

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILENTA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 431

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 431.....

Witness

Art McGann,
11, Hollybrock Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.
Identity

Telegraphist, Belfast,
1919-1922.

Subject

I.R.A. Intelligence work, Belfast,
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 1570.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Art ^{McGann} ~~McGann~~,
McGann

II, Hollybrook Road, Clontarf,

Dublin.

I had contacted Ramon Cooney before 1916. He was then a boy and I was active in the Gaelic League and in G.A.A. circles. When things became active at the end of 1919 I arranged with Cooney to supply any copies of military and police telegrams on which I could lay my hands. I was a telegraphist in Belfast and as a Testing Officer I was in a position to tap any line working to or through Belfast. Cooney and Seán Cusack visited my house and arrangements were made accordingly. The possibility first occurred to me when dealing with police code-telegrams. They were acknowledged from the various out-stations as follows "message received and understood". But one stupid sergeant (Portglenone) returned his acknowledgement in cypher. Relating this to the written acknowledgement in English, it was not difficult to translate the original cypher message. Until shortly before his arrest Cooney lived in my mother's house in Baltic Avenue, Antrim Road. I lived adjacent in Lothair Avenue. My back entry connected almost direct with my mother's back entry. Her house was raided frequently. Occasionally I met Cusack and we (three) discussed the details to be observed and I was frequently advised to expect activity at certain periods. After Cooney's arrest, late in 1920, I contacted Cusack when possible at his home in Little York St. and at Lavery's public house, Old Park Road.

I cannot remember the number of cypher messages passed by me to Cooney and Cusack. Every opportunity which presented itself was availed of, consonant with safety, to supply them with anything I thought useful. I myself did not decode as the time factor was important and the material was dangerous to be retained for long ^{periods} in my possession. Some periods of duty occurred at times when it would not be possible to come into possession of any communications of value. I should add that prior to Cooney's arrest when the preparations for Swanzy's execution were taking place I conferred with Cusack's group about the possibility of isolating Lisburn from a communication point of view. I pointed out the impossibility of the proposal. I advised Cooney in the matter of accommodating the Cork visitors. On the date of the execution I was advised by Cooney to be on duty at the G.P.O.

Soon after this I fell under suspicion although not officially connected with I.R.A. headquarters. I was invited to join the official organisation, but Cusack informed me that I was more useful in an unattached capacity. He showed me a letter from Michael Collins to this effect. Raids began on my house at this stage and continued up to my departure in 1922 (four in all). Nothing incriminating was found. I received notice on 14th June from a source in touch with the late Joe McKelvey R.I.P. following the de-coding of a message that all suspects in the Government services, Railways etc. were to be interned at once. I had closed up my house and sent my family to Draperstown prior to this, and lived at night in Bangor and other places. I warned my P. O. colleagues whom I thought in danger. Three days later the swoop came. P.O. suspects were

arrested and jailed; my house was broken into and thoroughly searched. I went immediately and consulted the late George Martin, Solicitor, - the official I.R.A. Solicitor. He advised me to leave. I took this step on the 16th June 1922.

Prior to the visit of the English King to open The Northern Parliament the late Dan Dempsey disclosed to me that there was a proposition to burn the G.P.O. after his arrival in Belfast. He asked me to supply him with a map of the Telegraph and Telephone departments which ran along the top of the building. Later I heard the project was cancelled, for what reason I do not know.

Signed; Art McEgan

Date; 29th Sept 1950

Witness;

John McEgan

29. 9. '50

