

W.A. 498  
**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 498

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 498

**Witness**

Michael McDunphy,  
25, St. Lawrence Road,  
Clontarf,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Section Leader, Irish Vols., "C" Company, 2nd Battalion  
1913-1915 and later;  
Assistant Sec. to Irish Government 1922-1937;  
Secretary to the President of Ireland 1937-1954;  
Director of the Bureau of Military History 1947 to date.

**Subject.**

- (a) Meeting with Father Michael O'Flanagan  
in 1918;
- (b) Meeting with Michael Collins in May, 1921,  
Proposed Dáil mission to Russia in 1921, etc.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

File No. S. 1600.

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

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SECOND STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL McDUNPHY.

A. My Meeting with Father Michael O'Flanagan in 1918.

1. In my statement dated 28 November, 1950, I gave the story of my dismissal from the Civil Service in the year 1918 following my refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance prescribed by the British Government in that year.

2. There is one small incident connected with that matter which is not particularly important, but I think it is no harm to record it.

3. Having made up my mind to refuse to take the Oath, my concern was where to find employment when my dismissal took place. There was at the time a national employment Bureau, with an office in 6 Harcourt Street, Dublin, which was the Headquarters of Sinn Féin, the head of the Bureau being a man named Phil MacMahon. I registered my name there. I was given the names of a few places which seemed to promise something, but they came to nothing, one of the openings being for a skilled watchmaker!

4. One day I received word that Father Michael O'Flanagan wished to see me at Phil MacMahon's office. Father O'Flanagan was at the time closely associated with the national movement, being, I think, Vice-President of Sinn Féin, and was then under an ecclesiastical ban for some matter associated with his activities. I had never met him before and I have no idea how he got to know about me or why he should have sent for me in particular, but I kept the appointment. He said that he had heard of my intention

to refuse to take the Oath of Allegiance. He pointed out the serious economic consequences to myself and my family - I was then married with one child - and advised me to reconsider my decision. I reminded him that he himself had taken a definite stand on matters of national principle and had not been deterred by fear of the consequences. He was very earnest and seemed seriously concerned for me, but once he realised that I had made up my mind he did not press the matter further.

5. As he was very much in the news I studied him while he was speaking. I noticed that his face had an unhealthy pallor tinged with grey, and that he was obviously either unhappy or ill, or perhaps both, and this was particularly borne on me as I wondered at the contrast between his own fearless behaviour and his cautious advice to me. That advice is of interest in the light of the different advice given to me by Richard Mulcahy in relation to the Volunteers.

B. Meeting with Michael Collins.

*Proposed Mission to Russia*

6. Following my dismissal from the Civil Service in 1918 I took up the study of German and Spanish, to add to what was then a sound knowledge of Irish and French. A lay Brother of the Dominican Order in St. Saviour's Dominick Street, Dublin, Brother Joachim, who was interested in me, apparently discussed me with Michael Collins with whom he was in close touch, and the latter said that he would like to see me some time.

7. An opportunity offered in May, 1921, when Brother Joachim learned from the Hon. James MacMahon, British Under Secretary of State in Dublin Castle, that the British Government were about to make final overtures for peace, with the accompanying threat that if they were not successful

they would proceed ruthlessly to destroy the I.R.A. and the country with them.

8. I brought Brother Joachim's news to Michael Collins, and met him in Fleming's Hotel, Gardiner's Row, which was owned by John O'Mahony, whose wife had been a Fleming. In the room with Michael Collins was a much older man - George MacGrath, Accountant General of Dáil Éireann - and this was the first time that I met either of them.

9. Michael Collins listened to my message, and I gathered that the news did not come to him as a surprise. His comment on ~~the~~ James MacMahon was pithy - "that white-livered coward"! While we were speaking, George MacGrath continued at his own work in another part of the room.

10. Michael Collins dismissed the subject, and then said that he was interested in my study of languages. The Dáil were contemplating sending a mission to Russia, and he asked me if I would go. I said that I would, but pointed out that I knew no Russian, although I was willing to learn it. He said that German would suffice for the purpose of the mission, and advised me to press forward my study of that language. The time was not yet ready for the mission to go, however, and in the meantime he offered me a post in the Dáil - Department of Finance - and he called George MacGrath over to confirm that. I said that I had a job at the moment but would consider his offer.

11. The mission to which he referred would appear to be that later undertaken by Dr. Patrick McCartan, but I heard nothing further from Michael Collins about it.

12. Shortly after, I wrote him, thanking him for his kindness and for his offer of an immediate post in Finance, but stated that I would prefer to remain in my existing employment for the present. I sent this letter to him

through a shop in Dorset Street, owned, I think, by a man named O'Neill, this being one of the secret despatch centres at the time.


13. Following the signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 6 December, 1921, I wrote to Michael Collins again, reminding him that there were a number of men like myself, who had lost their employment on national principles, whose training might be of use in the new Irish administration to be set up under the Treaty. I wrote similarly to my former colleague, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, who was closely associated with Michael Collins.

14. The Provisional Government of Ireland provided for in the Treaty was established in Dublin on the 14th January, 1922, with Michael Collins as Chairman, and Diarmuid O'Hegarty as Secretary. I was appointed Assistant Secretary as from the 29th of that month, and held that post, and that of Assistant Secretary to subsequent Governments, under different administrations until appointed to my present post of Secretary to the President of Ireland on the coming into operation of the Constitution of Ireland on 29th December, 1937.

15. Still holding the office of Secretary to the President, which is my permanent Civil Service appointment, I was appointed to the post of Director of the Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921, on the 1st January, 1947, and I still hold both posts.

Signed:

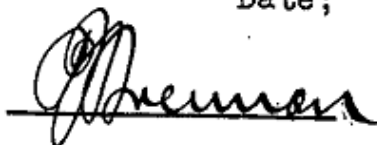
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 498

  
Barrister-at-law,  
Secty. to President of  
Ireland.

Date;

13 April, 1951.

Witness:



SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT TO W.S. 498 BY MR. MICHAEL McDUNPHY,

25, St. Lawrence Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

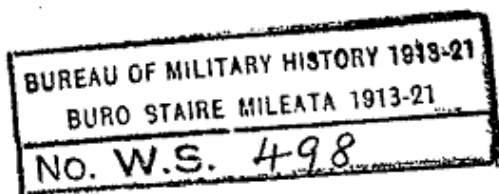
1. Since writing my statement of 13th April, 1951, I have found correspondence bearing on my meeting with Michael Collins in May, 1921, consisting of a letter of mine dated 18th November, 1946, to Mr. George McGrath, former Accountant General of Dáil Éireann, and his reply of 20th November, 1946. Certified copies of each of these letters is attached. The original letter from George McGrath, which I retain, is in his own handwriting.
2. His statement that he could not remember any reference being made in his presence to the proposed mission to Russia is explained by the fact mentioned by me in paragraph 9 of my statement of 13th April, 1951, that during the early part of my conversation with Michael Collins, McGrath continued at his own work in another part of the room.
3. The George McGrath referred to above was Accountant General of Dáil Éireann from the creation of that appointment in 1919 up to its abolition in September, 1922, and was subsequently Comptroller and Auditor General of succeeding Irish Governments until his retirement on account of age in December, 1944. He died in May, 1948.

4. He was a brother of Mr. Joseph McGrath, who was substitute Minister of Labour of Dáil Éireann in 1920 and a member of subsequent Irish Governments from 11th January, 1922, as Minister for Labour and Minister for Industry and Commerce up to 21st September, 1923, when he resigned office as a Minister.

Signed: *W. J. [unclear]*

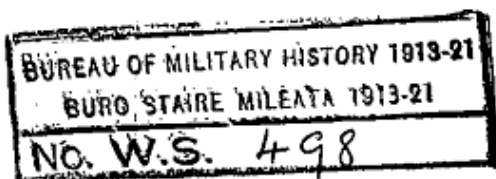
Date: 24th April, 1956.

Witness: *W. J. [unclear]*



*Actual copy*  
*McDunphy*

24.4.56



"Gortinore",  
11 Alma Road,  
Monkstown.

November 20th '46.

Dear Michael,

I received yours of the 18th inst.

I remember quite well your meeting with the late General Michael Collins about May 1921.- You mentioned that the British were about to intensify their terrorism to the extent that all traffic even the Dublin Trams would be stopped, giving the name of your informant. M.C. treated the matter rather coldly, I thought, implying that they were capable of doing anything.

I do not remember any reference being made in my presence of sending a mission to Russia or any other country.. I can only remember that mention was made of a vacancy in the Dáil department of Finance for a person with Accountancy experience. You informed General Collins quite candidly that your forte was not accountancy. Even so the post in Finance was offered to you. You replied by asking M.C. if he would advise you to take the post having regard to your training and experience. I think M.C. replied that that was a matter for yourself.

It is difficult to think back for a quarter of a century but I must admit that events which happened during that hectic period stand out very plainly in perspective. Strange to say I remember that after the interview I made a mental note that it was a pity that you were not offered a post in the Diplomatic Service. Would it be that you had two interviews with M.C. and that I was present at one of them only?

Regarding the date I can only measure this by referring to a rather outstanding event of that period - the raid on 22 Mary St. The address and name of Mr. Liam Langley the person afterwards appointed to be one of my assistants was found by the Black and Tans and retained by them. We had to advise Langley to keep out of the way and could not allow him near the office until after the truce. This raid was made after your interview as well as I can remember and I think happened in the latter part of May 1921. We probably would not have communicated with Langley until a week or so after your interview, which probably took place early in May 1921.

Hoping that you, Mrs. McDunphy and family are all in the best of health.

I am quite well again thank God - so is Mrs. McGrath.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) GEORGE McGRATH.



*Actual copy  
unduly new 4.56*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 498

18th November, 1946.

Dear George,

You will probably be surprised to receive this letter.

I wonder if you can throw your mind back to a certain night in 1921, probably in May or June, on which I called by appointment on Michael Collins in Fleming's Hotel, Gardiner's Row, with a message from Brother Joachim of the Dominican Friary, Dominick St. He had learned from the then British Under Secretary, Hon. James McMahon, that a final effort was about to be made by the British Government to come to terms with the Dáil, with a view to the termination of hostilities and subsequently to some sort of a political settlement. Underlying the proposal was a threat that if this effort did not succeed, then the British Government were going all out in a war of extermination.

Michael Collins' reaction was not very flattering to the Hon. James McMahon. He discussed the matter briefly, and then turned to my own affairs.

Brother Joachim had told him that I had been dismissed from the Civil Service in 1918 for refusing to take the oath of allegiance, and that since then, while earning my living in another sphere, I was intensively studying Spanish and German. Mr. Collins said that the Dáil were contemplating sending a mission to Russia, and that he would like to consider the question of sending me, as my knowledge of German would be very valuable. I said that I would be delighted to go, but it seemed to me that Russian rather than German would be the essential language. He replied that in higher diplomatic circles German would be just as valuable.

Nothing definite, however, had been decided about the Russian mission. If however, in the meantime I would like to accept a small post in the Dáil Ministry of Finance under your control he would appoint me. I said I would give the matter consideration and some days later I wrote and informed him that I would prefer to hold on to my existing post in commercial life for the present.

You were the only other person present at that meeting.

I wonder if you recollect the incident and if you could give me date and time and confirm or correct my memory of what occurred on that occasion.

I was very sorry to hear that you have not been too well recently and hope that you are now on the way to full recovery.

Please give my very sincere regards to Mrs. McGrath. I hope that she and the family are keeping in the best of health.

Yours sincerely,

(M. McDunphy)

George McGrath, Esq.,  
11 Alma Rd.,  
Monkstown.

