

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 844

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 844

Witness

Bernard Nolan,
3 Castleview Terrace,
Rathfarnham,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'E' Company, 4th Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1919 - .

Subject.

- (a) Organisation of Sinn Fein, Belfast, 1919 - ;
- (b) Shooting of Christopher Reynolds,
Rathfarnham, Dublin, 1st April 1921.

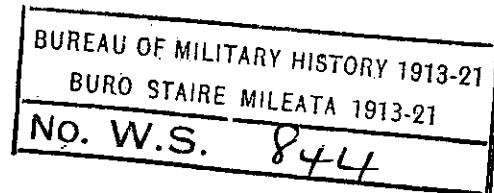
Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL



Statement of Bernard Nolan,

3, Castlevew Terrace, Rathfarnham.

Towards the end of 1918 or early in 1919 I was in touch with the Secretary to the Commissioner of the R.I.C. - a man named Timoney who was a personal friend of mine - in Belfast. I was employed in Belfast at the time. All information coming through the Commissioner was more or less imparted to me through Timoney - this I handed over to Michael Carolan who was at the time very prominent in the Irish Republican Army, Belfast area. I later introduced Carolan to Timoney.

I cannot remember any particular item of importance that came into my hands through this source. I think the information generally concerned proposed raids and arrests to be carried out by members of the Crown Forces; also names of people who came under their suspicion.

Sometime during 1919 Timoney advised me to leave my place of employment - I should mention that Leahy, Kelly and Leahy, where I was employed, was a Nationalist firm. Had a member of the staff been arrested, there is no doubt that reprisals would have been taken against them.

I returned to Dublin and became attached to 'E' Company of the 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade. Ted Kelly was Battalion O/C at the time and my Company O/C was F.X. Coughlan.

I was not long with the Company when the Company Commander called for Volunteers to go to Belfast for

organisation work on behalf of Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. in East Down. I was the only one who volunteered from my Company. I was instructed to report to Páidín O'Keefe who was then Treasurer of Sinn Féin in William Street. He told me that, officially, I was going to Belfast to organise on behalf of Sinn Féin but I was to make it my business to try and bring ^{together} two men named Doran and Halpenny, who had had a dispute amongst themselves. Both were I.R.A. Company leaders in Downpatrick and seemingly the local leading personalities in the movement there had failed to bring them together. Dr. Moore of Bishopscourt, Co. Down, who was Chairman of the local Sinn Féin Cumann, asked me specially to try and compose the differences that existed between these two men. I saw the men in question and discovered that any difference that existed was, on the whole, trivial and due to local prejudices. However, I succeeded in smoothing over the troubled waters and the two men became friends again. I think the main purpose underlying this reconciliation was to avoid a larger split in the I.R.A. movement there.

Leading personalities in the Sinn Féin movement whom I met there were Dr. Moore, Father Byrne, James Smyth and a man named Hughes. Dr. Moore brought me around to various clubs. At each club I went to I explained that my mission was to organise on behalf of Sinn Féin and to procure funds to finance the movement. The response was fairly generous and quite a lot of money was procured.

During my period of organising work there I worked

under the cloak of an insurance agent. It so happened that, through my former business associates, I was friendly with members of the R.I.C. A friendly Sergeant, named Bradley, advised me one day that it would be better for me to leave the area and not to go through Belfast as I had come under suspicion.

The house I stopped in was raided that night.

I returned to Dublin and reported to my Company Commander. I was then put on Intelligence work. F.X. Coughlan told me that the Intelligence members of his Company had been sending in trivial reports which amounted to nothing from the enemy point of view. He told me that I would have to improve the position; that I should make contact with members of the R.I.C., the Black and Tans and military; try to get into their confidence and, in this way, I might gain some items of information which would be useful to him. He also warned me that I should be very careful when making out my reports not to mention names unless I was very definite about the people concerned.

I personally knew Constable Brophy of the R.I.C. at Rathfarnham. It was usual for him to give out information regarding intended raids. The information was left at Wolohan's public house in Rathfarnham. Mr. Wolohan himself was the contact. I collected the information from him and passed it on to the Company Commander.

I was only about a fortnight on this work when my brother and I were arrested by Auxiliaries at our home.

We were brought to the Castle and were interrogated there by a. Captain ~~Harding~~ ^{HARDY B.G.N}. The Auxiliary officer who took us into custody was a Captain Fleury. He seemed to be very familiar with the appointments of I.R.A. officers in the 4th Battalion. To mention one, he said "Your brother is Quartermaster of 'A' Company". I should mention that information had been given away about 'A' Company previously and a number of arrests followed. I suppose it was as a result of that information that Fleury was familiar with the position my brother held in 'A' Company. He told us that ~~Harding~~ ^{Hardy B.G.N} would interrogate us and that, later, we would probably end up in Ballykinlar.

When I went before ~~Harding~~ ^{Hardy B.G.N} he asked me where I had been for the past couple of months. I said "In Belfast". He asked me what I was doing there and I bluffed my way and said I was there in connection with business. Apparently he was not quite sure of me and only held me for a couple of days, after which I was released. Following my release I became very friendly with the Auxiliary officer Captain Fleury and from time to time I had several drinks with him in Butler's in Trinity Street. I should mention that Butler's was more or less a rendezvous for members of the Auxiliary Force. They assembled there for their drinks. I do not think I got any information of importance from Fleury. I think the main purpose in my being encouraged to meet him was to try and get to know the Auxiliaries who frequented that public house. Members of G.H.Q. Intelligence also frequented that public house observing the movements of the Auxiliary Forces.

Information from Constable Brophy ceased after some time so we were no longer in a position to be informed of intended raids. I think that the Auxiliaries must have got suspicious that information concerning proposed activities was being passed on to the I.R.A. The result was that the Auxiliaries, when patrolling the streets or going on raids, took a local policeman with them. The procedure changed in as much as they no longer discussed intending raids or arrests with the local police before carrying them out.

On the night of April 1st/2nd, 1921, Christopher Reynolds, residing in Rathfarnham, County Dublin, received word to look up a man named O'Kelly, who had come to Rathfarnham "on the run", and tell him to clear out, as there was to be a raid for him that night. O'Kelly was located in a house convenient to where Reynolds lived.

Reynolds's father was at the time dangerously ill, and Chris risked stopping at home. He and O'Kelly were arrested about 12 o'clock midnight. I live in close proximity to where the raid took place, but heard nothing of it. About 12.30 I was awakened by my sister, who told me the "Tans" were in the house. I immediately got out of bed, and proceeding downstairs I was met, and ordered back to my room.

Then proceeded a thorough search accompanied by abuse, verbal and otherwise. I was ordered to dress, and, having been a prisoner in the Castle previously, knew what to expect as regards "comforts", so I put on all the clothes I could conveniently wear.

When their search was completed I was ordered outside, where I saw armoured cars, tenders, a large body of military and "police".

In one tender were seated Reynolds and O'Kelly. The latter was told to get down and go. I was put in his place beside Reynolds. The military had no part in this business except that they were in charge of armoured cars. They disappeared before the incidents that followed took place.

As we were leaving Rathfarnham R.I.C. Barracks one of our captors said to me: "Nolan, you had better attempt to escape to-night". I asked him why and he informed me it was quicker than getting hanged. I replied: "I'll take my chance and go to the Castle".

Eventually we started on what was poor Reynolds's last drive, and almost my own. We proceeded by Terenure and Rathgar to Rathmines Road and stopped directly opposite Grove Park. By this time the military had completely disappeared.

Meanwhile our escort had dismounted and surrounded the tender. Reynolds and I were seated facing the chapel side of Rathmines. I told Reynolds to say an Act of Contrition. I need not say I said one myself and never more fervently. We were asked "Prisoners all right?". I replied we were, though I did not think so. Next we were told to "Stand up". Reynolds stood up. I remained seated, and told Reynolds to sit down. At this time, of course, there were no lights in any of the streets. The night was very dark, and all lights

had been extinguished on the tenders. We got a second order to stand up. I stood up, changing my position as much as possible, and in turning round to get a rifle that had been left in the tender against the seat behind me, I heard a volley.

The two of us collapsed in the tender, and when I became conscious I found we were lying on our backs on the footpath. I heard a voice saying "That so-and-so is not dead yet". They fired again I again became unconscious.

On wakening I could not see a trace of the escort. I felt Reynolds on the path beside me, to all appearances dead. I stood up and was about to proceed to Portobello House for assistance when I luckily heard movements on the far side of the road. I resumed my position on the path beside my comrade and awaited developments. I had had previous experience as an amateur actor, and the moment the lighted torch appeared I feigned death so successfully that they immediately put out their lamps and the order was given to "get us up", meaning into the tender.

It might be asked how a person could see a light when his eyes are closed. The light itself cannot be seen, but a bright haze can be seen through the closed eyelids.

We were thrown up into the tender. Our assailants also got up.

They drove off. I tried to trace what direction we were going, but soon I lost trace.

All this time I was perfectly conscious, lying face downwards in the bottom of the tender. One of the crowd, in order to light his pipe, stuck his rifle and bayonet downwards in the tender, but it passed through the sleeve of my coat without doing any damage. Our drive ended after about five minutes, and where we were I had not the slightest idea.

After some time talking amongst themselves, our escort went away for a few minutes, and returned with stretchers, on to which we were dragged from the tender. They did not think it worth while to lift us out. When we dropped on the stretcher I bumped my forehead on the stay, and was for the moment stunned.

We were carried into the guardroom of King George V hospital, and before we were brought there our escort had evidently informed the staff we had been engaged in an ambush early in the day, had been arrested that night, and that we had been shot attempting to escape. This much I learned from the conversation between the military and other hospital officers.

In the guardroom, when we were brought in were two Auxiliaries dead, one R.I.C. dead, and several others wounded. Needless to say, it was a most awful sight that night in the guardroom.

During this time, I still remained absolutely motionless, scarcely daring to breathe.

Eventually our captors went away, and shortly afterwards Reynolds became conscious, said he was dying, and wanted to see a priest. The hospital staff stared

at Reynolds, amazed that he was alive. I thought it was time, too, that I should recover, and turned on the stretcher and sat up also.

The hospital staff looked at us dumbfounded. When they got over their surprise they immediately dispatched a courier for a priest to Aghrim St. I may state here the priest who came was Father Flanagan.

But our captors were not done with us yet. They had evidently been just outside the door, and when they heard our voices they walked back quickly into the guardroom, guns in hand.

When the hospital military guard saw the others come back they rushed to their rifle rack, seized the rifles, stood at the "present", and warned the police that if they did not leave the room forthwith they would fire. And there was no doubt, whatever, they meant it. The Sergeant in charge of the soldiers told the others in effect: "These two men, dead or alive, Sinn Féiners or whatever they are, are in our charge, and the man who will attempt to harm our prisoners will pay for it".

Only for those Tommies I certainly would not be alive to-day, and Reynolds would not have lived to receive the Rites of the Church.

I remember going into the operating theatre and awakening afterwards in bed in the prisoners' ward. I was not operated on. Poor Chris Reynolds was. This was about three in the morning. He was conscious. I told him to make a statement to our fellow prisoner about the

happenings of the night, which he did.

I also made a statement of the above facts to the men beside me in the ward, and to our confessor, so if I did not survive the facts might be produced at the inquest.

Reynolds was beyond all hope from the start. He became unconscious again about seven in the morning, and died the same afternoon. Except for my disabled arm I was feeling fairly well.

Four bullets were extracted from my back, apart from six other wounds, none of which damaged the ribs, lungs, or any other vital spot.

At the military inquiry afterwards I was brought from bed on a stretcher without any notice, legal advice, etc., and subjected to two hours' cross-examination by the court and a well-known English K.C., on behalf of the police.

When I was about ten days in the prisoners' ward in King George V. Hospital word came that I was to be removed. The medical officers objected, and I was left where I was for about another fortnight, when at three in the morning I was taken from bed by Auxiliaries and removed to Mountjoy.

I was detained there until the Truce came, and with the exception of T.D.s, I was the first prisoner released. When released, I was transferred to the Mater Hospital.

Signed: Bernard Jos. Nolan

(Bernard Jos. Nolan)

Date: 12th May 1953

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Witness:

W. Ivory Comdr

(W. Ivory) Comd't.

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