

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUIRO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,365

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,365.....

Witness

Bulmer Hobson,
Errisbeg,
Roundstone,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Member of Supreme Council of I.R.B.
One of the founders of the Irish
Volunteers, and member of the
Executive of that body, pre 1916.
Subject.

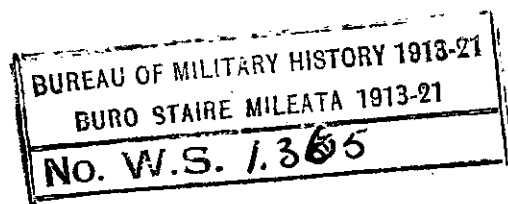
His memories of Roger Casement.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.8.....

COPY.



2 Márta, 1956.

S. S.

A Chara,

I am desired by the Director to refer to your broadcast talk on Roger Casement from Radio Éireann on Sunday 17th ultimo, concerning which he has heard and read very favourable comments.

He would be grateful if you could see your way to let him have, at your convenience, a copy of the text of the talk for inclusion in the Archives if it adds to or develops in any way what is already on record from you. He has asked me to remind you of your promise some time ago to prepare further material for the Bureau and he trusts that you will find time to do so.

He desires me to express again his sincere appreciation of the valuable assistance which you have already given to the Bureau.

Mise, le meas,

(Signed)

P.J. BRENNAN

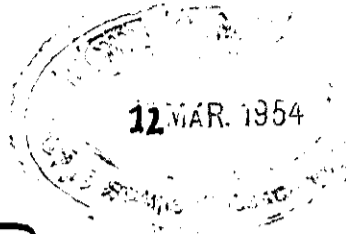
Rúnaí.

Mr. Bulmer Hobson,
Errisbeg,
Roundstone,
Co. GALWAY.

ORIGINAL

THE MILL HOUSE
WHITECHURCH ROAD
RATHFARNHAM
DUBLIN
PHONE:
95219

W. S. 1,365



ERRISBEG WEST
ROUNDSTONE
CO. GALWAY

9.3.56

Dear Colonel Brennan

In answer to your letter of 2nd Mar. I enclose the script of my broadcast on Roger Casement. I hear it is to be repeated at Easter.

I still fully intend to prepare some more material for you but always something intervenes. At present my eyes prevent my writing much. but I suppose it will get done

Somedime.

Please give my regards
to the family & Joyce
& of course to yourself

Dulma A. Brown

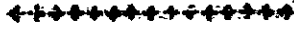
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MEMOIRS OF ROGER CASHEM.



BY

BILLY HOBSON.



*Broadcast
from Radio Queen
Feb 1956*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1813-21
BURO STAIRS MILEATA 1813-21
No. W.S. 1,865

MEMORIES OF ROGER CASEMENT.

BY

BULMER HOBSON.

BROADCAST FROM RADIO ÉIREANN

FEBRUARY, 1956.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.365

MEMORIES OF ROGER CASEMENT.

My friendship with Roger Casement began in the summer of 1904, when we were both guests in a charming old house at Cushendun in the Glens of Antrim. He had recently become famous for his exposure of the brutal treatment of the native populations in the Congo.

When various European Powers parcelled out for exploitation the vast, rich and defenceless lands of Africa the Congo fell to the lot of Belgium. One of the forms of exploitation adopted by the Belgians was simple, and while it lasted, very profitable. In many areas the defenceless native people, men, women and even quite small children were ordered to bring in, every month, a specified quota of raw rubber from the forests. The quota was so heavy that they had no time to do anything else. If they brought the full quota, they were paid with trinkets and trifles, when they ^{were} paid at all. If they did not bring in the full quota they were brutally flogged, tortured and often mutilated; persistent defaulters would have a hand or a foot cut off. If they ran away they were hunted with dogs and guns, and when caught were frequently murdered. This taught the native peoples of the Congo they could not trifle with white civilisation.

Presently news of these events began to leak out and an agitation blew up in England led by public spirited men like E.D. Movell, and they raised such a row that the Government was driven to take action. The British Government was to a degree implicated because they had helped Belgium to acquire the Congo.

Casement was a Consul in the employment of what was then the United Kingdom of Gt. Britain and Ireland and the Foreign Office asked him to investigate and report on conditions in the Congo. He had been in Africa for many years and had explored large areas then almost unknown to Europeans.

He was a very unusual explorer. He was not prospecting for minerals or oil or interested in exploiting either the land or the people. He did not want to found colonies or annex territories to enlarge the Empire. He just wanted to see those vast unknown lands and to study the ways of life of strange and unknown peoples. He did not organise expeditions with equipment that needed long trains of bearers and armed guards. Instead he went off alone often for months at a time, his only companions two bulldogs and his only weapon a walking stick. He was quite fearless and when he wandered among some remote people, who perhaps had never seen a white man, he did not need arms. His commanding appearance, his quite self-confidence and his complete and unaffected friendliness were protection enough.

When Casement was asked to report on conditions in the Congo he could have gone officially as a British Consul and the Belgian authorities would have tidied things up and shown him around and he would have seen nothing that they did not wish him to see. Instead he went in alone and unannounced and saw everything before the Belgian authorities realised what was happening. The evidence he collected of the brutal ill-treatment of the native peoples could not be questioned and the effect of his Report was shattering. On the way back to England, in Brussels

the King of the Belgians tried to bribe him to water it down. Casement's name became known everywhere and the whole rotten regime in the Congo was wiped out and that horrible form of exploitation ended for ever.

It was not of these things that Casement and I talked as we wandered about Gleann Duin in that lovely summer of 1904. He had been a devoted admirer of Parnell and had felt that Ireland was finished when Parnell died. But in 1904 a new wind was blowing. The Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association were spreading all over the country. Feiseanna were being organised in every county, a literary and dramatic revival was attracting attention and the young Sinn Féin movement was taking shape. Young Ireland had come alive again.

Casement was intensely interested. He wanted to help and he did help in many ways. He was absent from Ireland a great deal in those years returning every year or two, he literally gave away everything he had to help the national movement. He raised money to defend prisoners, to feed school children in the Gaeltacht, to finance Gaelic colleges and to keep our small and insolvent newspapers in existence. He sometimes wrote articles for the United Irishman, the Peasant and Irish Freedom. When he was away Ireland was always in his thoughts and nearly every week I used to send him all the news that could be trusted to the post.

His work took him first to Spain and then to Brazil where he became Consul General. While he was there an American named Hardenburg published a book called The Devil's Paradise alleging that conditions existed in the Putumayo on the upper reaches of the Amazon worse even than

those Casement had exposed in the Congo. Again the British Government was implicated, and more directly than before; it was a British Company that was carrying on the traffic and the Foreign Office was forced to take action.

Two Peruvians, The Arana Brothers, had come to London and floated a public company with a large capital and some well-known names among the Directors, to develop, as they said their rubber estates on the upper Amazon. The Company was floated, the capital subscribed and in due course the profits began to roll in. The English Directors and shareholders neither knew nor did they make any enquiry about their "estates" in the Putamayo. The area was very remote, 3,000 miles up the Amazon in wild unsettled country. The nearest Brazilian magistrate was 1,000 miles down the river, and besides some of her neighbours disputed the ownership of the territory with Brazil. The Companies steamers on the river were almost the only way the territory could be reached. None of the English Directors had ever been near the place. In fact the Aranas had recruited a gang of ruffians, settled them in this remote place inhabited by quiet and defenceless native populations and forced these people to collect raw rubber in the forests. They had carried out this operation with a relentless ferocity beside which the operations in the Congo were child's play. Flogging, torture, mutilation and murder were the means of coercion and so heavy was the quota of rubber demanded that the people had no time to gather food and were starving. They were in process of being wiped out, but the profits rolled into London.

The Foreign Office in London told the English Directors of the Company they must send out some of their Directors

to investigate the rumours and Casement was to accompany them and furnish his report to the Government. He of course was the real investigator. The conditions he found were incredible and many of them unprintable. His Report, published by the British Government revealed the unbelievable brutality with which the poor people of the Putumayo were treated. The torture and mutilation of defenceless people had passed beyond the compelling of them to bring in rubber, it had become a sport practised daily.

The Report shocked the world, the Company was hastily wound up, but whether conditions were really improved or whether some other gang continued the destruction of the native population I do not know.

Casement came back with health impaired and in a state of deep distress. He was a sensitive man and felt the tortures and the wrongs inflicted on a primitive and distant people as keenly as if they had been inflicted on his own people in Ireland. He was pursued by the nightmare of the things he had seen. He came straight to Dublin from the Putumayo and most of his report was written there and I was with him daily at that time, and we talked of little else. I saw his photographs of maimed and tortured people and he told me of the shockingly indecent diary kept by one Armando Normand of which he had got possession and which was part of the evidence he was sending into the Foreign Office. Normand was a ringleader of the gang.

Casement's only consolation was that now he could leave the Consular Service and devote his time to affairs in Ireland.

For several years whenever we could meet Casement and I discussed the probability of a war between Germany and England and its possible consequences in and for Ireland. To get people thinking about that possibility I wrote some articles in Irish Freedom in 1912 and he wrote a memorandum on Ireland which I took to the United States in January, 1914, and had conveyed to the German Ambassador in Washington.

When the Irish Volunteer movement started in 1913 Casement became an active member of its first governing body and it was he who raised the money to purchase the guns which we landed at Howth and Kilcool in July and August, 1914. I have a vivid memory of a morning in June, 1914, when Erskine Childers and I went to his rooms in Buswells Hotel in Molesworth St. and settled all the details for the landing at Howth. The next time I met Childers was on the pier at Howth when his yacht was being unloaded by the Irish Volunteers.

In the meantime Casement had gone to America with the intention of getting into touch with Count Bernstorff in Washington. Then the war came a year earlier than we had expected it. I never saw him again.

Casement went to Germany after the war had started just as Wolfe Tone had gone to France in 1795. He wanted to get Irish Freedom out of the quarrels of the European powers. Of the Czech leaders Masaryk came to London and Benes to Paris with exactly the same intent for their own country. They wanted to take Czecho Slovakia out of the Austrian Empire. In London Casement was denounced as a traitor and Masaryk was hailed as a great patriot. Doubtless in Vienna the position was exactly reversed.

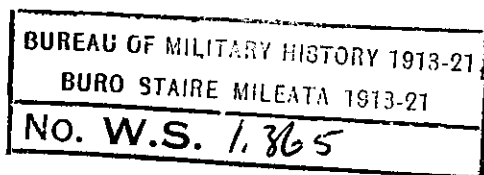
Casement got an undertaking from the German Government that if the course of the war enabled them to do so they would help to establish an independent Ireland. Masaryk got the same promise in London. Masaryk appealed to the victors, Casement to the vanquished. That was the precise difference between them. Masaryk became the first president of Czecho Slovakia, Casement was hanged in Pentonville.

And not content with hanging him, when Casement was in their hands and could no longer reply and prove the falsehood of the statements they dug up Armando Normands indecent diary from the Putumayo and pretending it was Casement's own diary circulated photographs of selected passages to the press in various parts of the world. It is doubtful if Vienna could have touched that depth of infamy.

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