers. This went to build up the Company armament, and we had a dump for it in Drimnagh Valley. A man by the name of John Gannon was in charge of that dump. His job was to keep the arms clean. Gannon, in company with a friend of his who was not a Volunteer but was a member of the Fianna - John Kenny by name - raided Moore's publichouse at the 3rd Lock Bridge, Inchicore, taking

cigarettes and some money. They lodged the loot in the dump where the arms were. Gannon's employer, Mr. Warren, on whose place, incidentally, the dump was, in an old mill, one day came into the mill and discovered the loot. He notified the R.I.C. and a raid was made on the mill which resulted in the discovery of the dump. They confiscated the arms and Gannon was arrested and charged with robbery. During the time he was awaiting trial, the big hunger-strike came off in Mountjoy and he fell into line with the hunger strikers. He was transferred after the hunger strike to the Curragh. Kenny went to England and wrote to Gannon from England for some money after Gannon's release. A raid on the mails in Westland Row resulted in the procurement of this letter. Kenny came home and he was summoned by the Volunteers in the old brickworks on the canal. He was questioned by Christy Byrne in regard to the raid on Moore's. He denied all knowledge, and Christy Byrne produced the letter. Kenny was deported and the case against Gannon was forgotten on account of being on hunger-strike.

On the night of the 3rd April, 1920, when all Income Tax offices were destroyed, a number of us proceeded to the private house of an Income Tax Inspector who resided near Lucan on the Lucan-Dublin road. We were instructed beforehand that a considerable number of documents dealing with income tax would be found in this man's house, so we entered his house and seized the documents. We burned some of them in his presence and took the remainder away.

I think it was during the month of October, 1920, that a number of police barracks throughout the country were being evacuated. On the 8th of that month I was ordered by my Company O/C to be at Crumlin village to destroy the Police Station there. On arrival, I found that the place was being mined by the engineers, of which the late Joe Gorman was one of the party. Jimmy McGuinness and myself saturated the place with petrol, and the engineers ignited the mine fuse. As the

front hall of the building began to burn, we heard shouting from the inside. Jimmy McGuinness and myself rushed in and discovered that a member of the engineer party had been trapped. We succeeded in getting him out. His hands and face were badly burned, and Christy Byrne, our O/C, had him conveyed to the house of a Miss Flood on the Naas road, where a doctor attended to him.

Later that same month Lieutenant Larry Murtagh and a few others and myself were detailed by our Company O/C to destroy the R.I.C. Barracks at Lower Palmerstown. On arriving at Chapelizod village, Murtagh, who was carrying a heavy bar, ordered me to give three knocks on the door of Ging's publichouse. It was understood that the door would be opened by the foreman, John Ashe (brother, I believe, of the late Tom Ashe). When I arrived at the door a voice from behind a nearby wall called on me to put up my hands. This command was followed by a volley of shots. Larry Murtagh dropped the iron bar he was carrying on to the road. The noise it made caused the firing to stop for a short time. We immediately got away to safety but, while doing so, fire was again opened up on us without result. The firing came from a party of British military. The village was raided that night and one man was arrested the following morning.

Bloody Sunday:

On Saturday the 20th November, 1920, the day before Bloody Sunday, Christy Byrne, my Company Commander, instructed me to be in the vicinity of Lower Leeson Street at nine o'clock on the following morning. He told me that I would meet Lieutenant E. Bennett there, who would be in charge, and that a number of other men would be with him. He then told me that our job was to shoot British Intelligence officers residing at a house in Lower Leeson Street, the number of which I now forget. On the following

morning Jimmy McGuinness and myself proceeded to Leeson Street, and there we met a number of men as already advised. I was instructed, immediately two members of our group entered the house, to take charge of the hall porter and cut the telephone. We knocked at the door which was immediately opened. We held up the porter who protested very strongly at our rough handling of him. Bennett looked through the register and found the names of the individuals we were in search of. These men had two names - their own and assumed ones. Bennett, McGuinness and Paddy O'Connor proceeded upstairs to search the rooms but they discovered that the occupants had gone the previous night. The whole party then withdrew and we made our getaway by Earlsfort Terrace. On reaching that point, a young lad ran out of a house, shouting, "Murder! Murder!". I asked him what was wrong and he said there was shooting going on in the house and that someone was getting murdered. I understood the position immediately and quietened him down by striking him with my hand. We then made our way on to Inchicore by the canal. On the way, we dumped our guns because of a patrol we had to pass.

The Active Service Unit:

On Christmas Day, 1920, Christy Byrne - my Company Commander - called to my house and explained to me that it was proposed to form an Active Service Unit in Dublin to combat the activities of British military and Black and Tans within the city and county of Dublin. He said that this would be a whole-time job and that I would have to leave my place of employment. I replied that, if Jimmy McGuinness, who was a personal friend of mine and whom I had been on many engagements with, volunteered for this Unit, I would immediately agree to joining it. I also asked him if Paddy O'Connor had been asked. He said no, but that he would try to locate him. He then told me that he had

recommended the three of us to General Headquarters and that his recommendation had been approved. I think it was about a day or two later Christy Byrne again came to me and instructed me to report the following day to St. Laurence O'Toole's Hall on the North Strand. I carried out his instruction and, on entering the hall, I saw a big number of men there, some of whom I knew. Two prominent men in the Volunteers occupied seats at the head of the hall. They were Oscar Traynor and Tom Ennis. Oscar Traynor was at that time Brigadier of the Dublin Brigade and Tom Ennis was Commandant of the 2nd Battalion. Oscar Traynor addressed all men present. He stated that the job we had undertaken was a very difficult one and that at the present moment any man who thought he would not be able for the task was to step out of the ranks and report back to his Company, adding that anyone who did this would not be thought anything the worse of and that it would be safer for him to do this than have something happen afterwards. He also said that the task was so difficult that it would entail whole-time service but that, if we survived when we had achieved our object, he guaranteed we would never be let down. He introduced to us our O/C, the late Paddy Flanagan. The Company was formed under Paddy Flanagan who addressed us. It was formed into four sections, Numbers 1 and 2 for the north side of the city, under Frank Flood who was a Lieutenant; Numbers 3 and 4 covered the south city and county under Padraig O'Connor. I was allocated to Number 4 Section, which covered Thomas Street, Inchicore and Dolphin's Barn areas, under the late Michael Sweeney who was Sergeant of the Section at that period. The late Gus Murphy was first Section Leader of No. 4 Section.

Our first meeting was in a hall in Camden Street.

That morning the places where we would meet in future were

decided on. For security reasons, we arranged not to stick to any particular place and, for this reason, we had a number of meeting places. Some of these, I remember, were Mrs. Harpur's at John Dillon Street, Michael Coyle's (a butcher's shop) in Meath Street, James Nolan's (a newsagent's shop) in Cork Street and an old brickworks in Kimmage. We had a dump in Mrs. Coyle's shop in Meath Street where we used to dump our revolvers. We also used to have our dump in Jimmy O'Neill's shop in Francis Street, better known as "The Sweep's". We used to meet there occasionally and we'd break up into small parties. When these meeting places were decided on, the Section arranged beforehand where it would hold its next meeting. It might meet in Francis Street one day and Cork Street another day. The Section Commander decided where the next meeting would take place. On each day a member of the Section would report to A.S.U. headquarters for orders or instructions. The A.S.U. at that time had its headquarters in a tailor's shop known as 'Jimmy Browne's' of Exchequer Street. One of the Browne family was a member of the A.S.U. Initially, that was the headquarters of the A.S.U. Later on it had its headquarters at the Engineers' Hall, Upper Gardiner Street. The strength of the A.S.U., as far as I remember, was fifty or fifty-three all ranks, and each section consisted of about twelve men. Our armaments consisted of a Webley revolver and about four or five rounds of ammunition. This would vary as the occasion demanded. If we were going on a particular job, such as, attacking or ambushing a military lorry, we were usually issued with a hand grenade.

The section dumps were located in Francis Street, Meath Street and also in Strand Street, in White's stores. The two White brothers were with us. We had another on the Crumlin road, better known as 'Kavanagh's Hills'. This was an outdoor dump which consisted of an oil drum, which was buried underground in a bank-way, and it was well concealed.

Laundry Van Held Up By A.S.U. And Contents Destroyed:

Padraig O'Connor received information that a laundry van would be proceeding on a certain day from the Metropolitan Laundry, Inchicore, to the Curragh and that it would contain the laundry of the Auxiliaries who were stationed on the Curragh. No. 4 Section of the A.S.U. was instructed to intercept this van and confiscate or destroy its contents. Padraig O'Connor and myself, at about 11 a.m., held up this van at Lansdowne Valley, Inchicore. We compelled the driver to drive into the Valley gate. We commandeered a horse and cart and loaded the contents of the van on to it, gave the driver a receipt and warned him to keep quiet about the matter. We proceeded to Kavanagh's Hills, about a quarter of a mile away, and dumped the stuff into a big field there. We decided that the clothing, which consisted of a number of blankets, etc., was too good to be destroyed, so we decided to give it to poor people in the area whom we knew were sympathetic. Other material we destroyed.

Despatch Rider from Baldonnell Held Up By A.S.U.:

In or about the same time four of us held up a despatch rider travelling from Baldonnell to Dublin and relieved him of his motor bike and despatches. On the following morning the papers published the hold-up but greatly exaggerated the number taking part. I think it was stated that the despatch rider was held up by a hundred men.

Kilmainham Military Guard Attacked By A.S.U.:

In or about the time that the previous incidents took place, it was usual for the British stationed at Richmond Barracks, Inchicore, to supply a guard to the Royal Hospital, namely, the Old Men's Home, Kilmainham. This guard was relieved daily and, as it marched, it was usually led by a regimental band. Knowing this, we decided to ambush it, so on a certain morning the complete section took up a position on the back road at Inchicore, facing the Barrack gate, across the Camac river. We waited until the guard marched from the Barracks and, as it was coming on to the archway, we opened fire and, as the guard were completely taken by surprise, they seemed to run amok and rushed in all directions. I cannot say what the actual casualties were but I believe that an officer was shot and wounded, and several Privates were also wounded. We retreated to the Great Southern Railway line and jumped on to the footplate of a guard's van, which was going in the direction of Inchicore Works. We alighted at Ballyfermot Bridge and got safely away.

Viceregal Despatch Rider Killed By A.S.U.:

It was usual for a despatch rider to take despatches on his motor bicycle from the Viceregal Lodge to Dublin Castle, so it was decided to hold him up and relieve him of his despatches. About 2.30 or 3 p.m. on a certain day, three of us took up a position near Rialto Bridge and, as the despatch rider came along, we shouted at him to halt. This he refused to do and we had no option but to fire on him. He was killed outright; the bicycle was confiscated and likewise the despatches and revolver. The despatches were later sent to headquarters. Michael Sweeney, the Section Commander, rode away on the bicycle and we went our separate ways. A bullet, fired from one of our guns, ricocheted off the wall and struck me in the left hand.

We later heard that the despatch rider who was killed that morning was the man who identified the late Frank Moran on Bloody Sunday.

Black And Tans Shot By A.S.U., Vicinity Of James  
Street Harbour:

One day I was in Jim Nolan's newsagent shop in Cork Street. A friend of mine by the name of Jimmy Butler, a member of "C" Company, 4th Battalion, rushed into the shop and said that there was a Black and Tan gone into Halpin's shop nearby. He said this Tan was related to the Halpin's, and that in all probability he would be there for some time. I told him that I had no gun and asked him if he could get one or, if not, would he keep Halpin's shop under observation until I returned with my arms. I went to Meath Street, got my revolver in Jim Coyle's butcher's shop, and proceeded back to Jim Nolan's shop where I met Paddy Rigney and Ollie O'Toole - two members of my section. They already knew of the Black and Tan being in Halpin's. In a short time, the Tan came out of the shop and the three of us trailed him up Cork Street towards Dolphin's Barn through a by-way, known as Emerald Square, which leads on to a pathway at the back of a place known as the Pipes. This was towards James Street Harbour. At the end of this pathway is a very narrow passage known as The Gut. I passed the Tan on a bicycle coming to this narrow passage. I dismounted and stood in a doorway on the left, facing the canal. My two comrades, Rigney and O'Toole, followed on behind him. When they appeared at the end of The Gut, Rigney fired on the Tan but his gun jumped. I shouted, "Don't fire!", as I was in line of fire. I followed him up and he turned round, drawing his gun. I fired and hit him in the stomach. He sank to his knees, with his revolver in his hand. I disarmed him and fired a few more shots with his own revolver, and he died instantly. As I

was about to leave the scene of the shooting, an employee of Guinness's came along who recognised me. I knew him and his name was Doran. He passed no remarks. We then proceeded to Meath Street where we dumped our arms in Coyle's shop. Paddy Rigney reported to Headquarters the next morning on the happenings of the day. Two men were sent out to Doran's house at Clondalkin where they warned him that he was not to speak of the shooting he had witnessed.

Attack On Major Winters' Car By A.S.U.:

We received information one morning that a touring car would be coming from Dublin Castle via Thomas Street to the Viceregal lodge and that some important person would be travelling in it. We got instructions that we were to attack this car. The section took up positions between Francis Street and Meath Street, and George Nolan and myself took up positions in Wright's butcher's stall. Other members of the section were spread out below and above our position. We were not long in position when a member of the section fired a shot. We knew then that the car we were awaiting was approaching our position. When the car approached the butcher's shop where we were standing, we rushed out and opened fire on it with revolvers. The car zig-zagged then, and the man who was sitting in the back fell forward. The occupant of the car, we learned later, was a Major Winters who, I believe, was a member of the Auxiliaries in Dublin Castle.

Belfast Boycott:

While the Belfast boycott was in progress, No. 4 Section were directed to raid the premises of the Belfast Printing Works in Bridge Street and to confiscate all typewriters found on the premises. We carried out the raid and must have taken about twelve typewriters away with us

in a handcart. We handed them over to Jackie Dunne who was then in charge of the Dublin Brigade dump.

British Patrol Attacked By A.S.U. at Rialto Bridge:

Early in March, 1921, the section staged an ambush on a British foot patrol of about twenty-five men who were patrolling the area from Inchicore via Rialto Bridge to Wellington Barracks, South Circular Road. We took up a position in a field near Rialto Bridge, which was the property of Alderman Flanagan. We lay behind a stone wall and waited until the patrol came into view and within revolver range. Jimmy McGuinness was in charge and he ordered us to open fire on them, which we did. Evidently the party were taken completely by surprise as they seemed to run amok and did not return the fire. I cannot say if we caused any casualties amongst them.

British Patrol Attacked By A.S.U. at Dolphin's Barn:

Shortly after this attack our section again staged an ambush on a second patrol. This time the patrol was passing down the South Circular Road near Dolphin's Barn Chapel and the White Heather Laundry. We took up positions across the canal, with the canal between us and the passing patrol. We waited until the patrol passed by an open space between houses and then opened fire. The British returned the fire, not very effectively. We suffered no casualties but I believe the British did.

British Patrol Attacked By A.S.U. At Sally's Bridge,  
South Circular Road:

Another patrol was ambushed at Sally's Bridge near the Boxing Stadium, South Circular Road. The British patrol were coming from the South Circular Road across Sally's Bridge, entering the canal. We took up a position in a field opposite where there was a high wall and a haystack. When the patrol reached the top of the bridge and were about to descend the slope, we got orders from our

section commander to open fire. We opened up with our Webley revolvers. The patrol immediately dropped down and took cover but I cannot say if they returned our fire. Anyway the engagement did not last long and we retired. I cannot say if any casualties were caused to the patrol but our section did not suffer any.

Military Lorry Captured At Harold's Cross By A.S.U.:

At about 2 p.m. one day, the section commander, observing a heavy car with two soldiers in it, pulled up at a licensed premises near the canal at Harold's Cross Bridge. He instructed two of us to accompany him to hold up the soldiers and take the car from them. We went along and, without any trouble, held up the soldiers in question and compelled them to drive the car to the dark lanes, Crumlin. We gave the soldiers a receipt for the car and, in their presence, burned it on the spot.

Half-way House Ambush By A.S.U.:

In the early summer of 1921 it was usual for the British at Baldonnel to provide transport for civilian employees at the aerodrome to take them to and from their homes in the city each day. For this purpose, two touring cars were provided. The section decided to intercept this convoy and take over and destroy the mechanical transport, so, without any difficulty, on an evening in May we held up the ~~three~~ cars at Halfwayhouse, compelled the civilians to alight and made the drivers drive us with their cars to Glencree, where we left them in a spot where they could be collected by the Wicklow Volunteers. As a result of the capture of these cars, the British decided to provide an armed escort in future. For some time during the month of May we closely observed the movements of this British escort from Baldonnel. We knew the civilians employed would be conveyed each evening in a Leyland lorry which contained an

armed escort. We also learned that, when these civilian employees reached their destination in the city, the lorry with its armed escort would return to Baldonnel. This information was passed on to the officer in charge of the Active Service Unit. As a result, he ordered Nos. 3 and 4 sections to stage an ambush for this lorry in the vicinity of Halfwayhouse, with Michael Sweeney in charge. On the evening on which it was arranged to have the attack, two sections took up positions on both sides of the road at the Halfwayhouse on the Crumlin road. Our plan of attack was that two men would take up a position behind a wall on the Lansdowne valley side. Other members of the section would be on the right-hand side of the road as one proceeded to Baldonnel from the city. Two other men, Michael Sweeney and Jimmy McGuinness, armed with grenades, would stand at the entrance to a public lavatory. Three of us took up a position on a bank on the same side and covered off McGuinness and Sweeney. The instructions were that the grenades were to be thrown first and that the remainder of the section would then open fire simultaneously. The two men who were on the bend of the road at Lansdowne valley were to fire and knock out the driver. Having taken up our positions, the lorry came into view and, as it came abreast of the lavatory, Jimmy McGuinness and Sweeney both fired two grenades at it. Jimmy McGuinness's grenade exploded in the centre of the lorry, but Sweeney's grenade, which was a large home-made No. 9, hit the top of the lorry and fell back on to the road, exploding. Jimmy McGuinness was very quick to see what was happening. He grabbed Sweeney almost instantly and threw him back into the lavatory, with the result that Sweeney was wounded in the abdomen. Were it not for McGuinness's quick action, Sweeney would have been blown to bits. While this was happening, the remainder of the sections opened fire simultaneously on the lorry. The British party were evidently taken by surprise and, when

they came under fire, the driver was wounded in the arm and the lorry slowed down and zigzagged for about a mile up the road, where it was brought to a standstill. At the time, we did not know the result of our ambush but we were told later that the casualties on the part of the British were very heavy - the figure given was thirty-two killed and wounded. The following night the Halfwayhouse was burned down by the British military. Before we retired from the scene of the ambush, Jim McGuinness and myself went into a publichouse to look for Sweeney. The publican assured us that he had not gone in there, so we trekked up the road and noticed some blood on it. Eventually we came to a field where we saw Sweeney lying wounded. This happened at the end of Walkinstown House, better known as the Bird Flanagan's. A motor car was standing by there, and we took Sweeney across the road to it. This was a doctor's car and we asked the driver if he would drive the wounded man to the city. He refused to do so, stating there was a doctor in the house. At that particular time a number of workmen were proceeding to their homes on bicycles from Inchicore Works, so we took a few bicycles from them and got the wounded man into Harold's Cross by means of the bicycles. He was later sent to the Mater Hospital. Jimmy McGuinness and myself, being locals, were identified by some local lads. They were, however, warned off not to say anything that would implicate us in the matter if questioned.

Transport Destroyed By A.S.U. At Kimmage Quarries:

Information reached the section hurriedly one day that two British lorries would be conveying stones from Dolphin's Barn Brickworks to a bombing range at the back of Richmond Barracks. The whole section was detailed to seize these lorries and destroy them, so we proceeded to the Brickworks and held up the drivers. One lorry was burned on the spot and the second one was taken to Kimmage Quarries and dumped

there with its load. The purpose of bringing this lorry to the quarry was a ruse to get the British to come out and look for it and so provide us with an opportunity of ambushing them. It did not materialise. The lorry eventually buried itself in the mud and became useless.

A.S.U. Ambush Auxiliary Officers At Dolphin's Barn:

Word reached the section from a Volunteer of "C" Company of the 4th Battalion, named Pender, that his Company had been out many a night waiting for a Ford touring car that travelled from the Viceregal Lodge to Dublin Castle conveying four Auxiliary officers. He said that they were fed up watching for it without intercepting it. He added that we might be able to do something about it but not to say he had given us the information. At the same time, he gave us a full and accurate description of the car. Two or three members of the Section stationed themselves at Dolphin's Barn Chapel. They were to open fire first when the car would approach them. Another member of the Section and myself stood at the corner of Scully's shop, opposite the White Heather Laundry, at a distance of about six hundred yards from the men at the Chapel. The Section Commander, Jimmy McGuinness, was standing on the opposite side of the road. After about a quarter of an hour's delay, the car came in sight of the men at the Chapel. They opened fire on it. Evidently their fire was not very effective, as the car still kept coming towards us. The occupants must have seen Jimmy McGuinness standing on the roadway, as they turned sideways and opened fire on him. Immediately I saw this, I threw my grenade into the centre of the car and it exploded. At the same time my comrade fired his hand-grenade under the car and it too exploded. The result was that the four occupants became fatal casualties and the car came to a standstill at a lamp post. Oscar Traynor, the Brigadier at the time, sent me a note of congratulation on the day's activities.

A.S.U. Attack Lorry Of Black And Tans, Camden Street:

Coming towards the end of March, 1921, instructions reached the Section that it was to be on the look-out for a lorry party of Black and Tans or Auxiliaries coming into the centre of the city via Camden Street.

At about 3 p.m. on a certain date, the complete Section took up positions in Camden Street and Montague Street to ambush and intercept this lorry. The Section was spread out on both sides of the road, more or less in two's, at the corners of side streets. The first pair were positioned at a furniture shop at the junction of Charlotte Street and Camden Street. Other pairs were at various street corners down to the lane leading to the Meath Hospital. When the lorry came abreast of the first pair at the junction of Charlotte Street, they opened fire on it. As it passed down Camden Street, fire was returned, while each pair of Section men fired at it. I cannot say if there were any casualties amongst the British. One of our men was wounded in the wrist.

Burning of the Custom House:

The men of Nos. 3 and 4 Sections were instructed to meet at Stephenson's Stores in Strand Street at about 10 a.m. on the 25th May, 1921. When we had reported, Paddy Flanagan, the O/C, addressed us and told us that the Custom House was going to be burned at one o'clock on that day, that this was to be a big operation and that the 2nd Battalion under Tom Ennis would enter the building and destroy it by fire. He said that the A.S.U. would act as a covering party on the outside, in conjunction with the Squad, and that Nos. 3 and 4 Sections were to take up a position on the north side of Butt Bridge. We were further instructed that we were not to fire on any British lorries unless they fired on us first. We were given a revolver, four or five

rounds of ammunition and one hand-grenade each. As we were about to leave our mobilisation place at Strand Street, Michael Collins came to the doorway on a bicycle and wished us luck. We left there in pairs at intervals and proceeded down Strand Street, Liffey Street, across the Halfpenny Bridge, along the Quays to Tara Street, across Butt Bridge and opposite Liberty Hall. We were all in position at 1 p.m. We were dressed in working clothes with dungarees.

At about ten minutes past one, we saw the fire starting in the Custom House. The blaze at that time could be seen through the windows on the different floors. At about this time also, an armoured car crossed O'Connell Bridge and swung on towards the Custom House, proceeding to the back entrance opposite Brooks Thomas's yard. It was followed by three or four armoured Lancia cars with cages on the top. This party, which consisted of Black and Tans, opened machine-gun fire on the Custom House windows as they came abreast of Liberty Hall. While this was happening, another party of Black and Tans, who were stationed in the London North Western Hotel on the Quays, came towards the Custom House at the double. When they came within our range, we opened fire on them and they immediately took cover behind Guinness barrels which were on the quayside. I threw my hand-grenade at a lorry in the vicinity of Liberty Hall. The Tans behind the cover of the Guinness barrels opened fire on us but we had fairly good cover behind the parapet of the bridge. Other lorries arrived almost immediately. When our ammunition was used up, we withdrew across into Tara Street. The Custom House was well alight by that time, which would be about 1.30 p.m. Three of us commandeered a horse-drawn sidecar and drove it towards Westland Row, where we left it at the station there.

A.S.U. Re-Organised:

A few days following the burning of the Custom House, all Sections of the Active Service Unit were mobilised for a meeting at the Plaza Hotel, Upper Gardiner Street. Present at this meeting also were members of the Squad and G.H.Q. Intelligence. Paddy Daly addressed all present and stated that he had now been appointed to command the A.S.U. He said that, owing to the very much reduced strength of the A.S.U. on account of arrests and other casualties, it was now proposed to re-organise it and that, from that day on, the Squad, the A.S.U. and Intelligence would merge and form one unit under his control. The new organisation would follow on the lines of the old one, that is to say, it would still consist of four Sections but the company would be divided into two halves, one half to operate in the north side of the city and the other half to operate in the south side of the city. Joe Leonard would take charge of the northern half, consisting of Nos. 1 and 2 Sections. Paddy O'Connor would command the second half-Company operating on the south side, consisting of Nos. 3 and 4 Sections. I cannot say who the Section Commanders of Nos. 1 and 2 Sections were, but I do know that "Onion" Quinn was to be in charge of No. 3 Section and Jimmy McGuinness was to be in charge of No. 4 Section. To bring the unit up to strength, new replacements were found from four Battalions of the Dublin Brigade. As far as I can recollect, the strength of the Company, including G.H.Q. Intelligence, approximated a hundred.

Plans For Attack On A Troop Train At Killester:

One of the first operations of the re-organised Active Service Unit was an attack on a troop train at Killester. This attack, however, did not come off, due to some mistake made on the part of a member of the A.S.U. who

fired prematurely at the wrong train thereby jeopardising any success on the part of the Unit. When plans were ready the A.S.U. were ordered to assemble at the Plaza Hotel early in the month of June, 1921, for instructions. Paddy Daly addressed all present and told us that on the following morning it was proposed to ambush a troop train at Killester Bridge, which would be coming from Belfast. He thereupon outlined the positions the men were to take up on both sides of the embankment. He said that the attack would start when he would give a signal - I cannot remember what form the signal was to take, whether it was to be the blast of a whistle, the firing of a shot or the waving of a handkerchief - that, when this signal was given, all men were to fire at the train with revolvers and grenades and that a land mine would be placed under the train at the particular spot where it would be ambushed by members of the Engineers that night. He then said that, in addition to the train being fired on, it was also proposed to burn it and he called for volunteers to take a supply of petrol to a railway bridge at Kilbarrack. I volunteered for this work. Somebody mentioned at this stage that Dan Holland would drive his own pony and car with a further supply of petrol.

On the morning following that meeting, I got my pony and car and, accompanied by my young brother, we collected twelve gallon tins of petrol at some place in Strand Street. We arrived at Killester on time, which was ten o'clock. I waited there for a short time for instructions to take the petrol down the railway line. After a short interval, I heard an explosion like a hand grenade going off. I thought the attack was on but almost immediately some men rushed down and told me to get away as quickly as I could with my petrol. I drove my pony and car on to the Howth road, to North Strand and into Abbey Street, where I dumped the petrol in Hanlon's Lime-yard.

I reported the following morning to the Plaza Hotel where an inquiry was going on between members of G.H.Q. Staff and the O/C, Paddy Daly, regarding the failure on the part of the A.S.U. to carry out the ambush satisfactorily. Two members of No. 4 Section were called before this inquiry, as it was suspected that one of them had thrown the hand grenade at the wrong train without orders. One of the men concerned produced his hand grenade, and this cleared him of any suspicion that he was responsible for prematurely firing it. He told me that he was asked why he did not fire and that he said, as he saw children on the train, he knew that some mistake had been made. The second individual that was called before the inquiry was, I was told, not able to produce his hand grenade, and this left the Court in no doubt as to his identity.

Two Auxiliaries Shot in Grafton Street:

On the 24th June, 1921, the entire Company, including G.H.Q. Intelligence, were assembled again at its headquarters, the Plaza Hotel, and Paddy Daly again addressed us. He said that at six o'clock that evening Kidd's Restaurant at the corner of Grafton Street was to be raided, all Auxiliary and Black and Tan officers found on the premises were to be shot and the place was to be bombed. I cannot recollect what jobs were given to other sections of the A.S.U. All I can say is that four of us were selected by a member of G.H.Q. Staff, Ned Kelleher, to meet him at a particular corner of Grafton Street - I think it was the turn above Wicklow Street - at 6 p.m. sharp. Before leaving the Plaza, he said, "When you hear a single shot being fired, you rush into Kidd's and carry out the instructions as given". We met him at the appointed time. The four of us loitered there for some time and no shot was fired. Kelleher came along. He stated that the job was off but that two Auxiliaries had gone up on the opposite side of Grafton

Street and would probably come down on our side shortly. They came down after about five minutes. He followed them and said to us, "There are your men!". The four of us fired at the two Auxiliaries. One man fell on top of the other on the footpath. We fired again at them and got away. The two Auxiliaries shot were, as far as I can recollect, Appleby and Wearing. One was a Sergeant.

Military Laundry Destroyed At Inchicore:

Information reached us that a substantial supply of laundry for British troops in the Curragh was being despatched on a certain day from the Metropolitan Laundry at Inchicore to the Curragh Camp. The Section was instructed to raid the premises and destroy the laundry for the British military. Four of us entered the laundry and were waiting there for other members of the Section to arrive with a van which they would commandeer from White's of the Coombe. This van was to be driven by a man named Kelly. We were to load the laundry on to this van and take it out to the country to destroy it. After some time the van arrived and, simultaneously with its arrival, we were surprised to see a number of British military who had hurriedly come from Kilmainham Prison. I heard the British military shout to our men in the van, "Hands Up!". I jumped into a pony and trap, the property of the laundry, that was in the yard and drove out with one comrade, the remaining two that were with me having escaped across the river. The six men who were captured in the van were taken to Mountjoy Prison and were subsequently sentenced. We heard that the manager of the laundry had given us away and that he had 'phoned Kilmainham for the British military. This annoyed us very much, and we went out to Robinhood Golf Links, Clondalkin, that evening where we thought we might find him playing golf, with the object of shooting him. However, he was not there.

On the following Sunday, instructions were sent to us that the manager was not to be interfered with, that he did not purposely give us away and that he merely 'phoned the British as he thought we were ordinary robbers going to loot the place.

Raid On Army And Navy Stores:

The Junior Army and Navy Stores which supplied the British army with general provisions and tobacco was situated in Cork Hill off Lord Edward Street. Four or five men of the section with myself raided this place one afternoon. At a particular time a motor van was being loaded with hams, tobacco and cigarettes and various sundries. We compelled the driver to take the van to Crumlin where the provisions were emptied in a shed, the property of Mr. Stanaway Mooney. As the driver was a civilian, he was warned not to disclose our identity and he was allowed to proceed on his way. The cigarettes were removed from their packets and put into fresh containers. The ham was divided up between prisoners' dependants and prisoners themselves in Mountjoy and Kilmainham gaols.

A further raid for provisions was carried out in the Cold and Ice Storage at Mill Street. Knowing that beef was being stored there, I accompanied a number of men from "C" Company to the premises, held up the watchman and gained admittance on a Saturday afternoon. We commandeered two horse-drawn lorries from Richardson's men (Guinnesses' carriers). We drove the horses to the stores at Mill Street and loaded them with supplies of frozen beef. We took the loaded carts, containing roughly five tons of beef, to Stanaway Mooney's, Crumlin. We dumped our cargos in the shed there and later divided this meat up amongst the prisoners' dependants. The deliveries were made by a young

brother of mine. The horses and carts were returned safely to Richardson's of Dolphin's Barn.

Following these raids we captured an ambulance near the Halfway House at the crossroads of Crumlin and later commandeered a motor bicycle from outside the Kildare Street Club. We took the ambulance to Glencree and left it in a dump there, and we brought the motor bicycle to the Greenhills where we concealed it.

Escape of Prisoners From Kilmainham Gaol:

Frank Teeling, Simon Donnelly and Ernie O'Malley escaped from Kilmainham Gaol on the 14th February, 1921. A few nights before the escape Jimmy Donnelly, O/C, "F" Company, 4th Battalion, contacted me and asked me would I come to Kilmainham Gaol gate on the following Sunday night, as a number of men in the Company had been detailed to help in the escape of a number of prisoners. On the night in question about ten or twelve men from "F" Company with myself met at a point at the back entrance to the prison. I don't know what arrangements were made internally for the escape of the prisoners. All I recollect is that a rope ladder with a long rope attached was thrown over the prison wall. When the ladder was thrown over the wall, the guide rope inside must have broken as the ladder, as a means of escape, became ineffective. I believe a note was sent out the main gate from the prisoners inside to give up the attempt for that night. At this time three British soldiers and their three lady friends, who were in the vicinity at the time, must have noticed what had happened - at least, we thought they had seen the preparations - so we took them prisoners and conveyed them to huts in the place where the British Memorial Park is now. On the following morning at about ten o'clock members of the A.S.U. had the prisoners conveyed in two taxis to the Fox-And-Geese, Clondalkin, to

a Mrs. Ronan's house, then known as the "French Gardens". The ladies were kept in separate departments and were attended to by my mother. Members of our guard looked after the soldiers. We warned them that, if they gave away any information about us later on in connection with the release of the prisoners, we would take drastic action on their relatives as we had already procured their home addresses from them. Following the escape of the prisoners, a couple of nights later the soldiers and lady prisoners were released. As a matter of fact, these soldier prisoners never gave us away. Paddy O'Connor and myself were held up one night by a British military patrol near Rialto Bridge and one of the hold-up party was one of the young soldiers whom we had held as prisoners at Clondalkin. He searched us and, although Paddy O'Connor was armed, he reported to his officer that he could find nothing on us.

Attack on Troop Train At Ballyfermot:

On the 8th July - two days before the Truce - Nos. 3 and 4 Sections of the A.S.U. took part in its last engagement, an attack on a troop train at Ballyfermot. On the evening before this operation, we were assembled at the Plaza Hotel. Paddy Daly outlined the plan for the destruction of the train. Nos. 3 and 4 Sections were to proceed to Ballyfermot railway bridge at one o'clock on the following day, armed with bombs, revolvers and one Thompson gun, and take up a position there to await the arrival of the train. One man was to act as scout and would signal to the Sections that the train was coming along, provided that it contained troops. Part of the railway line coming to the bridge was to be greased to slow down the train. The Thompson gun was to be mounted on the parapet of the bridge, and a sack, steeped in paraffin oil and petrol, was to be thrown on top of the second carriage as the train passed under the bridge. I was instructed to light the sack and

throw it on to the second carriage. Another man was to take up a position on the other side of the bridge and empty a drum of petrol on to the carriages. Simultaneously with this happening, the men on the left-hand side of the embankment were to throw grenades on the train, and the one man on the right-hand side on top of the bridge, Jimmy McGuinness, was to open fire with his Thompson gun.

On the morning in question, we took up our positions as instructed. A young brother of mine brought along the petrol. After about twenty minutes in position, the train arrived and the signal was given that it contained troops. Fire was opened on it immediately. As the train passed under the bridge, the petrol from the drum was poured down and the soaked petrol sack was thrown on to the top of it. When the train passed under the bridge, it slowed down. The tops of the carriages were well alight as a result of the saturated lighted petrol sack that I had thrown on it. It pulled up at Clondalkin Station where I believe the wounded were removed. I believe the casualties were fairly heavy.

SIGNED:

Joseph M. Guinness  
(Joseph McGuinness).

DATE:

November 7<sup>th</sup> - 1951

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 607

WITNESS:

William Ivory Comdt.  
(William Ivory, Comdt.)