

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 643

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 643

Witness

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Identity.

Typist in Dail Eireann Propaganda Office,  
1919-1921.

Subject.

"The Irish Bulletin" 1919-1921.

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ORIGINAL

The Irish Bulletin

Broadcast by Kathleen McKenna (Napoli) -  
Part I.

Copies obtained from

Radio Eireann. BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21 BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21 No. W.S. 643
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When I speak of the "Black and Tan Days" to members of the younger generation I am often surprised to note how little they are interested in that period of Irish History. I think that this spirit in the youth of today is due, to a large extent, to the fact that we are yet too near to the "Troubled Times" to be in a position to review them in the true light of history, also to the fact that the "Treaty Split" was unworthy of, and overshadowed what went before it, and to a new, and to my mind, mistaken doctrine, which advocates the burying of the memory of past wrongs. The memory of those who laid down their lives that their Motherland might live, is sacred. It should be kept alive, so that those sacrifices may not be forgotten, but exalt and inspire future generations.

Much of the true history of the Black and Tan times has yet to be written, but the men and women who witnessed that period are passing away. This is why I feel that it is my duty to leave on record my intimate personal knowledge of the almost unknown story of the "Irish Bulletin". I presume to do so because I am the only person who was present at its birth, and at the preparation of every edition of it, without exception, until its mission was finished at the time of the Truce, though it went on until December, 1921, in another form.

"The Irish Bulletin" was a mimeographed news bulletin dealing truthfully and concisely with Ireland's Fight for Independence from 12th November, 1919, through the fearful and stirring days of 1920

and 1921, up to the epoch of the Truce negotiations. Published under enormous difficulties at the height of the Black and Tan reign of terror, it was distributed gratis by the Propaganda Department of Dail Eireann to English and American newspapers and to their special correspondents here, and the London correspondents of foreign newspapers, who had agreed to consider and use, if of sufficient interest to them, the otherwise unobtainable information contained in it. It was also, of course, given to Irish newspapers. It was sent, as well, to private individuals both here and in England who were awakening to an interest in our generally misunderstood Cause, or to shame at what was being done in Ireland by the forces of the Crown - people of public spirit, as, for instance, some Members of the British Parliament, who based questions in the House of Commons on information published in the Bulletin.

The Bulletin was edited from its inception in November 1919 until his arrest on 11th February 1921 by Desmond FitzGerald, whose idea it was, and the information it contained was compiled by him and by Robert Brennan and Frank Gallagher. After Desmond Fitzgerald's arrest Erskine Childers who had been appointed Substitute Director of Propaganda by the Dáil edited it for some months till after the Truce.

The Bulletin was delivered by hand and by post under covering addresses, parcels of it were forwarded by helpers in London for re-posting there. In it was often incorporated secret and incriminating information obtained in such ways as by the armed holding up and raiding of British secret mails by the I.R.A. and by information obtained from our helpers actually inside Dublin Castle and British Government Offices, as well

as sworn statements made by victims of assaults, burnings & other acts of terrorism, or by witnesses of murders, masked raids, etc. All the statements made in the Bulletin were substantiated by proofs, and were of such a nature that, were it not for the Bulletin organisation, they would never have received Press publicity. The unmasking of British terrorist methods the clear, truthful exposition of otherwise unknown aspects of the national struggle, the elaborate, but futile attempts made by the British Intelligence service to suppress it, the publicity given in it to secret orders even prior to their being known in British Headquarters themselves, made of the Irish Bulletin a weapon which had a very considerable part in the breaking down of British morale in Ireland. After the Truce this fact was confirmed by statements made both from Dublin Castle and from Michael Collins.

I joined the Propaganda Department at the Sinn Fein Headquarters, No. 6, Harcourt Street, in November 1919 on the invitation of Robert Brennan, who had been in charge of the Sinn Fein Propaganda Department now merging its work in the new Dail Eireann Department of Propaganda, the first Director of which was Laurence Ginnell, T.D. Owing to the absence in prison of Laurence Ginnell, Desmond Fitzgerald, T.D. had been appointed Substitute Director by the Dail on June 17th 1919. At the moment he was absent in London where he was putting into operation his idea of obtaining a wider Press than we had had so far, by trying to get publication of our aspirations, and of the British efforts to suppress them, in the Foreign Press. It had become clear to him that items of Irish news sent to European and world papers had very little chance of publication, but he thought that by personal

contacts with the London correspondents of these papers something could be done to interest them. As no one in our Movement had such contacts he determined to make them himself, if possible. He remembered that among the young poets he knew in London there was one, F.S. Flint, who through his absorption with French Literature had friends among French journalists. It is of interest that Ezra Pound in his "Letters" published this year by Faber & Faber, mentions Flint and D. FitzGerald as being, with T.E. Hulme and himself, the founders of the Imagist Group of poets in London in 1908-9, and speaks of Flint as being very "Frenchified." At any rate this idea turned out very successful. With his personality and his genius for friendship, and through his own "Gallic" quality, and his knowledge of and love for French Literature, Desmond Fitzgerald soon formed some real friendships among the London correspondents of French newspapers, and through them got to know Dutch, Spanish and South American, Italian, Greek, Scandinavian, Finnish, South African, Australian as well as American London correspondents, although this was not all done in one visit. Because they liked him they developed some interest in Ireland, and were willing to read the Bulletin which he soon established, and to use information from it for their papers, and Foreign newspapers were induced eventually to send representatives at times to Ireland.

On the 11th November 1919, Desmond FitzGerald entered the general room where I was typing on his way to his private office. In the course of the afternoon Arthur Griffith and Bob Brennan joined him. Later I was called in and told of the projected

newsletter. When asked by Arthur Griffith, I agreed that the title "Irish Bulletin" was simple and clear. I placed a wax sheet in the typewriter, typed the title "Irish Bulletin", the date and two statements, one long and one short, dealing with recent events. I then mimeographed it. The Irish Bulletin was born! Michael Nunan, who was also on the staff, addressed about thirty envelopes, inserted the folded Bulletin, and we set out to post some to London and to deliver others to the Dublin newspapers.

By the time of the Truce the Bulletin ran into two, three or more pages daily and two Gestetner Rotary Machines were necessary to roll off the many thousands of pages required to supply five copies a week to each person on the list which had become a long one - some twelve hundred recipients.

A few days after the first edition had been issued Frank Gallagher, recently released from jail, I think, came in to resume work and from then on his active pen supplied a large part of the copy for the Bulletin. He was unsparing of himself in his devotion to the work.

A copy of a Weekly Summary of Acts of Aggression compiled by Anna FitzSimons (now Anna Kelly) accompanied the Bulletin once a week.

Shortly after the institution of the Bulletin a raid was anticipated on No. 6 and Arthur Griffith suggested to me that it would be wise to remove the Bulletin equipment elsewhere. The place decided upon was a Sinn Fein office occupied by Paidin O'Keefe, situated over the Farm Produce shop in Baggot Street. I made my way there, while Michael, carrying the typewriter and copying press, arrived by another route, only to find that we could not remain as our presence

might bring trouble on others whose hide-out it was. I had to issue next day's Bulletin and some subsequent ones from the basement of Bob Brennan's home in Belgrave Square, Rathmines, the script coming from 6 Harcourt Street where it had been compiled and edited.

As this house was in danger of being raided, I had to transfer, with the equipment, to the home of Mrs. Diarmuid Coffey and her son, in Pembroke Road who allowed us to use a delightful room where I worked quite alone for about twelve days. The Director, Desmond FitzGerald, called in daily, Michael bringing everything I required and taking away the prepared Bulletin. At this time the entire staff was comprised of Bob Brennan, who besides writing for the Bulletin was also continuing the work he had been doing for Sinn Fein Propaganda in No. 6, Frank Gallagher, Anna FitzSimons, Michael Nunan and myself and, of course, our Director. A place where we could be united had to be found. Eventually Mrs. Nugent kindly placed rooms at our disposal in Upper Mount Street. Here we worked happily and in comparative peace for several months. There was, however, a continual movement of I.R.A. gun-men here and when we feared that the house was under suspicion, it was decided to transfer the Bulletin to other quarters. These were difficult to find and in the meantime a temporary place to work was arranged in Desmond FitzGerald's flat in Upper Pembroke Street but this was not safe for long and I next found myself rolling off the ever increasing numbers of the Bulletin in a flat in Fitzwilliam Square belonging to a friend of Frank Gallagher's. In both flats I worked alone, contact with the staff being maintained through the

medium of Michael, a silent and efficient boy of great courage and foresight.

Finally Bob Brennan succeeded in renting a flat for us all in an elegant building in the select Molesworth Street zone and just a few doors away from the Grand Lodge of Freemasons. It consisted of one large room in which four of the staff worked amid piles of newspaper files, a second large room where later a Gestetner machine was installed and a small room off it for the use of the Director. The ground floor was occupied by a firm of Crown Solicitors, the basement by a caretaker; we were on the second floor while on the top two floors were two aged ladies who kept many cats.

Just now the hunt for the Bulletin which had published some damning but irrefutable accusations became more intense. Nugent's had been raided. The closing off by military cordons of entire areas throughout the city followed by house to house searches by Auxiliaries and Black and Tans were frequent. The Bulletin news became more exciting. Each evening I crossed the city to a place known as "The Dump" over Mansfield's Boot Shop in O'Connell Street and to the offices of Michael Collins first in Mary Street later in Maurice Collins's shop Parnell Street and Devlin's, Parnell Square, to collect documents to be used in the compilation of the Bulletin.

The winter we spent in Molesworth Street was bitterly cold. Owing to the need for secrecy we could not have the flat cleaned by the caretaker whom we didn't know and thus could not light fires. Often the duplicating ink froze in the tubes and we resorted to burning twisted up newspapers to thaw out the ink



and our own stiff fingers. Our Director coughed incessantly and Bob Brennan and Frank Gallagher huddled writing all day in their often rain-soaked overcoats. Anna FitzSimons and I often put blotting paper round our stockings to dry them and to keep us warm but in the evening when all helped in the rush at post time, cold and damp were forgotten.

In a flat in Belvedere Road where I lived with my father I had a typewriter and hand-duplicating machine. Here I prepared by night the "Weekly Summary of Aggressions". One night during Curfew when the zone was cordoned off silently, I spent an anxious time in dim candle light concealing some of the papers just previously mimeographed and burning what could not be hidden lest the now inevitable raid should reveal my home to be a section of the long sought for Bulletin office.

(Signed) Kathleen McKenna, August, 1951.

(12, Via Monte,  
Monteperticu,  
Viterbo,  
Italy.)

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

The Irish Bulletin NO. W.S.

Broadcast by Mrs. Kathleen Napoli (McKenna)

Part II

Copies obtained from Radio Éireann.

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The Irish Bulletin was a mimeographed news bulletin first issued on November 11th, 1919, and edited until his arrest on the 11th February, 1921, by Desmond FitzGerald, T.D., Director of Propaganda for Dáil Éireann, whose idea it was. He, Robert Brennan and Frank Gallagher compiled the information it contained. This information was always truthful. Much of it was obtained by the raiding of British secret mails, by reports from our helpers inside Dublin Castle or by sworn statements of victims of assaults or by witnesses of murders by the Castle Gang information which without the Bulletin would never have come out.

The Bulletin was sent to the London correspondents of the European and World press with whom Desmond FitzGerald had made friends on visits to London. The result was soon seen in an increase of news items and articles about Ireland in foreign papers.

I am qualified to speak of the Bulletin as I mimeographed its first issue and every other issue without exception until the Truce. As the British authorities were desperately anxious to suppress the Bulletin it had necessarily to be got out secretly, the staff moving from one office to another according as a raid looked likely. We were now in an office in Molesworth Street.

In my home in Belvedere Road, enclosed within a cordoned-off zone, I spent the night destroying and concealing documents. Next morning, with barbed-wire entanglements round the area, a machine-gun mounted on the roof of the shop opposite, Tans and Auxies moving about, I succeeded in passing safely through the cordon and reached Molesworth Street to find my colleagues bewailing my supposed arrest and awaiting the arrival of a trusted locksmith to open the office doors, the keys of which I kept. When the Tans visited my home they found an aged gentleman and a deaf old landlady, beyond all suspicion.

On the Saturday evening prior to Bloody Sunday, Desmond FitzGerald called me to his home in Upper Pembroke Street to collect the scripts of three Bulletins. From then onwards I had always spare scripts to be used in case one could not be prepared daily.

After Ernie O'Malley, who had been arrested under the name of Stewart, had made his dramatic escape from Kilmainham, he came one evening to Molesworth Street where I typed a statement for him relative to his interrogation and experience while in the hands of the Castle Murder Gang.

One Saturday evening during February 1921, I got word that the Molesworth Street area had been cordoned off. I hurried to Dawson Street but could not pass through the military cordon. From the distance I saw troops carrying papers from a building to a lorry, but could not ascertain if it were the Bulletin office. Next morning I was with Barney Mellows on the opposite pavement but still did not know if the office had been "got". We

had to know, so it was decided that I should ring for the caretaker. This faithful woman as she turned out to be, assured me that our offices had not been entered, though troops had been on the landing outside the doors and the ladies from the top floors had assured the Crown Forces that "on account of the dirty condition of the stairs the rooms must certainly be occupied by Sin Fyners." Usually paid for cleaning the offices she had guessed, as she had known our Director to see, that we must be engaged in secret national work and had preferred to forego her earnings rather than embarrass us. That same evening Anna FitzSimons had to argue with a worker of a Dublin newspaper going to print to have deleted a paragraph inadvertently inserted, which announced that all the offices in Molesworth Street had been raided, with the exception of those on the first floor of number eleven, of which the caretaker had not the keys!

Our Director decided to purchase a Rotary Gestetner for which the Dail sanctioned the expenditure and I went with him to the sales rooms to select a machine and learn to operate it. The sale was made by an ex-British Officer who was "all right" and the machine was delivered to us by Joe Hyland, Collins' driver.

While we were in Molesworth Street Robert Brennan who during the Director's absence on work in London, edited the Bulletin, left our Department. Michael Nunan was arrested and interned. Kathleen McGilligan joined our staff.

On the evening of February 11th, 1921, Desmond FitzGerald, who though, "on the run" from his home, continued to work in Molesworth Street, cycled to Ely Place to see his wife. He was followed and the

house was surrounded by Black and Tans who arrested him and took him to the Castle. Erskine Childers was now appointed Substitute Director of Propaganda, but he rarely came to Molesworth Street as he set up another office elsewhere. Frank Gallagher brought the edited material of the Bulletin to me each day from him. Shiela Murphy had now joined the staff and contributing her zeal and efficiency was of the greatest service.

One morning as I was typing the Bulletin in the quiet of the room recently occupied by Desmond FitzGerald, Frank Gallagher rushed in from the front room to say that a lightning military cordon had been drawn all round our area, and that soldiers with field kitchens installed on the very pavement outside our hall door were cooking dinner. Headquarters had been established in the office of the Crown Solicitors just beneath us. Seamus, our new messenger was sent out to reconnoitre. On the basis of the news he brought back it was decided that all must be attempted to get Frank Gallagher, who was of such importance to our organisation, safely off the scene. Our plans were swiftly made. His revolver was concealed deeply amid the newspapers files, and his pockets emptied of everything that might arouse suspicion. From the window I watched him as accompanied by Anna FitzSimons, he passed through the military cordon to safety. Then Kathleen McGilligan went out, taking with her the list of addresses for the Bulletin.

I remained alone to finish the typing and to roll off the Bulletin copies. I was scared, but the need to get out the Bulletin and the knowledge that its failure to appear would give a clue to the

whereabouts of the office helped me. When I had prepared many copies, I slipped them into a case and succeeded in getting through the cordon and went to the McGilligan house, 32, Lr. Leeson Street where Kathleen had already addressed the envelopes. That evening the Bulletin circulated as usual in Dublin and next morning the English recipients and correspondents of foreign newspapers received their copies.

That evening Joe Hyland drove me with all the equipment, across the city to my home in Belvedere Road, and from there the Bulletin was issued by me until Erskine Childers directed the return to Molesworth Street which had escaped detection after all. On that occasion, however, another "hide out" situated in the nearby South Frederick Street, was captured. The occupants had made good their escape and a hurriedly abandoned breakfast showed to the Crown Forces that once again they had been outwitted by the I.R.A.

On a large table in the room containing the Gestetner, Erskine Childers had had spread out in varying sized piles copies of pamphlets. On the floor were dozens of bundles of extra Bulletin copies which Kathleen McGilligan rolled off in her rare moments of spare time. It was Saturday morning and all was disorder, fuss and confusion. Childers had called relative to the pamphlets and was sitting at the table with someone standing near him who may have been Bob Barton. The Gestetner was being operated when something went wrong with it. Something was needed to get on with the work. I am unable to recall what. Seamus was hurriedly sent over to the Gestetner Salesrooms to procure it.

He returned together with a salesman whom we did not know. This man pushed right into the room taking us all unawares. From the spread-out pamphlets, the Bulletin bundles, our confusion, the stencil attached to the machine which he approached with a pretence of helping, the nature of the office was quite evident. It is to be suspected that it was he who eventually gave it away.

On Holy Saturday, 1919, our Molesworth Street office was raided by armed British forces and everything including the Rotary Gestetner machine, my typewriter, the address list, was carried off to the North Wall Hotel where the Auxiliaries began to issue a bogus Bulletin.

When I returned to Dublin from an Easter weekend holiday I found Anna FitzSimons typing the day's issue in the kitchen of a flat in Exchequer Street occupied by the Local Government Department, in which were Liam Cosgrave, Kevin O'Higgins, Commissioner Cogan and others. A range served as a table and placed on it was a flat duplicating machine on which I rolled off that day's Bulletin, thus avoiding any discontinuity in the unbroken sequence. While we were in Exchequer Street, from the North Wall Hotel bogus Bulletins, subtly-worded, began to be issued and were sent out to our list of addresses. The first edition lamented the raid and related the taking away of all the equipment by the British Forces. We bought a rubber stamp bearing the words - "Official Copy" and stamped this in green ink near the title of the authentic Bulletin. The Bogus Bulletin now appeared with a similar stamp. It was soon evident that the Bogus Bulletin was being issued under difficulties as

the raiders had left behind in Molesworth Street the wooden tray which served the paper automatically into the Gestetner, making it necessary to put in each sheet by hand. In addition, the material composing the silk stencils clogged the letters of my typewriter and as they were not cleaned the Bogus Bulletin soon became illegible and easily distinguished from the sharp clear copies issued by us.

The Bogus Bulletin was completely unmasked by us in the Authentic Bulletin when Richard Foley a type expert, was called to the McGilligan house where upon closely comparing the Bogus Bulletins with copies of those issued prior to the raid, he declared that both had been typed on the same typewriter. As the British Publicity Organ, "The Weekly Summary" had given an account of their raid on our Propaganda Department, boasting that they had captured all our machinery, including my typewriter, it followed that as they had my typewriter the Bulletin typed on it could not be issued by the Dáil Éireann Propaganda Department.

The activities of the Bogus Bulletin were terminated when Michael Collins had bombs thrown into the North Wall Hotel.

Once more the entire staff was united in the home of Maureen and Tessie Power in Harold's Cross. There was a continual coming and going of I.R.A. men in this house and we felt far from easy about the safety of the new machinery which had had to be purchased and which now included a second rotary machine. From there we moved once again to a house in Longford Terrace, Rathgar, where, on the



recommendation of Erskine Childers, Eithne O'Beirne joined the staff to aid with despatch work.

Our last move prior to the Truce was to the residence in Rathgar Road of Seamus Murphy who, for his I.R.A. activities, had had to leave Galway for Dublin. In spite of his being "badly wanted" his wife made us completely welcome in their home. While there we secured the highly efficient service of Honor Murphy, who relieved me of a heavy portion of the now enormous volume of typing and copying work. To this dear girl, who brought to our well tried ranks an inspiring enthusiasm, I confidently passed over, when I went to London with the Treaty Delegation, the continuation, under a new form, of the "Irish Bulletin". With the coming of the Truce "The Irish Bulletin" on which I had the honour to work, had successfully completed its mission.

The house of Seamus Murphy had a delightful garden with a swing - and it was raspberry season. For the first time in many days we felt less harried, but our precautions were always maintained.

I recall the days of my work on the Bulletin with a deep sense of nostalgic happiness. How wonderful if the spirit which animated them could return!

(Signed) Kathleen McKenna

( 12, Via Monte,  
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