

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 608

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 608

Witness

Patrick J. O'Connor,
("Ninepence" O'Connor),
5 Addison Place,
Glasnevin,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade,
1915 - ;

Member of A.S.U. Dublin Brigade, 1920-1921.

Subject.

- (a) National activities 1915-1921;
- (b) Easter Week 1916 - Cabra Road Bridge;
- (c) Raid on Collinstown Aerodrome, 20/3/1919;
- (d) A.S.U. Dublin Brigade, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1859

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Statement of Patrick J. O'Connor.

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No. W.S. 608

Statement of Patrick J. O'Connor,

5 Addison Place, Glasnevin, Dublin.

Around the summer of the year 1915 I joined "C" Company of the 1st Battalion, The Irish Volunteers, at 41 Parnell Square. I cannot recall the names of my Company officers.

The Irish American Alliance.

Along with being a member of the Volunteers I was already a member of an organisation known as "The Irish American Alliance", of which organisation the late J.J. Walsh was in charge. We met on Sunday mornings and sometimes during the week at, I think, 28 North Frederick Street. I think this organisation was approximately 100 strong. When I first joined this organisation J.J. Walsh addressed us and outlined for us our duties. These were to find out as far as possible the strength of military garrisons and their activities in Dublin city. My chief source of information was obtained from ordinary soldiers with whom I had drinks in various public houses. The information obtained would be given verbally by me to J.J. Walsh. I cannot say if all the members of this organisation were engaged on this work but it was their duty to do so. Whether they ever went to the extremes that I did to procure the information I cannot say. J.J. Walsh expressed great pleasure at the information that I gave him from time to time.

Easter Week, 1916.

I had no advanced information that a Rising was contemplated. In common with other Volunteers of my Company I felt that some activities of major importance were about to take place.

As I lived in Finglas I received no mobilisation order from my Company officer for a parade for Easter Sunday or Easter Monday. Sometime pretty late on Easter Monday evening rumour reached me at my home in Finglas that a Rising had started in the city. I felt that it was my duty to report to my Company Commander straight away. Without any more ado I made my way to Phibsboro'. On arriving there I saw that a British military cordon was in position at Doyle's Corner and a detachment of troops had already occupied the North City Mills. Some friends told me that Volunteers were on the Cabra Road bridge so I thought it better to join them there rather than search for my own Company. I succeeded in joining this group later that evening. The unit was about 24 strong and was commanded by a man named O'Reilly. Members of his unit identified me and I had no trouble in having myself accepted. This Volunteer Unit had already erected two barricades at Cabra Bridge. One barricade was used to hold up troops coming from the city direction. The other barricade was used to prevent troops entering the city from the Park. I might mention that the barricades were by no means elaborate or effective: they mainly consisted of boxes of clay taken from front gardens of neighbouring houses and hand-carts and ladders. The first night there, Monday night, was very quiet, and it was not until about 4 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon that we were attacked, the British, in the meantime, having succeeded in getting a field-piece outside

the Deaf and Dumb Institute. They fired at least three shells into our barricades. One was fired right over the barricades and its shrapnel killed some youths at Phibsboro' Corner. When the first shells were fired into the barricade we saw it was useless to man them any longer, so we withdrew to the neighbouring houses. At dusk, under cover of darkness that night, the entire party withdrew to Finglas Bridge across the fields and the canal. On arriving there, O'Reilly, the officer in charge of the Volunteer Unit, assembled us all and told me that as I was near home I should proceed there and they also intended to disperse. By this time they had dumped their guns and ammunition in the house of a relative of mine. I took no further part in the activities of Easter Week.

Raid on Collinstown Aerodrome.

Following the release of the 1916 prisoners from various English gaols and internment camps, my old Battalion, namely the 1st Battalion, was re-organised and I found myself back this time with "F" Company. The Company officers were, as far as I can remember, Dermot O'Hegarty and Liam Archer. The Company strength was very weak at the outset but it increased as time went on. The Company paraded sometimes at 41 Parnell Square and other times in another house a few doors down the street. On these parades we took part in drilling and were given lectures on the theory of the rifle. We were occasionally ordered out for field training early in the morning to Ballymun area. This type of training continued into the year 1919 and the first activity of major importance that I was engaged in was a raid on Collinstown Aerodrome in March of that year.

I was employed by a building contractor on building operations at Collinstown Aerodrome. Perhaps it was on this account that I was one of the men selected by Paddy Houlihan to carry out a raid on Collinstown Aerodrome with a view to capturing arms and ammunition.

About 7 p.m. on the 20th March, 1919, a number of men of my Company, including myself, were drilling in the fields at Ballygaul. Paddy Houlihan, the Company Commander, called me out of the ranks and instructed me to proceed home, get my gun, which was a .32 revolver, and ammunition, and proceed to a house he named at Parnell Square. I carried out his instructions and on arriving there I saw that a number of men from other Companies of the Battalion were there also. Paddy Houlihan addressed us and told us that the job in hand was a raid on Collinstown Aerodrome. A number of Volunteers were dressed in British Army uniform. Others just wore their ordinary civilian attire. My particular job that night was to guide a party across the fields from the Blanchford Arms public-house on the Swords road to the Aerodrome. I cannot say the strength of the party detailed for this operation, but I know that they were conveyed in four cars to the vicinity of the Aerodrome. Two travelled by Ballymun and two went out by Whitehall. Instructions were given that the four cars were to be met at the Blanchford Arms. I travelled in a car going via Ballymun about 2 a.m. We were delayed a bit en route as one of the cars got punctured and a spare wheel had to be put on. Starting from the Blanchford Arms I led a party of men across country to the vicinity of the Aerodrome. We crawled into the Aerodrome and when we reached a point very near where the military sentry was on his 'beat', Christy O'Malley jumped

the sentry and took him completely by surprise. Almost immediately the remainder of my party rushed the guardroom, held up the guard, dismantled the telephone, cut the rifle racks with hack-saws and tied up the guard with ropes. One of our uniformed party took the place of the sentry and performed ordinary sentry duty while we were securing the arms and ammunition in the guardroom. I rushed back for the cars and brought them down to the guardroom at the Aerodrome where the rifles and ammunition were quickly loaded on to them. One car proceeded to a dump at Rush and Lusk, another to St. Margaret's, and the remaining two cars were used to take the raiding party to town. The car that went to Lusk, having delivered its load of arms and ammunition, returned to town, but on the way in got broken down. The two Doyles who were in it had to discard their British uniforms and make their way back to the city in their ordinary clothes, posing as cattle drovers. I did not return to work next morning as it was a very wet day. I did, however, report to Dick McKee, who was living in Finglas at the time, on the success of the night's work. I think in all we had captured about 72 rifles with a considerable quantity of rifle and machine-gun ammunition. I returned to my normal work there on the following day and no suspicion was thrown on me. I should have mentioned that there were a pair of very watchful dogs in this Aerodrome. A member of our party doped these dogs on the evening before the raid with the result that they were completely inactive while the raid was taking place.

"F" Company Activities.

Following the raid on Collinstown Aerodrome the Company activities were mainly confined to raiding private

houses for arms. In this the Company was fairly successful, as it acquired quite a number of shotguns and revolvers.

Twenty of us were detailed one night to go to Ashtown station for the purpose of seizing arms which were being conveyed by train from the West to Dublin city. I think Paddy Houlihan was in charge of this party. We arrived at Ashtown station at 6 a.m. but discovered that the train had already gone by. The train was scheduled to arrive at Ashtown at 6 a.m. and we were there on time, but for some reason or other it passed before its time.

It was usual for British military policemen to parade the streets of Dublin at night-time, armed with revolvers. A decision was taken that these policemen should be held up and relieved of their guns. One night in the early autumn of, I think, 1919, six of us from "F" Company were detailed to act as a covering or supporting party to the party carrying out the actual disarming. When the policemen were assembling at College Green, on completion of their tour of duty, the party detailed to hold them up were in readiness in the vicinity of the Bank of Ireland. The six of us detailed for support were at different sides of the street, three of us at the Bank of Ireland side and three at the College Green side of Westmoreland Street. The hold-up party relieved the military policemen of their arms without any resistance being put up. When we saw that the job had been carried out quietly and successfully we withdrew.

The Active Service Unit.

On St. Stephen's Day, 1920, I was instructed by Paddy Houlihan, my Company Officer, to report to Oriel Hall, Seville Place. On arrival there I found that a big number

of men were present. We were addressed by Oscar Traynor, who told us that we had been selected by our Company officers to join a new unit which was to be known as the "Active Service Unit" of the Dublin Brigade. He said that this unit was to be available for full-time duty for twenty-four hours of the day to attack enemy troops and police, wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself. He further intimated that if any of us felt that we would not be able for the work in mind we could now stand out of the ranks, and nothing the worse would be thought of us for doing so. He told us that whole-time employment meant that we would have to leave our normal places of employment, but that we would receive £4.10.0. per week and that any of us who would survive would get the same figure as long as we would be alive. He then introduced Paddy Flanagan as the officer who was to be in charge of the Active Service Unit.

Following this meeting a parade of the Active Service Unit took place at the Plaza Hotel and the unit was organised into two groups, one for the north side and one for the south side. Frank Flood was to command the north side group, but I cannot recall who was to take charge of the group operating on the south side of the city. Each of these groups was in turn divided into sections - Nos. 1 and 2 sections to operate on the north side, and Nos. 3 and 4 to operate on the south side. I was detailed to No. 1 section. Kit O'Malley was my first Section Commander.

Our armaments consisted of revolvers and grenades, and we could have whichever we chose. I preferred a grenade to a revolver, so on any job that I was detailed for I usually carried a grenade.

We had various dumps for storing our armament. We had one at Temple Lane off Temple Street, another at Morelands in Abbey Street, and another at the Lotts, North Strand Street. We used these places from time to time, and did not remain in any one of them for any considerable period of time. We kept shifting from one to another, sometimes after a period of a week, other occasions we might remain in one particular place for a fortnight.

A. S. U. Attack Auxiliaries, Bachelor's Walk.

My first job with the Active Service Unit was an attack on Auxiliaries in tenders at Bachelor's Walk. This attack took place about mid-day early in January, 1921. We knew it was usual for tenders of Auxiliaries to travel down the Quays at this time of the day. Six of us under Christy O'Malley were detailed for the job. We took up positions at intervals along the North Quays in the vicinity of the suspension bridge. Each man made sure that he had a safe line of retreat.

On the day in question, after waiting for about a quarter of an hour, two tenders came down the Quays from the direction of Phoenix Park. As the lorries came abreast of our positions our first two men opened fire on the second lorry and the second pair opened fire on the first lorry. Myself and my comrade were the last two men, and we fired our grenades at the last lorry. The lorries kept moving. I believe we did cause casualties, as one of our scouts who was on the look-out further up towards O'Connell Bridge, reported that he had seen some of the Auxiliaries hanging over the side of the lorries as if they had been severely wounded. I know that I put my grenade clean into the lorry and saw it exploding.

Our party got away safely. The Auxiliaries did not return the fire as they were taken completely by surprise.

A. S. U. Attack British Courtmartial Officers.

Early in March, 1921, we received instructions that a number of British officers who were engaged on courtmartial duties in Dublin Castle would be going to G.H.Q. on a certain date. We were instructed to take up position on Ormond Quay, extending from Capel Street bridge to the Four Courts, and ambush this party as it travelled along the Quays. Five of us were detailed for this job and we were under the command of Tom Flood. I was posted at Gibson's tailor's shop near the Four Courts and was armed with a grenade. I was not long there when three Ford touring cars crossed Capel Street bridge. The cars were allowed proceed up the Quays and when they came abreast of the position taken up by two of our men, Tom Flood and Christy Fitzsimons, they fired on the third car, having allowed the first two to pass unmolested. The second car in the convoy of three was attacked by the next pair, and finally when the first car reached my position I threw my grenade at it. My grenade went in under the hood of the car and exploded. I must have caused casualties as the grenade exploded fully. In any case, an observation party that was posted further up the Quays reported later that we had inflicted casualties. The British party did not return the fire.

Immediately I threw my grenade I turned about and made for safety. I had not gone far when a Black and Tan in civilian attire who was standing on the footpath, fired at me. Fortunately he missed me.

A. S. U. Attack R. I. C. at Ormond Quay.

A second ambush took place in practically the same locality a few days later, this time at 6 p.m. Information reached us one evening that a group of R. I. C. men, believed to be the Igoe gang, were heading in the direction of the Phoenix Park from the Castle. Six of us took up positions along the Quays between the Ormond Hotel and the Four Courts. I found myself at a book stall between the Ormond Hotel and Gibsons, the tailor's. A look-out man beside me warned me that three lorries were coming down the Quays from Capel Street bridge. As they passed through the positions taken up by the remainder of our party, fire was opened on them. When they came to my position I threw my grenade at one of the lorries and made good my escape.

According to reports later received, we inflicted some casualties. One of our men, Seán Quinn, was slightly wounded by a bit of shrapnel from one of our grenades.

One of the G. H. Q. Intelligence Staff reported that the cars attacked were in fact conveying members of the Igoe gang.

A. S. U. Attack Auxiliaries at Phibsboro'.

Information reached us that a Ford car conveying Auxiliaries would be travelling from the Depot, Phoenix Park, down the North Circular Road at a certain time on a Sunday in the month of February, 1921. Six of the Active Service Unit, including myself, waited for this car in the vicinity of St. Peter's Church, Phibsboro. As we were too early, Tom Flood, who was paired off with me said to me, "We have some time to spare. We will go down and get the

paper". When Tom Flood got the paper the two of us walked up to the entrance to Dalymount Park, where we proceeded to read the paper. As we were reading, to our surprise the car came from the city direction. It pulled up opposite the entrance to Dalymount Park where Flood and myself were waiting. We took no action. The driver of the car got out, crossed the road and spoke to a uniformed policeman. He returned in a short time and the car moved off. As it was getting under way the two members of the Active Service Unit who were armed with grenades, fired them at the car and brought it to a standstill. Simultaneously, the remaining four members of the Squad, including Tom Flood and myself, opened fire on it also, inflicting casualties. I cannot say for certain how many of the Auxiliaries were wounded, but I know definitely that one was wounded because he was getting out of the car and seemed to be struck by a revolver bullet and fell backwards. Joe Dolan reported later that we had, in fact, severely wounded two of them.

Attempted derailment of Train.

About the middle of June, 1921, a big number of the Active Service Unit were detailed to de-rail a troop train at St. Anne's Bridge, Drumcondra, in conjunction with the Engineers. We were told that the Engineers would have the fish-plates on the railway tracks loosened, and that when the train would reach the embankment near this bridge the rails would be so loose that the engine would run off them and the whole train would capsize. We were then to open fire on the British troops.

We mobilised armed with grenades and revolvers. We were not long in position when an empty goods train was shunted up the line, which seemed to indicate that the

authorities had got information. Tom Ennis, who was in command on that particular morning, quickly ordered us to withdraw from our positions and get safely away. He felt, I think, that the British authorities must have been informed that the rails had been tampered with and that an ambush party was in wait. The troopstrain did not travel on this line that particular morning, but it did travel the next morning and was attacked, I believe, by another party.

Attack on Troops Train at Killester.

Another attack, which did not materialise, was planned to take place on a train at Killester. This was regarded as a major operation, as the entire Active Service Unit, Squad and Intelligence section was taking part in it. Paddy Daly was in charge.

We were in position at about nine or ten o'clock on the morning the attack was to take place. We were told that the Engineers had mined the railway in the vicinity of Killester bridge. We were instructed that it was a troops train we were to attack and that nobody was to open fire on it until the train was derailed. Having waited for a considerable time a train came along from the Howth direction. Some member of the ambush party prematurely fired on this train. Orders were immediately issued that we were to withdraw to safety as quickly as we could, as the wrong train had been fired on. Fortunately enough, the mines which had been placed on the railway did not explode.

A. S. U. seize Motor Tyres.

During the summer of 1921 three members of the Active Service Unit, including myself, raided premises in South William Street and seized a big quantity of motor tyres, the property of Black and Tans, which were being vulcanised there.

At about noon on the day the raid took place Bill Stapleton drove us in the A. S. U. van to South William Street. I went into the premises and held up the manager in the office. I had not a gun but I pretended that I was armed. While this was happening Seán Caffrey and Bill Stapleton loaded the motor tyres into the van. When I saw that the van was loaded I released the manager and the three of us got away. Stapleton drove the van away, and I cannot say how the tyres were disposed of.

Burning of Custom House.

On the morning that the Custom House was burned the full Active Service Unit, I think, was mobilised at the Lotts, South Anne Street, which was one of our headquarters. Paddy Flanagan addressed us there, and told us that the Custom House was to be burned that day and that we were to take part in its destruction. He said that some sections of the Active Service Unit would operate outside the building and that other sections would be given jobs in the building itself. Tom Flood, my Section Commander, picked a number of us for inside duty.

I cannot say what time we left our headquarters, but we got to the Custom House before one o'clock. We were armed with revolvers.

On arriving at the Custom House, Tom Flood reported

to Tom Ennis, who was in charge of the burning operations, that his party was ready.

Flood detailed me to stand at the back door facing down the docks and told me I was to prevent anyone from entering or leaving the building by that door. I was to withdraw from my post as soon as I heard the blast of a whistle.

I had been at my post for a considerable length of time when I heard shooting from outside the building. Almost immediately following the shooting I heard the blast of a whistle and I withdrew from the door to enter the building but I could not get very far as the building was then alight. I returned to the door and opened it. I went outside and took cover behind a sandbagged position. I saw that there was an armoured car on the Quay beside the first docks bridge. It was not firing at the time. I made my way from my position to the docks gate of the Custom House with a view to making my escape from the grounds. Just then the armoured car on the Quays moved round to the front of the building. This gave me the chance I was looking for. The way was clear at the Store Street end and I got into the bondage store there, from which point I eventually escaped through a window into Amiens Street station.

**Instructions to shoot up Crown Forces
in Grafton Street.**

Some time towards the end of June, 1921, the entire Active Service Unit was mobilised to shoot up Auxiliaries, Black and Tans and British military found in various restaurants in Grafton Street, particularly Kidds Restaurant, as it was well known that this place was used almost exclusively by members of the Crown forces.

A number of the Active Service Unit were picked by various Intelligence Officers for various places.

Joe Dolan selected me for Kidds Restaurant. The shootings were timed for six o'clock, but we were to be in the restaurant a short time before that. As we were about to enter the restaurant the Intelligence Officer who was in charge of the party that was to cover off Joe Dolan and myself, came along and said, "Don't go in yet, as my party has not come on the scene".

At about six o'clock we heard shooting further up Grafton Street. We received no order after that and, therefore, acted on our own discretion and did not go into the restaurant.

Arms Dump, Glasnevin Cemetery.

Dublin Brigade headquarters used one of the vaults in what is known as the Old Circle in Glasnevin Cemetery as a dump. A considerable quantity of revolvers, grenades and ammunition was stored in a coffin in this vault. The corpse that originally rested in that coffin was transferred to another coffin. This was done to avoid suspicion, when the people who owned the vault visited it.

Periodically three or four of us were detailed to take out these revolvers for cleaning and inspection. This work was done in the vault after midnight. One of us always entered the vault with a candle and newspaper and great care had to be taken to ensure that no grease was dropped on the coffin or that no gravel or dirt was brought in on our feet.

This dump continued to be used up to the Truce and was never discovered by the British military.

WITNESS *W. Ivory Comdt.*
(W. Ivory Comdt.)

SIGNED

DATE

8/7/51
P. J. O'Connell
"Ninepence"