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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 445

Witness

Col. James J. Slattery (Retired)

Daars, Sallins,

Co. Kildare.

IdentityMember of 'F' Coy. 2nd Battalion Dublin Brigade
Irish Volunteers, 1914 - .

Member of 'The Squad' 1919-1921.

Subject

- (a) Jacob's Factory Easter Week 1916;
- (b) Formation of 'The Squad' 1919;
- (c) Activities against enemy agents 1919-1921;
- (d) Bloody Sunday, November, 1920;
- (e) Burning of Custom House, May 1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S.1512.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 445

STATEMENT BY JAMES SLATTERY (Colonel, retired)

Daars, Sallins, County Kildare.

I joined the Volunteers in May 1914. I joined "F" Company of the 2nd Battalion.

The first action I participated in was the landing of arms at Howth on 26th July, 1914.

When the split occurred in the original Volunteer organisation I remained loyal to the Irish Volunteers.

Up to 1916 no event of importance took place, other than parading, drilling and manoeuvres with Ginger O'Connell.

Easter Week, 1916.

Some time during Holy Week, 1916, I received mobilisation orders to parade at the Father Mathew Park, Fairview, on Easter Sunday. I paraded in accordance with my orders, although I had read the cancellation notice in the paper that day. When the parade fell in, it was disbanded and we were given instructions to remain at home and await further orders.

On Easter Monday morning I got orders to parade at Stephen's Green at about 11.30 a.m., and I paraded in accordance with orders. We were marched across to Jacobs under Commandant MacDonagh. On reaching Jacobs we smashed in the doors and forced an entry.

I did not go into Jacobs. I was placed in charge of a small group of men to occupy barricades at New Street at the back of Jacobs. We commandeered carts and formed a barricade across the road.

Late that night we were withdrawn to Jacobs, and after that I enjoyed a very quiet week.

When the order for the surrender came, we marched out

of Jacobs under Jimmy Shields into Bride Street. We grounded our arms there. We were marched to Richmond Barracks, and later deported to Knutsford. After some time in Knutsford I was transferred to Frongoch, and remained there until I was released with the general body of prisoners.

A few months after my return home I joined "E" Company of the 2nd Battalion under Dick McKee. We paraded at Clonliffe Hall. I remained with that Company up to the Truce, but was detached for some time to a unit known officially as the Squad.

Formation of Squad.

About a fortnight before the shooting of Detective Smith (30th July, 1919) I received instructions to proceed to a house in North Great George's Street, I think it was No. 35. On arriving there I found a fairly big number of Volunteers present. Dick McKee and Mick McDonnell were there, and they picked out a number of us and took us to an inner room. Dick McKee addressed those of us who had been selected and asked us if we had any objection to shooting enemy agents. The greater number of Volunteers objected for one reason or another. When I was asked the question I said I was prepared to obey orders.

Some of the Volunteers who accepted the proposition put to them that night were Tom Ennis, Tom Keogh, I am not sure if Mick Kennedy of Ballybough was there then, Paddy Daly, Tom Kilcoyne and Joe Leonard.

As far as I remember it was not indicated to us at that meeting that we were to become a unit to be known later as the Squad. We were merely told that we were to be given special duties. This was all said to us by Dick McKee and Mick McDonnell.

I recall that two men, who had previously told Mick McDonnell that they had no objection to being selected for special duty, turned down the proposition at that meeting. Mick McDonnell seemed very annoyed at them and asked them why they had signified their willingness in the first instance.

Following that meeting I received my orders through Mick McDonnell. I looked upon him as the officer in charge of the section to which I was attached. There was another section under the command of Paddy Daly. I remember Paddy Daly's section were looking for Detective Officer Hoey and our section were looking for Detective Officer Smith. On several occasions the two sections co-operated in operations that were carried out. I became a full-time paid member of the Squad in company with Tom Keogh, Ben Barrett, Mick Keogh and Vincie Byrne. I cannot remember what date the Squad was officially formed and paid.

My recollection is that during the last year before the Truce the permanent members of the Squad were as follows:- Tom Keogh, Mick Reilly, Eddie Byrne, Paddy Griffin, J. Conroy, William Stapleton, Vincent Byrne, Ben Byrne, Frank Bolster, Pat McCrae, M. Kennedy (not the man from Ballybough) and myself. There was one other man whose name I cannot recall. These men did not serve in the Squad from the start. They joined the Squad some time between its formation and a year before the Truce. Others who had joined the Squad had gone from it, some of them had died. The members of the Squad at this time were permanently employed. Paddy Daly had gone to take charge of the Active Service Unit, and I took over control of the Squad after Mick McDonnell left.

When I took over the Squad I received my orders direct from the Intelligence Office in No. 3 Crow Street, usually from Liam Tobin, sometimes from Cullen, and occasionally

from Collins. On one occasion we were trying to get two sets of revolvers, a spare set for the South side and another set for the North side of the city, so that when we were carrying out an operation in the South city we could dump our guns and not have to carry them across the city, and vice versa. Keogh and myself met Collins about this matter in Phil Shanahan's public-house. He asked us what was wrong and we told him. He said, "What will you have?" and we said we would have two small sherries. He left them for us and went off. We had the guns in a couple of days.

Activities against enemy agents and spies.

Mick McDonnell told us that Detective Officer Smith was living in Millmount Avenue and he was to be shot as he was becoming too active working against Volunteer interests. Mick McDonnell instructed me to go to Drumcondra Bridge and take with me Tom Keogh, Tom Ennis and Mick Kennedy, who knew Smith by sight. Mick McDonnell told us that Smith usually came home by tram, alighted at Botanic Avenue, and walked across the bridge. We were to wait at the bridge and shoot Smith when opportunity offered. We waited at Drumcondra bridge for about five nights. Finally we saw a man approaching across the bridge and Kennedy said, "I think this is Smith". I told him to make sure, but Kennedy said he could not be sure, although he thought it was Smith. I said, "If this man turns into Millmount Avenue we will shoot him", because I knew Smith was living there, and between Kennedy being nearly sure of his identity and the fact that he turned into Millmount Avenue would leave very little doubt about him. Kennedy was still undecided, but instead of turning into the Avenue, the man walked across, passed the Avenue and turned down a lane going along the back of the Avenue. After he

passed us and crossed over I nearly dropped on my knees thinking I had nearly shot an innocent man, but when he turned down at the back of the houses we knew it was Smith. By this time he had gone out of range and we knew we had missed him. There was a bit of an argument then, "I told you so", and so on.

We stayed around the bridge for about half an hour thinking Smith would go to the window of his house, and seeing us still there think nothing of it. Mick McDonnell arrived on the scene and asked us did Smith not come. We told him Smith came alright but that we did not recognise him in time. McDonnell then said, "What the hell are you doing here so?" I told him that I figured that Smith would have a look out the window, and the fact that we were still there would allay suspicion.

We came back again to the bridge and after about a week we shot Smith. We had .38 guns and they were too small. I thought that the minute we would fire at him he would fall, but after we hit him he ran. The four of us fired at him. Keogh and myself ran after him right to his own door and I think he fell at the door, but he got into the house. He lived for about a fortnight afterwards. I met Mick McDonnell the following morning and he said we had made a right mess of the job the night before, but I can assure you that I was more worried until Smith died than Mick was. We never used .38 guns again, we used .45 guns after that lesson.

Mick McDonnell called on me at 9 Woodville Road on an evening in September, 1919, and asked me would I mind going on a job. I told him I would not mind, and he said, "They very nearly got the man we want to guard. They nearly got him to-day" - he was referring to Mick Collins. That was the first time I got an inkling that Collins was the heart of things. There had been a raid on the Sinn Féin

headquarters at 6 Harcourt Street, and Collins had a very narrow escape. It became very urgent to get Detective Officer Hoey, because he was the leading spirit in the raiders, and at this time Daly and Kilcoyne had been looking for him for a fortnight.

Ennis, Mick McDonnell and I came down to Townsend Street. Mick said he thought that Detective Hoey would be going off duty at about ten o'clock, and he did go off. Hoey crossed over from College Street towards the police headquarters in Brunswick Street. I asked Mick if he was sure that this man was Hoey, and he said, "I am not quite sure, but we will go after him". We intended that if he went straight to the door of the building we would shoot him, but instead of going there he went down Townsend Street nearly as far as Tara Street. We passed him by when he was looking at a window and Mick said, "It is Hoey all right". He went into a shop and we passed back up to the corner of Hawkins Street. When we saw him approaching again, we crossed over to his side of the street, which was at the back of the barracks, and we shot him at the door of the garage.

After shooting Hoey, Mick McDonnell said we had better go to Mick Collins and report to him direct that Hoey had been shot that night (12th September 1919) in Townsend Street.

Detective Barton was shot on 30th November, 1919. I have nothing much to say about him except that I received orders (again through Mick McDonnell) that Barton was to be eliminated.

Tom Keogh, Joe Leonard, Vincie Byrne and myself were sent out to look for Barton. On arriving at College Street somebody said that he had passed and gone into College Street so we went down there. I heard a couple of shots, and the next thing I saw was Barton on the ground. The peculiar

thing about it was that I saw Barton standing up again and firing a shot after he had fallen.

Barton was not shot by the section with which I was operating. I believe he was shot by Paddy Daly's section.

We received information from our Intelligence Section that a man named Molloy, an enemy agent, who was supposed to be double-crossing the British and working for us, was actually working for the British and double-crossing us. They discovered that as far as we were concerned he was a spy.

About the middle of March, 1920, Mick McDonnell asked me to come along with him as Molloy was to be eliminated. We proceeded to Grafton Street where we saw Molloy. Mick either knew Molloy by sight or Liam Tobin pointed him out. We followed Molloy down Grafton Street into Wicklow Street, and shot him at the corner of William Street and Wicklow Street. The crowd started shouting and made attempts to stop us getting away, but Tom Keogh and Vincie Byrne, who were covering us, drew their guns. In this way we succeeded in getting away safely.

We were informed that a British financial agent by the name of Alan Bell was over here on behalf of the British Government, trying to locate Republican and Dáil funds, and that in our own interests he should be disposed of. I think he lived in Monkstown.

A few days after the shooting of Molloy, Mick McDonnell detailed myself and several others to meet the tram taking Bell into his office one morning. Tom Keogh was sent out to Bell's house on a bicycle, and was to cycle in ahead of the tram on which Bell was travelling. My party were waiting in the vicinity of the showgrounds in Ballsbridge, and Tom

Keogh came cycling along and signalled to us that the wanted agent was on the next tram. We stopped the tram at, I think, Anglesea Road, boarded it and Bell was taken off and executed. I was on the top of the tram, and as I was coming down the steps I heard the shooting and saw Bell falling on the side of the road. Mick McDonnell caught Bell by the shoulder and said, "We want you". I know he resisted.

From our point of view there was a great mistake made that morning. The place selected for the elimination of Bell was not very populous, with the result that we had a long distance to run before we could mingle with people and lose ourselves. We always felt very secure when a wanted man was shot in a thickly populated district, because when the shooting was over we could easily mix with the crowd and escape the watchful eyes of enemy agents. Such was not the case in the shooting of Bell. There was scarcely anybody on the road that morning, and if enemy forces had come along we would have had no chance of escaping. That was a lesson that we took deeply to heart and remembered for future occasions.

A man named Dalton - I cannot say whether he was a member of the R.I.C. or a member of the Detective Force - was shot by Keogh and myself at the Black Church in Dorset Street towards the end of April, 1920. This man had been sent up from the country to identify I.R.A. men from Mayo and Galway.

The Intelligence Section got to know of his activities, with the result that we were instructed to have him put away. Liam Tobin was the man who pointed Dalton out to us on the evening that he was shot. Vincie Byrne was also a member of the party.

Frank Brooke was a Director of the Eastern Railway Company, and a member of the Advisory Committee to Lord French. I do not know much about him except that we received instructions to shoot him.

In the forenoon of a day towards the end of July, 1920, Paddy Daly, Tom Keogh and myself proceeded to the offices of the railway company at Westland Row. Brooke was sitting at his table when we entered his office. We immediately opened fire on him and he fell. As we were going down the stairs again Daly said to me, "Are you sure we got him?" I said I was not sure, and Daly said, "What about going back and making sure?". Keogh and myself went back. When I went into the room I saw a man standing at the left of the door and I fired a shot in his direction, at the same time looking across at Brooke on the floor. I fired a couple of shots at Brooke and satisfied myself that he was dead. Although I did not wound the other man who was in the room, I was informed afterwards that it would have been a good job if he had been shot, as he too was making himself a nuisance.

Sergeant Roche was an R.I.C. man from Tipperary who came up to Dublin to identify the body of Treacy and another body believed to be that of Dan Breen. We got word that Roche was visiting the Castle on a Sunday evening about the middle of October, 1920, prior to going back home.

A party of us went to Capel Street Bridge. Paddy Daly, Charlie Dalton and Neligan were there. When we arrived there we were told that Neligan would point out Roche and another R.I.C. man as they stepped off the tram. We took up our positions and then we saw Neligan talking to two men up near the Ormond Hotel. One of them was a

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(Signature)

Name: (J. Moloney.)

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stout man and looked more like a farmer than an R.I.C. man. Joe Dolan and Frank Thornton were supposed to shoot these men, and we got the job of covering them off. We did not take any particular notice for a little while, until we saw Dolan approaching us with a drawn gun in his hand, and the two men who had been talking to Neligan walking in front of him. When they passed us, Dolan levelled his gun and we knew that they were the men we were looking for, so we fired at them, killing Roche. The other man escaped, although we had the place surrounded. He got away before we realised he was one of the men we were looking for.

John Ryan was, in one way or another, an agent of the Dublin Castle authorities. As far as I can recollect it was he who was responsible for the arrest of McKee and Clancy. He knew them and he was supposed to have tracked them that night to the place where they slept, somewhere around Gloucester Street.

Early in February, 1921, instructions were given to have Ryan executed. Four or five of us proceeded to the Gloucester Diamond, where it was known Ryan used to frequent. a member of the Intelligence Section, entered the public-house there and shot Ryan. Five or six members of the Squad, including myself, acted as covering party for

About February, 1921, it was customary for policemen from Dublin Castle to have lunch in the Ormond Hotel. Instructions were received that action should be taken to have these men confined to the Castle and prevented from frequenting hotels.

I was instructed to proceed to the Ormond Hotel to find out if it would be a good place to shoot whatever policemen would be found there. Examining the hotel I

thought it would not be a good place for the operation, as some innocent people might be hurt, and besides that there might be many enemy agents in civilian attire in the hotel itself. Viewing the position between the Ormond Hotel and the Castle, I thought the best spot would be Parliament Street, at the junction of Essex Street and Parliament Street.

Positions were taken up and Ned Kellegher, who represented Intelligence, signalled when three policemen were approaching. Paddy Griffin, Bolster and Ben Byrne, I think, opened fire on the policemen and the three of them were killed. I do not know their names.

I cannot say if this was effective in stopping the policemen coming out for lunch.

British Military Wagon held up at Berkeley Road.

On 12th February, 1920, Seán Russell, my Company Captain, informed me that he had orders to send a few men to intercept a military lorry some place in the vicinity of Berkeley Road, as it was believed that this lorry would be conveying Robert Barton from Ship Street barracks to Mountjoy Prison, following his trial. Peadar Clancy was in charge of this operation. The entire Squad, plus a few men from "E" Company, 2nd Battalion, assembled at Berkeley Road fairly early in the day.

When we got to Berkeley Road a hand-cart and a ladder were pushed across the road to stop the progress of the military lorry. The lorry came along and was duly halted, but we discovered that Barton was not in it. It was then allowed to proceed.

Just before we blockaded the road, Mick McDonnell

arrived on his motor bicycle and said that the lorry with Barton in it had left Ship Street. Evidently Mick McDonnell only thought that Barton was in the van.

After the lorry had been held up, one of our men accidentally discharged a shot. The military did not return the fire, but shouted to us that one of our own men had fired. No casualties occurred. Clancy had jumped into the lorry as soon as it was held up.

Munitions train, Newcomen Bridge.

We got information that a munitions train was leaving the North Wall on a certain date and that it was to be fired on.

The entire Squad, assisted by members of the Dublin Brigade and men from the country including General Michael Brennan, assembled in the vicinity of Newcomen Bridge. We were waiting for the train, but at the last moment the operation was cancelled. At that particular moment I had the pin drawn from my grenade, and, being rather annoyed over the operation being called off, I fired the grenade at the passing train. I believe that the signal-man on the line was wounded. I do not know why this operation was cancelled.

King's Inns raided for arms.

On 1st June, 1920, a raid for arms was made on the King's Inns. This was a British military post with a garrison of from 25 to 30 men. Peadar Clancy was in charge of this operation, which was to be carried out by members of the Squad, assisted by some men from the 1st Battalion. Joe Dolan was told off to cover the sentries

at the main entrance gate. When Keogh and I reached Dolan he was to hold up the sentry, which he did very slickly. Keogh and I then slipped into the guardroom smartly and held up the guard. Captain Jimmy Kavanagh brought some of his Company in and collected the arms, which were loaded on a Ford car and driven away by David Golden. Keogh and myself travelled with him in the car. We captured quite a number of rifles, I cannot say how many, and I think one or two machine guns were captured as well. The job Keogh and I had was to hold up the guard and keep them covered.

The operation was carried out without any casualties and no shots were fired. It took place early in the day. When this operation was being planned, it was decided that it should be carried out on a fine day, the idea being that in the very good weather the soldiers would be out in the grounds at the back.

The rifles were locked in racks and we had difficulty in getting the keys. The soldiers stated that they had not ^{got} the keys, but Keogh noticed one of them acting suspiciously, and ordered him to hand out the keys, which he did.

Bloody Sunday.

On the evening of 20th November, 1920, the Squad, the Active Service Unit, and a lot of other Volunteers from individual units were ordered to parade at a house in Gardiner Street, I believe. We were addressed there by Dick McKee, who told us that an operation had been planned for the following morning, Sunday, at nine a.m., to eliminate a number of British intelligence agents and spies who were residing in houses throughout the city. He

had the names and addresses of the men who were to be executed. There were members of the Intelligence Section present.

I was assigned to 22 Lower Mount Street, where two enemy agents were located. One was Lieutenant McMahon, but I cannot remember the other man's name.

Tom Keogh and myself from the Squad, with six others from "E" Company of the 2nd Battalion, proceeded to Lower Mount Street, at the appointed hour on the following morning, 21st November. We knocked at the door and a maid admitted us. We left two men inside the door to see that nobody would enter or leave the house, and the remainder of us proceeded upstairs to two rooms, the numbers of which we had already ascertained. We had only just gone upstairs when we heard shooting downstairs. The housekeeper or some other lady in the house had seen a patrol of Tans passing by outside, and had started to scream. The Tans immediately surrounded the house and tried to gain admission. One of our young men, Billy McLean, fired at them through the door and eased the situation for us for a little while, although he got wounded in the hand himself. I think the Tans fired first.

We succeeded in shooting Lieutenant McMahon, but could not gain admission into the room where the other agent was sleeping. There was a second man in McMahon's bed, but we did not shoot him as we had no instructions to do so. We discovered afterwards that he was an undesirable character as far as we were concerned, and that we should have shot him.

We went downstairs and tried to get out but found the British forces at the front of the house. We went

to the back of the house, and a member of "E" Company, Jim Dempsey, and myself got through by getting over a wall. We understood that the rest of our party were following us, but after going a little distance we found we were alone. What actually happened was that Teeling was the third man to scale the wall, and as he got up he was fired on from the house. We were all fired on, but Teeling was the only man who was hit. Teeling took cover in the garden. The other members of our party retired and got safely through the front door in the confusion. It was only hours afterwards that we discovered Teeling was wounded. Dempsey and myself went round by the South Circular Road, and got a wash-up in Golden's house, Victoria Street. We got home safely. Some time before the football match most of us met again, and it transpired that Teeling was on the missing list.

Burning of the Custom House.

The operation which resulted in the burning of the Custom House on 25th May, 1921, was carried out by the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade under the command of Tom Ennis. The Battalion was reinforced by the Active Service Unit, the Squad and men drawn from other units of the Dublin Brigade. Michael Collins did not want the Squad to take part in the operation, but Ennis insisted on securing their co-operation.

I was assigned the task of holding the Beresford Place door. My instructions were to collect the policeman outside the door, take him inside, and allow nobody out once they entered the Custom House.

I went to the policeman at about five minutes to one on that day, and asked him to come inside with me, which

he did reluctantly only after I showed him my gun. The main body of I.R.A. arrived and carried in the fuel, paraffin and petrol tins, which had arrived in a lorry driven by Tom Kilcoyne. Parties under Ennis carried the fuel upstairs to the different departments and saturated the whole place. In the meantime, while this was in progress, a tender of Black and Tans arrived in front of the main entrance door. The tender had got there without any opposition. The Tans lay down on the square facing the building, and I went outside and fired a couple of shots from a Peter the Painter. I went back and said to Tom Flood, "There is going to be sport here to-day", in order to keep up the morale of the men. Flood himself did not need any bucking up, he was a good lad. A few minutes afterwards, an armoured car arrived in the square, and there was general firing.

A whistle was to be blown when everything was ready for the rooms in the Custom House to be set alight. Somebody blew a whistle, and Tom Ennis came down the stairs. I asked him if the fires had been started and he said no. He wanted to know did I hear the whistle and I told him I did. He started cursing and went back again. After a few minutes the place did go on fire and we got instructions to leave. All the men who were upstairs taking part in the burning of the Custom House crowded down to the main hall. Nobody was keen on going out, but I was very anxious to go out because I did not think I would stand a chance if I was arrested. I tried to get the lads to burst out with me. A few of them did, but the Tans opened fire when we got outside the door. Seán Doyle, whose brother had been executed, broke through. He did not want to be arrested because he knew he stood no chance. When we were about half-way across the square

there was a burst of machine gun fire and I was hit on the hand. I called Doyle, who was slightly in front of me, and I saw blood trickling down his chin. I told him to keep going in the direction of Gardiner Street.

Later in the day I was talking to Seán Doyle and he told me that he got into a car and was taken to the Mater Hospital. He was in the Mater before me. He told me that he had been shot through the lung.

I got some ladies in Phil Shanahan's place to tidy me up. They took my gun and got me a cab. They took a message to Jim Kirwan to say, if questioned by the military, that I had been working with him and that I got a tumour on the hand while shifting cases.

I got my wounds dressed in the Mater Hospital and was there for nearly a fortnight. On the night of the burning of the Custom House or the night after it, a party of British military and medical men came to the Mater Hospital and examined our charts. The nun warned me beforehand to pretend I was asleep if they came. I pretended to be asleep and they looked at the chart. They looked at Doyle, and a few days afterwards Doyle died. I think the shock of seeing the military, assisted by his wound, caused his death.

SIGNED

DATE

James J. Slattery
13th Nov. 1950

WITNESS

W. Davy Bondt

