

W. S. 956.

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MIL' TA 1913-21

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 956

Witness

George White,
Detective Branch,
Dublin Castle.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company 3rd Batt'n Dublin Bgde.,
1917 - ;

Quartermaster A.S.U., Dublin, 1921 - .

Subject.

- (a) Third Batt'n. Dublin Bgde. 1917-1922;
- (b) Bloody Sunday, November 1920, -
28 Pembroke St., Dublin.
- (c) Formation and personnel of A.S.U. Dublin, 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No .S.2280.

Form B S M 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1919-21
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STATEMENT BY MR. GEORGE WHITE

DETECTIVE BRANCH, DUBLIN CASTLE.

I joined C. Company, 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers about June 1917. The company was under the command of Captain Paddy Flanagan; the lieutenants were Joe O'Connor (Little Joe) and Seamus Grace. All three officers had taken part in the Rising in the Boland's Mills area.

Joe O'Connor (Holy Joe) was commandant of the 3rd Battalion. Parades were held weekly at 41 York St. and 34 Camden St. We paid a weekly subscription of sixpence towards company funds; in addition, we subscribed according to our means to an arms fund. About this time national spirit was very high among the young men and there was a big influx into the Volunteers. Nothing eventful happened in 1917 beyond drilling and training in the use of arms.

One Sunday late in 1918 or early in 1919 the company went out to the Dublin Mountains for drilling and other exercises. During the course of the day we were approached by two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, one of whom was Constable Jones; the name of the other I cannot recollect. Captain Flanagan asked them what they wanted; one of them replied: "You are under arrest". Captain Flanagan said: "I do not recognise your authority" and thereupon relieved one of the R.I.C. of the .45 revolver which he was carrying. We bound them with their own braces and we then continued our drilling. The R.I.C. men must have been missed because, on our way home that evening, we met four or five lorry loads of police proceeding in the direction of the Dublin Mountains.

During a parade in 41 York St. we were raided by D.M.P. and about twenty five of us were arrested. Noel Lemass was among those arrested; also a man named Louis D'Arcy. Paddy Flanagan

escaped. We were charged in the District Court under the Defence of the Realm Act with illegal drilling and sentenced to two months imprisonment. On instructions from G.H.Q. an appeal was lodged on our behalf and we were allowed out on bail. The appeal was heard at Green St. and it was turned down, after which we were transferred to Mountjoy and from there to Belfast - Crumlin Road Jail. We arrived in Belfast a week after the smash-up of the prison by Austin Stack and Eamon Fleming. Terence McSwiney, Kevin O'Higgins, Michael Brennan, Liam Pedlar and Ernest Blythe were in Belfast at the time. Conditions in Belfast were good, for concessions had been won as a result of the revolt. On the termination of our sentence we were released and resumed our activities with the company.

Shortly after the armistice the British arranged a victory parade which was to pass through College Green. It had been decided that Lord French should be shot while taking the salute. I was instructed to parade at 6 Harcourt St. to take part in the attack and while I was there awaiting instructions to proceed to College Green an order came from the Chief of Staff that the operation was not to be carried out.

At Easter 1919, we carried out the burning of Income Tax papers at 32 Nassau St. Later that year Lord French's mails were taken off a van at North Earl St. by Captain Flanagan.

In 1920 we started armed patrols of the street and, on the first appearance of the Auxiliaries in the streets in May, Captain Flanagan, my brother Mick, Jim Gibbons and I attacked a tender of Auxiliaries at Liffey Street. It was the first attack on the Auxiliaries in Dublin. The bomb hopped off the lorry and back on the street where it exploded.

In November 1920 a section of the company held a parade at Great Strand Street. While the parade was in progress a number

of men in civilian clothes came down Strand St. in our direction Gibbons and I were standing together at Cahill's Printing Works and the first two civilians passed us on the path. They suddenly turned and pulled guns from their pockets. They ordered us to put up our hands. I ducked down and made a run up Strand St. towards Jervis St. and Jim Gibbons went to the right. The two men fired about six or eight shots and I remember a whippet dog jumping out in the dark. I escaped, but Gibbons was caught by two of the party who had gone on in front of the two who fired. These were the special Igoe squad who were recruited from the R.I.C. There were twelve of them - only one was English. They were recruited at the time by General Tudor and were under Sergeant Igoe who had served through the 1914-18 war. Gibbons was badly treated but they let him go afterwards. Michael Collins was in O'Neill's publichouse this same night.

On Bloody Sunday C/Company were allotted to 28 Pembroke St. There were eight British Intelligence officers on Captain Flanagan's list - Major Dowling, Major Price, Colonel Montgomery, Lieut. Kenleyside, Lieut. Aymes, Lieut. Bennett, Lieut. Murray and one other whose name I cannot remember. Montgomery, Dowling and Price were executed; Murray was badly wounded and Aymes and Bennett were caught in a house in Donnybrook by another company. Green, the porter in the hotel, was under suspicion by the British authorities and was arrested and charged with complicity. He was convicted and sentenced to three years' penal servitude. He died afterwards in the Union. Green, in fact, had not helped us in any way; he knew nothing whatever about our plans and was, therefore, wrongfully convicted. Jim Doyle, who was known to us as "The Shelmalier" shot and killed an officer on the landing of the hotel; he was trying to warn Montgomery. We proceeded to 19 Ormond Quay and dumped a number of guns there.

I met Paddy Flanagan later that day by arrangement and walked down to O'Connell St. some time about 2 p.m. We had an idea that we might go to the match in Croke Park but Paddy said it would be too risky. We saw the Auxiliary lorries going toward Croke Park. The following night my own home in Swift's Row was raided by British military. Mick and I were at home at the time. We had a narrow escape that night because the first place they knocked at was 19 Ormond Quay where all the stuff was dumped. They came into our house eventually and made a thorough search of the whole place. The captain in charge was a gentleman, but the I.O. was an objectionable type. They went through everything in the house, including papers and documents of every description. My father, who had been a member of the R.I.C., always kept the police box in which were his discharge papers. The British I.O. got the papers and the captain in charge intervened, saying there was no necessity to go any further and stopped the search. However, he warned my father to get Mick and me out of the country.

The following night we decided we would change our residence for a while as the situation was getting worse. We knew a friendly house in Capel St. owned by people named Fox, but at the last minute we decided to risk staying in our own home. Fox's was raided that night and they were looking for us there. Paddy Flanagan had a workshop in Aungier St. and it was full of arms. During the time that George Hampton was working there a bullet went off and the neighbours became frightened. After this we had to evacuate and remove the stuff to Swift's Row by handcart. On the way down, Farrell, who owned the handcart and was a friend of ours, was held up by Auxiliaries in Aungier St. The stuff was on the handcart and covered by an old tarpaulin. Farrell left the handcart on the street and walked over to a window. He was questioned but the handcart went unnoticed. He then continued on his way with the cart to Swift's Row, where we had a dump. At that time Sean Russell,

Director of Munitions, and George Plunkett had a dump in No. 3 Swift's Row. They were experimenting with land mines at the time and had a lot of gear. They used occasionally examine this material. A Jew named Max Cohen was a tenant in this house; he knew all about the dump but said nothing about it. His brother, Abraham, had an antique shop at 20 Ormond Quay and he told Mick and me that at any time it was necessary we could use his house as a means of escape.

At this time things were becoming very hot in Dublin and the Active Service Unit was about to be launched. Some few days before Christmas 1920, I was instructed to attend a meeting at Oriel Hall on St. Stephen's Day. I went there as instructed. The meeting was addressed by the Brigade O/C., Oscar Traynor, who told us that it had been decided to form an Active Service Unit. He explained to us that it would be a full-time job and that we would be paid a salary of £4.10.0. weekly. He said that the object of the A.S.U. was to combat the Auxiliaries and that we would commence operations immediately, and we were to work in conjunction with H.Q. Squad. Captain Paddy Flanagan was appointed O/C. Frank Flood was 1st Lieutenant, the I.O. was William Doyle, the M.O. was Sean Flanagan, who is at present a doctor in New York. Jim Gibbons was Adjutant, and Tommy Bryan was Q.M. Frank Flood and Tommie Bryan were executed in Mountjoy Prison in March 1921 for their parts in the Drumcondra ambush. The members of the A.S.U. were drawn from the four battalions; it was organised into four sections numbered one to four to correspond to the battalions with a section commander in charge of each section. Each section operated in its own battalion area. I was allotted to No. 3 Section and, therefore, we operated in the 3rd Battalion area.

We had three meeting places - Barracks, we called them - 17 Eustace St. (Paddy Flanagan's office), 17 Temple Bar, and 17 Great Strand St. The different sections paraded at 9 a.m.

each morning unless there was a particular operation planned. They attacked the British military in daily ambushes in their areas. The Intelligence were concentrating on the capture of Tudor and Macready. We were often out waiting half a day at a particular point where the Intelligence would be expecting these men to pass. Once, we were waiting for French at Leeson Street, he came by Mount St. from Beggars Bush. He had a remarkable escape that day for his car was caught between two loads of hay and was practically at a standstill in Mount Street.

On another occasion we were waiting with the H.Q. Squad at Capel St. Bridge for General Tudor. While we waited, three open touring cars arrived from the direction of the Phoenix Park. These were Igoe's squad. We got no signal to attack and allowed them to cross Capel St. Bridge towards the Castle. Joe Carroll and I were standing at the corner of the bridge - we were to throw bombs into the car when it slowed up at the corner and the A.S.U. were to close in. Guilfoyle was to give the signal that day. While waiting, we saw Igoe and the squad coming across the bridge on foot and still we remained as we were. One half of the Igoe squad went to the Ormond Hotel and the other to Campion's, a restaurant in Capel St. About 20 minutes later we were dismissed.

I forgot to mention an operation on the railway bridge at Harcourt Terrace. We were in C/Company at the time and Captain Flanagan instructed us to go up on the bridge and to throw two No. 9 bombs on a lorry which was to pass below. We were there until 5 a.m. but nothing passed, so we got down off the bridge at Ranelagh and went to Paddy's house. Operations like that took place daily.

The Drumcondra Ambush.

On the morning of the Drumcondra ambush I was present at 17 Temple Bar. I was instructed by Captain Flanagan to hand out some bombs and ammunition to Frank Flood and I heard Flood being

instructed by Captain Flanagan to carry out the ambush at Drumcondra Bridge. The men were a long time waiting at the bridge and then they proceeded to Goose Green. There was a Sergeant Singleton living in the vicinity who 'phoned the Castle from the old Petty Sessions Court in Drumcondra. The British arrived and surrounded the attacking party. Kit O'Malley and Burke got away, but Tom Brien, Flood and Doyle were captured. Michael Magee was wounded and died afterwards. These men were tried and sentenced to death. I succeeded Tom Brien as Q.M.

Previous to this there were some emigrants from the West of Ireland staying in the Globe Hotel. Captain Flanagan got instructions from the O/C. to place these people under arrest. My brother, Morrissey and McPhillips placed them under arrest and conveyed them to 100 Seville Place. This house was raided and the emigrants were taken prisoner. They were sentenced to three years. They were afterwards released, but the escort, consisting of my brother, Michael White, Patrick Morrissey, Philips and Joseph Carroll were arrested and sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

There was a raid for arms in the United Services Club, Stephen's Green. We took shotguns and a few revolvers which belonged to members of the Club - people connected with the British army.

Attack on Igoe Squad at Arran Quay.

The Igoe Squad were coming from the Depot, Phoenix Park, to the Castle, along the quays. There was an exchange of shots and bombs were thrown at the cars. Captain Flanagan was in charge of that attack. Myself, my brother, Jim Gibbons and Joe Carroll took part in this operation.

There was an attack on Major Fitzjohn, an officer on General Tudor's staff, at Charlemont St. Bridge, as he was proceeding from Clonskea Castle to Dublin Castle. We were placed in position by Captain Flanagan about 9.45 a.m.

Hughes of the Intelligence Department changed our positions, with the result that when the car came up Flood and Doyle opened fire. They missed the driver and the car swerved coming to the top of the bridge. Mick and I threw two bombs at the car and these rebounded back on the street. Carroll and McPhilips were on the city side of the bridge and they fired at the car as it proceeded at a terrific pace down Charlemont St. It struck a milkcart on its way. The Major's wife was with him at the time and the Irish Times made much of this incident, accusing us of attacking women. Of course, we did not know that he would be accompanied by his wife. It was believed that the Major was wounded in the attack.

There was an incident at Swift's Row. I was on the run at the time and used to come to my own house every morning by bicycle. As I came near the house I saw a tall man in civilian clothes looking into a shop window. He seemed to me to be like a member of the British forces and to be there for no good purpose. When I came to the house young Breen was there and I told him to keep an eye on this civilian. Breen used to carry an old Spanish revolver which only worked occasionally. He walked down and the civilian, who was evidently watching, moved up Strand St., as Breen walked down Swift's Row. Breen followed him up Strand St. and when they got about halfway up Breen decided he would investigate the matter further, so he pulled the gun and called on the man to put up his hands. As the man pulled up his hands, he drew a revolver from his pocket and then young Breen pressed the trigger of the gun he was carrying. Breen's gun failed to work and the other man fired at Breen, missing him. The man turned and ran up Strand Street with Breen running after him across Capel St. Bridge. Breen hit him on the back with the old gun but the man succeeded in getting into the Castle.

Another incident took place in a room in Crampton Buildings where Paddy Dalton was lodging. He was secretary to the Adjutant General, Gearoid O'Sullivan, who had an office in Arran Quay over a furniture shop owned by the Butler Sisters. Dalton used to work in this office. Dalton was sitting on the bed reading a novel, while a member of C/Company, Anthony O'Reilly, was tricking with a .45 gun. He did not think there was anything in it, but there happened to be a round in it and the bullet went into Dalton's groin. I went out to get into touch with the Adjutant General and walked into Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy who were walking up the quays. McKee was O/C. Dublin at the time I reported the matter to McKee and he instructed me to get Dalton into the Mater under an assumed name. I got him into the Mater where he eventually recovered.

A spy named Byrne was taken into 17 Strand St. by Captain Daly, B/Company, 1st Battalion, and two other members of B/Coy. There was an order for his execution. They questioned and cross-examined Byrne who denied everything and afterwards they took him out and fired at him in Jervis St. He was wounded and taken into the hospital. Next day I got word from the porter in the hospital that Byrne was anxious to make a statement to a police officer. I informed Captain Flanagan of this. He sent to the O/C. for further instructions; the O/C. at the time was Oscar Traynor. Flanagan was ordered to complete the execution of Byrne which he carried out on the same day. The execution squad consisted of Flanagan, Gibbons, Willie Doyle and James Browne. H.Q. Squad at the time were in Squire's of Abbey St. but they evacuated after this.

About April of 1921 - some time previous to the burning of the Custom House - a considerable amount of indiscipline crept in amongst the H.Q. squad and they were inclined to drink rather excessively. Collins was anxious to replace Keogh by

Paddy Daly who was a prisoner in Ballykinlar at the time and a teetotaller. He instructed Daly to sign any papers necessary to obtain his release, which he did. When Collins mentioned to Keogh that he intended to put Daly in charge of the squad, Keogh refused to hand over to Daly and the majority of the squad backed Keogh and threatened all kinds of reprisals. In fact, at a meeting in Gardiner St. which was presided over by Oscar Traynor and attended by the squad and members of the A.S.U. and at which I was present, the attitude of the H.Q. squad was definitely disobedient and they cut up rather rough. This meeting was concerned with the planning of the Seville Place operation. This trouble resolved itself at the burning of the Custom House when Keogh and the majority of the squad were arrested; Daly assumed command automatically and the remainder of the squad and the A.S.U. amalgamated and formed what was known as the Dublin Guard. A number of the A.S.U. refused to sign on under Daly.

Burning of Custom House.

This was definitely a Dublin Brigade job, although the A.S.U. and the squad took part in it. Flanagan was given a job inside the building and I was on the outside with Rigney and about ten members of the A.S.U. We were standing at Liberty Hall when the men went inside the Custom House. We were supposed to patrol up the quays as far as Abbey St. and our orders were to attack any troops or objects which might come from the direction of O'Connell St. The 4th Battalion were on the south side of Butt Bridge and the 1st Battalion were over towards Gardiner St. When we got as far as Marlboro' St. we heard a few shots and people started running away from the Custom House. We moved a little way towards the Custom House and the shooting became heavier. We moved back again towards Marlboro St. where we met Rigney who was anxious to relieve the position. We had a discussion but decided we could do

nothing to help. At this time Auxiliaries and troops had arrived from every direction. An Auxiliary lorry happened to come from the direction of the North Wall and some of the men inside the Custom House opened fire on it; it was this incident which gave the alarm. We went back to the barracks in Strand St. and took it for granted that Flanagan was a prisoner. At 4 p.m. that evening Flanagan escaped over the back railings and got away towards the North Wall. He eventually made his way back to Strand St. Another man - Stephenson - escaped that day too. After this operation there were only about fifteen men left out of a total of fifty in the A.S.U.

About three or four days later we were instructed by Joe Dolan to find a man named Coffey, who had said he could identify Keogh as a member of the execution squad, but we could not find this man.

We carried out a few ambushes after this in the A.S.U. area. When the two units were disbanded, Flanagan went back as O/C. of G/Company, 3rd Battalion, and I returned to the company also. This was about three weeks before the Truce.

When the Truce came we went to a training camp in Ballinascorney; this was a shooting lodge in the mountains, and Paddy O'Connor was the O/C. We continued our training there, pending a resumption of hostilities, or a settlement. Meanwhile, recruiting was opened up again and Flanagan was promoted Vice-Commandant of the battalion. I was elected O/C. of F/Company, 3rd Battalion.

Sean MacMahon and some others came one night to York St. They were trying to induce men to accept the Treaty, but Flanagan refused to admit them.

I was instructed by Commandant Joe O'Connor to proceed to the Masonic Hall in Molesworth St. where a number of Belfast refugees had taken shelter.

Commandant O'Connor instructed me to put them out and establish a military post there - an outpost of the Four Courts. The Kildare St. Club had been occupied by Noel Lemass about the same time. We barricaded the Hall and put it in a state of defence. During the occupation Daly and Thornton came one night but we did not answer the knock. We remained at the ready until they left. We continued in occupation until an arrangement was arrived at between the Provisional Government and the O/C. Dublin. I handed the Hall back to Hugo MacNeill of the Provisional Government.

Early in June 1922, my uncle, who was in business in London, was taken ill. I was requested to go across to transfer his business to Dublin and got permission from the Battalion O/C. to go over. Paddy Flanagan, the Vice-Commandant, came with me. We were there about a week when we heard a Stop Press being called; on buying a copy of the paper we saw that the Four Courts had been attacked by Provisional Government troops. Flanagan, on reading this news, was greatly upset and actually broke down and said: "My God, they are mad". We decided to return home and were actually sitting in the train at Euston when Dinny Kelleher, who was Vice-Commandant of London at the time Sir Henry Wilson was shot, came into our carriage. He said there was a meeting being held in Mooney's in the Strand to discuss the possibility of rescuing Dunn and Sullivan, who were awaiting trial at the time. Paddy volunteered to carry out the risk provided he had sufficient men and Thompson guns, but after some discussion he came to the conclusion that the London people were not wholehearted about the idea as what they really wanted was sufficient men from Dublin to come over and do the job. We returned home and Kelleher accompanied us. On arrival, he got into touch with Liam Lynch. I heard afterwards from Kelleher that Lynch said to him: "Why didn't

you send a man with two legs to do the job?" and Lynch promised to do what he could to rescue the two men in London. Kelleher then went and interviewed Collins in Portobello Barracks. They were suspicious of him as they placed him under open arrest. He was released, however, and returned to London.

