

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,669

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1669

Witness

Stephen Foley
173 Deansgrange,
Blackrock, Co. Dublin

Identity.

Lieut. G/Coy. 1st Battn. Cork I Bde.

Subject.

G/Coy. 1st Battn. Cork I Bde. I.R.A.
1918-21

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY STEPHEN FOLEY,
173 Deansgrange, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

My first connection with the Volunteer Movement was when I joined the Irish National Volunteers in Blackrock, County Dublin, in the year 1913. I subsequently transferred to the Foxrock (Co. Dublin) Company and later to the Dunlaoghaire Company.

We drilled in an old schoolhouse known as 'Rosary Lodge', York Road, Dunlaoghaire, so far as I can remember. Our instructors were ex-British Army men. Fred Allen was, I remember, Captain of the Glasthule Company at that time. They also drilled in the same hall as we did.

I was a member of the Dunlaoghaire Company, Irish Volunteers, at the time of the 1916 Rising and I remember being told to report to the hall at Dunlaoghaire on the Monday of Easter Week, 1916. We were addressed by Fred Allen who told us to report back again on the following day - Tuesday. We had about twenty Howth rifles in the Company.

I reported with the others to the hall in Dunlaoghaire on Tuesday and got word late that day that there was no chance of getting into Dublin, as the city was surrounded by military. I kept in touch with the hall during the week of the Rising, but was told there was "nothing doing". So far as I know none of our Company took part in the Easter Rising, 1916. I have an idea that Fred Allen was working under Major Seán McBride who was executed after the Rising by the British.

When the Volunteers were reorganised in our district in 1917, I rejoined the Dunlaoghaire Company. Tom Connor of Glasthule was Company Captain. We had between twenty and thirty men in the Company, which included the districts of Blackrock and Glasthule. I was a Section Leader in our Company.

Early in 1918, I was asked to organise a Company in Deansgrange where I lived. I got about twenty men together, forming a half-Company. I was appointed 2nd Lieutenant. There was also a half-Company organised in Blackrock. Both met in a hall known as 'Soden's Hall', Deansgrange. I remember that Liam Pedlar was 1st Lieutenant in Blackrock. Tom Connor was Captain of the two half-Companies in Deansgrange and Blackrock. We were attached to the 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade. Simon Donnelly and Joe O'Connor were Battalion officers.

We 'ran' a ceilidhe and Irish class in Soden's Hall as a cover for our meetings there, where we also drilled. We also had open-air drilling and trainingⁱⁿ military exercises in the open country at Foxrock, County Dublin.

In the summer of 1918, twenty-two of us received summonses to attend Court on charges of illegal drilling. We were instructed by our Company officers not to appear in Court, but to clear out of the district. We went out to Ticknock and slept in old tents, changing our pitch at night to avoid arrest. Eventually, our party dispersed all over the country. Some went to the County Meath, others to Galway and Cavan. Liam Tannam, O/C. of the Dundrum (County Dublin) Company at the time and myself decided to go down to Cork.

When I reached Cork city I was a member of the Blackpool Company for a few weeks. I remember the Captain's name was Chris Gorman.

I then transferred to "C" Company, 1st Battalion, Cork No. 1. Brigade. Dick Murphy was then Captain of that Company and Mick Tobin a Lieutenant. We had about a hundred men in the Company. In Cork I was known as "MacAlister".

My first activities with "C" Company were concerned with the raiding of private houses for arms. These houses were mainly occupied by people of the gentry class, most of whom belonged to the British Army or Navy.

About six or eight of us used to carry out these raids at night. A few of us would carry revolvers just in case we might need them. In only one instance, to my knowledge, was it necessary to use a revolver on these raids. This happened when we were raiding the house of a Captain Clarke at Farran, just outside Cork city. Before reaching Clarke's house we cut the telephone wire leading to the house. When we knocked at the door we were told that Captain Clarke was out; however, we went inside to search for arms and when one of our party - Walter Furlong - entered a room he found Clarke there. Both men were armed with revolvers and both fired, Furlong wounding Clarke. We then made a thorough search of the place and got ten or twelve shotguns. It appears that there was a shooting party being held there the following day and the guns had arrived in Clarke's for the shoot. We knew about this before we went to raid the place.

Attack on Blarney R.I.C. Barracks.

On 1st June, 1920, I took part with other men from the 1st and 6th Battalions of the Cork No. 1. Brigade in an attack on the R.I.C. Barracks at Blarney, County Cork. The attack took place about 10 p.m. Blarney is about six miles west of Cork city.

The barracks was a large building with loop-holed walls, steel shutters on the window and sandbag defences. It was situated between the Courthouse on one side and Smyth's Hotel on the other. The garrison was, so far as I can remember, a Sergeant and about a dozen men.

The plan of attack was to blow a breach with explosives through the wall between the bar in Smyth's Hotel and the barracks. The breach was then to be rushed and the building captured.

A few of our lads entered the hotel with the explosives shortly before 10 p.m. About twenty of us (of whom I was one), forming the attacking party, advanced to a position from which we could rush quickly across the street and into the hotel the moment the explosion went off. I was armed with a revolver and a bomb. I also carried a short iron bar to prise slates off the barrack roof if necessary and force an entry that way.

Shortly after 10 p.m. a terrific explosion occurred in the hotel and when I heard it I dashed across the street and into the hotel. I could see nothing only smoke and dust. Pieces of the hotel wall were falling around. I dashed upstairs but it was the same up there. I came down again and was nearly being attacked by some of our own lads who mistook me for an R.I.C. man in the smoke and general confusion. When the dust and smoke cleared a little it was possible to see that the hotel took the main brunt of the blast. A large portion of the wall between the hotel and the barracks was, however, blown away but the breach made was backed by solid masonry, which was not affected by the explosion at all and which prevented us from entering the barracks.

My next recollection of the event was a whistle blast from outside, which was our signal to retreat. We 'pulled out' under fire from the garrison in the barracks and I got safely back to the city later that night.

I believe that there were upwards of four hundred Cork Volunteers on duty that night. The greater portion of these men was engaged blocking roads and cutting telephone wires to hamper the movements of enemy forces going to the assistance of the police at Blarney. Another party armed with shotguns opened fire on the barracks from positions in houses nearby when the explosion in the hotel went off. This was done to cover those of us who formed the actual assault party. So far as I can recollect the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks on the day following the attack. The evacuated building was then burned to the ground by the local Volunteers.

Some months prior to the attack on Blarney Barracks I was one of a party of about ten men who raided a gunsmith's shop in Patrick Street, Cork, known as "Murrays".

It was on a winter's evening about 5 p.m. when a couple of us watched the manager of Murray's leave the shop and get on a tram for his home. We boarded the tram and when he left it, we held him up with revolvers and took the keys of the shop from him. We returned to the city and with some others, who were waiting for us, we entered the shop, being careful to close the door, after us. We got shotguns, some rifles, revolvers, ammunition and spare parts for guns. Equipment of all kinds was taken away in a car we had parked outside the shop. The job was done so quietly that a police patrol across the road from us never suspected what was happening. All the stuff captured by us was taken to a safe place. Quite a lot

of it was used in the attack on Blarney barracks to which I have already referred.

Attack on King Street R.I.C. Barracks.

One evening early in the month of July, 1920, I was told to take up position at the Coliseum Cinema, King Street (now McCurtain Street), Cork, for an attack on the R.I.C. barracks which is just across the road from that cinema. I was armed with a revolver. Other men were here and there in King Street also armed.

A party of three or four of our lads entered a house beside the barracks, and, having removed the occupants, laid explosives against the dividing wall between the barracks and the house. Just before the explosion went off an R.I.C. man left the barracks and was fired on by one of our lads. I and the man with me, named Matt Ryan, then opened fire. After a few moments we got orders to clear away, which we did.

I believe that our job that evening was merely to act as cover for the lads laying the explosives. I do not think there was any intention of taking the barracks by assault, as it was situated only a short distance from the main military barracks - Victoria (now "Collins") barracks. At any rate the R.I.C. barracks was very badly damaged by the explosion and was evacuated immediately afterwards.

Shooting of Inspector Smyth, R.I.C.

It was about the middle of July, 1920, when Dan ("Sando") Donovan, O/C. of the 1st Battalion told me that Inspector Smyth of the R.I.C. was in the County Club, South Mall, Cork, and that he was to be shot that night.

I went along to the Club armed with a revolver at the time appointed. Others who came along were "Sando" Donovan, Leo Aherne, Dick Murphy, Corny Sullivan and Martin Donovan. Those were the names of the men present, so far as I can remember them.

When we went to the door of the Club the porter was standing there. "Sando" and Martin Donovan said something to him. The next thing was the porter put up his hands and walked in front of "Sando" and Martin to a door of a room where Smyth and his friends were. The porter actually pointed to the door of the room. Leo Aherne and Corny Sullivan remained at the front door, whilst I and Dick Murphy went up on to the first landing. Very shortly afterwards shots rang out. Our lads left the room where Smyth had been and we all then left the building mingling with the crowd which was then leaving a nearby cinema. Smyth had been shot and killed and a County Inspector of the R.I.C. who was with him was badly wounded.

It was in July, 1920, when Seán Hegarty, O/C. Cork No. 1. Brigade, sent for me. I met him in the house of the Misses Wallis, St. Augustine Street, Cork, where he informed me that I had been selected with two other men to go to Belfast to shoot Inspector Swanzy of the R.I.C. Swanzy was the officer in charge of the police murder gang who shot and killed Tomás McCurtain in his (McCurtain's) home on the night of 20th March, 1920. Tomás was, at the time, Brigadier of the Cork No. 1. Brigade and Lord Mayor of Cork.

I am not sure of the names of the other two men who were to accompany me on the job, but, I think, they were Corny Sullivan and Sean Culhane. The latter was Battalion Intelligence Officer at the time.

I travelled alone to Dublin as instructed and was only a short time there when I met Florrie O'Donoghue, the Cork No. 1. Brigade Intelligence Officer, as I was leaving my lodgings one evening. Florrie showed me a telegram which I well remember read as follows:- "Don't send cases return all empties". This message had, I think, come from the Belfast I.R.A. and meant that the job of shooting Swanzy was off for the time being and that no men were to be sent up then to shoot him. Florrie told me to return to Cork, which I did.

Swanzy was, eventually, shot by our lads, but I did not take part in the shooting.

Late in the year 1920 "Sando" Donovan called to Ford's factory where I worked and told me that Seán Hegarty wanted to see me in Wallis's of St. Augustine Street. I remember calling to Wallis's the following morning (Sunday) and meeting Hegarty. He told me that there was a dangerous job on. There were two other Corkmen there named Martin Donovan and Seán Healy. We were told we were to go to Dublin where arrangements would be made for us to contact Mick Collins. In Dublin we would meet other men who would be going with us across to England. Hegarty did not tell us what the job was but we knew from the little he did say that it was a very dangerous one and that there was very little chance of us coming back alive. He gave me some money to cover my expenses to Dublin.

Martin Donovan, Sean Healy and I went by car to Blarney, where we took the train to Dublin. We did this to avoid being seen by spies at the Cork railway station who might recognise us and pass on the word that we had left Cork.

When we got to Dublin, we went to Vaughan's Hotel, where we booked in. As we were booking I asked the porter if his name was

"Stephen". He said "Yes". I then gave him a note (which I had got from Seán Hegarty) to give to Mick Collins.

Collins called into Vaughan's that same evening. He said to me "You are not going to England in the morning; you may be going the following evening."

Florrie O'Donoghue came into the hotel a day or so later and expressed surprise at seeing us. He said, "I thought ye would be in England by this". I knew then that we were going to England on some shooting job, but what exactly it was I did not then know, so far as I can remember now. I think it had something to do with shooting Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, and the Members of the British Cabinet.

Martin Donovan, Seán Healy and I, were together in a large room in Vaughan's when Mick Collins came in accompanied by Cathal Brugha, Dick McKee, J.J. Walsh and some others. We went to leave the room but Collins told us to remain. As we weren't at the same table as his party, I do not know what happened.

Later in the week Collins told us the job was off and that we were to return to our units. This we did.

Early in the month of March, 1921, armed parties from all the I.R.A. Companies in Cork were ordered to patrol the city and suburbs and shoot every policeman and soldier met with, whether he was armed or unarmed. This order was given by way of reprisal for the brutal murder of I.R.A. prisoners captured by the British at Dripsey, County Cork, some short time previously.

Six of us from "G" Company were patrolling North Main Street, three of us on either side of the street, when, just before curfew at 10 p.m., a soldier came along our side of the street with two

civilians. We fired on the soldier, killing him.

In the month of March, 1921, as things were getting very hot for me in the city, I joined up the Cork No. 1. Brigade Flying Column in the vicinity of Ballyvourney in West Cork. 'Sando' Donovan was in charge of the Column which numbered about thirty men. We were armed with rifles, revolvers, shotguns and grenades. We had a machine-gun also. I was with the Column only a short while when the order came to disband as there was a big military round-up going on in the West Cork area at that time.

We came together again sometime in late May, so far as I can remember, this time also in the Ballyvourney-Macroon district. Many a time we lay in ambush for the British but they failed to turn up. We were getting so fed up with this sort of business that we went into Macroon one night and opened fire on Macroon Castle which was the headquarters of the Auxiliaries. We hoped that our fire would draw them out. We moved outside the town and waited for days in the hopes that the Auxiliaries would come and look for us, but they remained safely behind the Castle walls. We never got a chance of a crack at them.

I went on leave from the 'Column' for a few days near the end of June and was in my home at Deansgrange, County Dublin, when the Truce came in July, 1921.

SIGNED: Stephen Foley

DATE: 5 September 1957

WITNESS: P. Soman

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