

W.S. 569

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 569

ROINN



COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 569

Witness

John Anthony Caffrey,
167 Navan Road,
Cabra,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company, Fianna Eireann (Nth. Dublin)
1916 - ;

Member of 'K' Company, 3rd Batt'n. Dublin Brigade
I.R.A. 1920;

Member of A.S.U. 1921.

Subject.

- (a) National activities 1916-1921;
- (b) Destruction of "Irish Independent machinery,
December 1919;
- (c) Attempted rescue of Sean McKeon from
Mountjoy Prison, May 1921.
- (d) The Active Service Unit, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S.1824

Form B S M 2

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. Fianna Éireann	1 - 2
2. The I.R.B.	2 - 3
3. I.R.A. Street Patrols	3 - 4
4. Attempted Rescue of Seán MacEoin	4 - 8
5. The Active Service Unit	8 - 11
6. Auxiliary Fired on in Grafton Street ...	11 - 13

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21

No. W.S. 5/9

STATEMENT BY JOHN ANTHONY GAFFREY

167 Navan Road, Cabra, Dublin.

Fianna Éireann.

I joined "C" Company of the Fianna (north side) in November, 1916. Our Headquarters were at 28 North Frederick Street. Peadar Browne was O/C. During the first two years the Fianna training consisted of route marches, ordinary foot drill and week-end training camps. As time went on our training took a more serious phase. Classes were formed for signalling, street fighting, revolver practice and intelligence work. A class on the construction and use of the Lewis gun was held at 13 Parliament Street over a shop there. I was selected from the Fianna to attend that class. Joe Byrne was the instructor.

Up to 1919, the Fianna was only organised into two units, known as the north and south side units. The Dublin Brigade of Volunteers was then formed in five Battalions - two Battalions on the north and two Battalions on the south side and an Engineering Battalion. In 1919 it was decided to re-organise the Fianna on similar lines to the Volunteers. This was to facilitate the organisation of the Volunteers. The Dublin Brigade of the Volunteer organisation was being built up from the civil population and from the Fianna. Boys who had served in the Fianna in a particular Battalion, such as No. 1, were being transferred to the corresponding Battalion in the Volunteers, being then fully trained. We also trained boys for specialist duties, such as engineers, signallers and intelligence. These boys were in turn transferred to their counterpart in the Volunteers.

There was a certain amount of opposition in the Fianna

Executive to using the Fianna as a training ground for the I.R.A. The opposition thought that the Fianna should be a purely boy scout organisation on the lines of the Baden Powell scouts. The opposition was, however, overcome by the influence of the I.R.B. Early in 1919 the Volunteers became the Irish Republican Army under the direct control of the Minister for Defence of Dail Éireann.

The I.R.B.

While I was a member of the Fianna I was also a member of the I.R.B. We met at Parnell Square, and I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Garry Houlihan. Meetings were held at least once a month, usually on a Sunday forenoon. I cannot recollect to what Circle I belonged or who the Centre was. Our Circle may have been called the Fianna Circle. At these meetings usually some person of importance from another Circle delivered a talk by way of a morale lifter. His name was never disclosed. We were simply told that a visitor would attend the next meeting and that he would have a very important lecture to give. This lecture was usually a short talk on some historical event which would be regarded as a propaganda talk at the present time.

I remember one instruction I received from the I.R.B. Four of us were told to go to a house in North Great George's Street on a certain date, where a meeting was due to take place. We were given a list containing three names and instructed to vote for these men when their names were proposed at the meeting. On the day in question we attended the meeting. There must have been about forty to sixty present. What the purpose of the meeting was I cannot say. The three names which I had on the list were duly proposed as chairman, treasurer and secretary. We voted for their election. Having done so we left the meeting. It occurred

to me in later years that this might have been a Trade Union meeting and that the I.R.B. sent us there to ensure that their nominees were elected to the given positions.

I was instructed to go to Thomas Street Library and ask for Mr. Stephenson, who, I think, was Librarian or Assistant Librarian, and to ask for certain books which dealt with the history of the Fenian Movement and the I.R.B. These books gave a good background of this particular movement. They were not handed out to everybody as when I asked for them they were produced from under the counter. Mr. Stephenson obviously expected me .

As a member of the Fianna I was sent on a job, which the Volunteers were doing, to the Irish Independent Office in Abbey Street, to smash up the machinery there. The "Independent", following the attack on Lord Franch at Ashtown in December, 1919, published an article gloating over the fact that one of the Volunteers - Martin Savage - was killed. They referred to him as an "assassin". Instructions were issued that by way of reprisal the paper was to be put out of action. About six of us were selected from the Fianna to accompany the Volunteers to accomplish this task. Although we smashed the machinery we did not succeed in our main purpose as the "Irish Independent" appeared on the streets of Dublin the following morning, having, I understand, been printed by one of the other Dublin newspapers.

I.R.A. Street Patrols.

About the summer of 1920 I was transferred to "K" Company, 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, from the Fianna. My Company Commander at that time was Harry Farrell. Jim Brogan was 1st Lieutenant, Jim Bird 2nd Lieutenant. Although I was officially a member of the Volunteers I did not sever my connection

completely with the Fianna; I was still a member of the Brigade staff and carried on training duties as usual. Initially my activities with "K" Company consisted of patrolling the streets at night time. The patrol area was from Purcell's, Westmoreland Street, along one side of Westmoreland Street to College Street, then along College Street into Pearse Street to Westland Row, along Westland Row through Lower Merrion Street to Merrion Square and Holles Street, down Holles Street, Pearse Street right to the south bank of the Liffey, then back up the Liffey to the starting point. The patrol consisted of about six men. Our tour of duty ran one night in four. This was later changed to a complete week in four. The armament consisted of about three revolvers and three grenades. The instructions of the patrol were to bomb any British military lorries provided such lorries contained armed men.

During one of these patrols early in February, 1921, at 7.30 p.m. just as we were about to retire, a Lancia car came along Merrion Square from the city going towards Beggars Bush Barracks. As it passed the top of Holles Street I threw a grenade which exploded over the car. The car contained about four or six Auxies. with a machine gun. It was a Lancia car with armoured plated sides and a wire cage on top. They did not return the fire until they passed over Mount Street Bridge, and they opened fire from that point.

Attempted rescue of Seán MacEoin.

Early in May, 1921, I was ordered to parade at No. 6 Gardiners Row, where I met Oscar Traynor, O/C., Dublin Brigade. He asked me did I know how to use a machine gun. I told him I had a good knowledge of the Lewis gun and a theoretical knowledge of other machine guns. He asked me

would I volunteer for a special job. I said I would. He told me then that it was proposed to capture an armoured car with a view to rescuing prisoners from Mountjoy. He informed me of the type of armoured car that it was proposed to capture so that if possible I could study from text books the guns that it might contain. I looked up all the text books I had and made a close study of the armaments that armoured cars would carry.

About a week later I was ordered to report at Morelands, Abbey Street. When I got there I met Tom Keogh to whom I had been introduced on the night I paraded before Oscar Traynor. Tom gave me full information about the job that he had in mind. It was to capture an armoured car at the Dublin Abattoir with a view to rescuing Seán MacEoin who was then a prisoner in Mountjoy Prison. (My recollection is that another prisoner was to be taken with MacEoin that morning. I think it was Frank Carty). Keogh closely examined me about my knowledge of machine guns and then explained that I was to man one of the guns in the captured car. For two mornings before the car was in fact captured I paraded with five or six others at Abbey Street under Tom Keogh. The first two mornings nothing happened and on the third morning, which I think was Saturday, Charlie Dalton of G.H.Q. Intelligence came hurriedly to Morelands and spoke to Tom Keogh.

Mick Collins was present on this morning. He often called to Morelands to see the members of the Unit. He was particularly friendly with Tom Keogh. Collins was the only senior officer I ever saw at the headquarters of the Active Service Unit. He always came by himself on a bicycle. On this morning he walked out with Tom Keogh. I happened

to be walking close and I heard Mick say "Well good luck, but whatever happens, come back."

We left immediately and Tom Keogh told us to move off for the Abattoir. When we got to the Abattoir Tom Keogh, Pat McCrae, Frank Bolster and another man whom I did not know and myself were together, Tom Keogh and Pat McCrae being in front. They went over to the armoured car and held up two soldiers who presumably were the drivers. In less time than it takes to tell we had taken over the car. This man whom I did not know and myself got into the turrets of the car; Tom Keogh and Frank Bolster got into the body of the car and Pat McCrae into the driver's seat. In a short time we got the car under way and we were driven out on to the North Circular Road, and we picked up two more of our men, dressed as British officers, Joe Leonard and Emmet Dalton.

On the way down I examined my gun and loaded it and satisfied myself that I could operate it if necessary. I called out to the other gunner if he was managing all right. He said "no", that he was in difficulties. I changed places with him and got his gun ready for action and remained with it.

On reaching Mountjoy one of our two officers spoke to the warder on duty and showed him an envelope. The warder opened the gate and admitted the car without any delay. He then locked the gate behind us and a second gate was opened. Close in front of the second gate was a third gate. The driver of the car, Pat McCrae, swerved the car round into position to prevent either of these gates being closed against him. He then moved the car completely round so that the front of it was actually through the gates and facing the exit. In the meantime Joe Leonard and Emmet Dalton had gone into the Governor's office.

Tom Keogh got out of the car and was standing alongside it. There was an arrangement made whereby a number of Volunteers were to hand in a parcel or parcels at the front gate with a view to keeping the wicket gate open so that the larger gate could be opened without any trouble when the necessity would arise. However, things apparently did not work out according to plan because the next thing I observed (having at this stage put my head outside the turret) was two of our men producing revolvers and holding up the warder at the main gate. I turned round to face the prison and on my right I saw coming towards the car a British soldier on sentry. As he came nearer to the car he apparently saw the warder being held up at the front gate. He brought his rifle down to the ready position and shouted "halt". Almost simultaneously he fired one shot at the main gate, the shot apparently passing very close to Tom Keogh. As he was getting ready to fire again Tom Keogh very slowly and deliberately pulled out his revolver and shot the sentry. He immediately stepped over, picked up the sentry's rifle which had fallen to the ground, and threw it on to the back of the car. He then climbed into the car. I shut down the turret and some shooting started from a look-out post on the top of Mountjoy which was manned by the Auxiliary Division. I endeavoured to bring the machine gun to bear on this post but discovered that I could not get sufficient elevation to cover the post. Nothing very much happened after that. Shortly afterwards Joe Leonard and Emmet Dalton came hurrying from the Governor's office, jumped into the car, and we drove out of Mountjoy, the gate by this time was opened. At the end of the avenue leading to the prison I succeeded in getting the ground position into the sights of the gun and fired a few bursts as the car was turning on to the North Circular Road towards Dorset Street.

We drove down to Jones' Road and I think it was somewhere there that Joe Leonard and Emmet Dalton, who were incidentally in British officers' uniform, left the armoured car and I believe transferred to another car.

We carried on with the car out towards Clontarf and we turned up either the Howth or the Malahide road. The car was going very slowly and was obviously over-heating because steam was coming from the radiator. In the middle of a hill the car stopped and the driver, Pat McCrae, was unable to get it started. Tom Keogh then decided that we would abandon the car and he asked me could the machine guns be dismantled easily. I told him "yes" and lifted out my own machine gun. Tom Keogh got out of the car, went into the fields on the left of the road which were then in plots. He went off while I remained with some of the others. Tom Keogh returned and said, "get out the stuff, we'll dump it here". Frank Bolster and I sat on the wall with a rifle each while Tom Keogh and I presume the second machine gunner carried the machine guns, revolvers and machine gun ammunition (180 rounds) away and dumped them. In the meantime the driver of the car, Pat McCrae, was looking for some means of destroying the car. Eventually he got underneath it and fired a shot at a petrol tap which released a stream of petrol on to the road. He then lighted papers, threw them underneath the car and the whole thing went up in a cloud of flame and blue smoke. The ammunition was safely dumped. While the car was stopped on the road an aeroplane passed overhead apparently looking for it. Tom Keogh took my rifle and put it in the dump. I walked across the fields and out at Fairview.

The Active Service Unit.

A short time following the burning of the Custom House (which operation incidentally I was not engaged in), I was

instructed to report to Oscar Traynor at No. 6 Gardiner's Row. On arrival there I met Joe Leonard with Oscar Traynor and Kit O'Malley. Oscar Traynor informed me that I was being transferred to the Active Service Unit and that I was to report forthwith to Morelands in Abbey Street. I paraded there at 9 o'clock in the morning where I met a number of other members of the Active Service Unit - Vinny Byrne, Tom Keogh, Bob Purcell, C. Maxwell, Joe Gillen and several others including Paddy Drury. I was not addressed by anybody as to what would be involved by joining this unit as I think all present took it for granted that I understood clearly what the nature of the activities being carried out by the Active Service Unit were. I was told, however, that I was being posted to No. 2 section with Paddy Drury as my section commander.

The whole of the Active Service Unit consisted of four sections - Nos. 1 and 2 operating on the north side of the city, and Nos. 3 and 4 operating on the south side of the city. Paddy Daly was in charge of the whole unit, with, as I understand, Joe Leonard as 1st Lieutenant, Pádraig Ó'Connor as 2nd Lieutenant and Vincent Byrne as Quartermaster, Joe Leonard's specific duty being in charge of Nos. 1 and 2 sections, while the 2nd Lieutenant, Pádraig O'Connor, was in charge of Nos. 3 and 4.

The two sections operating on the north side worked something along these lines. One section took up duty at 9 a.m. at Headquarters, Morelands, Abbey Street, and remained there until word came from a G.H.Q. Intelligence Officer that men were wanted for some job. The number of men required would be stated and these would be detailed to accompany the Intelligence Officer. The section that took up duty at 9 a.m. was relieved at 2 p.m. by another section which remained on duty until 7 p.m. That finished the day's

work - at least that is the way the two sections worked when I joined the unit at first.

There were times when Nos. 1 and 2 sections went out together and joined Nos. 3 and 4 sections for some important operation. One of these was the ambushing of a troop train at Killester. This operation took place some time in the early summer of 1921. In the forenoon of the morning in question No. 2 section under Paddy Drury was ordered to proceed to Killester. We arrived there, climbed into the fields and joined up with the remainder of the Active Service Unit. The section commander addressed us and explained that our mission that morning was to de-rail and ambush a troop train in the vicinity of Killester and that simultaneously with the destruction of this train two other trains were being destroyed further up the country. Bombs and a few rifles were delivered to us on the spot, having been brought there by pony and trap. We brought our own revolvers from Morelands. We were told to take up positions on the railway embankment and nobody was to open fire until a whistle was blown, presumably by Paddy Daly, O/C. We all understood that the troop train would be preceded by a pilot engine and that the pilot engine was to be allowed to pass, and that members of the Engineering Battalion would have some sections of the railway loosened and ready to be pulled away when the pilot engine had passed. We were in position for about ten minutes when somebody said, "there are troops coming along the line". Almost immediately a train passed and a bomb was thrown from the far side of the track. This train was neither a troop train nor a pilot engine, apparently it was a local passenger train. A few shots were fired and we were ordered to retreat. Subsequently an enquiry was held into the failure to ambush the train, and the Volunteer who fired the bomb prematurely

was courtmartialled and transferred from the unit.

Auxiliary~~is~~ fired on in Grafton Street.

On an evening in June 1921, the entire Active Service Unit in conjunction with selected members of the Dublin Brigade were detailed to shoot every auxiliary in Grafton Street, and at the same time one squad was to bomb Kidd's Buffet, which was one of the places chiefly frequented by members of the auxiliary division. The section to which I was attached was to operate on the top of Grafton Street, South King Street to Chatham Street. Our instructions were that the operation would commence at 6 or 6.15 p.m. sharp. An Intelligence Officer was attached to each squad to point out the members of the Auxiliary Division who would, of course, be in mufti. The Intelligence Officer in our squad was Joey Kavanagh. Also in our squad were - Paddy Drury, a young lad named Kavanagh who was an orderly in the Divisional Intelligence H.Q., and another man whose name I believe was Quinn.

When we left Morelands in Abbey Street it became apparent almost immediately that there was undue activity of British patrols as on the Quays we walked straight into one of these, and as time was getting short we decided to take a chance and cross Capel Street Bridge, turning on to the south side of the Quays down towards the city, going through Commercial Buildings into Dame Street and eventually reached Grafton Street via Clarendon Street. We proceeded towards the top of Grafton Street. As we reached South King Street a girl was coming towards us and Paddy Drury stepped forward and spoke to her for a few seconds. The girl turned round hurriedly and went out of Grafton Street into South King Street. We turned into South King Street and immediately the Intelligence Officer, Joey Kavanagh, said, "here's two of them" (meaning two auxiliaries). The two men were in

front of us. We followed them closely and as we came to the corner of Chatham Street it was almost within a minute of the time for operations to commence. The auxiliaries continued across Chatham Street down Grafton Street. We stopped on the edge of the path. Immediately the two men had crossed the road they walked into the squad which was operating in that section and were shot on the corner. We turned round and Joey Kavanagh said, "there's another", pointing towards a man who was standing at a shop door. Paddy Drury and I fired. The door of the shop fell open; the man fell on the ground; the glass of the shop door was shattered; my gun, a Peter the Painter, jammed and we immediately ran up Grafton Street on to Stephen's Green, turned down a lane at the side of the College of Surgeons and into Camden Street where we went into a barber's shop and dumped our guns there. We then dispersed, Paddy Drury and myself going to Harold's Cross where there was pony racing. We bought programmes which we marked up as an alibi for the night. I believe the two auxiliaries that were shot were Appleby and Wearing. The man we fired at was not in fact hit; he may have been injured by falling glass.

There was a rather interesting sequel to this job. The girl whom Paddy Drury had spoken to was, of course, a friend of his and he did not want her walking into Grafton Street at that particular time. There was a D.M.P. constable on duty at the top of Grafton Street. The next issue of the police gazette the "Hue and Cry" contained a too accurate description of this incident and of Paddy Drury and myself.

I continued on with the Active Service Unit up to the Truce, and one of our last jobs on the morning of the

Truce, 11th July, 1921, was to seize a motor bicycle at Westland Row and motor tyres from Dunlops, Abbey Street.

SIGNED

John A. Caffrey

DATE

14th September 1951

WITNESS *William Ivory Lomas*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 569