

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 512

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 512.....

Witness

Sean McCluskey,
5 Gilbert Road,
Fairbrothers' Fields,
South Circular Road,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'K' Company 3rd Battalion Dublin Brigade 1917 -;
Caretaker of Dail Offices and Sinn Fein Bank 1919-1920.

Subject.

- (a) Police Raid on Volunteer Headquarters,
Parnell Square, 1918;
- (b) Attempts at arrest of Michael Collins
by Crown Forces 1919-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1765.....

Form B.S.M. 2

Statement of Seán McCluskey,

5 Gilbert Road, Fairbrother's Fields,

South Circular Road, Dublin.

In 1917 a number of us who regarded ourselves as remnants of the old Redmondite Volunteers were taken over en bloc to the 3rd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade. General Mulcahy took us over and administered the Oath. We were about 18 or 19 strong and we formed a Company on our own which was "K" Company of the 3rd Battalion. Captain Tom Cullen was in charge of this Company. I remember one night some time early in 1918 the Company Commander called for Volunteers to travel north in connection with the South Armagh by-election. Seven or eight of us volunteered and travelled to Newry where we remained until the election was over. The election passed off without incident and we returned, in company with other Volunteers of the Dublin Brigade, to Dublin. From then Company activities were mainly confined to drilling, lectures and the procurement of arms.

While I was employed by Hilton Brothers of Townsend Street, I was also caretaker of 44 Parnell Square, being employed by Colonel Moore and Mr. Eckersley. 44 Parnell Square was at that time my Company Headquarters. Home-made bombs were being made there in the underground cellars by Captain Cullen and other members of the Company. The Police raided the place sometime in October, 1918, and discovered some of the bombs that were made on the premises and five sticks of gelignite together with thirty feet of fuse. On the next day I was arrested and taken to the Bridewell where I was held for about a week. I was then transferred to Mountjoy where I was visited by police and military and closely

questioned about small boxes containing gelignite and fuse. They wanted to know if I had ever seen these before which, of course, I flatly denied. After about three weeks I was finally released. I remember there was a question asked in the House of Commons concerning the raid on Parnell Square and the reply given was that there was as much explosives found there as would blow up Dublin and Belfast which, of course, was completely false.

Later in the year 1919, Miss Kathleen Brennan (sister-in-law of Eamon Ceannt), a member of the Cumann na mBan, came to me and asked me if I would caretake the new Dail Offices at 76 Harcourt Street. I agreed to take on the job and that night I was brought before Michael Collins at 6 Harcourt Street. Collins told me that the job was mine and that he had complete confidence in me, so I moved in with my family a short time later.

1919

About September ~~1920~~ the Dail Offices were transferred from 6 Harcourt Street to No. 76. I remember it was on a Saturday and I remarked to Collins, "This is a bad day to be moving in", and he laughingly replied, saying, "It is supposed to be a lucky day in England". At that time, as far as I can recollect, Collins's staff in No. 76 consisted of Fintan Murphy, Miss Lawless and Miss Mason (now wife of Mr. Derrig). Collins used to come in every morning and sometimes at night time. Collins had a secret press, made by Batt O'Connor, installed on the second floor in one of the back rooms. I knew where this press was, and so did every other member of the staff. This was built into an alcove in the room. It had a secret door and a secret press button and was painted over. Anybody entering the room would have been completely deceived as it would never

occur to anyone that there was a secret press there. There was an escape route provided also through the roof. A small ladder was always ready on the landing to help an escapee getting on to the skylight.

About the middle of November 1919, I remember there was a meeting held in Collins's office. This was during the day. Sometime before lunch the British military and police raided the place. A porter by the name of Bob Conlon, who was with me at the time, answered a knock at the front door. When he opened it I saw immediately that the police and military were outside, so I rushed up the stairs to warn those present at the meeting. Apparently, they already knew of it as some of them must have seen the military approach from a window. As I was going upstairs I saw that Collins was making his way to the landing from which he made his escape. We delayed the entry of the military by bolting the door and they had to burst it in with their rifles. While this was happening Miss Lawless brought a lot of documents down to my wife's bedroom. My wife at that time was convalescing after the birth of a baby and she took the documents from Miss Lawless and put them under her in the bed. On this occasion Mick Collins, when he got on to the roof, made his way to the Standard Hotel and had to burst the glass fanlight there which enabled him to reach the street. The hotel porter got him a cab in which he got away. The police thoroughly searched No. 76 but failed to discover any documents there and even though they tapped the walls the secret press still escaped their notice. The following who were present at the meeting were arrested :- Dan O'Donovan, Sean O'Mahony,

Fintan Murphy, Sean Hayes, Frank Lawless, Michael Lynch, Dermot O'Hegarty, Dick McKee and Padraig O'Sheehan. They were tried the following morning and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. I would have been arrested that morning only for a friendly inspector named McFeely who warned me to go downstairs and remain there. I suspected that McFeely was working for Collins at that time. Collins returned to No. 76 that evening and worked there until 10 p.m. He warned me that I was not to attend any Volunteer parades and that I was to remain on the premises the whole time and that any letters that were delivered there should be given to him personally at Liam Devlin's place in Parnell Street.

About three weeks later a further raid was carried out. This time Tom Cullen rushed into the building and told us that the place would be raided within ten minutes. At the time the only people in the building were Miss Lawless and myself. Before Tom Cullen had time to get out the raiding party arrived and he rushed downstairs to my living-quarters and took my child in his arms, pretending that he was my wife's brother. The raiding party withdrew without taking any documents. I think it was following this raid or a short time later that the police closed up the building, having nailed the doors up. I don't know what became of the staff. They were transferred to some other offices but I had to remain on the premises.

On the 10th February, 1920, I transferred my family, on the instructions of Collins, to 6⁸ Lower Leeson Street which was at that time the National Land Bank. I succeeded in transferring some of the furniture also around to different offices occupied by Dáil Éireann. In fact, I think we have a desk in the National City Bank at the moment

that was transferred from there. As far as I can recollect, the staff of the Land Bank at the time consisted of Mr. Smith Gordon, Mr. T. Caffrey, Michael MacAmhalghaidh and Miss O'Brien. Later this staff was increased by the presence of Eamon Morcan, Mr. Cogan, Mr. Clancy and Mr. Vinales and Mr. Walsh. (The last four are at present in the National City Bank, College Green). I remember a raid on this place by Black & Tans and a man in civilian clothes who was evidently an accountant. They examined books and documents of the Bank. This was followed by another raid - I think on the same evening, I remember at the time I was burning cheques in a back room when they again asked for Smith Gordon, and, as he was not on the premises at the time, they asked me for his address. I said I did not know it. They rejoined, "That's alright; we'll find him". They did not, however, return to the Bank that evening.

Collins still instructed me to the effect that any letters which were delivered at the Bank to me were to be given to him. They were never, of course, addressed personally to Collins but it was understood that any letters that would come to me were intended for him. I remember on the eve of 'Bloody Sunday' five letters were delivered to me from different parts of the country. They were just handed to me by couriers with instructions that they were to be delivered to Collins. I went to Croke Park on 'Bloody Sunday' to deliver the letters to Collins as I expected to see him there.. I was searched going through the barrier in Croke Park but the letters were not found as I had them well concealed. I did not see Collins at Croke Park, so I held the letters until

Monday night when I delivered them to him at Liam Devlin's public-house.

There was another raid on the Bank about a month later. At this time I was out but as I approached Leeson Street I saw Tan lorries pulled up outside the Bank premises. I waited until the lorries had departed and my wife told me that they were looking for me on this occasion.

When cash lodgments in the Bank became very heavy, I had to take the money from Leeson Street and lodge it with a Cashier of the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society in Thomas Street. I never had an armed escort and used to think to myself that if I were ever held up it would have been a nice haul for somebody. I remember on about six or seven visits to the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society I was carrying on my person as large a sum as £14,000.

Collins had an office in a house in Mespil Road. Evidently the British Authorities finally discovered this and one night they made a surprise raid on the place. Miss Hoey and her mother resided at this house and when the Tans did not find Collins on the premises they decided to leave a party there overnight with a view to intercepting him when he arrived next morning. Mrs. Hoey became very ill during the night - I cannot say if this was a ruse or genuine. However, her daughter, Miss Hoey, asked permission to go for a Doctor for her mother. This was granted on the understanding that an escort would go with her. She called at the house of Dr. Alice Barry and on the way back she whispered to Dr. Barry to get in touch with me at 67 Lower Leeson Street and to warn Michael Collins that the Tans were in possession of her house.

At about 7.15 o'clock on the following morning, Dr. Barry contacted me and gave me the instructions passed on by Miss Hoey. I got out of bed immediately and rushed across the road to McGilligans' house where 'Ginger' O'Connell was staying. Then I went out to Batt O'Connor's place and to Miss Mason who was Michael Collins's secretary. Both of these lived in Donnybrook direction. The people that I got in touch with immediately got out of bed and took up positions at the various street corners leading to Mespil Road with the purpose of warning Collins. 'Ginger' O'Connell was the first to contact Collins at Merrion Square when the latter was cycling towards the office. It was due to the foresight of Miss Hoey that Collins was saved from arrest and capture. Later that morning Collins saw Joe ^{O'Rully} ~~Vize~~ and myself coming out of 22 Mary Street which was one of Collins's haunts. He called us over and gave us a dressing-down, warning us that in future two of us were not to come out of the office at the same time. When he calmed down he called me aside and asked me how I succeeded in getting word so quickly round about the raid on Mespil Road. I explained the situation to him and he seemed very appreciative and pleased.

On the following Sunday Collins sent for me from Dr. Barry's house where he was that morning. I again had to give him a full explanation of the method I adopted on the previous morning to save him from arrest. He then asked me to go round by Milady's field at the back of Miss Hoey's place to see if I could find out if Miss Hoey's house was still occupied. However, he changed his mind at the last minute and I did not go.

To the best of my recollection the foregoing statement sets out the principal incidents and experiences that I had while serving under Collins, both in 76 Harcourt Street and 69 Lower Leeson Street. I always found Collins a very gruff but big-hearted individual - always jovial. I remember when there was a big price on his head he didn't forget to give me a nice present at Christmas.

I remember on one occasion I was informed by Larry Nugent of 'K' Company that he had received information from a Unionist source that £2,000 was to be offered for the capture of Collins, dead or alive. I told Collins this personally and he laughingly replied, "Sure they might as well make it £5,000".

Signed: Sean O'Flaherty

Date: 24/5/1951

Witness: William Ivory Bondi

