

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,759

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,759.

Witness

Christopher Crothers,
8, East Lombard St.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member, I.C.A., Irish Volunteers
& I.R.A., 1918-1921.

Subject.

Intelligence work, Dublin,
1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 1,797.

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement of Christopher Crothers,

8 East Lombard Street, Dublin.

About the beginning of March 1920 a friend of my grandmother, a Miss Kate Murphy, was employed in a house numbered 15 Upper Fitzwilliam Street. Miss Murphy approached me one evening when she was visiting the house and told me that about twelve men had taken up residence in the house where she was employed. She thought that they were ex-British Officers because of the fact that one man to whom the others appeared to look up to was a man who had lost his arm in the Great War (No. 1). He was known as Captain Bennett. I asked her if she was sure they were ex-officers and she said she could not be certain. She added they were all acting as Commercial Travellers. What they were travelling for she did not know, with the exception of Bennett who, she knew, was travelling for Irish horn beads. I asked her why she came to me with this story and she told me that while these men were supposed to be commercial travellers they never went out in the daytime; that the earliest they left the house was at 5 o'clock in the evening and that they were not back when she was retiring. She added that she knew they returned in

the small hours of the morning - sometimes around 6 and 7 a.m. I told her to be very careful but to let me know if she could find out anything more about them. I reported this matter to my then Commanding Officer, Captain Robert de Coeur of the Citizen Army. I understand that Captain de Coeur gave my report to the O/C., Intelligence, Dublin Brigade. As a result of this Captain de Coeur instructed me to keep very close watch on the House, No. 15 Upper Fitzwilliam Street, and if possible to get into it when these men were absent. After this I had several conversations with Miss Murphy who gave me reports concerning the times that these men left the house and when they returned. They always left the house between 5 and 7 p.m.. They were never seen leaving together: they generally left in ones and twos and on some occasions they did not leave the house until very late at night. All these matters I reported to Captain de Coeur. Sometime between the months of May and June one morning the citizens of Dublin found posted on most of the tram and lamp standards in the city a small bill-head purporting to have been issued by the Catholic Bishops with reference to association with the

I.R.A., Sinn Fein and kindred organisations. The bill-head was approximately 6" x 4". That evening Miss Murphy came to me with three or four of the posters and informed me that the men staying in the house had hundreds of these posters and that they were out all night posting them up throughout the city. She came to me at roughly 7.30 p.m. and I asked her if I went with her could I get into the house. She said yes, but that it would be a bit risky, adding that these men had gone out but she did not know whether they would return or not. However, I went with her to No. 15 Upper Fitzwilliam Street and on top of a wardrobe in the front drawing-room there were actually thousands of the bill-heads. I also saw in this room what appeared to be small trinkets and little ornaments that seemed to have been taken in raids. In a small jug I found a piece of paper on which was written a parody from the Gilbert & Sullivan opera - 'Tit-willo'. I was satisfied on finding this piece of paper that the ornaments and trinkets that were in the house had been taken during raids in County Dublin and elsewhere. I took a number of the bill-heads that evening to Captain de Coeur and when he saw them he immediately took me to the

house of the O/C. Intelligence, Dublin Brigade. At that time this man lived at the rear of Fairview Catholic Church. It was pretty late when we got to the house and we failed to get in contact with the man for whom we were looking. I understand, however, that Captain de Coeur did make contact with him later on that evening or early in the morning. As a result of this I was asked to try if possible to get the name of every man who was in the house and if possible to report more regularly on what was occurring there. This I did. As well as that I visited the house whenever the opportunity occurred and searched for any documents or evidence that would be of help. A few weeks later I was instructed to keep away from the house but at the same time to keep in close contact with Miss Murphy. About the month of August Miss Murphy reported that the men were leaving the house in the matter of a few days. I asked her from whom did she get that information. She told me that Captain Bennett told her they were going. I then asked her how did it occur that he spoke to her and gave her this information and she told me that she had occasion to go into his room that morning and he started to jeer her about her friends and told her that he was leaving and that her friends would find it very

hard to find him. I reported this matter at once and was told to carry on. It would appear from the information I received that somebody was observed watching the house and that they in turn were watched. The men in question left the house in about three days. It was impossible to learn where they went because it was understood that they were breaking up in ones and twos. However, the night before their departure they had a royal party and for the first time it was noticed that every man was armed. As a matter of fact, two of them got so drunk that they shot up the washand-stand basin in the toilet.

