

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITARIA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1722

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,722.

Witness

Seumas Robinson,
10 Highfield Road, Rathgar,
Dublin.

Identity.

O/C., South Tipperary Brigade.
O/C., 2nd Southern Division, I.R.A.
Member of Volunteer Executive.
Member of Bureau of Military History.

Subject.

Easter Week, Dublin, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 132.

SEUMAS ROBINSON

1902. Joined the first Fianna (Red Branch Knights); founded by Bulmer Hobson in 1902, Belfast.
1902. Joined "Oscar" junior hurling club, Belfast.
1903. Joined Gaelic League, Glasgow.
1913. December. Joined the Irish Volunteers, Glasgow.
1916. January. Attached to Kimmage Garrison.
1916. Easter Week. Stationed i/c. at Hopkins & Hopkins, O'Connell Street (Bridge).
1916. May. Interned Richmond Barracks (one week), Stafford Gaol, Frongoch, Reading Gaol. Released Christmas Day, 1916.
1917. February. Assisted in reorganising the Volunteers in Tipperary.
1918. October. Elected Brigadier, South Tipperary Brigade.
1920. Elected T.D. to Second Dáil, East Tipperary and Waterford.
1921. November/December. Appointed O/C., 2nd Southern Division, I.R.A., in succession to E. O'Malley.
1922. Elected Member of Volunteer Executive.
1928. Elected Senator.
1935. January. Appointed Member of M.S.P. Board.
1949. Appointed Member, Bureau of Military History.
1953. (?) Appointed Member of Military Registration Board.

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No. W.S. 1722

SECOND STATEMENT BY Mr. SEUMAS ROBINSON,
18 Highfield Road, Rathgar, Dublin,

WRITTEN AT THE REQUEST OF Mrs. INA CONNOLLY-HERON,

OCTOBER, 1957.

Commandant-General James Connolly, Officer in Command of Dublin, left the G.P.O. on two occasions at least, to reconnoitre. He was probably anxious to locate the exact positions of the British forces so as to find the most strategic point to vacate General Headquarters. James Connolly was wounded on two of these occasions: first, he got a bullet wound in the arm while outside in front of the G.P.O. He was attended by the M/O., Dr. James Ryan. Connolly moved round immediately after the wound being dressed as if nothing had happened to him. No one except the Doctor and the nurses who attended him seemed to know anything about it; at least it was some years after 1916 that I learned anything about this wound. On the second occasion he left the G.P.O. alone and secretly to reconnoitre the area south to Bachelors Walk and west at the rear of the G.P.O. No one except G.H.Q. Staff seemed to know he was out reconnoitring at the time. Certainly the Volunteers on guard at the ground-floor outpost in Abbey Street were quite unaware of this: I happened to be there and opened the door for him and let him in on his return.

As some of these details and some others to follow have never been published it may be as well that I should give an explanation of my presence in Abbey Street then.

For the second time on Thursday of Easter Week we had been ordered to vacate Hopkins & Hopkins; the rear of the block of buildings was on fire on the second occasion. Three of us left at the same time: Andy Conroy (a Citizen Army man), a young Volunteer Lieutenant and I. O'Connell Street was being swept with machine-gun fire. Conroy was very seriously wounded in the stomach, but we all three arrived at the G.P.O. The other two entered the G.P.O. by Henry Street, I arrived at Princes Street. I had had nothing to eat since Tuesday and had no sleep since

Monday. It was now fairly late on Thursday evening. On making enquiries about something to eat I was told that it was past tea time, and that was that! When I found myself for the first time among a crowd without any personal responsibility a sleep reaction set in: I felt overpowered from want of it. I had almost to implore a Volunteer Officer who seemed to be in charge of the beds on the ground floor. He pointed to a bed under a counter. I crept into it. I was left undisturbed from 7 p.m. until midnight when he wakened me to do sentry duty until 5 a.m., that is, I had only five hours sleep followed by five hours lone sentry duty. I could see no one about during those long five hours; I had to keep knocking my knuckles against a granite stone window-sill to keep awake . . . my head was swimming! But on getting a cup of tea I was thoroughly alert again. I thought I was entitled to a spell of freedom; I didn't report to George Plunkett, Captain of the Kimmage Garrison, but went off in search of the farthest post held on this, the G.P.C. side of O'Connell Street.

I found that there was not a Volunteer beyond Abbey Street right down to the Liffey. When Kelly's Gunpowder Shop was shelled early in the week (Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, I think) the whole block of buildings from Bachelors Walk Quay to Abbey Street were ordered to be vacated: so Peadar Bracken told me. Not only was there no Volunteer beyond Abbey Street on this Friday morning but there were only six Volunteers on the ground-floor in Abbey Street when I got there. These were Martin and Joe Gleeson of Liverpool - two Kimmage Garrison men - , two Volunteers on guard at the windows facing O'Connell Street - these windows were barricaded up to the top-and there were also two very young Volunteers on guard at the door leading to Abbey Street. These two young boys seemed to be labouring under a great nerve strain. I spoke to them but they seemed not anxious to talk; they spoke quietly to one another only very seldom as they marched slowly up and down past the door.

This door was barricaded with sandbags about $4\frac{1}{2}$ ' high with a clearance of about 3' to allow for the opening of the door. There was terrific firing along Abbey Street: machine-gun, rifle and 'pom-pom' fire answered during every slight lull by a loud defiant 'pong!' of a Howth gun. I was wondering why there were so few Volunteers at this most important post seeing there was a goodly number of men in the G.P.O. I spoke to some of the men on the spot; the British could have rushed this ground-floor position with half a Company. Recently Oscar Traynor told me that he had a posse of riflemen replying to the British from an upper landing at the corner of Abbey Street and O'Connell Street where we were, but above us. Perhaps I merely helped to put the "wind up" some of the young fellows because during a longish lull of about fifteen seconds there was suddenly a loud clattering of nailed boots running across Abbey Street accompanied by another tremendous outburst^{burst} of firing and followed by a loud knocking on the door. The two young Volunteers backed away with rifles lowered and pointed towards the door. The man outside shouted "Open the door". As I was supernumerary I didn't like to butt in too soon. I nodded to the two young fellows and pointed to the door. They were in a slight crouching position, eyes glued on the door, rifles lowered as if waiting to receive charge. They uttered not a word. ^{it}I shouted "Who are you!" "A Volunteer! Open the door!" Now I had some experience of being out in the 'rain' five times during that week, and of being left out in it for about two minutes on the last occasion. I had to run the gauntlet, each time, of machine-gun and rifle snipers, and it was most disconcerting and distressing to be delayed at a window of the G.P.O. by what was (from my point of view at such an awful moment) an overdose of caution, or such a lack of imagination as to be unable, from their relative safe position, to picture the predicament of the poor fellow out in the rain of bullets. They wanted to know who I was: "A Volunteer!", what did I want "In out of the rain for Heaven's sake!!", how were they to know I wasn't a spy or a stooge to get them to open a way for the enemy . . . it would be too dangerous. "Can't you see that I'm only one man with a shot-gun!!!"

After a few more seconds during which I could hear some back-stage whispering, I was told blandly that I should go and knock at a door a little farther down! It was relatively easy to get in by Henry Street; but Princes Street . . .! In fairness to the Volunteers in the G.P.O. I think it well to point out that the vast majority of the G.P.O. garrison had not been outside the precincts during the week, and by Thursday evening they had been worked up to a crisis of expectation of an assault by the British, and, the ordinary Volunteers, knowing that the buildings opposite the G.P.O. had been vacated from Wednesday, didn't know there were any Volunteers still trying to hold O'Connell Street Bridge from Hopkins & Hopkins. They must have wondered where I had come from if I was not a spy! I was held up for no more than a minute or ^{so} two but it seemed like an hour. I was so annoyed that I completely forgot to be afraid.

No wonder I had a practical sympathy with the poor "Volunteer!" out in the bombardment in Abbey Street. I shouted to the Volunteers in the room not to let me down and I scrambled over the barricade. The Gleasons advanced. I cocked my gun, finger on the trigger, pressed the gun tightly against my side to absorb the 'kick' and then I cautiously opened the door with my left hand! In strode James Connolly! It would be difficult to describe my surprise; and it would be impossible for me to describe the shock I got when he immediately began to scold me for "not being at your post which is here", pointing at the sandbags. I was so nonplussed in front of the great man that all I could do was to murmur "It was not my post". Connolly heaved himself over the barricade and ambled slowly with measured tread to the Gleasons, chatted with them a moment or two, then continued on his way to the G.P.O. During all this time Connolly showed no signs of excitement or distress much less of pain. The only sign of emotion was his slight trace of anger or annoyance at my supposed delay in opening the door. At that time I thought he was giving us all a lesson in coolness after passing through

the inferno that was Abbey Street. And what a lesson that was I ^{couldn't} ~~didn't~~ ^{even} realise until that Friday night when I realised that he had made his way through all the buildings, over all sorts of obstacles and through all the narrow zig-zag holes in the walls from Abbey Street to Princes Street and so to the G.P.O. as if he were on a casual inspection, with his ankle shattered by a bullet or shrapnel. He had his predicament from everyone.

Connolly appeared so unruffled that no one seemed to be aware that he was hurt much less severely crippled until Dr. Ryan had cut the boot off him. No wonder as Dr. Jim Ryan told me a few weeks ago "His ankle was shattered something awful".

I was quite unaware of this on Friday evening late, after the evacuation of the G.P.O. I had been dumping the explosives in the basement of the G.P.O. and was one of the last group to leave under George Plunkett. When I arrived in Moore Street I found a large jug, filled it with water and offered drinks to whoever wanted one. The General ⁱⁿ Officer/Command P.H. Pearse had told us in a lecture he had given us in Kimmage that one of the things we should be prepared for was the cutting off of the water supply. I was surprised to find that very few wanted a drink after the "heat" of that day until I knocked at a door, was called in, found myself in the emergency hospital, enquired did they require any water, was told "No. There is no shortage of water. The British haven't cut it off yet". Seeing my discomfort Dr. Lynn smilingly said she would take a little from me. As I walked towards Dr. Lynn I heard a cheery voice call out "Help, Toney!" It was James Connolly sitting up in a bed smiling and chatting merrily with those about him. The Gleasons must have told him who I was; his "Toney" was a reference to our common association with Belfast and Glasgow. I suppose (also I hope!) the Gleasons also cleared me of any blame for the delay in letting him in at Abbey Street!!

James Connolly a man's man in every fibre of his body and mind.

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WITNESS:

Herman

Seamus Robinson

16th December 1957