

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 550

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 550

Witness

Maurice J. Collins,
8 Iona Drive,
Glasnevin,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of:

- (a) I.R.B. Dublin, 1908 - ;
- (b) 'F' Company 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade,
Irish Volunteers 1913 - .
Subject.

- (a) National activities 1908-1921;
- (b) Church St. area, Easter Week 1916;
- (c) I.R.A. Intelligence work, 1919-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1768.....

Form B.S.M. 2

C O N T E N T S.

| | <u>Page.</u> |
|--|--------------|
| 1. I.R.B. meetings addressed by Hobson. | 1. |
| 2. Volunteer organisation established. | 1. |
| 3. <u>THE RISING</u> - Guard on Bulmer Hobson. | 2 - 4. |
| 4. <u>Premises at 65 Parnell Street used as a dispatch centre</u> - Wounded Volunteers received and taken to Jervis Street Hospital - Secret box for dispatches installed by Batt O'Connor. | 4 - 6. |
| 5. Letters for Auxiliaries collected on Mail Boat and taken to 65 Parnell Street for censorship by the I.R.A. | 6 - 7. |
| 6. Rifles collected at Smithfield Garage. | 7. |
| 7. Assistance and co-operation given by Sergeant John Collins (brother), D.M.P. | 7. |

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STATEMENT OF MAURICE J. COLLINS,

8, Iona Drive, Glasnevin, Dublin.

I came to Dublin from ^{Co.}Limerick on the 12th June, 1901, and I played Gaelic Football with the Éire Óg football club. I went to London in September, 1904. I joined the Milesian Gaelic Club there and was in London until 1908 when I came to Dublin.

I joined the I.R.B. in 1908 or 1909. P.S. O'Hegarty was the Centre. We met at Chancery Lane. I attended all meetings of the I.R.B. to which I was summoned at 41 Parnell Square generally. Many of the meetings that I attended were addressed by such men as Seán MacDermott and Bulmer Hobson, etc.

We were instructed to attend a meeting which was to be held at the Rotunda on the 25th November, 1913 for the purpose of establishing the Volunteer organisation. I think it was Eoin MacNeill that addressed us that night. I think the gist of the address was to the effect that young men throughout the country were wanted to form a Volunteer organisation in the South to counter Carson's organisation in the North. Following that meeting I joined "F" Company of the 1st Battalion. Ned Daly was Battalion Commandant. Piaras Beaslai, Fionán Lynch and Gearóid O'Sullivan were also members of "F" Company with me. The Battalion and Company activities were, of course, confined to drilling, route marches and lectures. Following the Redmondite split I would say that 75% of the Company remained loyal.

Coming on to 1916, drilling, training and lectures continued. Early in that year I felt that a Rising was seriously contemplated because we were instructed to procure all the arms we possibly could. I bought my own rifle, as did all the other members of the Company. They were, for the most part, teachers and civil servants. We were all members of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League then. Although I attended many meetings of the I.R.B., it was never made plain to us when the Rising would take place, but many hints were thrown out that such was contemplated. In the addresses which I heard it was stressed that force of arms was the only means by which England would give us freedom.

During Holy Week I made arrangements to travel to the country with my fiancé for the Easter week-end. Jack Shouldice called on Easter Saturday morning to tell me that the Rising was fixed for the following day - Easter Sunday. I then told him of the plans I had made to go to the country. His comment was, "Well, Maurice, although you have arrangements made to go to the country never deny that I did not tell you". In reply I said, "Certainly not, Jack, I will never deny it and now I will not travel to the country". It must have been Shouldice who told me that I was to parade with my Company on the following day. I regarded this as a mobilisation order. However, I did not parade next morning as I must have received instructions that the parade was cancelled. Instead of parading a big number of us assembled at the premises of Johnnie Hyland, a tobacconist, in North Frederick Street, as we knew some instructions would issue as a result of an I.R.B. Headquarters meeting. Some time that afternoon word reached us that the Rising was to take place at 12 o'clock on Easter Monday. In the meantime I was instructed to proceed with my rifle to Martin Conlon's

house, Cabra Park, to take charge of Bulmer Hobson, who was detained there as a prisoner. Michael Lynch of "F" Company was also with me. We found Hobson in a rather distressed state of mind and had to warn him several times to remain calm and quiet. He did not discuss the situation with us; neither did he show any animosity towards us personally. While he was a prisoner with us his fiance called, inquiring if Bulmer Hobson were there, but we considered it better to deny his presence. We held him prisoner until Wednesday night when an order came, signed by either Pearse or Connolly, that Hobson could be released. The instruction was carried to us by Sean T. O'Kelly. I had to endorse this order to the effect that I would comply with the instruction. There and then we released him and Michael Lynch and myself proceeded to Church Street to rejoin our Company then under Jack Shouldice.

In Church Street I was posted for duty in Lamb's public-house, first floor, at the corner of North King Street, which was then occupied by us. Later the British took up a position behind a barricade about 150 yards from our post with the result that we came under heavy fire. This continued until Friday evening when instructions were issued that we were to withdraw to the Four Courts and on the following day, Saturday, notice of surrender reached us. We were assembled by either Pierce Beasley or Ned Daly - I cannot remember which - and the orders for surrender were read out to us. These orders were to the effect that all guns and ammunition in our possession were to be handed over to the British. Later that night (Saturday night) the Four Courts garrison were marched in a body to the Rotunda Gardens. We stayed for the night in the open and we marched the following morning to Richmond Barracks where the prisoners from all the other garrisons throughout the city were assembled. Here I remained for

a fortnight and during this time many of my comrades were being picked out for courtmartial or deportation by members of 'G' Division. Inspector Love figured prominently in this work of identification. He seemed to be familiar with a lot of well-known Volunteers. I remember one incident of a Detective whom we had taken prisoner while in Church Street named Heffernan; I told the boys that although he was a Detective he was to be treated well. It so happened that while I was in Richmond Barracks this same Detective was brought along to identify any prisoners. Good enough of him, he passed me by although he knew me well.

On the morning that we had received orders from the British that we were to be deported I was standing beside Seán MacDermott in the Barrack Square and said to him, "It looks, Seán, as if we will be all together wherever we are going this time". He replied, "No Maurice, the next place you and I will meet will be in Heaven. Up to that he had not been courtmartialled and I could not understand why he passed this remark. That evening we marched out of Richmond Barracks to a boat at the North Wall which we boarded en route for England. Our destination was Wandsworth Prison. We were detained in Wandsworth prison before being transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp from where we were released in the autumn of 1916.

Following my return home I got married but did not resume my former employment as a Civil Servant as my dismissal from the Service reached me in December 1916. It so happened that I received pay from Easter Saturday up to Christmas Week 1916 through an oversight on the part of some official, as he failed to inform me at the proper time of my dismissal. I then went into business as a tobacconist and confectioner with a billiard room attached

at 65 Parnell Street.

From 1918 on these premises were used extensively by Michael Collins as one of his depots. I think it was Colonel Joe O'Reilly told me that dispatches would be reaching me from various parts of the country and that I was to hold them for him. I am sure this instruction came from Collins as he and I were inseparable friends. This friendship started when we were both in London and continued to the end.

When the Black & Tan war was at its height I received several dispatches notifying me that Volunteers who were wounded would reach my place and requesting me to take them down to Dr. John Ryan, 69 Lower Gardiner Street, for medical attention. Dr. Ryan was House Surgeon in Jervis Street Hospital and he took wounded men to the hospital and provided beds and medical attention for them. I cannot recall the names of any of the wounded men that came to my place. They would be brought in a car to my place and I accompanied them to Dr. Ryan's house.

For the purpose of secreting dispatches, Batt O'Connor installed a secret hiding-place under the counter in my premises. He simply cut a square out of the floor into which he fitted a box. The box was fitted so tightly that it escaped the attention of the many raiders who searched the premises. The Volunteers called at my house with dispatches. These would be given to whoever was in the shop at the time such as my wife, my sister-in-law or brother-in-law. No remarks were passed and when it was considered safe these dispatches would be dropped into the secret hiding-place and were usually called for by Joe O'Reilly. At this time Michael Collins was almost a daily visitor.

During the latter period of 1920 my premises were being raided by the Black and Tans continuously and on the 1st November of that year I was raided seven times on one

day. I think the reason for this particular raid was that they captured some letter which pointed the finger of suspicion at me. However, I considered it much safer to be away from the premises during these raids. The raiders said to my wife, "All we want your husband for is to interrogate him". However, Mick Collins said to me, "If they get you, you will never be seen alive again".

One day Mick Collins approached me and said that he wanted to carry the war into the enemy's camp in England where the Black and Tans came from. He asked me could I get him a reliable man in the Post Office staff on the Mail Boat who would bring a number of letters addressed to the Black & Tans at Gormanstown (their headquarters) to my address. From my associations with the Post Office staff on the Mail Boat prior to my dismissal in 1916 I recalled the name of one individual whom I felt I could trust implicitly. This was Ben Kennedy, at present residing at 60 Bushy Park Road, Terenure. I got in touch with him and told him what the 'big fellow' wanted done. I pointed out to him how dangerous it would be but he brushed the idea aside and said that he would do it. He travelled on the Mail Boat as a Post Office sorter from Dublin to Holyhead and back. On the journey back he would sort letters for Gormanstown and bring them to my premises afterwards. They came in bundles of from 200 to 300 each time at least two or three times a week - all according to the duties he had to perform. Within a few hours of their delivery they were collected by Joe O'Reilly or some other member of Collins's staff whom I knew. On one occasion we had a very narrow escape. No sooner had Kennedy delivered the Black & Tan letters to me when the place was burst open by the Tans looking for the Castle mails that had been stolen from the Rotunda a half hour earlier. On that particular occasion my wife concealed the letters in her bed. At that time she was nursing a

baby and although they searched the house very thoroughly they did not ask her to leave the bed.

Some time early in 1920 Collins asked me to collect some rifles from the Royal Barracks at Smithfield garage and that Joe O'Reilly would accompany me. At 10.30 one night I harnassed the pony and put four empty milk churns into the car. We met a soldier at Smithfield as arranged. The rifles were tied up in a bag and we put them into one of the churns and brought them back to the stable that night. Next morning I harnassed the pony and took the rifles to Ardiff's dairy, Kilmainham. On my journey there I was held up by Detective Dan Coffey who at the time had a very bad name amongst us. I got the wind up as I thought that he would search the churns but to my great relief he only stopped me to ask who lived in a certain room upstairs in a certain house in Parnell Street.

My brother, John, was a Sergeant in the D.M.P. stationed at Donnybrook. It was usual at that time to detail a member of the D.M.P. to accompany Black & Tans on their raids to point out the houses that were earmarked to be searched. The usual procedure was that instructions would be sent out from Dublin Castle to the Superintendent giving particulars of the houses that were to be raided that night. This information would immediately be passed on to the Station Sergeant of the Police area in which the raids were to take place. As soon as possible John would notify me of the raids to be carried out that night and I immediately passed on the information to Joe O'Reilly. In this way many 'wanted' men were saved from arrest. Collins appreciated the work of my brother very much as he asked me to arrange a meeting with him. This meeting took place in my house and Collins openly expressed his thanks and appreciation of the good work John had done.

In December, 1920, Collins said to me, "Things are

getting too hot here for you; you had better clear out or we will both be caught". I demurred at first but seeing that he was so insistent about my going away, I finally agreed. He arranged my passage with Liam Devlin to Greenock, Scotland. On the 12th December I left Dublin dressed as a priest. The clothes were supplied by my cousin, Father Maurice O'Shea. He was in City Quay at the time and I had often stopped with him during my absence from home. When I reached Greenock I met Mr. McGivern who took me to Mr. McAuley's house. McGivern found lodgings for me and after about a fortnight he placed me in a job as Manager of a public-house. I held this job until the 11th July, 1921. I then told my employer, who was a fine type of Scotsman, that I was returning home as I had a business of my own in Dublin. He implored me to remain on with him and that he would increase my wages. However, I promised him that I would return in a short time and remain with him until he found a suitable substitute. I remained true to my promise, returning in about two weeks when I stayed with him until September when a suitable man was found. During the whole time I was with him he only knew me as Jack Kennedy and had no idea that I was 'on the run'. When the whole thing was over and the Treaty signed we corresponded and I gave him full particulars of my reason for taking up employment with him. He then invited my wife and myself for a holiday which we gladly accepted.

Signed: Maurice Callan's

Date: 3. 7. 1951

Witness: William Jerry Bond

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