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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 486

Witness

Lieut.-Col. Daniel McDonnell,
20 Hatch Street,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of 'A' Company, 1st Batt'n. Dublin Brigade
1917 - ;

Member of Intelligence Staff, I.R.A.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1917-1921;
- (b) Raid on Collinstown Aerodrome;
- (c) Execution of British spies;
- (d) I.R.A. Intelligence;
- (e) Bloody Sunday, November 1920.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2.

Statement by Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel McDonnell,
20, Hatch Street, Dublin.

In 1917 about the time that Thomas Ashe died on hunger strike I joined the Volunteers. The first Company I joined was "A" Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade. The Company Commander at that time was Peadar Healy.

We carried on our organisation and drilling of the Company at the Columcille Hall, 6 Blackhall Street, Dublin. The first weapons that we used for the purposes of drilling were pieces of wood shaped like rifles. I was not too long in the Company when I was asked to take up a specialist class in engineering and wireless under a very highly intelligent man who was in the G.P.O. Lines Department, one Andy Fitzpatrick. He gave us a very thorough preparation in the wiring and installing of telephones, the tapping of telephone lines and all that particular type of knowledge. This all happened about 1917. Shortly afterwards I was asked to take on instruction in ordinary drill, musketry, rifle markmanship, and the next thing was I found myself section commander within the Company.

The Company was organised in four sections and the strength was in or about 120 in 1917. The sections were organised in districts, i.e. in whatever district you lived. At the time these sections were formed I was made No. 4 section commander although I lived in another area, and in this section, although the Company was organised and located on the north side of the city, all the members were from the south side. They lived approximately in the area around James Street, Grand Canal Harbour, Robert Street, up towards Cork Street, and my job was to know, go round and locate

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these lads and generally look after the whole section. At the same time I was appointed a drill instructor to special classes for the Battalion.

The Battalion Commander at this time was Peadar Clancy, later Paddy Holohan. Dick McKee was Brigade Commander. One of the Lieutenants of the Company at that time was George Fitzgerald. He is still living and can be located in the Old Comrades Association, 1st Battalion, "A" Company.

I carried on in the ordinary normal way with the Company through 1918 and then came the first big moment of my career, which was to go on an active service job. The job was the raid on Collinstown Aerodrome.

This raid was carried out under the supervision of the late Dick McKee. It was actually commanded by Paddy Holohan. Each individual on the raid got a particular task to do. First of all we were to go to Parnell Square where there was a complete plan of the Aerodrome laid out in front of Dick McKee, showing every approach and every avenue to it, and all the possible places where trouble was likely to be met in our attempted job. We were to go out in the cars, which we did. The members of my Company with whom I was really connected on the job were, Peadar Breslin (deceased), George Fitzgerald, Joe Dolan, and I am not sure, Phil Leddy; also a man called Ryan (killed in Croke Park 1921) and Mick Magee (killed in Clonturk Park 1921).

As I have already pointed out we had various jobs allotted to each member of the party. My particular job was, when we came to the guard-room to get into it, go to the first room on my right immediately, hold up and not let anybody move within that room. We crawled up as silently

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as possible. We wore old masks over our faces. I stole a stocking belonging to my mother, split it, put two eye-holes in it and wore it.

I was armed with a .38 five-chamber Iver Johnson revolver. I also had a knuckleduster and a stiletto. We got as far as what I presume was a hangar in the Aerodrome. There was a halt and the man in front of me was inclined to turn and bolt. For the first time in my life I used a weapon with intent to use it violently. I stuck it in his back and used bad language for the first time in my life. I told this particular man to go on. He went on. We got to the guard-room. Whoever was in front of me had overpowered the sentry. I went into the guard-room. I immediately made a dash for the room which I was allocated. To my surprise I found something like twelve or thirteen British soldiers in the room. They were in all sorts of dress, partly undressed and dressed. I told them to put up their hands. One fellow attempted to move. They all stood with their hands up; some were mighty, big men, some were very poor physical types. Two other members of the party, Ryan and Magee, came in with ropes and proceeded to tie up each individual member of the guard. The method they adopted was, they turned each member over on his tummy on the floor, tied his hands behind his back, brought his feet together and tied his knees and swung the rope from rafter overhead. Ryan kept shouting for more rope and he was afterwards known as "more rope". They proceeded very methodically with this whole job.

While they were doing this job my eyes grew more and more accustomed to the semi light in the place and then I saw all the rifles of the place on a rack. The rack was
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locked. The equipment and ammunition for the rifles were also locked in this particular rack. I then shouted for a man with a hack-saw to come out and cut the rifle rack. Somebody came. I could not say who it was. He cut the rack and we duly got the rifles, and loaded them into the private cars and a sort of lorry.

I personally did not know the destination of these rifles. We loaded up all the stuff - equipment, rifles, bayonets and ammunition, we could lay hands on.

When the job was finished I was detailed to go in a taxi and arrived in Dublin about 3 a.m. I went to bed at home and had to be at my employment at 6 o'clock the following morning, which I duly was. I left instructions for my mother to clean up my things so as not to leave any traces, which she did.

Coming back to Collinstown - there were two hounds which the guard used for giving them warning of any unwelcome people around the place. Two members of the party - one was George Fitzgerald - were dressed as British officers. The hounds did not mind British officers, and the main job now to deal with an outlying sentry was the control of those dogs.

The "intelligence" of the job was done by the ordinary members of our Company, such as "A" Company, I think "E" Company and "C" Company, 1st Battalion, in the course of their work as workmen in the Aerodrome in Collinstown, and it was they who did the whole intelligence and general reconnaissance of the place before we went to it.

The number of rifles, which is on record in the newspapers, was 75. I think there were a couple of Lewis guns, equipment and ammunition. The majority of this stuff

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was sent to the various units down the country who could use that type of weapon far more effectively than we could within the city boundary.

We carried on in the usual way. The next job of any importance on which I was engaged but on which I did very little because of the situation in which I found myself was the Church Street ambush. It was in that particular raid that Kevin Barry and Frank Flood were captured. My particular job in that raid was to go with three or four other members of our Company to the upper portion of Church Street cross to Kings Inns near Constitution Hill. I saw little or nothing that night.

In the meantime I was still actively engaged in drilling, preparing and all that sort of thing. I might also mention that during all this period we paid a subscription every week to the Volunteers and any weapons we got we had to purchase them ourselves. I still had my Iver Johnson of which I was very proud.

I was not engaged in anything much further than several odd patrols which we did around the city, with the exception of one particular job of a different kind. I was detailed with another member of our Company to report to Michael Magee, with the co-operation of the New Ireland Assurance people, at the New Ireland Assurance Offices in O'Connell Street over Kapp & Petersons, to stay the night in this particular place and watch and record the activities of all the British forces during the night across O'Connell Bridge and up along the Quays. This night was an unique night in so far as it was the first night on which curfew was imposed on Dublin City. I might say this was a very dull and monotonous affair. However, we recorded every lorry, every armoured car, every patrol, whether auxiliary, military or D.M.P. that passed up

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and down during the hours of curfew.

The Company Commanders had changed during this time and one Peadar McNulty was made O.C. of the Company. At the same time I was busy recruiting people into the Company and I brought in quite a number of men who were very active afterwards - Phil Leddy, who is now a Senior Civil Servant, was Captain; Robert Skelly, Quartermaster of the Company for a long time; Patrick Wylie; Charlie Byrne.

"A" Company had a number of very ingenious individuals, among them the late Peadar Breslin and his brother, Christie. The reason I say they were ingenious is - they built at 6 Blackhall Street a perfect arsenal which was underneath the cellars. The way into it was what appeared to be an ordinary sewer trap door and they concreted it. To get into it, you had to go in on your hands and when inside you could stand up. They erected shelves in this place and used it as the dump for all the weapons of the Company. Though the Hall was raided several times that dump was never discovered by any raiders.

Charlie Byrne was a member of Intelligence and later A.D.C. to William Cosgrave.

Three Companies used to parade and drill in 6 Blackhall Street - "A" Company, "D" Company and "G" Company of the 1st Battalion.

During all this period specialist classes were always going on in some section; everybody was being trained in one way or another, which seems at the present time rather extraordinary.

During that time while I was in the Company our names were changed from Irish Volunteers to the I.R.A. This was

in or about 1918, and we were asked then to make our declaration of fealty to the I.R.A.

The Columcille Hall was carried on at that time under the guise of a Gaelic League Hall. A teacher called Ignatius or Ikey Calendar, a great Irish speaker, had classes going on for Irish dancing, language, etc. I began to learn Irish there under a teacher named Seán Ó Conchubhair.

About July or August, 1920, I am not exactly sure, I was invited to become a member of the Intelligence Staff. I was interviewed by Liam Tobin and the late Tom Cullen. The three first members of Intelligence of whom I know, were Liam Tobin, Frank Thornton and Tom Cullen. Then came Joe Dolan and Joe Guilfoyle. Charlie Dalton joined up about the same time as I did, also Ned Kelleher, and a lad called Seamus Hughes (at present a Garda Síochána in the Detective Branch).

Around this time a very able agent named Byrne or Jameson, of the British Government, met his latter end at a place called Ballymun Road. I personally don't know anything about that incident except that he was an agent of Sir Basil Thompson's and also that he had ingratiated himself very much into our Intelligence staff with some story of being a favourable anti-British agent. Beyond that I know very little about him.

Also about that time a fellow called Molloy met his latter end in or around Suffolk Street. He was on a similar racket. He was in the British service and professed to be anxious to help the I.R.A. He had, in his own estimation, become a temporary agent of ours from the

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Castle and as a result of counter espionage his whole face was uncovered, so he met his end. This was about July or August or September, 1920. There was also another individual and I am not too clear whether we got him or not - I think we did. Quinlisk was his name. These were all members of the British armed forces who professed to be in deep sympathy with us to get in our good graces, and Byrne and Molloy to a certain extent had, but they were uncovered by other agents within the Castle itself.

Some time before that another agent who gave a terrible lot for discussion afterwards, also met his latter end at Simmonscourt Road. He was the late Alan Bell.

When we joined the Intelligence staff, we all got numbers - my own particular number was 101 - and when I had any written report to make, which was rarely, I just signed it '101'. My first assignment was to go to Leeson Street at 9 o'clock on a Monday morning and to report on all British personnel, whether in cars or on foot, that passed up Leeson Street Bridge. Along came three or four staff cars with staff officers, etc., and with brass hats, red bands, etc. I did this morning after morning. At the same time another member of our staff had been detailed to watch these fellows from another place, and what we saw, between us, tallied. Nothing that I know of was done in these particular cases.

We were next taken into the office and our first job was (at this time there had been a couple of raids made on the G.P.O.) to go through every letter from wherever it came, that went to the Castle. Apart from that we got in every morning a complete pile of letters from all over the country, from England, from everywhere, whether to the Castle Authorities, to G.H.Q. or to R.I.C. depot. All these letters varied and we got quite an amount of information from

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them especially from people anxious to give Crown Forces information. Inter-department, official and unofficial, also came through our hands. Then I discovered we had a complete organisation within the Post Office itself.

Our office was in 3 Crow Street. We were known as manufacturing agents. We also built up and checked up on the codes used by the British forces between Dublin and the country. They used two kinds of codes; one was the simple letter code which was changed monthly. Another code which was more complicated and much harder to break down was a number code which was changed frequently. What happened was, we got the letters of the first 25 per cent of the message from our sources within the Castle, and as the messages came through we worked them out. We were not as efficient with this code as with the letter code; the reason being by the time we had it broken down and had it working, the system was changed again.

Joe Reilly was a special courier between Michael Collins and every other person with whom he dealt.

Our principal agent within the Post Office was a Mr. Moynihan, who died recently. We kept regular hours, not that we need keep them, but we kept them for the illusion that we were business people. We were on whole-time work. I did more outdoor work than indoor work. I then came in contact with all members of the Squad who did most of their work or jobs on instructions from our Department.

I was the chief contact between Dave Neligan and our Department. At the time I started to maintain contact with him, he was a Detective Officer who was more or less protecting Thomas O'Shaughnessy, Recorder of Dublin. I was in contact with him from early November, 1920, until the Treaty was signed in December, 1921.

The next big affair that took place, and which was principally organised from our Department, was the 'Bloody Sunday' shootings, 21st November, 1920. There were at least, to my knowledge, anything between fifty-five and sixty agents marked down for destruction that morning.

In the 1st Battalion area there was a large number of agents who resided on the North Circular Road and the adjoining roads to the Park, and as far as I know none of those was interfered with. The 2nd Battalion area had to deal with the area of O'Connell Street and to a certain extent Mount Street. The 3rd Battalion area was in or around Leeson Street, Pembroke area; the 4th Battalion area in and around Portobello. I mention the 4th Battalion because it is a Battalion that is overlooked.

The particular Company that dealt with the job that I personally had to be on - No. 7 Ranelagh Road - was the Rathfarnham Company. We got a very ugly mission to perform. It was to go to the house, No. 7 Ranelagh Road, where a British agent called Noble, and his paramour lived. They were both agents, and our information was that they both were the main cause of a member of our organisation, named Doyle, getting a very cruel death in the Dublin Mountains.

Every job on that morning was timed to take place at the same time, which was 9 o'clock sharp, and any that could get off to schedule, did so. In this particular instance we set off at 9 o'clock and we found our bird had flown, simply because he had gone out at 7 o'clock that morning to do something special. That left us in a very peculiar situation because we were to shoot both of them; we were not to shoot the woman unless the man was there. We cleared out, and a 4th Battalion man, F.X., Coughlan, on the job went off to his

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particular area and Joe Dolan and myself went down to the south side of the river and we got across O'Connell Bridge by ferry boat. We went across to a spot not far from North Richmond Street where I met for the first time Mick McDonnell. By degrees the others were coming in.

Later Tom Keogh asked Joe Dolan and myself to go to the Football and Hurling Matches in Croke Park. We went there. His theory was that if there was any sudden raid we would be much safer there. We parked ourselves on the famous Hill 16, and the match had just started when, as far as we could see, there was a rumble and bustle going on around the entrance gate at the Hogan Stand side. (I personally had no interest in the match). We suddenly realised that the whole ground was under rifle and machine-gun fire. We scattered and separated from one another on the Hill. My hat fell off and while I was picking it up the man in front of me was shot. I was very fit in those days and I ran across the slob lands at the back of Hill 16 over to the Ballybough gate. I ran so fast that I was nearly the first to reach it. The gates were not open. I jumped for the top of the gate, caught it and went over the far side. I pulled myself together. Although the British Forces had a local man guiding them, they still made a bad job of it. This entrance was not covered by any British Forces. I then went to where I lived in Infirmary Road. We had safely dumped our guns before going to Croke Park.

Next morning we turned into Crow Street as usual and started off the routine again. We then knew the actual number of British agents who had been disposed of. We were disappointed with the result. It did achieve a purpose as most of the British agents were terrified of the place and had gone to ground. That evening I did not go home. Joe Dolan and myself went somewhere else, until a few minutes

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before curfew, and when I arrived there I found my home in chaos. My mother, extraordinary though it may seem, was as cool as a cucumber, and quietly informed me that the military and Tans had been in the house looking for a Daniel McDonnell. "Your Dad was here when they called", she said, "and he said, 'I am Daniel McDonnell'", which was quite true. They took him away and lodged him in Collins Barracks (then known as the Royal Barracks). He was paraded for identification at least two or three times a day and all classes came and looked at him upside down - senior British officers, women, civilians of every description, and from the description of one woman (it was the woman in No. 7 Ranelagh Road). He got a very thorough scrutinising but, apparently, they did not pin anything on him.

He was drafted with a lot of men to a vessel called "The Sea Wolf" to the North Wall. The boat set out in this November period from the North Wall to Belfast Lough. They were taken over by a military escort who were inclined to be very rough with them and who did not make any attempt to stop the Belfast crowd gathering. The Commander of "The Sea Wolf" ordered the military and everybody in Belfast off his boat, brought all the prisoners back on the boat again and from whatever resources he had on board he fed everyone of them and he further told the military escort that it was not pigs they were dealing with; they were human beings. Then he took them and marched them on the Quay himself. He said, "Whatever is going to happen is not going to happen under my jurisdiction". They then went by train to Ballykinlar. They were given a palliasse and damp straw to sleep on. My father remained in Ballykinlar until about 12th April, 1921, when they suddenly released him.

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Meanwhile, our family at that time could starve for the breadwinner. There was an organisation in force which prevented that happening, the White Cross. They made a certain allowance to our family - in or about £2. 10s., or £3. a week.

I decided to stop at home that night, i.e. the night after the 'Bloody Sunday' shootings, and I continued to stop there until about April 1921. At this time I was still in close contact with Dave Neligan, and I also met a Mr. MacNamara, another Detective Officer. The one I did not meet at this time and who was actually in trouble then was Ned Broy. I never actually met him until after the Truce.

We did a number of trailing and "following-up" jobs on various people and also did other work - some which failed and some that did not fail. One particular individual I was after was a Captain Cecil B. Leedes. Before he came to Dublin he was, apparently, a Chinese Labour Corps Commander, and he was taken over here for the one purpose of inflicting his methods of getting information on our people, which were primarily diabolical. I don't know exactly what they were, but I believe they were pretty terrible, i.e. the removal of finger nails, etc.

I discovered him and where he lived through a contact of ours, as we had a lot of contacts with hotel waiters, boots, etc. This famous genius, contrary to his kind, lived in a temperance hotel, St. Andrew's Hotel, Exchequer Street, Dublin. I soon learned that his general habit of going out was between 9 and 9.30 every morning. I also learned from our own Headquarters that his methods were getting cruder and cruder, within and they would have to be stopped.

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It was a difficult thing to plan in the first instance because of the proximity to Dublin Castle and of the proximity to "F" Company and the Auxiliaries. The chief of the "Squad" came along with me, saw the layout of the place where this man was. He saw the man himself - he was about 6'3" in height. All the members of the Squad came in not once or twice but at least four or five times before they decided on the method to be adopted in disposing of this individual. Two members were detailed for the actual disposal of Leedes. Four members covered him off from the rear in case anybody should interfere with him and four more covered him off at Drury Street and four more at South William Street. I mention this because it gives a general idea of how any particular job was carried out.

We dispersed along Drury Street, William Street, Stephen's Green, back down Merrion Square, Holles Street, down the Quays, eventually across the ferry to the north side of the city. This again gives a general description of the dispersals of this kind.

There were several other jobs which took place during that time. In all this time we still carried on our office at Crow Street and kept supplying the different branches with their information. We used get the various R.I.C. messages dealing with the various I.R.A. activities down south and in the west.

About this time also we deemed that we wanted extra members into the staff and three I remember distinctly came in - Charles Byrne (at present in Kennedy's Bakery), Peter Magee and Jack Walsh.

I continued to meet Dave Neligan all the time and got whatever particular messages he would have. They were

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passed on through Joe Reilly to Michael Collins. I made it a point to know only what I would have to know, the reason being, in case I was ever captured no amount of torture would force me to say what I did not know.

About this time the British Intelligence was practically wiped out. Nothing was working for them and local Intelligence in the so-called D.M.P., i.e. the "G" Branch, was finished. The whole system of Intelligence for the British Government had broken down. This was about March 1921. After that the Intelligence was more or less haphazard.

During all this time we did not know whether we would be alive twenty-four hours or not. We had to mix with all the British Forces, get back again into I.R.A. outfits and fight them. It was an extraordinary situation. We owe our existence to-day to our wits.

About this time also there was a famous character, named Captain Hardy, with the British, who had one leg and whom we made several efforts to get and failed. Eventually, he got Joe Guilfoyle on the job. Joe did some of his time in an internment camp and was released long before the Truce came. Our instructions were if we were captured to use every means in our power to get out, to sign any declaration that the British demanded but on no account were we to attempt any violent tactics of the I.R.A. such as hunger strike, etc. Every means would be used through our own contacts within to get us out. We were a specially trained body, difficult to replace and had to be got out at all costs. We never got Hardy.

About this time we got information about 9 o'clock one morning from within the Post Office that the whole mail in
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connection with the Dáil Bonds had been held up by the British Post Office Authorities in the Rotunda. Our own staff (Intelligence) went straight and got precise details as to where this whole bag of mail was. It was in a cage in the Rotunda at the bottom of a shoot. We walked into the Rotunda and went to this cage. Our contact with the Post Office switched off any means of communication and we got the bag of mail and put it on an ass and cart. We were walking out quite silently when along came the British Forces to collect the bag and passed us by unknowingly. That particular raid is of importance because Michael Collins, as Minister for Finance at this time, was issuing the Dáil Bonds to America. We eventually got them out by different methods and they were eventually circulated in America and all over the country.

We brought the mail to 23 Mary Street, which was the headquarters of Michael Collins as Minister for Finance. One particular individual, George McGrath, was his financial genius. We got everything under way, with the aid of our friend, Moynihan. He was the most invaluable man in the whole organisation of Michael Collins. He was a senior staff officer in the G.P.O. and he had his own staff within the G.P.O. of which we knew nothing. He was much older than any of us.

My next very clear recollection was of an individual in a public-house not far from Little Green Street, a barman who had rather a loose tongue, and a number of our people used to frequent this place. Joe Dolan and myself were to tell this fellow to keep quiet and generally frighten the life out of him. I was living at this time at 34 South William Street and I had arranged to meet Dolan at Little Green Street about 3 o'clock in the afternoon to see this barman. I might

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mention that we all dressed very well in those days. I put a gun in my pocket, walked down along William Street, down George's Street, turned into Dame Street and into Parliament Street. When in Parliament Street I found I was in the midst of every member of "F" Company of the Auxiliaries and every member of the Castle dressed in every conceivable way, all bristling with guns and they all searching people, etc. "Oh, my God", I said, "I am finished. I'll either have to fight my way out or get shot". So I walked brazenly along and kept my hands in my pocket. One fellow came over to search me. Another member said to him, "What the so-and-so do you mean?", and he said to me, "Sorry, chum, this fellow does not know our own fellows yet". I immediately took up the cue.

I said, "Come on and I will show you where to find them". Two of them came with me. We got to the end of Essex Street. "I think they went this way," I said, "Essex Street and Temple Bar". We turned into Fownes Street and into Cecelia Street by the Old Medical School. I said, "Come on, we will soon get them". When there I threw my eyes over my shoulder to see if the boys were with me. I saw that they were some way behind, so I put on an extra pace from the Medical School to Crown Alley and when there I again threw my eyes over my shoulder. There was no sign of them. I went at a full one hundred yards pace down Crown Alley through Athkinsons, down the Halfpenny Bridge. That was the last of that incident. I might mention that at that time I could do one hundred yards in ten seconds or a little under.

Prior to this I had decided not to go home on certain nights. Joe Dolan and myself used to go to the Columcille Hall, Blackhall Street. There were a number of little

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girls and boys attending the Gaelic League classes that were being carried out in the Hall, and, believe it or not - when the kids were finished we used play with them in the Hall all over the place, and we used to do this regularly. One particular night, in or about curfew, a member of "A" Company came down to the Hall in a terrible state looking for me. His name was Patrick Wylie. At this time there had been formed the rather infamous Igo gang, and they had picked him up on Infirmary Road and had taken him up to what is known as Billy King's field beside St. Bricin's Hospital. They nearly half killed him and they said to him, "You are Daniel McDonnell". He said, "I am not", and every time he said he was not he got a blow or kick. So he said, "I can prove I am not". One fellow said, "How can you?" He said, "I have got my indentures on me". He proved that he was not the man they were looking for. They let him go. This lad came to tell me all that happened. I decided to get out of Infirmary Road. I did not go home that night or ever again. I met one of the girls in the hall and she said that she would chance putting me up for the night. Her name was Miss Cissie Mulhall, later wife of Billy Ashton, and I stopped in her house for the night.

Next day Ned Kelleher discussed where we were to stop. Ned said, "Stop in my place - 34 South William Street". We had quite a party of I.R.A. stopping here - Ned Kelleher, Alphonsus O'Neill, Tom Lillis, Simon McInerney, myself. Simon McInerney belonged to Clare and to No. 4 Section, A.S.U., in Dublin. At this particular time Bob O'Neill was not in anything particular and I eventually introduced him and he became a member of the Intelligence Squad.

We still continued to carry on. We found Crow Street getting a bit cramped and we eventually got a place in Pearse Street over the present Palace Cinema. A large number of our

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staff operated there about the early summer of 1921.

The next thing of importance that happened to me about 1921, was when Charles Dalton and I were detailed to go and act as a cover party to an important meeting being held in No. 3 Mountjoy Square. We were there all day and discovered that we were a cover party for what was a meeting of the Dáil. We were not actually present at that particular debate but I do know De Valera was there, also Seán O'Mahony of Cork - anti-Treaty.

Michael Collins came down and was discussing with Charles Dalton and myself. He never said much, but he did say to us, "Boys, I am having a terrible time". I said, "How?" He said, "They want to chuck-in, O'Mahony and Dev say the whole thing is hopeless and they don't want anything to happen." The catering for this meeting was carried out by Mrs. Seán Connolly.

Shortly after this I was informed that Dave Neligan had joined the British Secret Service and it was decided that I, as a member of the staff, would act as contact between him and our own organisation and for that purpose I would have to go and live in Dún Laoghaire. Also that I would get in contact with any of our own people in the Dún Laoghaire area. The first one I contacted was Willie Walsh. Willie Walsh, at this time, was always in and out of St. Michael's Hospital. He suffered a lot from fits and every time we had anything of importance to do he had a fit. Eventually I got in touch with Jimmy Murray and we listed quite a lot of British agents or sympathisers, and got, among other particular agents, a Tramway Inspector named Andy Knight. He met his last end near Cliff Castle.

I stayed in 42 Mulgrave Street. George McGrath stayed in the same house with me. We never knew one another. George

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was in Finance. I was in Intelligence.

I carried on out there and used to come in to the city by tram with any information that Dave Neligan would have. During that time I got in contact with the two other Castle agents through Dave. I met them as a friend and went round with them everywhere. They were known to me as Fever and Ashe. Both of these, to my mind, were blameless individuals. We decided to leave them alone. They were a very useful cover for our activities and if they went out of the place, two other agents who would probably be more dangerous would be appointed. I gave Fever and Ashe a certain amount of information. We gave them a certain number of Volunteers to raid also.

During this time I did few jobs in the city. I did come in for one or two. There was a huge job being carried off in Seville Place with the Dublin Brigade, the Squad and I think the 2nd Battalion Active Service Unit. The Castle were under the impression that 100 Seville Place was a favourite meeting place of the I.R.A. Information had been got to them from our people that there were meetings of the I.R.A. held there. On this particular night they decided they would give them the full information of a meeting, and then duly got the whole 2nd Battalion, A.S.U. and all, on to the railway bridge over Seville Place and around about that area. I found myself in the centre of the bridge over Seville Place. Next to me was a fellow with a huge contraption in his hand. I don't know who he was. This article was shaped like one of the huge insulators on the E.S.B. Transformer Stations and he told me it was packed with gun powder, slugs and gelignite. He said he had invented this himself. He also said he was not sure how it would work but he was going to drop it on a lorry. He said, "When I do drop it, it should blow the whole outfit out".

I said, "Okay". I moved away, put three fellows between him and myself. I had a couple of egg bombs myself.

The Castle was rung up and the Tans came as far as the North Strand but they never came down as far as Seville Place so that the job never took place. This was about May, 1921.

The next job was the Custom House. Our particular section got strict orders from Michael Collins that on no account were we to go near the Custom House, the reason being he did not want to have everybody involved in it. He was not too happy about the results. Not one of our section or of our Intelligence was involved in that particular job.

I went back to Dún Laoghaire with Dave Neligan, keeping myself under cover, etc. The next time I came into Dublin was for the Grafton Street job. That was, to my mind, a do or die job. At this particular time things were so bad with all the units that it was a question of how long they could last, would we last a month, a fortnight? The only reason was we had little left to fight with. We had no ammunition; we had a few guns. So bad was it that they cut down Winchester ammunition to fit .45 and several members of the A.S.U. and other units met with serious accidents as a result.

Dolan and I knew that one particular Company had not used up all their stuff - they had a first-class dump. Charlie Byrne, Dolan and I went to Blackhall Street in the middle of the day to this dump and we took every weapon belonging to the Company away with us because we decided we had to get it to use it. I knew best how to get into this particular dump and pulled out all the stuff. There was not much in it. There was enough to keep us going for another while. That particular incident was not discovered until well into the Truce.

We learned at this time that some of us had been followed and under observation to be shot by local I.R.A. Companies in Dublin because of our mixing around with the British forces. The Grafton Street job was so bad that in the organisation of it one particular member of our staff had to be put on a table so that he could be seen. That was Joe Guilfoyle. The plan of the Grafton Street job was briefly this. We were divided up into a number of sections and each section had one Intelligence officer with it. My part of the street was from Switzers to Johnston's Court. We all started off in the afternoon between 3 and 4 o'clock and our job was to take down every member of the British force that we met in that particular part of the street. In the stretch that I went along there was not one in it. We went along and got as far as Kodak and the only one that was in any way hostile was a woman and her daughters. Pádraig O'Connor was along with me. I tipped her under the chin and told her to drop the glasses quickly if she wanted to live and get back into Kodak's. Then as we got to Johnston's Court we heard bang, bang. I said, "There is something doing, Ned Kelleher is there yet". We went off and dumped our guns. I dumped mine with the 4th Battalion that night. I walked back to Mercer's Hospital and heard they were taking in the lads that were shot in Grafton Street. I stood in the middle of the crowd.

I went back to Dún Laoghaire, and the next thing we knew about was the visit of Archbishop Clune. He was the intermediary between Sir Alfred Cope and our own people with regard to possible peace. I remained in Dún Laoghaire all this time.

We next heard that a Truce had been arranged. The day before we were thinking that this might be our last.

The Truce came on and I came in to Pearse Street, but still had to keep contact with Dave Neligan. Then we learned that the Government were sending over five members to London to act on their behalf in the negotiations, with Lloyd George and company. They were going to Cadogan Square and Hans Square. All the members of the staff visited Hans Square with the exception of myself. They were couriers between there and the home Government all during the whole proceedings from July up to 6th December and they went backwards and forwards bringing all the information from here and bringing all the information from England with them. I was told to stay in Dán Laoghaire and bring all my data up to date, which I did. About December I came in for the Treaty debates. That closes my story.

A very surprising thing was that all this time a number of men on the Intelligence and Squad were living on their nerves, and when the reaction came, how many retained their sanity is surprising.

Signed:

W. J. Connell

Date:

31 Jan. 1951

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 486

Witness:

Joseph Kearns Comdh