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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**.....454.....

Witness

Miss Bridie O'Reilly,
276 North Circular Road,
Dublin.

Identity

Shorthand-Typist in Offices of
Dick Mulcahy and Gearoid O'Sullivan 1919-1921.

Subject

Custody of Army documents, and raids
on Army Offices, 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. **S.1607**.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

STATEMENT OF MISS BRIDIE O'REILLY,
276, North Circular Road, Dublin.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21 NO. W.S. 454

When I had finished my training in Maguire's College, I became shorthand-typist to Richard Mulcahy in October or November, 1919. How I know the date is that I was in 76, Harcourt Street when that place was raided by the military, accompanied by the Dublin Metropolitan Police, on Armistice Day, 1919. I was quite new to the office then. Jenny Mason, Eveleen Lawless and others were employed there also. They had been working there before me. Several people were arrested, including Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Frank Lawless and Dick McKee. Daithi O'Donoghue escaped arrest, as he happened to be out. Michael Collins was on the premises also but he escaped through the roof and out through the Standard Hotel. In a short time, he came back and resumed his work.

It was through Lily O'Brennan I was contacted to take up the work that Dick Mulcahy wanted done. I don't think Dick, who was Chief of Staff, had any typist before me.

After that raid, he did not think it safe to continue to work in Harcourt Street, and I went in and shared Tom Cullen's office in Bachelor's Walk, where we remained until a suitable place was found. Tom had some post in the Quartermaster General's staff. At that time, I was still rather new to the work and I did not even know what the various initials meant. Dick Mulcahy never came himself to Bachelor's Walk, although he used to come to 76, Harcourt

Street. He happened to be away down the country when the raid I mentioned took place, so he also escaped arrest. Eveleen Lawless and Jenny Mason stayed on a while in 76, Harcourt Street after us. My work at that stage was solely for General Mulcahy, typing reports, etc.

Early in 1920 I began to work also for Gearóid O'Sullivan. I met him first at University College with General Mulcahy and was introduced to him as the new Adjutant-General. The onus was left on him to find an office to deal with the work of the Adjutant-General's Department. My best recollection is that the first office he found was in Eustace Street. He used to get me to send out notices for Headquarter meetings and instructions for engagements in the country. I typed reports of these engagements for the information of the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff, and did any other work I was asked to do.

We had a system of covering addresses in the city to which communications from the country came. Similarly, we had covering addresses in the country as, obviously, it would not be safe to communicate direct with the Officers Commanding the various Brigades. We were probably not more than a few months in Eustace Street. We took every precaution to safeguard the documents in our possession.

I had two brothers in the Volunteers and, on that account, could bring nothing home in the way of incriminating documents. Our house was raided several times, but the only

thing of mine ever found was a shorthand notebook, which was, however, too old to be of any value to the authorities. Among the things it contained was a letter, in shorthand, starting, "Dear Dick", and ending "C.S.". Dick was Dick McKee, and C.S., Chief of Staff, but no names were mentioned. The notebook was returned to me by a D.M.P. man whom I knew.

We took the most important documents away with us daily and deposited them in various places. I did this in the evening on my way home, and Paddy Howard, a step-brother of Joe O'Reilly, who was the despatch rider, collected them in the morning and brought them to the office on his push-bike. Two of these places come to my mind at the moment - Máire Deegan and Máire O'Neill's shop in Dorset Street and a furniture shop belonging to Mrs. Walsh in Little Denmark Street, which was managed by her daughter. Paddy Dalton, an ex-railway clerk who had been released from prison after a hunger-strike, was another member of the staff.

We were not very long in Eustace Street when the premises were raided. The probable reason for the raid was that quite a lot of men used to come in and out, such as, Peadar Clancy, Dick McKee, Tom Cullen, Joe O'Reilly, and they must have been seen and recognised, as the street is so narrow it would not be easy to escape notice. The raid happened very early in the morning - Saturday, I think - before I or anyone else came to work. Copies of "An t-Oglach" and other similar literature were taken, but nothing at all of any importance. Neither Cathal Brugha, Dick Mulcahy nor Mick Collins ever visited that office. Volunteer officers from the country would come now and again,

brought along by Paddy Howard or one of the others who would know them. There were never any arms or ammunition kept there.

We moved again and got temporary premises in Mrs. Wyse-Power's in Henry Street, a room above the restaurant. We were not very long working there - a couple of months at the most - when Mrs. Power told us she had got word that she was going to be raided. We packed up, and there happened to be a lad, called George Fitzgerald, of the 1st Battalion in the office. We resurrected a bag and put all the stuff in it, and he took it away to the house of Michael Kelly in Manor Street. The next thing we heard was that Michael Kelly's was raided, and the bag - which was Mrs. Power's - and all that was in it were taken away. Mrs. Power did not like it a bit, as she was attached to the bag for sentimental reasons. I afterwards heard that she recovered it during the Truce. Lots of things were recovered that time, including a shorthand dictionary of mine. The contents of the bag were not really of vital importance, only headed stationery, the office stamp and such things. We had really removed them, in order that Mrs. Power's place would not be recognised as an office.

We got temporary accommodation in Diarmuid O'Hegarty's office in Middle Abbey Street. Miss Molly Ryan was his confidential typist. Another typist, Miss Bridie Clyne, was working there too, but not for any section of the army; it might have been for the Belfast Boycott. I cannot remember that the place was ever raided while I was there; it may have been raided after we left. However, one morning as I was coming in to work, I noticed that the whole block of

buildings was surrounded by military. One of the soldiers asked me did I want to pass, and I said I did. I proceeded into the building and up to our office, where I found Micheál O'Loinsigh and Miss Archer, Diarmuid O'Hegarty's wife - I don't know whether they were married at that time. They were unaware that the building was surrounded. I warned them and went out again by a side entrance and down a lane, as my case was full of incriminating documents. Our office was not raided that particular time.

Our final resting place before the Truce was on Ormond Quay. We took two rooms at No. 30, over the Reliance Tailors. It was Mr. Reynolds procured them for us. Only the Adjutant-General and his staff occupied them. I got on well with Gearóid, although some people thought his manner very abrupt.

I went fairly regularly to contact Cathal Brugha at Lalor's in Ormond Quay and, later, at the Children's Hospital, Temple Street, where he used to sleep at one of the lodges at the back. I typed for him too. His work would be instructions to the Chief of Staff and the Adjutant-General. He would not communicate personally with the officers in the country. His communications would probably be observations on the suggestions of the Chief of Staff and Adjutant-General, although I cannot at this stage remember any details.

I cannot be sure that Cathal Brugha ever came to that office. Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy and Rory O'Connor were fairly regular visitors there. Joe O'Reilly came regularly with despatches from Mick Collins, as well as various couriers from other offices. Dick Mulcahy never came. We felt much safer there than in Eustace Street, as there were

no houses directly opposite. We saw Igoe and his gang regularly parading the Quays.

Miss Gleeson's Restaurant in Parkgate Street was a favourite rendez-vous for the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans, and our fellows were going to make a raid on it one time. On Gearoid's instruction, I called at it and I reported on it. As a result, they decided not to raid, the chief reason being that Miss Gleeson herself was on our side and might be able to collect some information which would be useful to us. Liam Tobin was the man who would look after the intelligence side and he may have contacted Miss Gleeson. It was she who afterwards owned the Restaurant, "An Stad", in North Frederick Street.

We remained undisturbed in Ormond Quay until the Truce. Any excitement we had, we got in reports from the country when the different operations took place. These reports came to the covering addresses and were only seldom reported in person by an individual who took part in them. As the reports came in, we typed them for the meetings of the Headquarters Staff, the Minister for Defence and the Chief of Staff, as already stated, getting a copy each.

I remember typing the reports about the Clonmult and Kilbriain operations. I have a particular recollection of the report of the execution of Mrs. Lindsay. I think West Cork mostly acted independently and simply sent their reports after the events. I cannot remember that any advice was sought from Headquarters regarding the treatment to be given to Mrs. Lindsay, although some men from Headquarters went down to West Cork after the event to obtain full information about the incident. One of these was Seán

O'Connell who may have been a member of the Intelligence staff.

Our Department issued the notices to the Officers Commanding the various Brigades of the cessation of hostilities consequent on the terms of the Truce. The hostilities were to cease from twelve o'clock noon on the 11th July, 1921. At the time, Gearoid O'Sullivan was away on holidays and Eamon Price was acting for him. I cannot remember who signed the order, but Dick Mulcahy or Eamon Price would be able to give that information. The order was multigraphed by me, and I have an idea - but I am not too specific about this - that they were sent by special couriers to ensure their delivery in time, because the weekend was intervening.

Shortly after the Truce started, Fr. O'Flanagan of Aughrim Street asked that somebody should be sent up to him from our office. I was sent as I knew the district and Fr. O'Flanagan well. I found a G-man with him. I don't know his name but we knew him as "Tuigeann-tu". He was one of those who were working for Mick Collins. He asked me to convey a message to Mick that we should make no change in our methods of working, that we should maintain the same secrecy in our operations, and that he himself and other collaborators should keep in the background as they had done hitherto, as the Truce might cease at any moment. I gave the message to Gearoid who, in turn, passed it on to Mick Collins. Fr. O'Flanagan also conveyed a message which I brought, on another occasion, I think, prior to the Truce, through the then chaplain of Arbour Hill Barracks to Seán McKeon, who was a wounded prisoner awaiting execution. I

don't know the contents of the message, as I did not type it.

The office staff continued to take the same precautions about secrecy and safeguarding documents, etc. Our staff was increased during the Truce by the addition of two typists one of whom was Kit Bulfin, now Sean McBride's wife. The work was heavier because the reorganisation of the I.R.A. proceeded. Training camps were started in various places and there were many new recruits to the I.R.A. Visitors from the country to the office were more frequent.

During the Truce, we moved from Ormond Quay to a suite of offices in Middle Abbey Street and remained there until Beggars Bush was taken over as a permanent headquarters for the Adjutant-General.

It was from the Adjutant-General's office at its various headquarters that the I.R.A. organ, "An t-Oglach", was circulated. Frank Boyce, an I.R.A. boy, who was an employee of the printers in Aungier Street, delivered them to us. Paddy Caldwell was also concerned in this.

While working for the Adjutant-General, I was also typing for Dick Mulcahy, Chief-of-Staff, up to May, 1921. I contacted him in the various houses where he was stopping - as already stated, he never came to the office. I took instructions from him in shorthand and did the necessary typing. I then brought the documents back for his signature. These would be mostly correspondence between himself and the Minister, and himself and the Adjutant-General. In May, 1921, the correspondence had increased to such an extent that a separate typist was found necessary for the Chief-of-Staff. I procured the services of Máire O'Reilly for him, and my work

for him ceased. We became very busy in our office too.

On one occasion just as I left the house in Belmont Avenue, where Dick Mulcahy was working, a detective followed me. He must have been waiting on the street and seen me coming out of the house. He got off his bicycle and stared at me but said nothing. I got on to a tram and, as I knew that Gearoid was at a meeting in an office in Dawson Street, I went and reported the incident to him. He sent word to Dick Mulcahy that the house was watched. I can't say whether it was raided or not, but I know that Dick Mulcahy was not caught.

I remained in the Department of Defence, which was officially established under the Treaty, until I was transferred to the Local Government Department in 1931. Our location changed at different times. We went from Beggars Bush to Portobello, thence to Griffith Barracks, and finally to Parkgate.

SIGNED:

B. W. Fitzgerald

DATE:

30/11/50

WITNESS:

In Curia

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