



'There were splashes of blood on the walls'

A British officer's wife remembers an IRA raid

In this account of Bloody Sunday, **Caroline Woodcock** describes seeing her husband and his comrades being shot in their home

In November 1920, Caroline Woodcock was living with her husband, the British officer Col Wilfred Woodcock, in a house on Pembroke Street in Dublin. There were a number of other officers living there, and some of them worked in intelligence.

She later wrote a memoir titled Experiences of an Officer's Wife in Ireland.

Here she describes how the house was attacked in the spate of morning killings by Michael Collins' Squad on Bloody Sunday. Three officers were shot dead and her husband was wounded.

It is exactly three months today since 'Red Sunday' in Dublin. I am writing this on a Sunday morning; like November 21, it is a fine sunny day. In the distance I hear the sound of church bells.

They were ringing that Sunday morning too, summoning the people, some to Mass, and others to murder.

My husband had hurried over his dressing. I was wearing a blouse with a lot of tiresome little buttons. Had it not been for those silly little buttons, I should have gone down to breakfast with my husband, and should have had the agony of seeing him and others killed or wounded before my eyes, and should probably have been shot myself.

I was standing at my bedroom window struggling with the cuff of my blouse when I saw a man get over the garden wall. I watched him idly; in spite of five months

in Dublin and constant alarms and excitements, I felt no fear, and not much anxiety. I thought he had come to see one of the maids. But directly I saw him take a revolver out of his pocket my fears were aroused, and I rushed to the door, and shouted to my husband, who had left the room a few minutes before.

It is a bitter thought now that if I had raised the alarm directly I saw the man get over the wall I might have roused some of the other officers, though I believe several of the murderers were already in the house. Their organisation was perfect.

My husband was unarmed. Staff and regimental officers had been warned that it would be wiser not to carry revolvers or to keep them in their rooms. Raids had been frequent in our neighbourhood. Accurate information as to where such weapons would be found was apparently always given by servants.

The four other officers who had rooms in the house each had several revolvers, but they never used them. No one fired a shot. I imagine they were surprised and shot down before they had time to arm themselves.

Our first thought was for those friends who lived on the lower floors, and, after looking at the man in the garden, my husband rushed down to warn them, and to bolt the hall door.

It was too late. The hall was full of armed men. He was ordered to put his hands up and to give his name. He did so, and

added: "There are women in the house." The murderers answered: "We know it."

At that moment the door behind my husband opened, and he, fearing that one of the officers he had hoped to warn was coming out of his room, shouted, "Look out, M."

As he spoke, they fired and shot my husband through the shoulder, and he fell at the foot of the stairs. He scrambled up, but was shot again through the back. Getting up again, he half-walked and half-crawled upstairs.

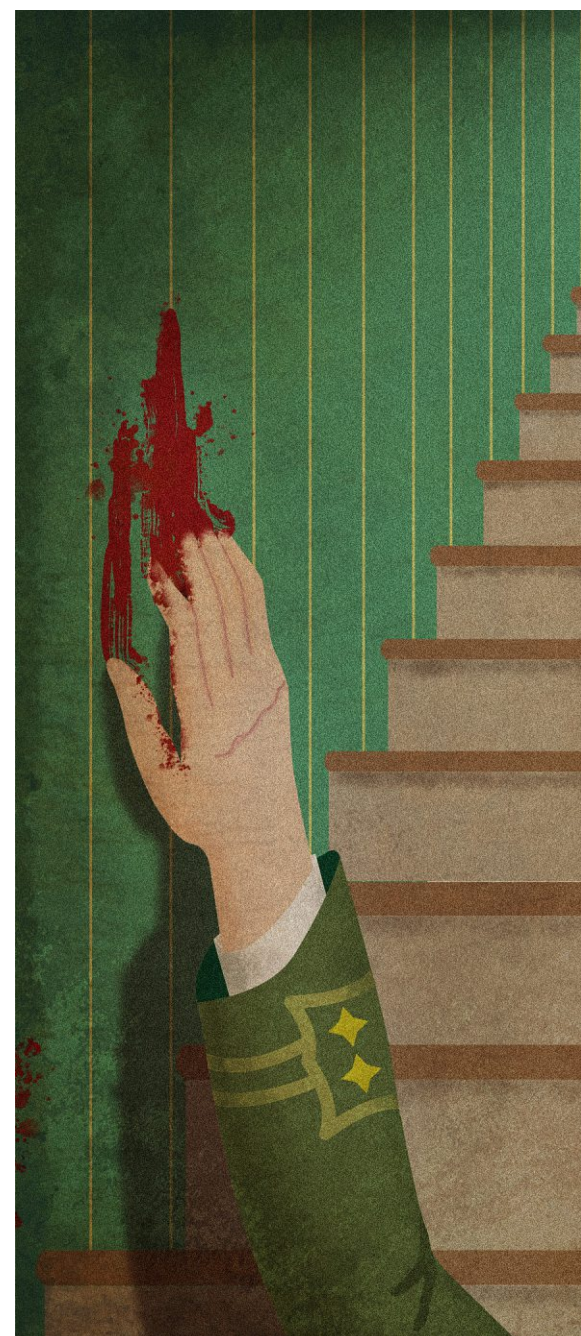
The other officer, who had not heard my husband's warning, was also fired at twice, and fell at his wife's feet, she herself being slightly wounded in the knee.

I had remained in my room, watching from the window the man in the garden, who stood a few feet from the back entrance, revolver in hand, ready to fire if any one tried to escape. I heard six shots only, though subsequently I found at least 50 must have been fired.

I was in an agony of anxiety. The door opened, and my husband came in; his shoulder was covered with blood, but his first words were: "It's all right, darling; they have only hit outlying portions of me. Go back to the window."

He had apparently walked upstairs (I can never understand now how he did get back to the room alone and unaided). I did not think he could be very badly hurt, so I did as I was told.

I saw about 20 men running and cycling away down a lane, and I also saw the man



in the garden being helped to escape by one of the servants from the flat, who came out with a key and let him out through another exit. It was a dreadful moment. I had watched him so carefully, and I did think that he, at least, would be caught.

I then turned to my husband, and found to my horror that he was just losing consciousness, and that the bed on which he was lying was soaked with blood.

I took his coat, and saw four bullet holes: two in his arm and shoulder, a horrible-looking one in his back, and another in front. We found afterwards that these were two entry and two exit holes.

He was conscious again, and I, thinking he was the only one wounded, rushed downstairs for help. Never to my dying day shall I forget the scene in the hall and on the stairs, where four officers had been shot.

There were great splashes of blood on the walls, floor, and stairs, bits of plaster were lying about, and on the walls were the marks of innumerable bullets. Fortunately, with two exceptions, the murderers had been so panic-stricken themselves and their hands so shaky that their firing had been wild in the extreme, and to this fact my husband and one other officer owed their lives.

I turned round the corner of the inner hall, and found a man in bright-blue pyjamas

'On the stairs the colonel was met by a youth, who ordered 'hands up'. He laughed'

Irish Independent

Extract from Irish Independent, November 23, 1920

Pembroke Street scene

The house at 28 Upper Pembroke Street, where two officers were killed and four wounded, was very popular as a temporary residence for officers and military officials.

When the door was opened seven or eight armed men rushed in and upstairs, and they made a minute search, while the shooting was going on, and then left.

Subsequently Mrs Gray, the landlady, who had been held up, made a tour of the house, finding Major Dowling, Grenadier Guards, and Capt Price, RE, both dead.

Both were on the point of going to breakfast when they were shot.

The wounded officers were Capt Kenlside [Keenlyside] (arm), Col Woodcock (back), Col Montgomery (badly wounded) and Mr Murray.

Major Dowling, who, it is said, was about to be demobilised, was connected with certain London

companies, one of which is connected with linen manufacture.

Mrs Kenlside [Keenlyside] had a struggle with the raiders, and probably to her interference was due the fact that her husband was only wounded.

Col Woodcock had an exciting experience. On the stairs he was met by a youth, who ordered "hands up". The colonel laughed, but, seeing the other raiders, shouted to Col Montgomery to look out. Both were immediately shot.

The house all over bore many traces of blood.

ILLUSTRATION: SHANE McINTYRE



*‘Two officers
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were then shot’*

Charlie Dalton, a member of Michael Collins’ Squad, was one of those sent to kill British officers in the house on Pembroke Street. He had been tipped off by a servant about the residents. He later gave this account of the event to the Bureau of Military History.

I was instructed by the deputy director of intelligence to contact a girl who had reported to a volunteer about some strange residents who were occupying the block of flats in which she was a maid.

I questioned the girl, whose name was Maudie. She described the routine of the residents of the flats, and it would seem from her account that they followed no regular occupation but did a lot of office work from their flats.

I arranged with her to bring me the contents of their waste-paper baskets. When these were examined we found torn-up documents which referred to the movements of wanted volunteers.

The director of intelligence and general HQ then decided that the only certain method of dealing with these enemy agents was by surprise and general attack.

When I arrived at Upper Pembroke Street, I met Paddy Flanagan (of the 3rd Battalion) and a few other volunteers.

Fortunately, at the zero hour of 9am, the hall door was open and the porter was shaking mats on the steps.

There were separate staircases in this double house, and a party proceeded up either staircase to the rooms.

I accompanied Flanagan and two other volunteers to a room at the top of the house occupied by two officers, one of these being Lieutenant [Major] Dowling.

We knocked at the door and pushed it open. The two officers were awake in bed. They were told to stand up and were then shot.

I told Flanagan that I wanted to search the room and he said: “Search be damned! Get out of here.”

We proceeded down the staircase to the hallway, where a number of other officers had been rounded up from their rooms and were lined up against the side of the staircase that led in the direction of the basement.

Our reaching this level was the signal for a volley.

In all there were six or seven agents in residence at this address, all holding British military commissions. All of them were shot but a few survived their wounds.

lying at the top of the kitchen stairs. He, I knew, had a flat on the fourth floor.

I leant over him. He was shot through both lungs. I could do nothing, and I knew if I was going to help my husband I must think only of him.

The outer hall was by then full of people, and I found that doctors had already been sent for.

I then heard that two officers were lying dead upstairs, and two were dangerously wounded; not one of the six officers who lived in the house had escaped.

I cannot describe the awful feeling of sick horror that came over me, and how I literally shook with mingled feelings of pity and passionate anger. I went to the telephone, rang up the barracks, and implored them to send soldiers at once, and then tore upstairs again to my husband.

At last the doctors came to my room. They told me they had already seen the other wounded, and, leaving them with my husband, I went downstairs again. I wanted to make sure that the servant I had seen helping one of the murderers to escape was arrested the moment they arrived.

After an agonising period of uncertainty, the doctors told me they did not consider my husband’s wounds dangerous, and shortly afterwards he was moved to the

Military Hospital. The other more dangerous cases were taken to a nursing home almost next door, but I was firm, and implored to be allowed to take him to our hospital.

I would not have trusted any one I loved in any nursing home in Ireland that day.

It was arranged that I should move my husband to the hospital, I returned to the flats to lock up. The place filled me with loathing.

I found my husband’s clothing soaking in the bath, and I could not help smiling, though I never felt less like smiling in my life, when I had a heated altercation (with the servant) as to whether Lux soap or salt was best for taking out blood-stains.

Our regiment was still guarding the house when I returned, and some of the men came up and spoke to me. Several of them had tears in their eyes. They had heard my husband was dead. Many of them had served with him in Malta and India. Others had fought under

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