

D1445

1 W M C D 4

This interview is being tape recorded. It is being conducted in an Interview Room at Gough Barracks in Armagh. Today's date is the 10th of April 2001 and the time is 2016. Eh my name is DC [REDACTED] and I am accompanied today by - D/C [REDACTED] - eh the subject of the interview, could you identify yourself for me, please.

ATKINSON

Robert Cecil Atkinson.

And your date of birth, please, Robert.

ATKINSON

And your current address.

ATKINSON

Right, ehm Robert you are accompanied today by your solicitor, legal representative

SOLICITOR

Sean Hagan, Portadown.

And also present in the eh room is

OMBUDSMAN

[REDACTED] of the Police Ombudsman's Office.

Right, eh Robert you were arrested earlier on today on suspicion of Conspiracy to Pervert the Course of Justice in relation to the Murder of Robert Hamill in 1997 and before I go on any further I have to caution you as per Article 3 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which states, You do not have to say anything, but I must caution you that if you do not mention when questioned, something which you later rely on in Court, it may harm your defence. If you do say anything it may be given in evidence. Do you understand that caution, Robert.

ATKINSON

Yes.

Is there anything you don't understand about it or you would like explained.

ATKINSON

No.

OK. Right, Robert ehm during eh after you were arrested this morning there was a search took place, a search took place at your

ATKINSON

Yes, I understand that.

At your home address on the [REDACTED] During that search ehm this notebook was found, OK.

ATKINSON

Yes.

And I, I refer to it as Police Identification Mark NWH3.

ATKINSON

Yes.

Ehm and it's described as a black address book, OK and as I say it was seized from

ATKINSON

Yes, I am aware of it, yes.

You are aware of it, OK.

ATKINSON

Yes.

Now, because this has been sealed

ATKINSON

Yes.

Ehm what, what has taken place is we've had a photocopy of some of the pages

ATKINSON

Yes.

Right ehm and you can see it yourself here (inaudible)

ATKINSON

Uh huh.

Ehm within the notebook

SOLICITOR

Excuse me, who was present during this search.

Who was present.

SOLICITOR

Yeah.

Eh Police Officers, I wasn't there myself and it's

SOLICITOR

How many Police Officers.

I don't know.

SOLICITOR

Anyone else.

I couldn't honestly tell you - no, I wasn't present during the search.

SOLICITOR

Mr Atkinson made a request that someone else apart from a Police Officers would be present during the search. Isn't that right.

ATKINSON

That's correct.

SOLICITOR

And was that request respected.

Unfortunately I'm not in a position to answer that question at the minute.

SOLICITOR

Well could it not be ascertained now before

we proceed with the interview.

It can be, if you want.

SOLICITOR

I think we might as well get that checked.

Uh huh, do you want it checked.

SOLICITOR

Yes.

OK, could you just clarify that for me again, Robert, before I do go away or your solicitor

SOLICITOR

Yeah, we want to know who else was present apart, how many Police Officers were present during the interview, who else was present and if not why was Mr Atkinson's request eh ignored.

OK. We'll have to stop the tape

SOLICITOR

That's fine.

Mr [REDACTED], have you any objections us stopping the tape and then to restart (inaudible) suspend the interview.

SOLICITOR

No objections to re-starting, none, none whatever, nothing

ATKINSON

No.

Well we'll stop the tape now and if we go by your - ehm eh the time is 2019 - OK - I am turning off the tapes - we are now resuming the interview of Robert Atkinson and the time, by my watch is 2028 hours - right - Robert, you have already been cautioned, do you want

SOLICITOR

Well just, I wish, wish to indicate that after a substantial interval eh Detective Constable [REDACTED] has returned to advise that the Police refused to respond to the questions raised in relation to the personnel in regard to the search of the suspect's house eh and there was a refusal to respond also to the eh question as to whether or not the suspect's wish was respected namely that some other independent person be present when the search was carried out and I wish to protest in the strongest terms at the continued refusal of Police to deal with these matters. It sounds, sounds to me extraordinary why at least we could not be told the truth at this stage so I'll put it no further at this point.

Fine, Mr O'Hagan

SOLICITOR

Hagan, yes.

Mr Hagan, right, I didn't refuse to answer your question just so that it's on tape

SOLICITOR

Well I, I

I gave you an answer, right, those matters will be clarified or answered at a later stage. My job, in this interview, is to put this exhibit, right, you have made your point and I have come down and I have given you an answer but my job in this interview is to put this exhibit to him. Once this exhibit has been put to him, if you want to make any other matters eh brought or brought to the attention of anybody either Police or otherwise then perhaps you could refer them to the Custody Sergeant

SOLICITOR

Yes, I know

But if they are a matter for, for the meantime in the interview if we can get on, go through this thing, this exhibit here, the notebook, Robert, we'll get it done.

SOLICITOR

Yes, I'm not being critical of you

Uh huh.

SOLICITOR

I'm being critical of the refusal of your Authorities to respond to what I regard a proper and a reasonable request and I am doing so not only in your presence but in the presence of the representative from the Police Ombudsman's Office.

OK - OK, Robert.

ATKINSON

That's fine, yeah.

Right, as I said before, you know you are under caution.

ATKINSON

Yes

Right.

ATKINSON

That's fine, yeah.

Just before we go on, we'll caution you again and remind you of the

ATKINSON

Right.

For the offence for which you were arrested namely eh Conspiracy to Pervert the Course of Justice eh in relation to the Murder of Robert Hamill in 1997. As I say you are under caution but I was just eh remind you of what it states, You do not have to say anything, but I must caution you that if you do not mention when questioned, something

which you later rely on in Court, it may harm your defence. If you do say anything it may be given in evidence.

ATKINSON

That's fine.

OK, Robert.

ATKINSON

Yeah.

Right, the exhibit that I was referring to just before the interruption was Police Identification Mark NWH3, which is a, described as a black address book. As I mentioned to you earlier the book is sealed, a photocopy has been taken of some of the pages

SOLICITOR

Right.

Ehm I'm just going to

ATKINSON

Yeah, yeah.

You know I'm not (inaudible)

ATKINSON

The notebook, you are going to hang onto it then, right.

Right.

ATKINSON

It's quite simple eh during my days in the MSU and latterly even in Portadown, all the guys carried a notebook for suspects or suspect vehicles, it meant that you didn't have to keep re-writing them into your notebook every time the notebook was finished. Well that's what that notebook is. I've had it for years, I'm sure if you checked the dates or the addresses, some of them is bound to be well out. Those were suspects that were given out to us in briefings and most of the guys carried a small notebook like that and kept their suspects all on it for handiness.

How long have you had that notebook, Robert.

ATKINSON

Eh I'm sure from I was in the MSU maybe or at least maybe seven, eight, nine years maybe.

Right, when, when were you in the MSU.

ATKINSON

Well, a good question eh I was in Craigavon, Portadown and Mahon Road and the MSU prior to that; that's when I started to carry a notebook, now I'm not sure if it's the exact same notebook but everyone carried a notebook.

Right.

ATKINSON Well eh yes I understand that
(inaudible)

ATKINSON I was, I'm quite aware of the notebook
Uh huh.

ATKINSON And I'm quite aware where it was at home, it
was in a drawer at the side of my bed.
Can you confirm that for me.

ATKINSON No, but I'm just eh
It's just marked as a notebook - OK, ehm as
I say some of the names

ATKINSON All the names would be suspects or people
that were regarded as
Suspects for

ATKINSON For any types of terrorism, eh criminal eh
thief, thief type people, anything like
that.
Uh huh.

ATKINSON Just general names that were read out for,
at a briefing for maybe a Collator or some
everyday use.
Uh huh.

ATKINSON There is nothing untoward about it, it's,
it's just an easier way of keeping eh your
names altogether. Every time you finish a
notebook you are going to have to start and
re-write those into the back of the new
notebook so that's the way most guys carried
the thing.
Right, so explain to me in your words again
the reason that you have this rather than
keeping them in the, I know what you are
talking about

ATKINSON Right.
At the back of the

ATKINSON Well as you can see there would be quite a
few names in a notebook that size and if you
re-write eh the names into your notebook
every time your notebook was finished you
would be covering a third of your notebook
nearly every time so the most of the guys
that I ever worked with carried a little
notebook and kept all the names of the
suspect vehicles and suspect persons and
that's what that is.

Right, where did you keep this notebook.

ATKINSON

I kept that notebook on my person with my notebook, with my Police issue notebook.

When.

ATKINSON

When I was on duty.

On duty.

ATKINSON

Uh huh.

Ehm is there any reason why it was at your house rather than in say the Police Station.

ATKINSON

Well I didn't think it was, I thought it was a safer place in my house than leaving it lying in the locker.

Right ehm just to, just to indicate, for the purposes of the tapes

ATKINSON

Uh huh.

There's people, well there's [REDACTED]

ATKINSON

Yes.

Ehm I think speaks for himself there whenever I mention the name.

ATKINSON

Yeah, uh huh.

ATKINSON

Yes.

Why, what interest has he.

ATKINSON

He was one of [REDACTED] cohorts.

Uh huh, [REDACTED]

ATKINSON

He's dead, he was an ex, he would've been a Loyalist UVF man at one stage.

Uh huh, [REDACTED]

ATKINSON

He would've been also UVF.

And how, how did you collate them, you know in this notebook.

ATKINSON

How did I collate them.

Aye, how did you collate them together.

ATKINSON

I just, I didn't collate them together, I kept, I kept, oh you mean well I kept eh Loyalist and Republicans or criminals whatever, I just kept them in separate groups.

Uh huh, OK, so these

ATKINSON

The easier way to work it, yeah.

These first few pages

ATKINSON

Uh huh.

Or sorry two pages here

ATKINSON

Right.

You are saying that these were

ATKINSON

Well they were Loyalist suspects, yes.

Loyalist Paramilitary suspects.

ATKINSON

Yes.

Right, and then we have here PIRA Coalisland and we've different names

ATKINSON

Yes, well those were ones eh when I was in the Birches Unit we covered eh that end of the country and they were crossing up through our area and travelling on their way to Lurgan and things like that so you had to sort of really know who your suspects were travelling through and that's what that is.

Uh huh, right, we'll move on, PIRA, Lurgan.

ATKINSON

Yes, the same thing again, Lurgan and Coalisland moved vice versa at times. It's just a simpler thing.

Is that a continuation.

ATKINSON

Eh I can't see, what is it.

Well I'll let you see that but (inaudible), there's

ATKINSON

Yeah, yeah, that's a continuation of Lurgan, yeah.

Right, those are all, we'll just turn over and PIRA, Portadown.

ATKINSON

Well eh wait till I see now, no, aye well there's a few PIRA and a there's a few eh what you would call ordinary thieves involved there, you know eh who knocked about with them

With PIRA suspects.

ATKINSON

Yeah.

Uh huh - right.

ATKINSON I'm sure Mr eh Hagan will know a few names on that list I would say.

SOLICITOR Absolutely not, I haven't been PIRA, Armagh.

ATKINSON Right, that's the same thing, they were just travelling through our area and had to be aware of them.

These, these three people here aren't

ATKINSON No, those were eh known thieves.

Ordinary crime.

ATKINSON Known criminals, yes ordinary crime, yeah.

Right - uh huh - by that you mean did, what

ATKINSON Well would have stole anything eh, eh would have called an old person's house and give me a glass of water

Bogus callers.

ATKINSON Yeah.

Burglaries.

ATKINSON Went into the house and things like that, yeah.

Handlers

ATKINSON Uh huh.

People like that.

ATKINSON Yeah.

Right, ehm and the reason that you kept this at house was because

ATKINSON I thought it was safer keeping it at home than in my locker.

OK.

ATKINSON My house is secure, there's armoured glass and stuff on it, there is no way you would get into my house.

Right, do you keep your Police issue notebook at home.

ATKINSON My Police, Police issue notebook was seized.

Uh huh.

ATKINSON So I haven't got it at the moment.

OK ehm did you ever keep it at home.

ATKINSON

Eh when I was coming home eh when I was coming home at night maybe if it had've been in my Police trousers if I hadn't changed I would have kept the two of them in my pocket.

Uh huh.

ATKINSON

But I didn't eh I didn't make a point of just keeping it at home or in my locker, you know, it just happened to me if I, if I put it in my coat pocket I carried it and that was it.

So basically you're telling me you have this notebook or had this notebook

ATKINSON

From a long time ago, if you had've checked there is a lot of people as I say dead and a lot of those addresses are years out of date.

When was the last time you think you made an entry in that.

ATKINSON

Auck it could be four years ago maybe or even more.

And when did you stop using it.

ATKINSON

Eh probably, in Craigavon I hadn't the same use for it because the people, the like of Coalisland people weren't travelling through they were by-passing us, they were going down the motorway and the local thieves in Craigavon were sort of known to the Police really so you didn't really have the same; Craigavon has it's own hard core of criminals with a few terrorists thrown in but generally you know them all.

Uh huh.

ATKINSON

And then after a while you got to know the names of them anyway; it was only when you were getting them at the start that you weren't aware who they were maybe so after a while you got to know them by name and by, by seeing them so you didn't need the notebook really.

OK, ehm - you're saying then by the nature of Craigavon (inaudible) situation you don't really have a, a passing population

ATKINSON

Well you have but the like of the Coalisland guys they would go down the motorway.

That's what I'm saying you don't

- ATKINSON Oh aye, yes, you're, you're in
(inaudible)
- ATKINSON You're in, you're in housing estates really,
you know what I mean.
Uh huh.
- ATKINSON And you're, you're, well you are working in
an area of about, I suppose three or four
square miles just in housing estates
Right.
- ATKINSON And you don't have the same eh it's more
local hoods, like half the hoods are in
Belfast and what moved into Craigavon so you
have them all living on your patch plus you
have a lot of eh eh itinerant guys who were
a bit hot, light fingered, you know.
Uh huh, right, when you talk about
(inaudible) travellers or travelling
criminals generally.
- ATKINSON Well both.
Both.
- ATKINSON There was a lot of itinerant camps about
Craigavon, centres, you know as such.
Right, OK.
- ATKINSON So that's really why, I hadn't been using
it.
Uh huh.
- ATKINSON It was in the drawer at the side of my bed
and I had no reason to use, you know.
How long have you been in Craigavon.
- ATKINSON Eh a good question, it's about three years.
Three years.
- ATKINSON I just wouldn't be sure of the exact date,
about three years.
And you wouldn't then have been using that
book
- ATKINSON No, no, the last time I would have used it
was in Portadown prior to; I think I used it
mostly in the Birches, you know, to be
honest. It was eh
- Right.
- ATKINSON Because we just did a two car patrol out

there and we were on our own and then you got a lot of travelling through your area. There is back roads in from the Birches in through Portadown that these guys used a lot. We used to stop them a lot on the back roads.

Right, OK, is there anything you want to add.

ATKINSON

No, that's eh

Right.

ATKINSON

Like as I say there is a logical explanation for it, it's nothing, nothing of, that I wish to hide; there is nothing to hide in it.

Eh Mr Hagan

SOLICITOR

No, I have no questions.

Right, OK, right, what about yourself, sir.

OMBUDSMAN

No there's nothing.

That's OK, if nobody has anything else to ask or add ehm the time being

ATKINSON

Well just, the only thing I would say if you do wish to check you can, you can see that a lot of those guys are now gone or, it's out of date, you know.

Right, just before we switch - you have been served, served the Form PACE 21, have you.

ATKINSON

I have, yes.

In the earlier interviews.

ATKINSON

Yeah, yeah.

OK ehm the time is now, it's ehm 2042 hours, I am now switching off the tape.

CHECKED & CERTIFIED AN ACCURATE TRANSCRIPT OF PACE
TAPE NO T262762A INTERVIEW OF ROBERT CECIL ATKINSON
ON 10 APRIL 2001 BETWEEN 2016 HOURS AND 2042 HOURS.

Wendell Dwyer