

W.S. 900

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 900

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 900.....

**Witness**

Joe Dolan,  
118 James' Street,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Member of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion,  
Dublin Brigade, 1917 - ;

Member of G.H.Q. Intelligence, 1920 - .

**Subject.**

Shooting of Sir Henry Wilson in London,  
22nd June 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1954.....

Form B.S.M. 2

Statement of Mr. Joe Dolan,  
118 James's Street, DUBLIN.

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The Shooting of Sir Henry Wilson and the surrounding  
circumstances.

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# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. *900*

*W.S. 8.900*

STATEMENT OF MR. JOSEPH DOLAN

118, James St., Dublin.

The Shooting of Sir Henry Wilson and the  
surrounding circumstances.

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The shooting of Sir Henry Wilson in London on the 22nd June, 1922, is an incident around which a lot of speculation and controversy has established itself since then. The shooting, of course, was carried out by Reggie Dunne, who was O/C of the London-Irish Volunteers at the time, and Joe O'Sullivan, another of the London-Irish Volunteers, but the question of whether they were instructed to carry out this job and, if so, by whom, has given rise to a lot of argument since then, in view of the fact that this incident took place after the signing of the Treaty and the establishment of the Provisional Government.

My own memory of the various incidents surrounding this event is very clear. Though I may forget things that happened yesterday or last week, my memory around that time is very vivid. I knew nothing about the shooting before it occurred and I first learned of it, like everyone else, through the newspaper reports on the day following the shooting. I was then a Staff Captain in the National Army attached to the Military Intelligence Branch at Oriel House. Naturally, we all discussed the

shooting, or the report of it that had appeared in the newspapers, but I don't think I spoke to anyone who knew any more about it than I did at the time.

Some time before the trial in London of Dunne and O'Sullivan - I can't remember just how long after the shooting that was, but it was definitely before the trial took place - I was instructed to report to Collins at his office in Portobello Barracks. I got this instruction from Liam Tobin during the daytime, and I reported forthwith to Portobello Barracks where I saw Collins. Collins was a man who wasted no words; he always spoke snappily and to the point. Having mentioned the shooting of Sir Henry Wilson, he immediately came to the point by saying that he wanted to effect a rescue of Dunne and O'Sullivan if at all possible. He said he wanted me to change into civilian attire immediately, report to Sam Maguire in London and there to see what could be done towards effecting a rescue at all costs. The idea was not that I should attempt the rescue immediately but that I should explore the possibilities and report back to Collins without delay.

Having changed into civilian clothes, I left for London by the mail boat that evening and reported to Sam Maguire as arranged. The rendezvous with Maguire was at Peele's publichouse in Fetter Lane, which is off Fleet St. That was the usual place where Maguire could be contacted. When I met Maguire, I discussed my mission with him, and I gathered from him that he already knew of the rescue project. He called over another man who was there at the time - Seán Golden, whom I already

knew - and told me that Golden would show me around. Golden, who was one of the London Volunteers also, had been standing nearby in the same pub but had not been in Maguire's company when I came along, and he was instructed by Maguire to show me the way around and assist me to explore the likely places where a rescue might be attempted. Golden, whom I knew personally, was one of the Volunteer Intelligence Branch in London.

The idea we had in mind was that the two prisoners should be rescued while they were being conveyed from the prison to the Court or place of trial, or in course of their return to the prison, whichever happened more conveniently. It was not considered possible to effect a rescue from the prison or from the courthouse, but we did think it might be possible to overpower the escort and rescue the prisoners from the prison van on their way to or from the court. We investigated the route and all possible alternative routes from Wandsworth Prison to the courthouse, and I formed the opinion that a rescue would be feasible. I also got in touch with their solicitor, a Mr. McDonald, who conveyed the message to me to blow up the prison van sooner than let them hang. I wrote out a report to Collins on the spot, in company with Golden, giving all the details and showing how I thought the job might be done.

Then I came straight back to Dublin and reported to Collins immediately. It was about three days since I had left Dublin. I had travelled all night the day

I left, spent two days in London carrying out these investigations and returned to Dublin on the following day to make my report to Collins. Actually, when I arrived back in Dublin, I went first to Oriel House, where I found things in a bit of a heap, as a lot of new fellows had come in since I left and my bed was taken up. The Civil War situation had by then reached a crisis and the attack on the Four Courts was going on. However, having changed out of my civilian clothes into uniform, I reported to Collins at Portobello Barracks, gave him my written report and discussed it with him for a short time.

I told Collins that, if I had six men either from G.H.Q. Squad or the Dublin A.S.U., with the help of the London Volunteers we could carry out the job. I did not put much trust in the London Volunteers and that is why I stipulated the Squad or A.S.U. men. Collins made no comment to me other than a remark like, "That's good", showing that he was satisfied with my report, and I left him at that.

My personal connection with the incident really closed at that point because immediately afterwards I was concerned with my military duties, the taking over of posts and so on, on account of the Civil War which had begun, but some time afterwards I met Sam Maguire - that was long after the execution of Dunne and O'Sullivan - and we discussed my last visit to him in London and my mission there. He told me that, subsequent to my visit, Tom Cullen had come over to London with apparently

the mission from Collins of checking on my report. Whether Tom Cullen reported adversely on the possibility of carrying out the rescue or not, I do not know, but Sam Maguire remarked to me that the job could easily have been done if it had been left to me but that, when Cullen came over, he could not see it the way I did and the attempt was consequently abandoned.

There is nothing more I can say from my personal knowledge on this incident except to express my firm belief that Collins did instruct Dunne to carry out the execution of Wilson. The Belfast pogrom was still going on and we all knew that Wilson was one of the chief forces at the back of it. Before the Truce it would have been perfectly legitimate to have Wilson executed, but perhaps it was only after the Truce that his responsibility in this matter was identified and his activities had not ceased with the Truce. To show, therefore, that Collins would have had no scruple in ordering Wilson's execution, I can quote another incident which occurred during the Truce and before the Wilson episode. This was Collins' order to me to carry out the execution of the British executioner, Ellis, and his assistant, Willetts. These men were due to come over to Derry for the execution of two Volunteers who had been condemned to death in Derry. This was part of the pogrom set-up. When it was not found possible to rescue the prisoners from Derry Jail, Collins decided that the executioners should be executed before they could carry out their job of executing the Volunteer prisoners.

On this occasion Charlie Byrne and I got instructions to report to Collins at the Gresham Hotel where he had his office at the time. Collins explained to us what he wanted done. We were told to get in touch with a man named Paddy Daly, who was one of the Liverpool Irish Volunteers, that he would show us where to go to find the men we were to shoot, and that he would give us the assistance of whatever number of the Liverpool Irish Volunteers as we might consider necessary.

We met Daly as arranged and we went first by train to Manchester. I undertook the shooting of Ellis, and six or seven of the Liverpool men came along with me. Charlie Byrne went after the other man, Willetts, with some of the Manchester Volunteers with him also. I have forgotten where it was that Willetts lived but they had to go to him by motor car.

We went by train to Rochdale where Ellis lived, and some of the Liverpool Volunteers conducted me to the house and pointed it out to me. I walked up to the door alone and knocked at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Ellis. At this stage I noticed that the other fellows had all disappeared, but I decided to go ahead with the job on my own. Mrs. Ellis informed me that her husband was not in, that he had gone to Ireland, but as I did not believe her at the time, I forced my way into the house and looked around. There was no one there and I had to accept her assurance that he had left already for Ireland. Our boats had probably crossed.



Charlie Byrne's mission had also proved abortive, but for a different reason. On the way to their destination the car broke down. Charlie wanted to hold up the first car that came along and commandeer it to carry out the job, but the others would not hear of this, and so he also came back without having accomplished his mission, though very probably Willetts had also left for Ireland by that time.

I forgot to mention that, when we arrived in Rochdale at first, there were about seven or eight of us in the party and we went to a publichouse where there were pictures and photographs decorating the walls of all the past and present British executioners. From amongst these Ellis was pointed out to me. Having studied this for a while, I was satisfied that I would know him when I met him and we went along to the house then.

On the way from Rochdale to Manchester, the train was held up for an hour by snowdrifts but, when we arrived in Manchester, I met Charlie Byrne and heard his story. We decided that there was nothing to be done then but to go straight back to Dublin, which we did by the first available boat.

On arrival in Dublin, we heard of the reprieve of the prisoners in Derry who had been condemned to death. They had been reprieved at the last moment, although the executioners had already arrived in Derry to carry out the executions.

Another thing which adds to my conviction that it was Collins who ordered the shooting of Wilson is a conversation I had with Sam Maguire in Dublin some time after the execution of Dunne and O'Sullivan. We were discussing the merits of these fellows, Dunne and O'Sullivan, and their courage in carrying out the job and going bravely to their execution afterwards. Maguire told me that some time a little previous to the shooting of Sir Henry Wilson, both Dunne and O'Sullivan had had white feathers sent to them by some of the Cumann na mBan girls in London, the reason for this being that most of the London Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan members favoured the anti-Treaty party while both Dunne and O'Sullivan had expressed pro-Treaty views.

When I was in London in 1922 in connection with the proposed rescue of Dunne and O'Sullivan, I met Denis Kelleher who was then O/C of the London I.R.A. Battalion which appointment he had taken over after the arrest of Reggie Dunne. I formed the impression that Kelleher was not much of a gun man, not one to be relied upon in a dangerous undertaking such as the rescue we were planning. Sam Maguire was the only one of the London crowd that I had much faith in that way, and that was why I stipulated in my report to Collins that the job could be done if about six of Dublin Squad or the A.S.U. could be sent over with me.

I knew nothing at the time of any other proposals to rescue Dunne and O'Sullivan, but since the recent

publication of Florrie O'Donoghue's article in the Sunday Press bearing on the matter and my letter to the press replying to some of the misstatements made, I have had letters from Pat O'Sullivan, Joe's brother, and from Frank Lee which, perhaps, explain how Kelleher and the Cork I.R.A. came into the picture. (Copies of these letters are appended to this statement).

From this it seems that Kelleher was Vice Comdt. to Reggie Dunne and, therefore, automatically took over the command of the London Battalion when Dunne was arrested following the shooting of Sir Henry Wilson. Some time before the shooting of Wilson, Pat O'Sullivan moved to Cork and was transferred to one of the Cork I.R.A. units, and following the arrest of his brother in London Pat, unaware of any other efforts, would naturally get in touch with Kelleher to see what could be done about a rescue. Presumably Kelleher, aware of the purpose of my visit, told him the matter was already in hand, and there it rested. Whether any actual proposition was made to Kelleher by the Cork I.R.A. or whether the latter made any contact with Collins or the Four Courts people about it, I do not know.

Signed :

*Joe Dolan*  
(Joe Dolan)

Date :

*14-11-53*

14.11.53.

Witness :

*J.V. Lawless Col.*  
(J.V. Lawless) Col.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. <i>900</i>

Appendix A.

"Carrigrohane",  
 31, Vernon Road,  
 Sutton,  
 Surrey.

28th September, 1953.

Joe. Dolan,  
 118 James St.,  
 Dublin.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
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A Chara,

I, as the brother of Joe O'Sullivan, and late Vice Comdt. London Batt. I.R.A. and the comrade of Reggie Dunne thank you for your letter in the Sunday Press Sept. 27th, giving the true facts about this case. For years now we of the Old I.R.A. Assn. here in London have been trying to get justice done to the memory of these two brave lads. We are at the moment collating all the evidence we can obtain, and your published letter will be of great help to us. The Secretary of the Assn. will be writing to you.

When Reggie Dunne was appointed Comdt. I was at the same time appointed Vice Comdt. We later enrolled my brother who, as you know, had only one leg. Afterwards I was transferred to the 1st Batt. Cork No. 1 Brigade. I knew all the facts as related in your letter. I crossed over from Cork to visit my brother and Reggie in Wandsworth Prison a few days before the end. A few days later I was wounded and a colleague killed just outside Cork. What has angered me is the mud and dirt thrown at the memory of these two gallant lads. Every writer of any article of the "times" seem to repeat the slander - that these lads were a couple of ex-service men acting without orders.

You may be surprised that every government since those days have refused to give recognition to the fact that it was an official job. I myself have approached each government in turn (I have a mass of correspondence) to give some small pension to Mrs. Dunne and my father as a small - a very small - recognition of the boys, but both my father and Mrs. Dunne died without any pension or recognition. To connect the family honour with the deed I as an old I.R.A. with active pre Truce service both here and in Cork applied for a pension (I have the medal). I, thank God, do not need the money but, like my late brother, I need the certificate, but in spite of the fact that I hold the very highest credentials from the highest in the movement I have failed. This I know is beside the point. I merely mention it as it all leads up to the point I am making viz: that my family is earmarked because of the Wilson affair, and those in high office are "face saving".

I have sent two letters to the Sunday Press on the matter of F. O'Donoghue's articles but they were never published. In one I stated that the order for the job was given my Michael Collins. I had a private letter back from the Editor really doubting my statement. Your letter now confirms it. I, of course, knew and worked with the late Sam Maguire and Seán Goulden. It was I who received Goulden into the Battalion when he was transferred from Ireland. At the time of the shooting as I say I crossed over from Cork with a rescue plan and met Billy Ahearn, who told me of your plans and begged me to get out of London for fear of jeopardising them. Surely even now at this late stage you will be good enough to give me in writing a similar statement to your letter. I want it for future history and a further booklet we are publishing. I presume you know or knew Billy Ahearn. Some years ago I had a lot of correspondence with him on this matter. I understood from him and others that he was at one time O/C Britain and that the late Seán McGrath was I/O Britain or perhaps London. I have in my possession the full report of Reggie Dunne smuggled out from Wandsworth Prison. If you would care for a copy of it I could let you have it.

The solicitor you mention, Mr. McDonald, is still alive. The Old I.R.A. Association have two Masses every year for Joe and Reggie and Mr. MacDonald is often there.

I enclose a booklet issued by the Association some few years back. It is this book which we now hope to bring up to date, using anything you may care to give us on the vital time.

With every good wish.

Is mise, le chara,

(Signed)

PATRICK O'SULLIVAN.

12, Nicholl Court,  
Craven Park,

London, N.W.10.

Tel. : Elgar 5073.

September 29th 1953.

Jos. Dolan, Esq.,  
118, James St.,  
Dublin.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 900
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A. Chara,

re "Dunne & O'Sullivan" (Trócaire ar a anam)

I find it difficult to find words by which I can express to you our appreciation for your letter in "The Sunday Press".

You may have seen a report in "The Irish Press" Sept. 21st, of our Annual General Meeting, at which the following resolution was passed. The text was printed in the Press.

That the Assn. of Old I.R.A. and Cumann na mBan (London) assembled at the Chandos Hotel, for their Annual General Meeting, puts on record an emphatic protest and denial against the statement contained in Major F. O'Donoghue's book (serialised in the Sunday Press) "No Other Law" the story of Liam Lynch, that: -

DUNNE AND O'SULLIVAN - EX MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH ARMY, WERE NOT ACTING UNDER THE ORDERS OF THE ARMY EXECUTIVE WHEN THEY SHOT AND KILLED SEN. SIR HENRY WILSON, the G.O.C. of the British Troops in Ireland. In the interests of historical accuracy, a full statement of the true facts is being collated, regarding this important epoch of Irish history and will be issued as soon as possible to the press".

A Sub-Committee of our Association was appointed to go into this matter. In the two meetings we have held, we have already collated a mass of evidence that should satisfy anyone, that the action of Dunne and O'Sullivan - WAS AN OFFICIAL ARMY ORDER.

Unfortunately, so many who knew the true facts are now dead and gone, but some left behind signed documents. We also have the booklet published some years ago, by the London Memorial Committee, under the

title : "Remembrance - the story of Dunne and O'Sullivan", but valuable tho it is, it lacks signed statements, except those of Reg. and Joe. In fact, it does not even state the names of the personnel of the Memorial Committee responsible for its publication.

There are, however, a few people left, mostly living in Ireland, who know the true facts, and if they have any respect for the honour and memory of Reg. and Joe, will now - like yourself - speak up and tell what they know. The story you have told last Sunday is exactly the facts as I have always known them, even to the statement that following Wilson's execution Reg and Joe were to take up appointments in Dublin.

At our last meeting Pat O'Sullivan (Joe's brother) and myself were delegated to go to Ireland to interview at least three people, in the hope of obtaining a signed statement from them. Pat O'Sullivan is laid up and unable to travel.

One query - you state in your letter that Sam McGuire was at the time O/C Britain. Are you certain on this? Our information has always been that Billy Aherne was O/C Britain, and he was one of the three we were to see. Dinny Kelliher (Cork) was Vice Commandant and with the arrest of Dunne became Commandant. He was the second man we would see. The third - Pa Murray - was at one time O/C Britain. He may or may not be able to help us.

We do know that on the night prior to the shooting that Reg and Joe met, together with another Officer of the I.R.A. Do you know for sure who the third man was? We believe it was Dinny Kelleher. We have always understood that there was to have been a third man on the job - with a get-away car. Who this third man was only he knows, although names have been mentioned.

It is our intention to publish what we hope will be the true story of the Wilson affair, and the final story for the use of future historians. Since it happened thirty years ago, the story of Dunne and O'Sullivan has always been "cloudy", and there has always been that very marked attitude of hush-hush from certain official quarters.

The late Seán McGrath laboured unceasingly till the day of his death to do what we are doing now, and we hope to place on record a document that will kill - for all time - the slurs and innuendoes that from time to time appear in print. Seemingly successive authors quote from earlier publications when writing on these things.

I am taking my band (Tara Céilidhe Band) to Ireland for a tour next week. We leave here on Monday the 5th, open at Newbridge on Tuesday, Balbriggan on Wednesday, Ballinasloe on Thursday, Sligo on Friday, record two radio programmes on Saturday morning and finish at Kanturk on Sunday.

I would welcome the opportunity of meeting you but have a busy week ahead, but if convenient to you I can meet you on Tuesday or Wednesday between noon and 5 p.m. or on Saturday same time, or Monday evening the 12th. I shall be staying with my brother at 63 Grove Park, Rathmines. (He was fired out of the British Civil Service with another brother, now in America, during the scrap).

Once again - a million thanks for your letter. It is just what we wanted and may have the effect of drawing out others who can speak out as you have done, and so vindicate and honour the memory of two great patriots.

Mise, le mees,

pp: Assn. of Old I.R.A. and Cumann na mBan  
(London)

(Signed)

Frank K. Lee (Secretary).



Appendix C.

"Carrigrohane",  
31 Vernon Road,  
Sutton,  
Surrey.

17th October, 1953.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 900

Dear Mr. Dolan,

Thank you so much for your letter of the 14th. It is very kind of you, it is like meeting an old friend from the past - when you speak so intimately of Joe and Reggie - it is like a breath of pure fresh air after the years of murk and gloom on the memory of, as you say, "these two brave officers".

Frank Lee told me he had met you and of the great help you have already given him. I shall look forward to receiving a complete statement from you concerning the whole affair, and there is not the slightest shadow of doubt that it will be most valuable and the most important evidence vindicating the honour of these two boys.

Please God we may meet one day. In the meantime, every good wish and again my sincere thanks.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed)

PAT O'SULLIVAN.

Appendix D.

63, Grove Park,  
Rathmines.

7th October, 1953.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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Dear Mr. Dolan,

I will most certainly see you before I leave - but when? I am here with my band and arrived yesterday. Played Newbridge last night till 3 a.m., to-night at Balbriggan till 2 a.m., to-morrow we are at Ballinasloe and go from there on Friday to Sligo. Finish there around 2 a.m. and then drive back here, as we must be in the Radio Station by 10 a.m. to record two radio programmes.

By the time we are through with this, around 1 o'clock I imagine, I'll be ready for a little rest. If fit enough I'll call on Saturday afternoon. Sunday we leave here midday for Kanturk and play there till 3 a.m. and then return here. The band return to London that night, but I am staying a day or two in the hope of clarifying the issue of Dunne and O'S.

I hesitate to attempt to thank you for your valuable contribution, but what of the others!! who know the facts. Why this continued silence!!? I wrote to three people last week who we know can speak out - if they wish to. My letters - together with earlier ones from Pat O'Sullivan are ignored.

I note O'D's comment on my two letters in last Sunday's paper, but he repeats that "HIS" statement (re D. & O'S) is true. Therefore, if we believe him, the shooting of Wilson was not an Official Army Order - but later O'D adds - "These brave men acted under orders". Whose orders? We know your version to be the true one, but I want to clarify with you was it Sam McGuire or Billy Ahearne who was O/C Britain at the time. We think the latter.

O'D. in his comment mentions Rory O'Connor's denial of responsibility. He might have added Arthur Griffith's reference to D & O'S - anarchists.

Looking forward to our meeting - till then - kindest regards.

(Signed) FRANK LEE.