

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 156

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 156 .....

**Witness**

Seumas Robinson

**Identity**

Member of Kimmage Garrison.  
O/C. Mid Tipperary Bde. I.R.A. 1919-1921.  
O/C. 1st Southern Division 1921-1923.

**Subject**

- (a) I.R.B. and I.V. Scotland 1903-1915.
- (b) Kimmage Garrison 1916.
- (c) Easter Week, O'Connell St. 1916.
- (d) *THE ASHTOWN AMBUSH 21<sup>st</sup> JAN 1919  
19<sup>th</sup> DEC*

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil

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Statement by Seumas Robinson.

Part I. 1903 - 1916.

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1. There was a national tradition in my family back to the time of both of my grandparents. My paternal grandfather, a Fenian, escaped to France in 1867. The family followed him later. Some of the younger members of the family including my father, were born in France. The whole family returned to Belfast some time before or about 1870.

On the maternal side, a grand-uncle, also a Fenian, escaped to the U.S.A. No news of him since. His name was Connolly, but I have no recollection of his christian name. There was an atmosphere of hush-hush on my mother's side of the family about this uncle. I think they were worried about the Excommunications.

My paternal grandfather was, too, decidedly worried about the Excommunications by the Bishops. My father once told me that my grandfather accepted the Bishops' ruling under protest. He had said that the Bishops' action was morally wrong but unfortunately they have the power to excommunicate the Fenians. To understand or better to appreciate my grandfather's attitude in this, it is necessary to point out that his whole young life had been one long struggle to retain the Faith. His father (my great-grandfather) had been a Grand Master of the Orange Order who married a saintly Catholic woman and thought the boys born to them should be brought up Protestants - he didn't mind the girls being Catholics. There was just that amount of hush-hush about this Protestant connection in our

family which prevented my getting more details about the great-grandfather. However, he seems to have been national - ~~Let's~~ a great many Protestants were in his day - and I believe he had some connection with the movement in 1798.

To get back to my grandfather. I was told that he left the Fenians and then he swore he'd never shave again till Ireland was free - he had a luxurious beard when I saw him last. He was then about 84 years old and I, 4.

My parents were ordinary typical Catholic Nationalists of their day. Their sympathy was with Parnell but couldn't take sides against the Bishops. They had also become convinced that the British Empire was invincible. They had all the arguments against us young people. Then the '98 centenary celebrations set us youngsters agog and enquiring. We wanted to prepare for another fight but we were told not to be foolish. "It would be lovely if it could be done", we were told "but your grandfathers failed and your great-grandfathers failed, all better men than you could ever hope to be, and besides England has become much stronger and is just as ruthless". I think it was Joe, my brother, who first pointed out to me that we should be ashamed of our father's generation. They were the first generation of Irishmen who had not struck a blow for Ireland. As I have said, the arguments were all on our parents' side, until the Boer War. Heavens! what thrills we got out of that great struggle. Bonfires in the streets on the news of a Boer victory, complete disbelief in Boer reverses! The Irish Boer Brigade! How we wished we were old enough to be with them! Yet all these years and for many more the dark cloud of the Irish Bishops' attitude hung like a pall over every generous impulse to free our country.

The Jansen-cum-Gallicanism of the Irish Bishops kept me perturbed. I knew Joe was an open militant Nationalist and

an admirer of the Fenians and didn't seem to be the least bit worried about excommunication: yet in those days he was an ardent Catholic. At last I asked him straight how he managed to answer the Bishops: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's ....." His almost contemptuous reply to my "childish question" (he seemed to think that only a simpleton or a fool or a heretic didn't know the answer) was "when you give to God the things that are God's, just tell me what is left for Caesar?".

That was an eye-opener to me. Then, on ruminating over the question, I began to see the humour in Our Lord's answer as well as the 'cuteness. His enemies saw it and dare not accuse Him of being in favour of Jewish slavery to Rome - which is what they would have done if the reply could with any show of reason be made to appear like that. I remember once many years later discussing the attitude of later Bishops on a similar situation, saying as a sort of peroration: -  
 "St. Patrick must be one of the greatest saints in Heaven because he has kept the Faith unsullied among the ordinary people of Ireland in spite of the Bishops and the majority of parish priests". All this may not be history in the ordinary sense, but history cannot be properly understood without some appreciation of all that went to make up the psychology of the people at any given time.

2.

Belfast 1903.

My first definite contact with the national movement was in 1903 when I joined the "Oscars" hurling club. This was one of the Fianna hurling clubs started in Belfast by Bulmer Hobson in, I believe, 1902. There was a number of such clubs but I was too young to retain much details of their activities or membership. The only activity, apart from hurling, which remains in my mind is an attempt by Hobson to produce a play written by him on Wolfe Tone. I cannot remember if the play

was ever produced. Of the members of these clubs I can ~~only~~ remember <sup>only</sup> the names of a few - my brother Joseph, my cousin Willie Robinson, John and Michael Clarke, William Flanagan, and a boy named Ferris. With the exception of my brother Joseph, I don't think any of them took much part in the national movement in later years. My brother Joseph was the first boy to join the Fianna, and as he is three years older than I am, he will certainly have more recollections of this period than I have. There was a number of Protestant boys in the movement then. Archie Heron is the only one I remember by name. Joe did a bit of "proslytising" among Protestant boys and has some funny stories about their dread of Rome.

3. Scotland and the I.R.B. 1903-1912.

The family were forced to emigrate to Scotland late in, I believe, 1903, and I joined the Gaelic League almost immediately. I cannot recollect the name of the Branch but it had its premises in ~~Crown~~<sup>Man</sup> Street, Glasgow. The only teacher whose name I can remember there was a man named Paddy Boyle from Donegal. He was very active in the Branch. I understand he is still alive and residing somewhere in County Donegal. I left Glasgow very soon after and went to school at St. Michael's, Dumfries. My contact with Glasgow from that until 1912 was merely on week-end visits and holidays. During these visits I kept in touch with the Gaelic League.

4. 1913 - 1915.

The Irish Volunteers were formed in Glasgow very shortly after their formation in Dublin. I cannot give any details of the formation, but my brother Joseph who was very active in national affairs in Glasgow at this time, will certainly be able to give information on this point. My first contact with the Irish Volunteers was when I joined "A" Company at the

Gaelic League Hall which was, I think, situated in London Street. I did not "join" the Volunteers formally - I was taken, took myself, for granted. This was some time about December 1913. I attended for drill and paid ~~my~~ subscription. Some members of this Company whom I can remember are Seán and Seumas Lanigan, Seán and Seumas Rice and some members of what later became known as the Kimmage Garrison to whom I shall refer later. We were drilled by an ex soldier whose name I cannot remember. I don't think I ever heard his name.

Apart from the ordinary foot drill I did not take part in any activities at this stage. The Fianna organisation in Glasgow were very active in raiding munition factories and mines for explosives. Some of the boys in this group were, Barney Priel, who still lives in Glasgow, Seumas Reader, who is at present on the staff of Leinster House, Éamon Mooney, B.O.W., Dún Laoghaire, and my brother Joseph. They will be able to give details of the Fianna activities in Glasgow at this time.

My brother always seemed anxious to keep me away from militant activities. He had the idea that I should stay at home to care for the old people, thus relieving him of anxiety and responsibility. I believe Joe himself was prepared for a life of hardship and excitement with a hangman's rope likely at the end. However, I had my own ideas but didn't mention them to Joe. I was always anxious to know how serious the movement was and I learned by trial and error a method to find out. The only way I could get Joe to talk was to throw cold water on their bona-fides. Then he told me in so positive, cool, matter-of-fact way that a fight would come off, not only in our time, but very shortly, that I believed him.

I prepared myself mentally and physically. I trained myself to be supple, not muscle-bound, and I found my strength increasing markedly. I learned to jump my own height - only

5' 6" - but it was tough going. I learned to sprint with all my clothes on in short bursts of 20 to 30 yards. I learned to shoot. My father had already taught me the theory of shooting and Joe had an air-rifle from our Belfast days and I took every opportunity of practice at circus and show grounds and at rifle ranges. I was very proud the first time I hit the ball dancing on the water fountain. I became quite good judging by what I saw round about me. I discovered with secret delight that the average British Tommy was quite a poor shot. I may have been unfortunate in those I came across. I had gained a confidence that later experience showed was not quite justified. I hadn't yet learned the need to be "quick on the draw"; that one had to be either "the quick or the dead".

August 1914 the first big war started. Conscription came to Britain and Scotland. We had great hopes that the war would give us a good opportunity to strike. Conscription. On looking back now to those days I remember that none of us in Glasgow was over perturbed. We were simply not going to be conscripted; yet there was no definite plan to deal with the situation that I can remember, but that among ourselves we decided to go on the run and get to Ireland.

Towards the end of 1915 I began to notice a suppressed excitement among the Fianna lads; they were holding their heads high, becoming self-confident with an elated seriousness. They were raiding continually for munitions. This activity increased as 1916 approached. The raids had become almost "barefaced" - they had got away with so much for so long without detection. At last a sort of grand finalé was planned and carried out at Uddington, I think it was, when a big haul of explosives was captured. An exodus to Dublin of all able-bodied Volunteers was to follow this. My knowledge of these raids was second-hand but my father's house was used as one of many temporary depots and although not a word was

spoken to me about any particular raid I knew they were on.

Suddenly and unexpectedly (that is the only way I can express the sensation at the time) my brother Joe was arrested. That would be 17th or 18th January, 1916. Seumas Reader was arrested the following night. By an outstanding piece of good luck the British Authorities had not till that moment suspected the Irish Volunteers of being responsible for the raids. As a matter of fact it was the Fianna and the I.R.B. who carried them out. All had gone well for the Fianna until the last big raid above referred to where the raiders in order to conserve space, threw away the wrappings. The wind scattered them round the countryside. The public became aware of the raid and London became alarmed and ordered the local police to act, or ! The Scots police were completely at sea as to who was responsible; their one and only suspicion was the anarchists. These unfortunates had been harried, searched and followed from the time the raiding had started, but, naturally, without results to the police. In desperation the Scots Police Authorities called in Maguire and Hannigan (the two Dublin Castle political G men appointed to watch the Irish in Scotland) for consultation. These two fellows guessed immediately who was behind the raids. They set out to make two arrests. Joe was arrested that night and Seumas Reader the next night. Reader and some other Volunteers had gone to Ireland a couple of days previously with explosives and he was to have remained in Ireland for the Rising. However, Seán McDermott sent him back urgently, armed, and "sworn" to deliver two despatches, one to the Volunteers, and one to the I.R.B. relating to plans for sending all able-bodied men, especially those who had military experience to Ireland.

Reader arrived in Glasgow and went straight to Carmichael's place (the son of the house was a Volunteer) and was having something to eat when the police arrived. Reader, I believe, had not yet heard of Robinson's arrest. Reader had

to think quickly. Something desperate had to be done, so he jumped up shouting and made an ostentatious rush for his revolver <sup>(in his overcoat)</sup> which in the excitement, got stuck in the pocket. The lady of the house knowing Reader, screamed, "Murder, murder!" "Don't shoot, don't shoot". The police rushed for the door in panic and Reader sensing the advantage, started to clam them. He told them they could arrest him if they let him accept all the blame as the people in the house were quite innocent. Reader then walked over to the coat rack and put on the wrong coat. In their anxiety to get off, the police rushed him away to a magistrate. One need hardly say that everything including the two despatches was cleared out in a very few minutes after the crowd had left. The two despatches were delivered and the munitions dumped elsewhere.

Reader was no sooner standing before the magistrate than that "magnate" noticed that the prisoner's coat was much too large. "That's not that young fellow's coat'. You've been hoodwinked, get back at once and search the house". They did, this time armed with a search warrant.

So, there was not one bit of concrete evidence against Reader. Joe Robinson, as I've said, had been arrested at his home the previous night. They had not a scintilla of evidence against him either - all because Maguire and Hannigan wanted to show off in front of the Scots Police how smart they were. Had they come prepared to search the two houses they would have had quite enough evidence and to spare.

These two Volunteers were held for trial on charges of high treason. The trial never came off because we discovered that either Hannigan or Maguire had stolen a Trades Union card belonging to Joe Robinson in a subsequent raid on his home, and which the Detective was prepared to swear had been picked up in a field near where the last raid had taken place. The Detective hadn't noticed that the date on the card was the same date as the raid Robinson was accused of. The card had been signed that day

in Belfast by a Trades Union official who was an Orangeman. Thus they dare not bring the case to court.

On realising the strength of our position I pressed our solicitor, a Mr. Orr of Hamilton, to demand a trial so as to expose the perfidy of the Detectives. This was turning the tables on them with a vengeance. From that moment the inactivity on the matter by the British Authorities was eloquent. I then urged the solicitor to institute Habeas Corpus proceedings! I was acting on the old adage of "attack is the best defence". Habeas Corpus was refused. No trial. No release either. However, I now felt Joe and Seumas were reasonably safe and began to think I might, with profit, give a little thought to myself.

5. 1916. Kimmage Garrison.

One evening about this time in the ~~Gaelic League~~ Gaelic League Hall which was now the Volunteer Drill Hall, I was approached by Tom O'Donnell, the I.R.B. Centre, and invited to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was sworn in on the spot but never attended any meetings as Tom O'Donnell informed me that same evening that all young men of military age were required in Ireland. This would be around February 1916. I knew that a group or groups of men had already gone to Ireland, so as soon as I could I left Glasgow with five or six others for Dublin. We arrived at the North Wall and went direct to Larkfield House, Kimmage, where we became known as the Kimmage Garrison. There were about fifty or sixty men in this group. The names of the members are as follows :-

KIMMAGE GARRISON.

D = Dublin: G = Glasgow: L = Liverpool:

Lon. = London: M = Manchester: T = Tullamore.

|      |                                |
|------|--------------------------------|
| M    | Agnew, Arthur                  |
| M    | Begley, David                  |
| L    | Bolger, John                   |
| L    | Bolger, James                  |
| T    | Bracken, Peadar                |
| G    | Breslins (2)                   |
| L    | Carroll, John                  |
| L    | Caldwell, Patrick              |
| G    | Carmichael, Andrew             |
| G    | Carigan, Charles               |
| L    | Clinch, Patrick J.             |
| M    | Coghlan, Joseph (Jerry Malone) |
| L    | Craven, Thomas                 |
| Lon. | Daly, Denis                    |
| Lon. | Daly, Liam                     |
| L    | Dickenson, William             |
| L    | Duffy, Joseph                  |
| G    | Friel, Bernard                 |
| L    | Furlong, Andrew (deceased)     |
| D    | Gahan, Joseph                  |
| Lon. | Goode, Alfred Joseph           |
| L    | Gleeson, Joseph                |
| L    | Gleeson, Martin                |
| G    | Hegarty, Seán (deceased)       |
|      | Horan, John (deceased)         |
| Lon. | Harling, John (deceased)       |
| M    | Kelly, Frank                   |
| L    | King, George (deceased)        |
| L    | King, John                     |
| L    | King, Patrick                  |

L Kerr, Niall (Junior) (deceased)  
 Lon. Kennan, Gilbert  
 Lon. Keating, Con (deceased)  
 M Lynch, Gilbert  
 L Landy, Seumas (deceased)  
 M McAuliffe, Garrett  
 L McDermott, Patrick  
 G McGallogly, John  
 G McGallogly, Seumas (deceased)  
 L McGarvey, Michael  
 Lon. McGrath, Michael  
 L McManus, Patrick  
 G McMullan, Brian  
 L McNeive, William  
 L McMahon, Patrick  
 G McCarra,  
 G Murphy, Michael  
 G Maguire, Patrick J.  
 G Maguire, Patrick (White)  
 G Morrin, Patrick (deceased)  
 M Mulvihill, Michael (deceased)  
 Lon. Noonan, Ernest  
 Lon. Noonan, Seán  
 T O'Braonáin, Seumas  
 M O'Connor, John (Blimey)  
 L O'Donnagáin, Seumas (deceased)  
 M O'Donnchadha, Tomás  
 M O'Donoghue, Patrick  
 L O'Donoghue, William  
 L O'Murchadha, Peadar  
 Lon. O'Reilly, Joseph  
 L O'Shea, Michael  
 L O'Dowd, James  
 L Murphy, Victor  
 M Murphy, Michael  
 D Plunkett, George, Officer-in-charge.

M Parr, Liam (deceased)  
G Robinson, Seumas  
L Roche, Liam  
M Ryan, Laurence  
G Scullion, Frank  
G Scullion, Patrick (deceased)  
L Supple, Pádraig  
Lon. Sheehan, Donal (deceased)  
Lon. Shortis, Patrick (deceased)  
L Thornton, Frank  
L Thornton, Hugh (deceased)  
L Thornton, Patrick (deceased)  
G Turner, Cormac  
L Walsh, Martin  
L Whelehan, Christopher  
Lon. Ward, Gilbert  
M Fulong, Joseph  
Lon. Furlong, Matthew (deceased)  
L Kerr, John  
L Kerr, Thomas  
Lon. Vise, Joseph  
L Egan, Joseph  
Lon. O'Leary, David  
Lon. O'Leary, Diarmuid

discussion among us as to ways and means of taking action against those who had been responsible for the cancellation of the mobilisation. George Plunkett, however, advised us not to worry and to stand to.

#### 7. Easter Monday.

On Easter Monday morning George Plunkett's pre-occupied demeanour had changed. He was wearing a broad, proud, confident smile and a sword! We were ordered by Plunkett to parade with full equipment and hard rations. We assembled in the grounds, and about 11.15 without any indication as to us rank and files that the time for action had come, we were marched to the Dolphin's Barn tram terminus and boarded a tram for the city. We were, as far as I can recollect, about sixty strong. We left the tram at College Green and marched to Liberty Hall.

Beresford Place was full of Citizen Army men and women. Everything was bustle and excitement. We formed up in front of, and our backs to, Liberty Hall, and Margaret Skinnider, whom I knew, rushed over to me and said "it's on". I asked, "what's on?". She said, "the rebellion, of course". This was the first positive information I had that action was to be taken that morning. There is nothing of importance to relate with regard to our stay at Liberty Hall, and about twenty minutes after our arrival there we formed up in a procession and moved along the Quays, feeling as if I were walking on air. Somewhere along the Quays Paddy King, our Quartermaster, asked me to take over charge of his section, and later Peadar Bracken came to me and showed me an order by James Connolly saying "we are to take over the two houses at the bridge - Hopkins & Hopkins and Kellys". Bracken said he would take over Kellys and I was to take over Hopkins. Near the bridge I fell out of the ranks, followed by a number of men, and rushed over towards Hopkins' corner. The main body proceeded around the corner, into O'Connell Street.

It was many years later that I learned that when

Peadar Bracken gave me the order to occupy Hopkins & Hopkins. I was ipso facto made a Lieutenant in charge of the second half of Bracken's Company!

The Garrison had been formed that morning ad hoc as far as I ever knew, into two Companies. I was not then aware of this arrangement, neither was the rest of "my" half Company apparently, and so only a section followed me when I fell out of the ranks at the bridge. I had been marching in front all the way from Liberty Hall, and, not having any responsibility till the last exciting moment, I have no idea who the men were who were behind me in the section or the Company.

The result of all this was that only the first line of four Volunteers remained to take over our allotted position:- Cormac Turner, Seumas Lundy, another Volunteer and myself. The Other Volunteer melted away later to the G.P.O.

The entry into Hopkins provided a problem. It had heavy steel shutters which I discovered when I struck them with an axe. As I considered they would give us good protection when inside I was anxious to effect an entry without destroying them. We thought of obtaining a ladder and for this purpose what remained of the section went in search of one leaving me alone at the corner. My attention was drawn to a D.M.P. man obviously in a hurry coming from the direction of Liberty Hall. I held him up in order to prevent his giving the news of our activities and almost at once I noticed a body of cavalry also coming from the direction of Liberty Hall. I looked around for some members of my section but they were still searching for the ladder and I was all alone at the corner. I backed around into O'Connell Street and laid down in the roadway near the footpath and trained my shot gun which was loaded with buck shot, on the corner. The cavalry appeared at the corner and just then a motor car with a civilian passenger drew up to the Officer-in-charge of the cavalry. He was obviously explaining to the officer that something was happening further up O'Connell Street.

and urging the officer to take some action. The officer, however, seemed to indicate that he had an escort duty on hands and eventually he proceeded on his way past the bridge to Bachelors Walk and up the Quays where he was later attacked by the Garrison at the Four Courts who by that time were in position.

I returned to Hopkins and broke into a hall door of the house next to Hopkins on the Quay side. On entering this hall door I found that Seumas Lundy and Cormac Turner were already inside. From the first floor of this house we bored through the wall into Hopkins making the aperture as small as possible. We barricaded the lower floor of Hopkins with whatever furniture was available and made a general inspection of the premises. The roof we found was useless as a firing point as it gave no protection whatever.

We could hear shouting and commotion coming from O'Connell Street but we still had no idea as to what was happening there. We opened the windows of Hopkins and took up our positions at them. Some time later a messenger came to us and from him we got some idea as to what was happening. We told him to bring word to the G.P.O. that we were only three men and required reinforcements. Two new men eventually arrived - Andy Fitzpatrick and Andy Conroy, both members of the Citizen Army. A third Citizen Army man arrived later. I do not recollect his name but he was the only one of our Garrison of six who had a service rifle, Lundy, Turner and myself being armed with shot guns, and Fitzpatrick and Conroy with small arms. We had also a fair supply of home-made grenades. Nothing happened much on Monday evening except a visit from a Cumann na mBan with tea.

8. Tuesday.

On Tuesday morning there was some shooting in our vicinity and we came to the conclusion that it was coming from McBirney's. I noticed that at one of the windows in McBirney's the figure of a girl or what appeared to be a girl used appear for a few moments and then go. Always after her appearance some shooting was heard and I concluded that she was either spotting for the gunner or was "herself" doing the shooting. On one occasion after her disappearance I fired at the window where she had been. She did not appear any more.

Early in the morning we started to drill through the walls of Hopkins down towards Abbey Street. We reached the D.B.C., found that the walls were too thick to bore through and also that volunteers had been boring up towards us. We arranged a platform on the first floor at the rere of the building and by this means established communication with the Irish Volunteers further down. Some time during this day I went to the G.P.O. and saw George Plunkett. I pointed out to him that we were under garrisoned and without provisions. He told me that there was<sup>no</sup> no men to spare. I returned to Hopkins and found that the Garrison had been doing some foraging and had obtained provisions, principally, I think, from the D.B.C. There was firing going on at this stage, gradually becoming heavier.

9. Wednesday.

My first recollection of Wednesday was hearing the sound of artillery fire and with the aid of a home-made periscope we saw a boat in the river just beyond the railway bridge shelling Liberty Hall. I went to the G.P.O. and reported this to George Plunkett. I had some conversation with my comrades of the Kimmage Garrison in the G.P.O. but the only thing which remains in my memory is the large collection of rumours which were afloat at the time. They were to the effect that the

whole country was in arms, that the British had suffered heavy casualties and that the Germans had landed and were marching on Dublin, etc. I returned to Hopkins. Each time I had to cross O'Connell Street under heavy machine-gun fire. The crossings were made in quadruple quick time!

10. Thursday.

Early on Thursday morning word came to us that Connolly had ordered the evacuation of our block. I went to the D.B.C. to confirm this as it seemed to me to be most unjustified. The officer-in-charge of the D.B.C. was a young Volunteer Lieutenant. I do not know who he was. The man who brought the order was there and I questioned him on it. He maintained that that was the order which Connolly had given him to bring to us. I told the Irish Volunteer Lieutenant that I did not like to evacuate the position without some confirmation. He, however, said he would obey the order and indicated to me that it was my duty to do the same. Not knowing my own real rank at that time I regarded him as being my superior, so I agreed. We accordingly set out for the G.P.O., evacuating the block at the Hibernian Bank in Abbey Street, down Abbey Street into Marlborough Street and so into North Earl Street. From North Earl Street corner we rushed across individually around the far side of the Pillar. There were about ten or fifteen of us in this group. There was heavy machine-gun and rifle fire coming down O'Connell Street from the direction of Westmoreland Street, Trinity College and McBirney's. However, we crossed and entered the G.P.O. without as far as I know even one casualty. I went straight to George Plunkett and told him that I did not think we should have been ordered to evacuate the position. He brought me to James Connolly in the main hall. Connolly said that the only order which was sent was for an Irish Volunteer sniper on the roof of the D.B.C. to evacuate that position, which was reported to be dangerous. Connolly then appointed Andy Conroy (whom Connolly knew personally) to

take charge of a party and re-occupy the whole block of buildings from Hopkins to the Hibernian Bank. I was a member of this party which numbered about twenty men. The only other person in the party whom I can now remember apart from Conroy, was Frank Scullin. We returned the way we had <sup>come</sup> gone into North Earl Street and into Marlborough Street. However, as we got into Marlborough Street, machine-gun fire was opened on us from a new British post. They must have moved closer when they spotted our evacuation. We rushed up Marlborough Street to get into the shelter of Abbey Street. A man in front of me fell and I had to leap over him to avoid falling. Then I realised that he had been hit and turned back to assist him. It was Frank Scullin. He said to me, "For God's sake, get in out of the rain". "I'm alright, it's only in the leg". The machine-gun was still firing but not in my direction. Even at that moment I got the impression that the gunner was respecting my efforts to help a wounded comrade and had trained his gun elsewhere. Frank crouched into a hallway in Marlborough Street and I rushed on into Abbey Street and back into the Hibernian Bank. There was no firing in Abbey Street just then.

Back inside, Conroy said I would have to return to the G.P.O. for more reinforcements. Quite a number of those who left the G.P.O. with us didn't reach our post. What happened them I do not know. Firing had now become very heavy. A machine-gun post in Tara Street and Trinity College and McBirney's, and snipers all round were engaged in heavy firing. At the back also in Marlborough Street there appeared to be heavy firing going on. I pointed out to Conroy that we had only just come from the G.P.O., that there was little likelihood of our getting reinforcements and that if I succeeded in running the gauntlet again back to the G.P.O. I would ask to be retained there. He did not insist and we re-occupied our positions in Hopkins. With me at this stage at Hopkins were the Irish Volunteer Lieutenant and Conroy himself.

Artillery fire was now coming close to us and Kellys opposite had been hit by shells - I think on the Wednesday. Hopkins itself was receiving very heavy machine-gun and rifle fire to which we were unable to reply with the arms we had.

A few hours after our return to Hopkins, word came again that we were to evacuate our positions and this time the order appeared to be justified with fires creeping up in our rear. In view of the heavy firing at our rear at a point blank range, we decided to evacuate directly across O'Connell Street. Conroy and the Irish Volunteer Lieutenant entered O'Connell Street a few doors down from Hopkins corner, and keeping close to the buildings, moved down towards Abbey Street. A machine-gunner, however, opened fire on them. They wheeled left and dashed directly across O'Connell Street. I saw Conroy leap into the air. He had obviously been hit but he continued to run and reach the shelter of the houses at Manfields corner where I lost sight of them. I myself, dashed out of the same hall door and directly across the street. I was half way over before the machine-gunners opened up on me. However, I reached the shelter of Abbey Street and made my way through the passage-way from Abbey Street into Prince's Street and so into the G.P.O. This would be late on Thursday evening.

#### 11. Friday.

My first task in the G.P.O. was to obtain some food as it was many hours since we had eaten. A Cumann na mBan provided me with some. My next aim was to get some sleep as since Sunday night sleep had been out of the question except for an occasional hour. I was utterly exhausted at this time and I got five hours' sleep from 7 p.m. till midnight when I went on guard. My next recollection is of finding myself in Manfields corner. I cannot now say how I got there. It must have been through the Metropole Hotel. As far as I can recollect this was early on Friday morning. There was a number of Volunteers on the ground floor in Manfields.

Two of them I knew - Martin and Joe Gleeson. There was a side door into Abbey Street and there were two young Volunteers on guard at it. There was heavy cannonading, machine-gun and rifle fire. Abbey Street was being swept by fire. Suddenly there was a clatter of feet running across the street, followed by very heavy knocking on the outside of this door. The young Volunteers, fearing, I presume, a British attack through the door, retreated. I called on Martin and Joe Gleeson to stand by me and I jumped across the sand-bags barricading the inside of the door and challenged the person who was knocking on the door<sup>✓</sup>. He replied, "a Volunteer, let me in". I opened the door and found that it was James Connolly ~~who was outside~~. I cannot explain why he was there and he did not appear to be injured. He gave me a lecture because of my delay in opening the door and I had to explain that I had not been on duty there and that it was only by chance that I happened to be at the door. Connolly then went across the room and chatted with the two Gleesons.

The heavy artillery and other fire were going on all this time. I was not on duty at any spot and was merely wandering around the buildings. I had been up from midnight on guard duty at a window and was entitled, I thought, to a respite. I found my way back into the G.P.O. some time about midday on Friday. The houses on the opposite side of O'Connell Street were all on fire and one building completely caved in. It was at this time that I remember the first shells hitting the roof of the G.P.O. They were incendiary shells and despite the efforts of some of the Garrison to control the fire with hose pipes, the fire spread and more shells were landing on the roof. Rifle bullets were coming through the windows and pinging on the walls. I could see Volunteers with rifles dodging up and down at the windows looking for opportunities to fire at the enemy who seemed very near. These <sup>✓</sup> seemed to expect and hope the enemy would try to rush the building; they were alert, vibrant. "Red lightning

lightened through my blood". *BUT THE ENEMY DID NOT CHARGE*

Volunteers were called for to remove explosives from the main hall to a cellar or room downstairs. I was one of the volunteers engaged on this work. I cannot recollect the names of the others. I didn't know them and had no time to notice. We brought the explosives to a lower room and laid a fuse where the fire would catch and explode the material after the building was vacated. When we had finished this work we found that the evacuation of the building was now almost complete, and I, with some others, evacuated the G.P.O. from a side door in Henry Street straight across into Henry Place.

We made our way up Henry Place and around to the opening into Moore Lane. There was heavy machine-gun fire from a British post coming down Moore Lane and one of our own machine-guns was replying to it. During a lull we dashed across the mouth of Moore Lane and entered the corner house at Moore Street by a side door.

This house was full of Irish Volunteers. I got a large jug and filled it with water and went around giving drinks to whoever needed them. I entered one room and saw James Connolly lying on a stretcher. He appeared to be very cheerful and waived his hand to me, saying, "Hello, Townie,"- the Gleesons had evidently told him who I was. This was the first time I knew that Connolly had been wounded.

There was a call for volunteers to bore through the buildings we now occupied, and I was one of the party. We were using a very large crowbar, and each man would take his turn at the bar for a few minutes and then stop to rest, a fresh man taking his place. During one of my spells of rest I lay flat down on the floor awaiting my turn to work the crowbar and fell fast asleep.

12. Saturday.

When I awoke it was completely dark and everything was quiet. I was utterly exhausted and, feeling around the darkened room, I came into contact with a vacant bed. I rolled into bed and again fell fast asleep.

When I awoke the next time it was daylight. There were sounds of firing some distance away. I got up and moved through the buildings towards an end house. There were a number of Volunteers there, including George Plunkett. We could see a British barricade nearby. A party was lined up to rush the barricade when orders came that we were not to fire on any British soldiers until further orders. I think it was Seán McDermott who brought this order to us, and I think it was Seán McGloughlin, who had a yellow band signifying Commandant rank, that spread the order.

Shortly afterwards we heard that the surrender had been arranged and we were eventually formed up in the yard of the house by George Plunkett and marched out into Moore Street and so into O'Connell Street. So confused is my mind about this period that I cannot remember whether we went up to Parnell Street and into O'Connell Street, or down into Henry Street and so into O'Connell Street. We were kept in O'Connell Street in formation and surrendered our arms. We were then moved up and herded into the Rotunda Gardens where we spent the night.

13. Sunday.

On Sunday we were marched to Richmond Barracks and were lodged in a large Gymnasium. We were passed individually through an Interrogation Room, and a number of us were lodged in parties in large barrack rooms, the rest deported that night. In my room were Pádraig Ó Máille, Joseph Gleeson, Joseph Derham, Seumas Mallin, M. W. O'Reilly, Barney Mellows, Frank Fahy, Major McBride and, I think, A. P. Reynolds. I remained in Richmond Barracks for about a week and was then deported to Stafford Jail, ~~from which~~ and on to Reading.

BUNO STAIRS MILITIA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 156

Seumas Robinson  
26th Oct 1948

MONDAY

OCTOBER 17<sup>th</sup> 1932

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913 21

BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913 21

No. W.S. 156

# THE ASHTOWN AMBUSH

## PREVIOUS PLANS TO KIDNAP LORD FRENCH

### AN ADVENTUROUS CYCLE RIDE

(By Senator Seamus Robinson, O/C. South Tipperary Brigade, I.R.A., 1918-'22, and then O/C 2nd Southern Division).

**S**HORTLY after the Soloheadbeg ambush of January 21, 1919, when Dan Breen, Sean Treacy, Sean Hogan and myself (of the South Tipperary Brigade, Irish Republican Army) were "on the run," we were awakened out of our sleep one night in Mrs Boland's house, in Dublin, by the sound of tramping footsteps and loud voices on the stairs.

The leader of the invading party was Michael Collins who explained that they had made a loud noise to show they were friends—a wise precaution. The sound of stealthy footsteps was always the signal for us to get our guns in case of surprise by the enemy. Mick soon let us know the object of his visit saying "Get up at once you are to ambush Lord French." At first we thought he was joking but he explained that he had received word that Lord French was to drive to Dublin Castle at 5 o'clock the following morning.

So Treacy, Hogan and I took up our position in Church Lane off Dame Street awaiting the coming of Lord French trying meanwhile to follow our instruction, to keep on the move yet remain on the spot—not a very easy thing to do. At different points all along the route men from all parts of the country, who had come to Dublin for an Army Convention, were stationed, some of whom were to take part in the attack and others who were to cover the retreat of the attackers.

But Lord French never came and we learned afterwards that our information was wrong and that he had no intention of passing through Dame Street that morning. Thomas MacCurraigh later the Lord Mayor of Cork was with us that morning and I remember his saying to me afterwards that the only good thing about the ambush was that he was given a revolver, which he had not been able to get before.

Lord French seemed to have had a charmed life and although plans were made later to kidnap him and hold him as hostage for Eamon de Valera—President of the Republic who was then in prison he was always able to slip through our hands.

#### ASHTOWN

Some time before the Ashtown ambush I was present at a meeting of the Active Service Units, drawn from the various battalions and presided over by Dick Mulcahy. He explained to us that we would have to carry out active warfare in such a way that there would be no casualties on our side, that is to say, that there was to be none of our men killed or taken prisoners. He said this was necessary because the Government was anxious that no military action should be traced to its authority or to the I.R.A. and that if an attack could be traced to the I.R.A. they might find it necessary to repudiate us. Mr de Valera had nothing to do with this decision being in fact at the time.

We accepted these terms although they opened up very unpleasant possibilities for us, for we would then be outlawed by the British repudiated by our own Government and also might suffer the censure of the Church.

On Friday the 19th December 1919 the party drawn from the A.S.U. of the various battalions, including Dan Breen, Treacy, Hogan and myself and numbering in all eleven men proceeded to Ashtown to carry out the attack on the Viceroy. Our information was that Lord French would come by train to Ashtown at 11.40 a.m. and that he would not go on to Broadstone but would leave the train there and travel by motor to the Viceregal Lodge.

We rode out the Cobla Road on our bicycles cycling two by two and I remember that Martin Savage sang all the way among his songs being "A soldier's life the life for me a soldier's death, so Ireland's free."

#### BARRICADING THE ROAD

Arrived at Kelly's public house Ashtown, which stands about two hundred yards from Ashtown Station, and about 100 yards from the Phoenix Park gate Paddy Daly who was in command of the party gave us our instructions. A large body of men standing about the road would be sure to attract atten-

tion, so we were to go into the public-house, and mingling with the customers, order some minerals as if we were cyclists passing along the road. Shortly before the train was due to arrive, we were to line the inside of the hedge on the right hand side of the road for about thirty yards. Breen, Martin Savage and Tom Keogh were to barricade the road at the last moment by drawing a country cart which stood by across the path of the coming cars. This had to be done in order to slow down the speed of the cars which always travelled at a terrific rate. Breen and his two comrades had to do this with an air of innocence or stupidity because if they looked too business like about it they might rouse the suspicions of some of the people in the public house.

#### A PROPOSAL

The usual order in which the Viceregal party travelled was first a motor car carrying Lord French's armed escort, then the car in which Lord French sat and then another carrying



SENATOR SEUMAS ROBINSON

the rest of his escort. Daly instructed us not to attack the first car.

The look-outs brought us word that the train was signalled and we moved quietly and quickly to our allotted posts along the inside of the hedge, keeping out of sight. In order to prevent civilian casualties, men were placed at the cross roads whose duty it was to prevent people walking into our range of fire.

Realising that Dal, might not have given cool consideration at this eleventh hour to a proposal I had made to him I made up my mind that I would withhold my bomb until after the second car was dealt with. I felt with absolute certainty that if this precaution were not taken our whole action might be marred by heavy casualties on our side and our instructions from G.H.Q. were that we were to avoid casualties.

#### D.M.P. MAN INTERFERES

The cars were starting from the station. The time had come for the road party to get into action and they began slowly to pull the country cart across the road to block the way of the viceregal party. While they were doing this a D.M.P. man appeared suddenly on the scene and taking our barricaders for countrymen engaged in their work began to argue with them that they could not bring their cart that way. Forging stupidity and obstinacy and not wanting to have a tussle with the policeman our men tried to carry on with their duty but the policeman, explaining that the passage must be kept clear for his Excellency, could not be persuaded to move.

At this point one of our party settled the argument by throwing the only missile he had at the policeman, namely a bomb. Of course he had not drawn the pin from the bomb so that there was no danger of its exploding and injuring him or any of our men. This surprise attack threw the policeman into confusion but also confused our barricading party and almost at the same moment the Viceroys cars came into range.

The cars came close together as I had hoped and immediately the action began. All of our men remembering their instructions concentrated their attack on the second car in which Lord French was thought to be travelling. I however, side-stepped orders and waiting until the second car had been bombed out of action hurled my bomb at the first car. What effect my bomb had I never heard with any certainty but the car bounded away, crashing past the slight barri-

cade It was discovered afterwards that contrary to the usual custom, Lord French was seated in the first, instead of in the second car

### CASUALTIES

Immediately after bombing I rushed to the end of the line, at the main road, our weak flank, where Dan Breen, Martin Savage and, I think, Keogh were standing without cover I was anxious to make sure that there would be no enfilading of our lines

Now the third car, the rear of the escort came dashing along at a furious pace bumping over and pushing aside obstacles on the road, the occupants prepared to defend their charge with their lives This was an open car Its fire took toll of our party

In the back of the car stood a soldier, with his legs braced between the seats his rifle held tight to his shoulder with the left hand and his right hand working evenly, almost gracefully on the bolt and trigger This soldier was a sharp-shooter His first shot gave young Martin Savage his death wound the second went through Breen's hat grazing his head, and the third hit Breen in the leg wounding him seriously Breen, now out of action limped painfully to cover in the public-house door and a milk-cart which fortunately for me came along the main road at this moment provided cover from which to continue the attack I was sorry for that milkman but I had neither the time nor the inclination to consider his point of view

The second car had been badly damaged by our fire and could not proceed any farther and as his comrades had fled leaving him to our mercy, the soldier who had been driving it walked out with his hands up The ambush was over All our party came out on the main road and the soldier was disarmed He was trembling and evidently expected to be shot, but we treated him with every courtesy He was obviously surprised and relieved when some one said 'We are soldiers too and do not shoot unarmed prisoners'

### ON BICYCLES

Savage had been killed outright, shot through the throat by the sharp-shooter We debated whether we should take his body away with us, but it was decided that it would be impossible at that time as we had only bicycles, and we had a wounded man to bring to safety Treacy and I remained behind the others until Breen was got away

Breen was very weak from loss of blood, and his leg was useless so that he could neither walk nor cycle by himself He was helped on to his bicycle and Paddy Daly, riding his own bicycle and supporting Breen on the other started on a difficult and perilous journey to reach the house of Mrs Foonney of Phibsborough Later we learned that Daly and Frank Thornton and others got our wounded comrade there in safety but it was more than a month before Breen was able to move about without assistance

As soon as the remainder of our party were safely away Treacy and I jumped on our bicycles and started to ride at top speed from Ashloven for we knew that the district would soon be swarming with British military searching for the I.P.A. We cycled along the path in case we should meet with a military lorry or armed motor cyclist as it would be easier for us in this way to get across a hedge and through the fields in case of an encounter

### BORROWED MACHINE

Unfortunately I had hardly started when one of my pedals struck a stone and came off so throwing my bicycle over a hedge I got on the back of Treacy's machine The bumping over stones made me press down on the rear mudguard and Treacy soon found he could make no progress Luckily for us a man came into view wheeling a brand new machine and politely but firmly we told him that we would have to borrow it from him for a few hours He was very indignant and obviously did not believe me when I promised that it would be left for him at a certain place and at a certain hour that evening I heard afterwards that this man was an R.I.C. pensioner The bicycle was handed over to the Dublin A.S.U. to return it as best they could

With the unwilling help of that ex-policeman I was able to resume my journey into town with Sean Treacy and at last we arrived at Lynch's

Dolphin's Barn Thinking at the time that Breen would be in Grantham St where his friends lived we did not go at once to 71 Heytesbury Street our Dublin H.Q. for fear of drawing too much attention to the district After a wash and shave we went out to enjoy the sensation caused by the attack on the Viceroys Very soon wild rumours were circulating through Dublin and we who had been on the spot really believed that Lord French and his car had been blown to bits at Ashloven I am sure that he was as delighted as we were disappointed that this was not really the case but although the action was not successful in one way it certainly caused a panic in British Government circles