

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

No. W.S. 403

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 403.....

Witness

Miss Molly Ryan,
2 Claremont Terrace,
Dundrum, Dublin.

Identity

Shorthand-Typist on Dail Eireann staff
1920-1921.

Subject

General account of her secretarial work
for Diarmuid O'Hegarty
1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 1541.....

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT OF MISS MOLLY RYAN,2 Claremont Terrace, Dumdrum,
Dublin.

In February 1920 - the 21st, I think - while still attending Skerry's College and the Underwood School of Typing, Joe O'Reilly, who was a friend of my family, asked me if I would take up a post as shorthand-typist in the secretariat of the Dail. I was only seventeen at the time, and I consulted my mother. She agreed. The salary was £3.10.0. a week to start and I would be on trial for three months, after which the salary would be £4.

I was not told where I was to work, but it was arranged that I would meet Joe O'Reilly at the corner of Grafton St. the following Sunday morning. He escorted me to Vaughan's Hotel where I was interviewed by Diarmuid O'Hegarty. Gearoid O'Sullivan was present. I don't think Mick Collins was. Diarmuid gave me a test in shorthand which apparently satisfied him as I was appointed. He stressed the fact that the utmost secrecy was necessary and that I should remain inconspicuous. He instructed me that if anybody made inquiries I was supposed to be working in Hayes and Finch's, Candle Manufacturers, in Eustace St. I was to report the following Monday week and when I did, I think Joe O'Reilly was again my escort. He brought me to Foley's Typing Bureau - I think in 15 College St. where Diarmuid had a room at the very top of the house. It was like an attic. I think I was there a week or a fortnight before Michael Ó Loinsigh - who had been arrested in the autumn - appeared.

I probably had not very important work to do for a while, being still on trial. I know there was activity from time to time. There was another small room off mine, where Paidin O'Keefe, Rory O'Connor and others used to go into sometimes and where, I believe, important meetings were held.

I think I was typing papers connected with meetings of the Dail, letters and minutes of the meetings held in that little room off mine. I cannot remember the substance of any of these.

I don't know how long we were there when we were shifted over, I think, to Mary St., where Mick Collins had his office. I have an idea that was the first time I was introduced to him. He frightened me at first. I thought him cross. He made some remark, such as: "I hope you will behave yourself". In a short time I changed my opinion about him and I thought him a grand type of man.

I don't think I was entrusted with the really important work until my three months' trial was up. I was then presented with a very handsome attaché case with a key. I then became the custodian of all the Dail files which were no longer kept in the office. I used to take them every night to my home in Dartry, where we had moved from Rathfarnham. No papers were ever left in the office and it was left to my own discretion what files I would bring in each day. I don't think Diarmuid was able to attend the office each day. He used to give me the minute book of the Dail Cabinet meetings containing his notes of the matters discussed at the Dail. His notes were pretty complete which made it easy for me to type them. If he dictated letters to me and could not come in that day to sign them I would take them home in my case and bring them in the next day.

When Diarmuid was appointed Director of Organisation of Oglaiġ na h-Eireann, I became busier than usual, but I think this was after we had moved to Abbey St. Bob Price used to come in ^{and} out a good deal then and had long talks with Diarmuid. He used to give me work to do too, reports on army activities, such as ambushes and raids throughout

Dublin and the country. At different times men would come in and give verbal accounts of these incidents to Bob or to Diarmuid if he was there. Sometimes written reports would come through the covering addresses.

I had two books of covering addresses - one for the Dail, and one for the army. I think I have these still and shall look them up when I have time. It was to these addresses we sent all communications. Many of the incidents described in these reports were of such a dangerous nature that I did my best to forget them, lest by any chance I would let slip anything in conversation. Not even to my own mother would I divulge anything in connection with the work of the office. As a matter of fact she did not even know where the office was. I took the books home with all other important documents every night, locked in my case. I had two locked trunks at home in my own room where I kept these documents.

While I was in Mary St., Diarmuid came in to me one night and said: "The Big Fellow wants you". When I saw Mick he asked me could I run. I said I could and he handed me a letter and said "Bring that up to Terenure College. On no account let it be captured on the way and don't hand it to anybody but the Superior". When I arrived there the gate was locked. I rattled it and it was opened almost immediately by the woman in the lodge who did not hesitate to let me through, so I must have been expected. The door of the College was opened by a lay brother and I asked for the Superior who came to me at once. He evidently expected the letter. He told me I was a very good girl and he sent the lay brother down the avenue with me apologising for not giving me tea, as it was near curfew hour. I ran home as fast as my legs could carry me and I was just in before curfew.

My efforts to forget the contents of the documents which were under my care were so successful that I cannot now remember any details of them.

I don't know why or when we moved out of Mary St. and into Abbey St., but I think the Mary St. office, which was Mick Collins's office, was never intended to be our permanent headquarters. I don't remember a raid taking place while we were in Mary St. At that time Miss Sinead Mason was confidential secretary to Mick Collins.

I remember another exciting incident that I think occurred while I was working in Abbey St. There was an ambush by the I.R.A. in Harcourt St. and the trams were diverted down Georges St. I was travelling in a 14 tram from Dartry where I lived, carrying the inevitable attaché case which I even took home to lunch. The tram was held up in Georges St. and boarded by Auxiliaries. Everyone was told to stand up. I had my case on the floor behind my legs. I stood up, remaining quite unflustered and keeping the case where it was. Everybody, including myself, was scrutinised closely by the officers. I drew a breath of relief when they departed without having noticed my case.

I had another rather narrow shave one morning that I was going to work. A friend of mine gave me a lift in his car to town and, as we were going along Up. Rathmines Road near Tranquilla Convent, a little girl, who was going to school, ran out in front of the car and was killed. The driver pulled up immediately and carried the child into Dr. Adye-Curran's house, which was quite close. There was the usual police investigation into the accident and I, being the principal witness, had to attend Court and answer questions, one of which was an inquiry about my place of employment. Joe Kearns, who was Manager of Hayes & Finch's, corroborated my statement that I was employed by them and that closed the matter.

At the meetings of the Dail Cabinet, Diarmuid took notes of the discussions and decisions of the meetings and he would afterwards classify them from memory aided by these notes and write them up fairly fully in what was called the Ministry Book. I always took this home with me too and brought it in when required. I have not now got it and I think it must be among the records held in the Taoiseach's office.

Among the people who visited us in the office were Joe McGrath, Rory O'Connor, Cathal Brugha, Dick Mulcahy, Kevin O'Higgins, Gearoid O'Sullivan, Piaras Beaslaoi, M.P. Colivet, Dinny McCullough, and various T.Ds. and I.R.A. officers from the country. Tom Cullen, Frank Thornton and a man called Daly used to pay visits to the office occasionally.

In Abbey St. Gearoid O'Sullivan, Adjutant General of the army, had an office adjoining ours. Those two offices, therefore, constituted the Secretariat of the Dail and the Army. Gearoid's secretary was Miss Bridie O'Reilly.

There were a good many organisers and I.R.A. commandants - under assumed names - visiting Gearoid. They had to pass through our office to his.

I cannot say how long we were in Abbey St. when one evening, as we were leaving for home, we found the whole block of buildings surrounded by British military and Auxiliaries. As usual, I was carrying my attaché case containing incriminating documents, but I was not frightened as I was completely unknown and not marked as having any connection with the movement. I realised what was happening when I reached the street. I returned to the office with Miss O'Reilly to give the alarm. Both Diarmuid O'Hegarty

and Gearoid O'Sullivan were in their respective rooms. They remained cool and calm as ever and quietly handed over to us some extra guns which they possessed. I took two, a small and a large revolver and locked them into my case. Miss O'Reilly did the same. Gearoid and Diarmuid told us to get out as best we could and told us to report an hour later at a house in the Quays referred to as the "Gut". I think that only Miss O'Reilly reported, as I had a long way to go.

The following morning I learned from Miss O'Reilly that the two men were safe. I cannot now state how they escaped, but probably over the roofs. I have an idea that Diarmuid told me not to come to Abbey St., but to Clare St. where Liam Cosgrave had his office. We continued to work in Clare St. I cannot remember whether Gearoid came to that address. Kevin O'Higgins was constantly working there with Mr. Cosgrave. Ene Hegarty was his confidential typist.

We stayed in Clare St. until we got offices in Lower O'Connell St. in the building now occupied by Messrs. Cassidy, the silk merchants. This was, I think, after the Truce. Our messenger was a boy called Sean Harling, a very valuable and reliable fellow ^(at that time). Diarmuid depended a lot on him. He afterwards joined the Republicans and, I think, took part in the Civil War. The morning that it broke out we found when we came in that some of our typewriters were missing and I think it was concluded that Sean had taken them for use in the Four Courts.

It was at the O'Connell St. office that the "dump" was located. All the messengers from the various departments came there to deliver and collect letters. This was, of course, after the Truce, as previous to that the letters were collected from the covering addresses, as stated already.

I was never present at any important meetings such as

those of the Cabinet or the army. I don't think any women were allowed into those, and all the typing connected with them was done by the shorthand-typists from the manuscripts supplied by Diarmuid O'Hegarty or someone else. I typed and duplicated the agenda for all the cabinet and Dail meetings and any other documents required for them.

Diarmuid went to London with the delegates for the Peace negotiations, but he did not take me with him. He took a girl called Gertie Conry who was a connection of Kevin O'Sheil and who had come into our office during the Truce. I was surprised and a little hurt that it was not me he took as I had been with him so long. When I said this to him he sent me an explanation in writing. He told me that as things were still in an indecisive condition and he did not know what would be the outcome of the negotiations he wanted me to stay and carry on the work of the office under the direction of Colm Ó Murchadha, who took his place while he was in London. I was not known and he wanted me to remain unknown as I still had custody of all the documents.

I continued my work which was always in arrears. I now had the opportunity to bring it up to date by completing the typing of the reports of the secret meetings of the Cabinet and the Dáil.

There was a liaison office in the Gresham Hotel where Emmet Dalton had his headquarters. There was also a member of the army working there, McAllister, who had been seriously wounded in an ambush in the North, and was no longer fit for active service. I did some work for them, the nature of which I just can't remember. Michael Collins used to come in there and on one occasion I was introduced to his fiancée, Kitty Kiernan.

When the Treaty debates were in progress at the University buildings I typed and duplicated, under Colm's direction, the agenda and minutes of the meetings.

I remember that McNamara, who was one of the Castle intelligence men employed by Collins, was about the University while the debates were going on. I think he was one of the men who used to come in occasionally to Diarmuid in the office.

I felt very sad when I heard of the Split and realised that men who had been so united and fought so well together had become such bitter enemies. No matter what happened I always felt the same respect for the men on both sides, who had risked their lives during the fight that ended so tragically in the split over the Treaty. I could see the justice of the arguments on both sides and I never could understand why such wonderful men could be so bitter against each other as they became.

Much as I would like to give a good deal more information, I cannot now recall any more matters that would be of historical interest to the Bureau. I was always so immersed in my daily work, which I knew would contribute to the cause of the freedom of our country from British domination, that I closed my mind to everything but the accomplishment to the best of my ability of the work allotted to me.

Signed:

Cholly Ryan

Date:

7. 7. 50

Witness:

Seán Cusáin

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