

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 429

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 429

Witness

Thomas Flynn,
152 Springfield Road,
Belfast.

Identity.

Company O/C.; Member of Battalion A.S.U.;
Member of Brigade A.S.U.; Battalion O/C.

Subject.

- (a) National activities 1917-1922;
- (b) Burning of Income Tax Offices, Belfast;
- (c) Belfast Pogrom, 1920 - .

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.1550

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS FLYNN

159 Springfield Road, Belfast.

I joined the Volunteers late in 1917. The comp. that I joined later became "D" Company, 1st Battalion, Belfast Brigade. When I joined, the Comp O.C. was Liam Gaynor. Later Joe McGee became Company O.C. I became Company O.C. in early 1921.

In the years 1917, 1918 and 1919, Volunteer activities were generally training in the use of arms, lectures and manoeuvres in the country.

The first activity of an active military nature was the burning of the Income Tax offices, Queen's Square, Belfast. We had Volunteers working in this office, and after office hours, through these Volunteers, we were able to gain admission. We overpowered the caretaker. We administered chloroform to this unfortunate man and tied him up. It was most fortunate that he was not suffocated or burned. All the papers and documents in the office were collected in trays and burned in the building.

The most important activity I was engaged in was the Fogrom, which commenced about the 16th July, 1920, and caused a situation that prevented both Nationalists and Unionists from taking part in their usual working-day activities. The Nationalists were attacked at their work in the shipbuilding yards in Queen's Island. Men were thrown into the docks. Such institutions as the Great Northern Railways' workshops and engineering works, foundries, rope works and bakeries where Nationalists were employed were also affected. In the spinning mills in both

Nationalist and Orange areas the Nationalists were put out of the mills. This wholesale system of victimization was tolerated and encouraged by the Royal Irish Constabulary authorities. The Ulster Volunteers made attempts to invade Nationalist areas in order to carry out a campaign of disruption of the city transport services, and the burning of Catholic people's houses. These efforts on Nationalist areas were made by young men using firearms. It became an essential part of I.R.A. policy in the city of Belfast to attack these armed Ulster Volunteers when engaged on raids into Nationalist areas.

I can remember when the situation in my district became critical and the need for direct action against armed mobs became urgent, I decided to use the men under my control in resisting with arms the attacks made on our district. I sent word to Roger McCorley that I was taking armed action. On receipt of this message, Roger came along to approve of such action. He found that we had gone into action, and he remained with us and took a personal part in the fighting. I was wounded in the eye on the 16th or 17th July, 1920.

From this time onwards it became necessary in our Company area to have a column of sixteen men under a Company Officer (I was in charge) to be on armed duty night and day. We found that this unit could afford fairly good protection to the Nationalist portions of our Company area. The type of attack made by Ulster Volunteers on Nationalist districts was to invade a neighbouring Nationalist area, burn houses and shoot up the inhabitants. Our job was to prevent all Orange penetrations, and to make it extremely costly to those who attempted such invasions. This type of activity, skirmishing for advantage, attack and counter attack, was a daily and nightly occurrence in some of the city areas. The ordinary Nationalist civilian did not take an active

part in these attacks. These people, however, made their houses available to the I.R.A. and helped us in every way possible. They fed us and made every possible provision for our comfort. The I.R.A. did their own scouting in each Company area; about twenty I.R.A. men were daily detailed for unarmed scout work. These men used electric torches, which would show light in three different colours to enable them, whilst under cover and acting as civilians, to inform us of the approach of the enemy raiding parties. A code was arranged for use of the coloured lights to give us particular information as to the enemy personnel and their methods of approach. For instance, the lights could tell us if the enemy forces were military, R.I.C., or men recognised as the Murder Gang, how they were travelling, etc.

When curfew was imposed in Belfast about the end of July, 1920, the Murder Gang started to operate. The men who formed this gang soon became known, and their usual system of working was as follows. When curfew was imposed, no Nationalists were allowed on the streets after curfew hour, and as the military and police had control, it was an easy matter for the Murder Gang, which in all cases was composed of R.I.C. or, later, Specials in uniform, to move about and select their victims. The after curfew activities by R.I.C. and others, included raiding for and arresting active I.R.A. men and known Republicans.

The first shootings carried out by the Murder Gang were Ned Trodden, John Gaynor and the Duffin brothers. When these shootings took place we realised that these tactics, if continued unpunished, would smash the morale of our men, and we took the following steps to put an end to it. We selected eight picked men from each Company in the Battalion - 32 men in all - to operate a day column of 16 men and a

night column of 16 men. These men were assisted by about 24 pickets, who were provided with electric torches to give warning of the approach of the enemy into a district. I took charge of this A.S.U.

Our first engagement with a raiding or murder gang was in Balaclava Street against a mixed force of military and police, who came into the area in motor tenders and dismounted for the apparent purpose of raiding and shooting up the area. We ambushed them about 4 a.m. after they had dismounted from their tenders. The engagement lasted about twenty minutes. There were four fatal casualties on the enemy side. The I.R.A. suffered no casualties.

In planning attacks on Crown Forces, we always had to provide for the swift and safe dumping of our arms, as soon as possible after the firing stopped, and getting away from the vicinity of the operation as soon as possible. In a city like Belfast, with generally about 70% of the population actively against us, our success in an operation depended on hard hitting and a quick getaway.

J. F. As an illustration, in an operation in Springfield Road, it took three weeks careful checking and amending of plans before we had the plans right. This particular tender, ^{which was planned to attack} came only on a Wednesday, as an escort on the pay of Special Constabulary who were engaged working at the extending of the City Cemetery. The car generally travelled at about sixty miles per hour, and the speed of the car necessitated our being only about six yards distant when we opened fire, to ensure hitting the target. The question of a retreat in this hostile area made the carrying out of the operation one for a particular spot, as, if it was carried out at any other place, our chances of getting away would be poor. At

4 p.m. the tender would be on Springfield Road, and the attack had to be exactly to time in the exact position, where we could make a successful and secret getaway to the house where it was arranged to dump our arms.

In another operation, a tender with 15 Special Constabulary came into Springfield Road area and were attacked on Springfield Road. In this operation the attack had to be made on the moving tender. There were twelve men armed with hand grenades posted about fifty yards from the rifle men. The grenade men came first into contact with the men in the tender, and used their hand grenades. Unfortunately only one grenade exploded and it effected no damage. The tender came along to us, rifle men, and we opened fire at about six yards range, and at about fifty yards past our position the tender ran into a hedge. Some of the men in the tender dismounted and engaged us. As they outnumbered us, we were forced to take to the fields, and we fought a rearguard action in our retreat across country. When portion of the crew of the tender were engaging us, the remainder of the men in the tender, about ten in all, were driven to the hospital to have wounds attended to. In this affair the I.R.A. had no casualties. During the fight in the fields, which lasted about thirty minutes, the enemy suffered a few casualties.

After this engagement we had to "dump" our rifles, as the area to which we were forced to retreat was completely surrounded when we arrived in it, by uniformed and un-uniformed armed men. We could not hope to get through the cordons placed around the area encumbered with our rifles and we were forced to dump them in a house in the surrounded area. In each area where activities were likely to happen, we had a number of friendly houses where arms

could be safely dumped in prepared receptacles, the detection of which in a raid was most unlikely.

In the year 1921 picked men from each Battalion were organised into a Brigade Active Service Unit. This unit is not to be confused with the first unit (Battalion) formed. The Brigade unit was composed of 21 men specially selected for full time service and were paid a weekly salary. This unit's duty was to deal with the murder gang, to carry out reprisals where considered necessary following murders of Republicans. The unit's duty also was to destroy all buildings about to be occupied as barracks or block-houses by the Army or the police force. I was a member of both the Battalion and Brigade Active Service Units.

Among the operations carried out by the A.S.U. were the following: burning of the premises of Adams, Printers, King Street (this firm was doing Government and British Army work), the Clonard picture house and the Tivoli picture house. These buildings were about to be occupied by military. There were also a couple of other large buildings burned. There was an attempt made to burn the Ulster Hall; in this operation the A.S.U. had a narrow escape, as we found ourselves surrounded by about 300 armed and uniformed men, who apparently had got suspicious for some reason. We were able to get away secretly, and we brought away with us all the evidence that we were on the job

The next operation I shall describe is one in which the Battalion A.S.U. took part with other Battalion men. It is known as the Reglan Street ambush. The operation was carried out as a result of information which we received from friendly R.I.C. sources, to the effect that a tender-load of R.I.C., whose reputation was generally bad and who

were regarded by other decent R.I.C. men as a murder gang, were to raid No. 3 and No. 39 Reglan Street - my home and a Divisional Officer's home. We were informed of the night and the hour that the raiding party were to come, and we had time to make ample preparation for the attack. We were waiting in a favourable position for attack when the tender came along with ten men in it. We attacked it and our opening fire killed the driver. This brought the tender to a standstill. The police put up a stiff fight, which lasted for about thirty minutes, until all the police in the tender were killed. We then proceeded to collect their arms, and when engaged in this, about 300 military and police arrived in the area and completely surrounded us on three sides.

This unlooked for complication nearly prevented us carrying out our plans for retreating from the ambush position in a certain direction. By a stroke of good luck, the line of retreat was not covered by the military or police, and we all got away unhurt, with the exception of myself. We had to engage in a rearguard action, which lasted for about 45 minutes. Our line of retreat led us through houses and across backyard walls. We might, for instance, get into a house on a certain street, into and across its backyard, into the backyard of a house at its rear and come out on another street. If our position in the next street became critical we would probably have to cross a number of backyard walls until we came to a more favourable position to cross the street.

I got my injury in this operation in the following manner. I was crossing a high wall with a rifle in my hand and I gripped a water spouting in order to swing off the wall. The spouting came away with me from its fastenings and I fell into a yard and came down on the hand

with which I was holding the rifle. I broke my wrist in two places and suffered excruciating pain.

After this particular operation I could not safely go to a Nationalist Hospital such as the Mater. On the following day about 4 p.m. I went to a Unionist Hospital under an assumed name and gave my age as different from my actual age. I received Hospital treatment there.

In night operations in the city such as the one I have last described, we found it desirable to have all the street lighting near where an attack was planned put out, but to have one lamp alight at the actual site of the operation. This worked out most satisfactorily in the Reglan Street fight, as the tender became immobilised in a position where we could use our hand-grenades from upstairs windows overlooking the tender. I am mentioning this to show how carefully and perhaps meticulously we made our plans.

Another operation I carried out in charge of the Battalion A.S.U. was the shooting of the horses of the Army Remount Depot. This shooting took place when the horses were being conveyed from the Great Northern Railway to various barracks in the city. This operation was most distasteful to our men. They did not relish carrying the war to the dumb animal kingdom.

On the 5th or 6th May, 1921, I mobilised my Company for the job of destroying three military lorries which came one day each week to Hughes and Dickson's Mill, Divis Street, for loads of flour which were taken to Victoria Barracks direct from the mill. With each lorry were three soldiers.

In order to provide against all forecastable danger of

surprise, I mobilised thirty men for this operation. There were seven telephones in the mill, one on each floor. I put an armed man at each telephone. There were four gateways leading from the mill, and I placed a man at each. There were three points in the vicinity of the mill, where police patrols were likely to operate, so I had to place scouts at each point. The remainder of the men had to hold up nine soldiers and destroy the lorries.

This operation was carried out without a hitch. Two of the soldiers with each lorry were armed with rifles. We captured the six rifles.

We got information that there was an Ulster Volunteer arms dump in a house in Agincourt Avenue, Ormeau Road. It was decided that we should raid this house. I got orders to get into the house on the pretence of being a plumber and be accompanied by an attendant - a Fianna boy. The house where the dump was located was one of five houses on a row and was an end house. I had to find out who the landlords of the houses were, and my reason for asking admittance was that the Corporation of Belfast had received a complaint that the landlords would not repair the water-pipes in the houses, and that I was told to inspect the water-pipes in each house and make a report. In making an inspection of the end house we saw the arms in an upstairs room. I immediately left the house and reported to a party waiting about a mile away. I went with them to help in carrying out the raid.

When we duly arrived at the house we found that a number of Ulster Volunteers, with uniformed Specials guarding them, were actually removing the arms and placing them on a waiting lorry at the door of the house. The

tenant in this house must have got suspicious of my visit when I saw the arms in the upper room, and gave the alarm as soon as I went from the house. The whole business must have been acted on very quickly, as we were back at the house in about an hour after I left it. We failed to get the stuff.

About the 9th June, 1921, sixteen men lodged in Crumlin Road prison were awaiting execution of sentence of death. Some of these men were Belfast men captured at the fight at Lappanduff, County Cavan, and were members of the No. 1 Belfast Brigade. It was decided by the 3rd Northern Division that an attempt to rescue all the sentenced men should be made. It was arranged with the men inside the prison that their part of the plans for the rescue was to overpower and tie up all the warders in the prison at approximately 6 p.m., i.e. after the change over to the night staff of warders was effected. Picked men from the Belfast Brigade were to take part in the outside part of the rescue plan. The position in the prison and outside it was not very favourable to the success of the plans. There was a military guard inside the prison under a commissioned officer. This guard had access to the entrance gate of the prison and the gate leading into the prison proper, so that in case of alarm the guard could take control at a point that could prevent all persons from going either in to or out of the prison from or to the public street.

An R.I.C. barracks was situated about 75 yards from the prison gate which presented a most difficult problem in our planning and a great danger. This barracks was covered by a picked party of I.R.A., whose duty was to prevent the police getting on to the street.

Immediately outside the prison gate were placed four men

under the command of Roger McCorley. I was one of those men. Our duty was to watch and protect the rear of the rescue party from the time they entered the prison, and when the rescue party and the rescued men came out from the prison we were to remain for some minutes in position and prevent all other agress from the prison. In case the plan succeeded this would not prove difficult, as the rescuers would have locked all doors and gates leaving and have removed all keys.

The rescue party consisted of: two men dressed in the uniform of British officers, one man dressed in the uniform of an R.I.C. Head Constable, and a man dressed in civilian clothes. This man was acting as a Special Branch man.

The success of the plan demanded that the rescue party should work strictly to time with the men inside; that the rescue party should be in the act of getting admittance at the main gate at the same time as the prisoners inside were dealing with the warders.

The rescue party approached the main prison gate and told the prison warder on duty there that the military officers required interviews with all the condemned prisoners. They requested him to open the outside gate. This he did. The rescue party were now inside the main gate, and still had another gate to get through before reaching the main gate leading into the prison proper. When they arrived at this second gate the warder on duty there was not the man whom it was expected should be on duty. This warder recognised Seán O'Neill, O.C. Belfast Brigade, who was acting the part of an R.I.C. Head Constable. The warder started to shout out an alarm. One of the rescue officers pushed this warder into a prison waiting-room and locked him in. The military

sentry inside the inner gate now became alarmed at what he heard and saw. He did not apparently know what he should do. He got his rifle at the ready, but he did not appear likely to use it against men in military or police officers' uniform.

At this stage the rescue party decided that it was impossible for them to get past the alerted military guard and that the attempt should be abandoned. They had all the prison keys which both warders had had in their possession. The keys were thrown into the prison Governor's office, which had a heavy gate at its entrance and could only be opened with the keys thrown inside. They then left the prison, locking all gates behind them. They were only two minutes altogether in the prison.

Our orders for the duty outside the prison gate were to remain in position at the gate for seven minutes after the rescue party had left the prison. Each man was armed with four hand-grenades each and two Webley revolvers. After the rescue party came out from the prison, we remained for seven minutes, during which there were no developments.

In connection with the attempted rescue, there were a number of motor cars held available in the vicinity of the prison to get all the rescued men away.

The Brigade Staff gave orders to raid for a special type of flash-lamp, which was required in large numbers by us for signalling purposes. There was only one place in the city where this special type of lamp was procurable, and it was situated in Garfield Street in the centre of the city. Our men went into the shop and immediately closed the front door. Then one man got into the window and commenced to re-arrange the articles on display there, whilst the

remainder raided the shop for the flash lamps. The men also had orders to commandeer cameras and binoculars. A large quantity of the lamps, some cameras and some binoculars were commandeered in this shop. The manager of the shop got a receipt for all the articles taken, and he was later paid the full value of them.

In May, 1921, a number of men from the Belfast Brigade volunteered for service as a Flying Column in County Cavan. In preparation for these men going to Cavan, their arms and equipment had to be collected, dispatched and left at an arranged rendezvous, to be collected as soon as the men arrived in Cavan. All their rifles and ammunition were collected and stored in our house and were dispatched from there. The rifles were taken down and wrapped up in travelling rugs to represent golf clubs, and were sent on per passenger train to Cavan. The ammunition was packed in Gladstone bags. My wife made up all those parcels and took all the stuff to the railway station. She made numerous journeys to Cavan with the rifles and ammunition before the men left Belfast. On one occasion she was taking a Gladstone bag of ammunition along to the station, and a Special Constable noticing her difficulty in carrying it insisted on giving her a helping hand. He did not suspect he was helping her to carry ammunition.

On about three occasions my wife had to engage a taxi, drive to Lisburn station, about eight miles from Belfast, and board a train there for Cavan, when it would be considered dangerous to attempt leaving by Belfast station.

The position in Belfast for about seven weeks before the Truce was so critical and the pressure on our Nationalist districts so great that I did not get my clothes off for

most of that time. I was getting no regular sleep and I was reduced to a state of extreme exhaustion.

When the Truce came I was ordered by the Brigade to go to Rathlin Island for a rest. Three other Volunteers and my wife travelled to Rathlin with me. When we arrived on the island we found that salvage operations were in progress two miles off Rathlin on H.M.S. "Drake", which sank there in 1918. We heard that there was a great quantity of explosives and detonators on the salvage vessel, "The Bouncer." The men working on the salvage operations came to the island regularly and at times "The Bouncer" was without any crew or watchman. We decided to make an attempt to capture the explosives on the Bouncer. The Brigade had little explosives at this time, and we knew that a capture of explosives would be most useful to us. We got friendly with the Captain and invited him out to shoot with us. One of my Volunteer comrades was an engineer, and we concentrated our efforts with the Captain to give our man a job on the salvage operations as an engineer. The Captain informed us that there was no vacancy, but a short time afterwards an accident occurred in which the ship's engineer lost his two legs, and our friend, being the only available qualified man, got the job. The new engineer drew up for us a plan of the ship showing exactly where the explosives were stored.

We organised a social evening on the island and invited the Captain and his whole crew to the social as our guests. When we got the crew of the "Bouncer" properly enjoying themselves and getting under the influence of drink, we took their small boat, went out in it and raided the ship and removed all the explosives, which we dispatched early the next morning on a motor boat to Belfast.

During the next day we were knocking about on the island with a .22 rifle firing at targets. A bird was resting on the wireless aerial and we fired at it. The bullet hit the aerial wire and cut it, causing the wireless station to go out of action. The R.I.C. came to the island to investigate the break in wireless communication. When we saw them coming we believed it was to investigate the seizure of the explosives. As it later turned out, we were never suspected for the removing of the explosives.

My wife, who had gone to Belfast with the explosives, returned to the island the next day, and we all remained on the island for another week.

After I returned from my holiday on Rathlin, I, with a number of other officers, sat for an examination held for the 1st Battalion to select men to go on a course of instructions to a training camp at Glenasmole, Co. Wicklow. I was selected along with Jimmie McDermott from the 1st Battalion. There were two men selected from each of the Belfast Battalions, and four each from the County Antrim and County Down Brigades.

We remained fourteen days in Glenasmole, and on our arrival back in Belfast we were sent to a Divisional training camp near Fair Head in County Antrim. I and John Cunningham were appointed instructors. About forty officers per week passed through this camp. Whilst we were in the training camp the Truce definitely broke down in Belfast and we were all recalled from the camp to resume activities in the city.

The activities in Belfast from the Truce period

onwards took on a somewhat different aspect. The opposition now was mostly men in uniform - "A", "B" and "C" Special Constabulary. When these forces got properly into their stride, they actually burned down streets of houses in our Battalion area whilst wearing police uniform. To make matters worse, the military forces were sometimes present at these burnings, and instead of attempting to stop the burnings were actually helping, by guarding and protecting those engaged. We got orders after this campaign started to shoot all men in uniform at sight.

From about October, 1921, I was Vice O.C. of the 1st Battalion, and as such was responsible for the organisation of all Battalion special services, such as signalling, first-aid, chemistry, engineering, and, later on, police. The fact that we adopted a policy of shooting all R.I.C. on sight compelled us to supply a police force to protect our civilian population. The starting of this police force also necessitated the setting up of Republican Courts. These Courts could only operate in a small way in the city, and dealt with offences such as looting.

I was appointed Battalion O/C. in November, 1921

About March, 1922, I was engaged on plans for the burning of the Custom House in Belfast. I had been in the Custom House and got access, owing to my employment, to the cellars where the bonded whiskey stores were located, and I made sketches and plans of the building.

On the 26th March, 1922, I and other members of the Battalion Staff were captured after the funeral of the McMahon family. This family were the victims of police murderers, who shot them dead on the 24th March.

Joe Savage, Brigade Q.M., Patrick McCarragher, Battalion

Vice C.C., John Simpson, Battalion Adjutant, and myself, Battalion O.C., were all captured in my own house. I had the plans of the Custom House on my person at the time we were arrested, and when we were being removed by military tender to Chichester R.I.C. barracks we each took a part in eating the Custom House plans and so got rid of them.

At the time our house was raided, Seán Keenan, Patrick McLaverty and Rory McNicholl, who were in the house, were able to escape and got clear. My wife was also in the house when the raid commenced. She got away with some papers and documents, at the start of the raid, and she returned to the house to see if there were any more about when she was arrested, and she was removed to Chichester Street barracks with us.

We were all charged, and we were brought up in Court on three occasions. On the last occasion the evidence of police witnesses in my wife's case proved conflicting, and the Judge ordered her discharge.

We all refused to recognise a court that was unwilling or unable to protect the lives or the property of the Nationalist minority in the North.

Found in my house some time after our arrest were plans for burning the principal buildings in the centre of the city. I was actually in the dock at the time this charge was preferred against me, and I asked to be shown the papers which were the basis for such a charge. I drew the Judge's attention to the fact that the papers bore no date, and I told him that the papers were old ones. The case was then adjourned. On the next sitting of the

(end of W.S. 429)

COPY.

Thomas Flynn, 152 Springfield Road,
Belfast.

W.S. 429

Mr. McCoy.

I have gone through the statement by Thomas Flynn, 152 Springfield Road, Belfast, Reg. No. W.S.429. It is a very informative statement, but there are a few points which seem to be capable of development. I attach a list of these.

It may not be necessary to call on this witness again. He may be able to give this additional information in response to a letter. That, however, is a matter for yourself to decide.

(Sgd.) M. McDunphy
DIRECTOR

11.6.51.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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COPY.

page 3, last paragraph.

It is stated briefly that the first shootings carried out by the Murder Gang were Ned Trodden, John Gaynor and the Duffin brothers, and no further information is given.

- (a) How, when and where was each of them killed?
- (b) What is the evidence that they were killed by the Murder Gang?
- (c) To what units were they attached, and what rank did each of them hold?
- (d) Is there anything to indicate why they in particular were selected for this fate?

Page 4, last paragraph.

- (a) When and where did the action take place?
- (b) Under whose command?
- (c) What were the details of the action?
- (d) What were the results?

Page 6, paragraph 1:

- (a) The names of officers and men of the A.S.U. should be given as far as the witness's recollection serves him.
- (b) What salary was paid to them, and how were the funds provided?
- (c) Under whom did they operate?
- (d) Was there any responsibility to or direction from General Headquarters in Dublin or elsewhere?

Page 6, last paragraph.

- (a) Could any indication be given of the "friendly R.I.C. sources"?
- (b) Through what channel or contacts was the information received?

Page 11, last paragraph.

The name of one of the rescuers, Sean O'Neill, O/C. Belfast Brigade, is mentioned.

- (a) What were the names, ranks and units of the other three?
- (b) Which of the three was dressed in the uniform of a British officer, and which in civilian clothes?

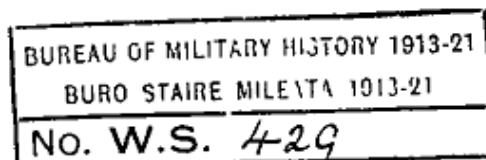
Page 16, paragraph 2.

The reference to (a) Volunteer Police, and (b) the Republican Courts, is not informative. The witness should be asked to develop these as fully as he can.

- (a) The organisation, personnel and control of the police.
- (b) The method by which they operated.
- (c) The places used for detention.
- (d) The organisation of the Courts.
- (e) The names of the Judges.
- (f) The places where trials were held.
- (g) The nature of the judgments, and the means of enforcing judgments.
- (h) Was there any attempt by the British authorities to interfere with either the police or the Courts, and if so, how was such action met?
- (i) Were the police forces and the Courts effective in spite of any such measures?

Page 18, last two paragraphs, andPage 19, last paragraph.

The witness should be asked to give the names of those who took part in these shootings, the places at which and the dates on which they took place, and the evidence, if any, on which it was decided that they should be executed.





CASAIRÉ _____

Director:

Re: Thomas Flynn. W.S. 429.

In connection with your memo re above. In dealing with witnesses in the six counties of Northern Ireland it is essential that a person should realise that to get a witness to give any sort of reasonable detail, in matters such as shootings, operations, reprisals, etc., this evidence to the Bureau is a matter of difficulty. This reluctance is understandable in people living under the conditions that the Nationalist population in Northern Ireland have to endure and is also apparent to others who are conversant with conditions up there.

The next point concerns the minute detail, which, when a statement is completed, would suggest itself to a person anxious to get a perfect story from each witness. This has a general application to all witnesses no matter where they reside and in no matter what walk of life they are placed. An investigator has to take witnesses as he finds them. Taking down the statement of a witness generally takes at least three or four sessions before it is completed. The first rough notes have to be read back to a witness and amended by him. An investigator has to accept a witnesses mode of expressing himself and has to put up with the human element which induces persons giving voluntary help and the loss of at least some of their leisure time to the work of the Bureau, to resent or get tired with an investigator who persists in soliciting details which a witness may not be able to remember after the lapse of approximately thirty years. That we are getting so much detail from people whose minds are not attuned to the historical importance of events is, to me, a matter of surprise.

Another point on which an investigator must be most careful is not to give a witness the impression that his or her evidence is being doubted. On several occasions when dealing with a witness and pressing for more detail concerning operations in which the witness took part, I was asked by the witness if I doubted his evidence.

In view of the above considerations in the approach to the job of covering an area by the evidence of a number of witnesses, I have always before my mind the closing in of the gaps which individual witnesses have left by getting evidence from other specialists who deal with such subjects as Intelligence, Courts, Purchase of arms and Arms importations, Munitions, Chemicals, etc.



(2).

CASAIRÉ

In connection with Mr. Flynn's statement, I wish to point out that in 1920 he was little better than a boy in years. He was engaged in events which would be considered tough for men of mature years. His memory and reactions to the events he took part in were concentrated on the military operations in which he participated.

I don't think I could get anything more detailed from Mr. Flynn. I questioned him minutely and I know that he would not give any details such as the names of comrades in command or participating in operations, names of the A.S.U., friendly R.I.C. sources. In fact, he gave me the name of the Sergeant in the R.I.C. who conveyed the information in connection with Reglan Street ambush (page 6), but not for publication.

Re. Page 11, last paragraph -

See Roger McCorley's evidence for details which Mr. Flynn could not remember.

Re. Page 16, paragraph 2 -

I have not yet taken evidence from a witness who could deal with these matters in an authoritative way. Such a witness is available in the Glens, on whom I shall call shortly when I go there again.

John Massey.
20th June, 1951.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 429

Seen
attached to the statement with copy
my note to which it is a reply

J
2365