

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 715

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 715

Witness

Colonel Frank Saurin,
Somali,
Bally,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member "F" Company, 2nd Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1916;
Member G. H. Q. Intelligence Section, 1920.

Subject.

- (a) National activities 1913-1921;
- (b) I. R. A. Intelligence 1920-1921;
- (c) Bloody Sunday, 21st November, 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S. 1526.

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Frank Saurin,

Somali, Baily, County Dublin.

As a boy I joined the youth organisation known as Fianna Éireann, and became a Section Leader in it late in the year 1913 or early 1914? My association with this organisation continued up to the week before Holy Week, 1916, when I was transferred to a Volunteer Unit of the Dublin Brigade - "F" Company of the 2nd Battalion.

At that time the Company Officers were:
Frank Henderson, O/C.; Pat Sweeney, 1st Lieutenant;
Oscar Traynor, 2nd Lieutenant, and Harry Colley,
Company Adjutant.

On Good Friday, 1916, the Company paraded at its usual parade ground, Father Mathew Park, Fairview, where (the late) Tom McDonagh inspected us. A further parade was held on Easter Sunday, but was dismissed almost immediately, due, possibly, to the countermanding orders published in the "Sunday Independent" regarding the mobilisation of the Volunteers throughout the country.

On Easter Monday morning I again mobilised with my Company at the Father Mathew Park with my brother Charles. No sooner had I come on parade than the Company O/C., Frank Henderson, ordered me to go home. I was then only fifteen years of age. A short time later on the same day, I made my way to O'Connell Street, where I saw horses lying dead on the roadway. Realising then the significance of events, I went to the G.P.O., assuring some officer there of my identity as a Volunteer and offering my services to the garrison, but despite my

endeavours I was not accepted. In consequence, I had no option but to return home.

Following the release of the prisoners from English jails and prison camps in June, 1917, the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade was re-organised, and I again found myself with my old unit, "F" Company. Our parade headquarters was beside Clonliffe College. The 2nd Battalion at the time was commanded either by Dick McKee or Seán Russell? About 1919, I was appointed Company I.O., and a recommendation was put forward for my promotion to Battalion I.O. However, this did not materialise, and I was transferred to G.H.Q. Intelligence Section of the Irish Republican Army in August 1920. This was a paid, whole-time job, directly under Michael Collins, and my immediate superiors were, Liam Tobin, Tom Cullen and Frank Thornton. Our headquarters at the time was at No. 3 Crow Street. Other Intelligence Officers were, Joe Guilfoyle, Charlie Dalton, Ned Kelliher, Joe Dolan, Paddy Kennedy, Charlie Byrne, Peter McGee and Dan McDonald. Each member was given a number to cover his identity for reference in correspondence and to sign reports. Each I.O. had his own "field" of work. Mine covered hotels, restaurants, sports meetings and such other places where the Auxiliaries and British Secret Service agents foregathered - Jammets, The Wicklow, The Shelbourne, Fullers, The Moira, The Central, etc. We had contacts in these hotels and restaurants, who passed on any information concerning enemy agents that might be of use to us. Through our agents I was enabled to get to know by sight a number of enemy personnel - the object being their extermination if and when the opportunity offered.

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One of my chief agents was a Miss Lily Mernin, a cousin of Piaras Beaslaf. She was a typist in Dublin Castle, and did typing work for Collins at 118 Clonliffe Road, the home of Pat Moynihan. Moynihan was a postal official in the Sorting Office, Rotunda Rink, and was the agent who gave us the information which led to the various raids on enemy mails. In addition to Lily Mernin being one of our agents at Dublin Castle, she was also attached to me for visiting hotel lounges and the like for spotting and identification work of enemy personnel who used to frequent such places. She and my wife used to attend whist drives run by "F" Company Auxiliaries in Dublin Castle. It was usual for one or two of the Auxiliaries to see the ladies to the tram. I followed from outside the Castle, all the time taking a mental description of the men - height, colour, features, clothes, etc. Subsequently I was given their names, rank and official position. In this way we got to know the identity of many Auxiliaries. So the identifying, watching and shadowing went on and on until such time as a job had to be carried out. The Squad were then notified for action and were generally accompanied by the particular I.O. who had been working on the case of the particular individual to be liquidated.

Colonel Garde who was second in command to General Tudor, occasionally stayed in the Shelbourne Hotel. One of his guards was a Captain James J. Walsh (1st class D.I., R.I.C.) who as a Tralee man knew Austin Stack. Walsh was endeavouring to arrest Stack and was assisted in his efforts by Mrs. Maud Walsh, who later became a Councillor of Dublin Corporation. We knew that she was assisting him in his work, and we regarded her as a British agent. I visited her at her home in Donnybrook

in the guise of an insurance agent, the purpose being for identification in case it was decided she should be executed.

The Shelbourne Hotel telephonist was one of my agents, and she tapped all calls going through the Shelbourne switchboard which might be of use. On one occasion Mrs. Walsh rang up Captain Walsh and told him that she had seen Austin Stack riding a bicycle. She said she was in a tram when she saw him; she got off the tram, but lost Stack. She asked Captain Walsh would she share the reward if they were successful in getting Stack. She was assured she would be rewarded and the figure of £2,000 was mentioned.

Incidentally, I should mention that Captain Walsh subsequently (about 1923) qualified as a Barrister and practised in the Irish Courts.

Brady and Halpin were shot in Clontarf just before the Truce. This was an "F" Company, 2nd Battalion, job. Brady, who was a Black and Tan and had been in the sacking of Balbriggan, was the principal target. He was the son of Brady the solicitor in Palace Street.

Brady was sitting on the sea wall opposite St. Lawrence Road, Clontarf, in company with two men, Halpin and Denver, when "X", the "F" Company man, cycled up and shot dead both Brady and Halpin. Halpin was an ex-British Navy A.B., and it is open to question whether he deserved to be shot. To the best of my recollection Brady was concerned in getting local information for the Black and Tans. Denver is still alive. He was a (neighbour) friend of Arthur Griffith when Arthur lived on St. Lawrence Road, Clontarf.

A lot of the work was abortive, and for example I mention the following. A daughter of "Tommy" O'Shaughnessy, the Right Hon. Judge Thomas O'Shaughnessy, Master of the High Courts, was to be married to a British Army Major. This Major had been moved from the occupation of the Rhine to do duty in Ireland and he was stationed in the Castle. Dave Neligan was O'Shaughnessy's guard, and gave us information about the wedding, which was to be in the Castle, and the reception arranged for O'Shaughnessy's house in Fitzwilliam Square. We decided we would try and get some of the male guests on the way to the reception. On the day of the wedding I took up position outside what was then Pigott's gramophone stores in Suffolk Street, from where my get-away would be through the stores and out through the piano stores in Grafton Street. We knew that there would be important officers among the guests at the wedding, and we knew the numbers of their cars. We expected there would be tenders of Auxiliaries there as well. The car number was the indication, and we would see the uniform of the occupants. The only car that came through Suffolk Street was I.O. 24, a brown-painted open Humber. It was being driven by a clergyman, and there were three ladies in wedding apparel sitting in it. I had spent the best part of the day standing around with a .45 Colt automatic in my pocket, with the chance of being picked up by some of the enemy, and all for nothing. That was in the spring of 1921.

There was another abortive operation about the end of June, 1921, when the Auxiliaries came out in small squads and paraded from Stephen's Green, through Grafton Street, College Green, Westmoreland Street and O'Connell Street. They used to go around in three's and four's, and they foregathered in Jammets in a big way.

We decided we would get them. The Intelligence men divided up the streets into blocks. Ned Kelliher had from the top of Grafton Street down to Harry Street; from Harry Street to Clarendon Street was my section; Joe Dolan had Jammets in his area. This attack was to take place at six o'clock in the evening in mid-week. The squads were to come across from the north side of the city, but, by a coincidence, the bridges, including O'Connell Bridge, were held up and everybody searched so the squads did not come over.

At six o'clock to the minute, I was standing at Jacksons at the corner of Clarendon Street, waiting for my squad when two or three shots rang out. I walked out into the street, but it was completely empty, the shots had cleared everybody off the street. Paddy Rigney and Ned Kelliher had shot an Auxiliary named Wannamaker (?) outside Seán O'Hurley's photographic shop in Grafton Street.

We had Thompson guns, and we intended using them at Jammets. In through a laneway in Grafton Street, Jammets had a bar and we intended going in there and firing with the Thompson guns at the Auxiliaries standing along the counter. That job was not called off, but it was interfered with because no one turned up to do it. The one shooting that was carried out was by men from the south side of the city, and I do not know whether these two men had any assistance or not. As far as I was concerned nobody turned up, and nobody turned up as far as Dolan was concerned.

That operation was again planned to take place about a week before the Truce, but it was called off by the Government in case it would interfere with the peace negotiations.

The major and most successful operation to the credit of G.H.Q. Intelligence was the execution of sixteen British Intelligence Officers on the morning of the 21st November, 1920. We attended at the Typographical Societies' Offices in Middle Gardiner Street on Saturday night, the 20th, for final briefing on the "job" to be carried out the following morning. I was detailed as I.O. to the Squad to execute Lieutenants Gerald Ames and Bennett at 38 Upper Mount Street. The only information I had as to their whereabouts at this address was a recently captured letter to Ames and in which Bennett was mentioned. At 10 o'clock on that night I went to Upper Mount Street to locate the house. Before leaving I arranged with the squad leader, Vincent Byrne, where to meet on the following morning. The time arranged for the "jobs" throughout the city was to be 9 a.m. on the 21st. We gained access to Number 38 without any difficulty. I asked a maid where was Mr. Bennett and Mr. Ames. When she told me, we tried the door of Bennett's room which was locked. Herbert Conroy, a member of the squad, had a sledge hammer under his coat and wanted to break in the door. I would not let him but instructed the maid to knock on the door which was opened by Bennett. We took him to a return room where Ames was sleeping, and having asked the squad for as much time as possible, as I was interested principally in the papers these Intelligence Officers might have, they were then executed in Ames' room. In my anxiety to make a thorough search I was unaware that the squad had left and, hearing some shooting in the street, I walked to the door of Bennett's room. I heard a noise and looking down the hall I saw a British soldier

N.B. Ames was a Grenadier Guards Officer. Bennett was also a member of the Guards.

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outside the room where the two bodies were. I wheeled to shoot but the soldier jumped into the room. At the same time, Tom Ennis, who was shooting across the street from the doorstep of "38", called on me to "come on".

I went to the door to see across the road another British soldier shooting down the street at the backs of our retreating squad with what appeared to be a .22 automatic. We both fired and he jumped in through the doorway of his house. Afterwards we learned, much to our disappointment, that Major Carew, a much wanted Intelligence Officer, was living in the house opposite, and the soldier firing was obviously his bat-man.

Tom and I hurried after the squad, the line of our retreat being to Sir John Rogerson's Quay and by ferry across the Liffey to the north side. I had to walk to the east side of Clontarf, armed, and with my pockets full of enemy documents. The prospects of getting there before the British were aroused and out on patrol were not very rosy. However, this was accomplished and I found I had captured some valuable documents when I sorted them out later that day at my home.

Amongst the papers I had Ames' Note-book which showed that their system of Intelligence work was similar to ours insofar that they had agents or "touts" working on identity numbers for patrol purposes in various areas about O'Connell Street, Parnell Street and Parnell Square, and other areas likely to bear fruit from the point of view of their "touts" spotting our people.

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SIGNED Frank Saurin.
FRANK SAURIN.

DATE 11^a Aug. 1952

WITNESS William Ivory Comdt.