

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 867

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 867.....

Witness

James Hynes,  
24 Palmerston Road,  
Rathmines,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers,  
Mullingar, 1915 - .

Subject.

Intelligence work for I.R.B.,  
Mullingar, 1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S. 2168.....

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

W. 8.867

STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES HYNES

(formerly of Mullingar)

24, Palmerston Road, Rathmines, Dublin.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

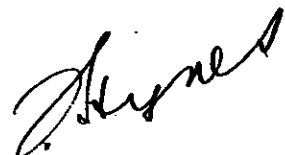
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 867

I worked as a clerk in Mullingar Post Office from the 1st November 1915, and later joined the local Volunteers, known as the Mullingar Company. I had only attended about two parades of the Volunteers when I was approached by David Burke, Jeweller, who suggested that I should go underground and do intelligence work. As a result of this I knew very little about the I.R.A. or its organisation or who was in charge in Mullingar area. I was then initiated into the I.R.B. by David Burke.

One day he showed me a cypher and asked me whether I ever saw any of these passing through the Post Office. I told him I did. He then told me - this was in 1919 - that the present local keyword for Mullingar area was "Stamboul". I made a note of the word and applied it to some messages which I saw going through, but I soon found that the keyword had been changed and replaced by another keyword - the extraordinary word "Republic". I know that Burke got these keywords from Sergeant Thomas Foskin, who, at the time, was personal clerk to the County Inspector R.I.C., Mullingar. I became conversant with the use of cyphers and when the cypher changed again I was able to break it down and discover the new keyword myself.

These, incidentally, were police cyphers for there were very few military cypher messages going through, and I never decoded any of these because I never got a key. Harry Conroy, who was Acting Divisional Intelligence Officer, met me early in 1921 and was to explain to me the operation of the Playfair system, used by the military, but we never got that far.



There were letter cyphers, but the more important cypher was composed of figures (numerals), each two numerals representing a letter of the alphabet, e.g., 39 might mean the letter "a". Burke used to get the key of this cypher from headquarters and he passed it on to me so that any messages I sent out were sent out in plain language. One of these figure cyphers was found on Terence McSwiney when he was arrested; the cypher was then changed immediately.

On three occasions I was able to break down the figure cypher myself before the key had reached me. Once I intercepted a heavily sealed letter going through to the District Inspector, Granard. I succeeded in removing the seals from the letter and found a new figure-cypher key. I managed to replace the seals and the letter went on in the ordinary way and that cypher remained in use for some considerable time afterwards. On another occasion I broke down the figure-cypher by sheer luck. The writer of the cypher made the mistake of placing commas at the end of each word. On a third occasion, when the key was changed, I observed that a batch of long letter-cypher telegrams was issued. I broke this down in the ordinary way and set it against the new figure-cypher telegram. I found that the letter-cypher telegram translated the figure-cypher and, in this way, I discovered the new key to the figure-cypher.

I generally sent the contents of decoded messages to David Burke, Harry Killeavy or Seán Grogan, or to a man named <sup>Joe</sup> Doyle, whose first name I cannot recollect. My brother, Edward, generally delivered them. I

*Joe*

*James*

sometimes left messages myself with the Misses Leonard, who ran a café in Pearse Street.

Most of these messages dealt with the movement of men and supplies. One message, in particular, was making inquiries regarding the bona fides of a man named Herlihy, who, apparently, was supplying information. One message from the District Inspector, Granard, to Dublin Castle reported that Seán MacEóin had travelled to Dublin and was staying at the Crown Hotel. Further messages showed that MacEóin was returning by an evening train. I got these messages out to, I believe, Harry Killeavy who was in charge in Mullingar area at the time. MacEóin was captured at Mullingar that night. Killeavy told me afterwards that he had arranged for the train to be stopped at a place called The Downs near Mullingar in order to get MacEóin off before it would get into Mullingar, but something went wrong and the train was not stopped.

I generally did the decoding while on night duty and was assisted in the copying of the cypher messages by Pat Dunne, P.O. Clerk, a native of Edgeworthstown, and by Miss Eileen Dawson of Bunninadden, Co. Sligo.

These operations went on all the time until the 28th May 1921, when I was arrested and interned. I was kept in internment in Rath Camp, Curragh, until 6th December 1921, after the Treaty. The police very likely had suspicions that I was meddling with their secret communications, but they had nothing definite or I would have met a worse fate than internment.

Signed: James Hynes

Date: 23 June 1953

Witness: Matthew Barry

(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

(James Hynes)

23 June 1953.