

ROINN COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 685

Witness

Mrs Bulmer Hobson,
59 Upper Leeson St.,
Dublin

Identity

Courier to Kilkenny,
Holy Week, 1916

Subject

Her recollections of Holy and Easter Weeks, 1916, including the detention of
Bulmer Hobson by the Irish Volunteer leaders, Holy Week, 1916.

File No. S 1987

Statement of Mrs. Bulmer Hobson (Claire Gregan)
59 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin WS 685

My work in the Volunteer Office.

I was working as a typist for Bulmer Hobson for about six months before the Rising. I was doing his private work and was not working for anybody else. It was he brought me in. I am not absolutely certain that I was engaged to him when I took on the job but I think I was. I had a room and typewriter to myself. I had been working previously with Henry Harrison in the Irish Volunteer Aid Organisation and used to interview people. Charles Teeling Waters, Ambrose Kelly, John Leonard, Brendan Fottrell and others were on that Committee. Henry Harrison was a very interesting person and told me many interesting stories about Parnell. They were all very nice people. No member of Parliament ever came to that office which was also in Dawson Street. Colonel Moore used to be in and out and also Colonel Cotter who had come over from England to help to organise the Volunteers. He was awfully nice. I liked both of them very much, but they did not get on with each other. Colonel Cotter often said people thought him mad for coming over from England but he did not mind them. He told me one day he had a letter from his wife in which she said, "Not only do I think you mad but your dog thinks the same". I corresponded with Colonel Cotter for a long time after he went back to at Christmas and Easter.

It was at the Volunteer Aid Office I met Bulmer. He called in one day on some business. I remember we were very busy. People were coming in paying subscriptions, Lady Fingal and De Montmorency and dozens of people like that. The Irish Volunteer Aid office closed. I think their work was finished and it was then Bulmer asked me to go over to the Republican Volunteer office at No. 2 Dawson Street. My office was in the third floor of the house at the front and Bulmer had his room at the back. On the next floor below Margaret Ryan worked. She was a sister of Pádraig Ó Riain. I remember seeing Michael O'Hanrahan there. He was an employee there but I don't know where he worked. O'Rahilly came in and out a lot. Blythe came in once I think at the time he was working as a labourer in Kerry to learn Irish. I saw Barney Mellows there but I could not say whether he was employed there. So many people came up and down that stairs that it was impossible to know who was working there and who was not. John McNeill practically never appeared. Seán McDermott, Joe Plunkett and occasionally 'Ginger' O'Connell and Seamus O'Connor were visitors there. I never saw Tom Clarke or James Connolly there, or De Valera. I seem to have a memory of O'Rahilly more than anybody. He used to go up to the floor above me and was always busy about something. He was a very sincere, nice person, but I never felt inclined to take him seriously. Desmond Fitzgerald often came in with him. Mabel Fitzgerald, his wife, was employed in No. 2 also. It must have been after Desmond's arrest. They had left Kerry and she was living in Bray. I used to visit her there as we were very friendly. Another person that I remember well was Eimar O'Duffy. He got a job as organiser and drill instructor from Bulmer, when he left his father's house. His father had forced his younger brother Kevin I think was his name who wanted to be a priest, into the British Army. To the best of my recollection he was killed at Gallipoli and Eimar, who did not get on with his father, left home and drove up to No. 2 Dawson Street in a side-car with his bag and asked Bulmer for a job.

Bulmer gladly gave him one as he had been in the O.T.C. in Trinity and was very useful to the Volunteers. He went to share digs with Seán Lester. I remember the time of the split in the Volunteers and Bulmer talking a lot about it. His idea in taking in the Redmond nominees was to keep the Volunteers together at any cost. He was afraid they would break up completely otherwise. When the split came after the outbreak of war he could not have been surprised; but I don't remember discussing that with him. As I did all Bulmer's work, I typed the reports of the meetings of the Executive but I don't remember any of the details of them.

My life in No. 2, Dawson Street was actually very quiet. I imagine they held their meetings at night. There was never any talk of a Rising to me and I never overheard any conversations that would suggest anything out of the ordinary was expected to take place. If they had discussions of that sort, they must have been at night. I knew drilling was going on and in the back of my mind I had a vague idea that it must lead to something and I thought that drilled and armed Volunteers must be a menace to England.

I vaguely remember a room where Cumann na mBan used to come in and out. That might have been the room where Mabel Fitzgerald was working. She was given a job to help her while her husband was in gaol. She had, at the same time, an allowance from her father. Min Ryan and others used to be in that room sometimes.

My visit to De Loughrey in Kilkenny.

I remember going down in Holy Week, 1916, to Kilkenny. I am not sure of the day but it might have been Wednesday. I was sent by Bulmer to Peter de Loughrey to bring a copy of the famous document. Bulmer gave me an envelope and told me the document was in it. I remember meeting Min Ryan on the stairs as I rushed out to catch the train and I told her where I was going and she said, "God speed you". I am not sure now what train I caught but judging from the fact that I went to the station from the office it was probably either late in the morning or early in the afternoon. I am practically certain I did not spend the night in Kilkenny. I certainly remember having a meal in an hotel there. I must have gone to De Loughrey's place of business and I gave him the envelope, He did not tell me what was in the letter. I conveyed to him that I knew about the document and we started to talk about the dangerous times. I never knew whether there was a letter with the document or not, but I have no recollection of typing one.

I think I met De Loughrey before that. My impression of him was that he was a reasonable, controlled type of man. If he said anything to me of importance, it has certainly not stuck in my mind. He gave me the impression that he assented to whatever was suggested. He gave me no reply either verbal or written to bring back. He said something like, "That will be all right, I will see to things" or words to that effect. I did not see any messenger or Volunteer from the country at No. 2, Dawson Street on Holy Thursday. They could have been there without my seeing them. There was great confusion in the building those days. I could not say either whether O'Rahilly was sent to the country with the document or any other message. It might have happened, in fact it is very likely. He was very friendly with Bulmer and he had a motor car.

O'Rahilly had much the same outlook in regard to the Volunteers as Bulmer had. He thought the time was not ripe for a Rising. At the same time he was easily swayed by others and my opinion is that if anyone pointed out to him it was his duty to take part in a rising he would agree. I know he said to somebody, "What would they say if I did not join them?", meaning McDermott, Plunkett, and those other members of the Committee.

I remember Bulmer telling me that he had to see McNeill about preventing the Rising and he afterwards told me that he had seen him. It might have been Thursday he went but I can't definitely state that.

It was probably on Good Friday he told me he had been out to Woodtown.

Good Friday: Bulmer's Arrest.

I have a vague recollection of excitement at the office on Good Friday morning of going through papers and destroying them, things that had to be got rid of. If John McNeill was there that morning it must have been for a short time, because I certainly did not see him. There was, of course, no ordinary office routine and I may have gone out with Bulmer for a chat or lunch we quite often had lunch together, It must have been then he told me about his visit to Woodtown House. I have no recollection of having another appointment with him before his arrest. I think, but I am not sure of this. He mentioned Martin Conlan's house as a place where a meeting was to be held and that must have been why I went to look for him there when I heard that he was arrested. I can't say when, how or where I heard he was arrested. Naturally there was a lot of talk at the time and rumours were flying. I can't say whether it was Friday or Saturday I went to Pádraig Ó Riain's house in Clonliffe Road to make inquiries about Bulmer. I had Seán Lester with me. I went to his digs to discuss it with him. They knew nothing about Bulmer at Ryan's and they were trying to think where he might be. It was then it occurred to me that I would go to Martin Conlan's house to find out if he was there. A Volunteer opened the door. I said, "I want to see Bulmer Hobson". He said he wasn't there. I said I knew he was. He repeated his denial. I assured him that if he let me see him I would give my word not to say where he was. The Volunteer again said he was not there. He looked rather frightened. I seemed to be firmly convinced Bulmer was there, although I had no proof of it. Bulmer told me afterwards he heard me and made a move to come to the door and that another Volunteer who was guarding him, pointed a gun at him. Of course, they had their orders. I went away and Bulmer saw me going down to the gate. He was in a front room at the side of the ball. I am nearly sure that was Saturday. I know I stayed in Ryan's that night. I got up fairly early on Sunday morning and I went into town. I continued to make enquiries but having to be very careful not knowing how much I could say. At that time I was in digs in Serpentine Avenue with another girl and I never discussed anything about the Volunteers with her. Afterwards she was a bit peeved when the Rising was over and the military raided the house and took away to the Castle, among other things, a box of Bulmer's letters to me. I never got them back.

Early on Sunday morning I went into Liberty Hall to see whether I could get any information there about Bulmer and also to find out the effect of the countermanding order. Naturally it was bound to make a difference. I think it was James Connolly I asked for first. I was told I could not see him that there was an important conference on. I walked up the stairs and there was a boy at a door on duty with a bayonet in his hand which he pointed at me. He said I could not see anybody as there was an important conference on. I asked could I send in a message. We must have called somebody who went in to inquire could I please see James Connolly. There was a bit of a delay about this. James Connolly came out and I passed through the door into a passage, where we talked. I had a funny feeling "Would I ever get out"? I was thinking of Bulmer's arrest. I did not feel like tears but I meant to insist as far as I could. I asked him, "Where is Bulmer Hobson?". He said he did not know where he was.

I said, "You know he has been arrested". He admitted that. I said, "Why was he arrested?". "Was he not a perfectly honest man?". We said he knew that but he might interfere with the plans for a rising. He was rather surly and I had to drag the words out of him. Connolly was rather like that. I said, "Pearse might know something about it, will you send him out to me?". He went down the corridor and he sent out Pearse. So I asked him the same question. He said much the same thing, but added that he would be all-right. They knew, he said, that he would upset their plans, thinking the time was not ripe. He was quite nice and quite polite. (It must have been after the Rising I heard that Connolly had suggested taking Bulmer to Kimmage and chloroforming him there. It was either Pearse or McDermott or both that said 'No' to that and made the suggestion of arresting him and guarding him in a house).

Then I asked Pearse could he send out McDermott. He replied that he was very busy and he did not think he knew anything more than himself. I said I wanted to see him all the same. He made no fuss about it, but sent McDermott out. I asked him the same question naturally. He told me that they had found it necessary to arrest him because he would interfere with their plans and I remember he added "and because of his influence". He did not say whom he might influence. I asked him why did they arrest him when they knew he had the interest of the country at heart as much as they had and that he was a most sincere man. It was Bulmer who was really responsible for bringing Seán McDermott to Dublin. He had known him in the nationalist movement in Belfast. It was a wonderful thing to find a nationalist at all in Belfast. After some time in Dublin relations, however, between them were strained and Bulmer often talked to me personally about McDermott. He thought him slippery, that he would seem to side with Bulmer's point of view while eventually he proved he was going in another direction. Seán always struck me as deadly sly. I also felt that a long life did not interest him much as he was not a strong man and was due for another operation. Seán was very sympathetic and assured me Bulmer was safe, and that I need not worry. We caught me affectionately by the arm and said very emphatically that of course they knew Bulmer was a man of integrity and sincerity. He would not tell me where he was but that he was quite safe. I remember he took my hand and told me not to worry that Bulmer would be released the following night. He shook hands with me and that was the last I saw of Seán McDermott. I don't remember anything more about Sunday. Of course I went back to Ryan's that evening and stayed the night there.

The following day I went in to town just shortly after the Rising had started and the G.P.O. was occupied by the Volunteers. There was not much excitement people walking around and one dead horse not a dozen lying in the street. The usual stories were circulating, that a couple of bishops had been shot in the street, etc. I know I walked around by myself and felt everything was very confused and I remember feeling very tired. In the afternoon I met Seán Lester. I think it was near Trinity College. He was looking very ill and depressed. I asked him what he was going to do. He asked me was there any word of Bulmer and he said he wished he could see and talk to him. I then asked him was he going into the Rising. He seemed uncertain but he thought he would though he really believed that Bulmer and those on the committee who thought like him were right. I said, "You must decide for yourself naturally and if I can I'll call into the G.P.O. later on". I remember feeling very badly about it, not knowing would I ever see him again.

My Visit to the G.P.O. on Easter Monday.

I know I brought a little parcel, probably containing a shirt and collar, for him to the G.P.O. in the evening. I don't now remember where I got the parcel. He must have brought it to Ryan's the day before. I would not have gone to his digs in Rathmines. I think it was late evening when I went to the G.P.O. I remember they had a horse in the main hall of the G.P.O. and a young Volunteer was feeding it with cabbages. I was let in because I said I wanted to see Pearse. I went upstairs and spoke to a couple of Volunteers on the way up. They talked about taking things in their stride when I asked some question about what was going to happen. I went into what looked like a big hall and I saw a fairly young British Officer sitting on a bench. I spoke to him for a few minutes and said "What do you think the British will do?".

"Oh", he said, "shell them out". He was good-natured and good-humoured about it and admitted that Britain was in an embarrassed position. While I was talking to him Pearse came along and I spoke to him. I made some remark such as "What is going to happen?". He said he did not know. I then asked him was Seán Lester there, saying I had some linen for him. He said "No, but we have been expecting him". I know that Seán was desperately torn about going in or staying out. On the one side he felt he ought to go in with Pearse and those others, while in his heart he felt Bulmer was right in thinking that the time was not ripe and that the Volunteers were not sufficiently organised, or trained or equipped.

I said to Pearse then, "He may be down in the Four Courts. I'll go and see". I said goodnight to Pearse who stood there very solemn in a Napoleonic attitude with his right hand on his breast.

Just then Desmond Fitzgerald came out of a room and greeted me most affectionately, calling out, "Hallo, Claire".

He was very cheerful. I asked him, "What are you doing?". What he answered was, "I am looking after the girls". He asked would I have a cup of tea. I said, "No, thank you" adding that I was looking for Seán Lester. After a few friendly words with Desmond, I took my departure.

I remember I could not get to the Four Courts although I tried. A man whom I met on the quays said, "You had better go back, it is very dangerous". I must have been very tired by that time.

Bulmer's Release: Our Visit to Woodtown.

It is strange that I cannot remember where I met Bulmer. To the best of my recollection it was on the street and he was looking for me. I have asked my son Declan to put that question to Bulmer who is expected up from Roundstone next week. We went out to Woodtown House, James McNeill's house, beyond Ballyboden. Again I can't remember how we got out whether we walked or got a cab. By that time I must have been exhausted from the worry and strain and going about the streets all day.

On Easter Tuesday Bulmer sent word to Ryan's that he was released. We went to his flat and walked out together to Woodtown Park. John McNeill's family were in Woodtown with James.

I think John was there himself too but I couldn't be certain of that. I have a vague recollection of his going to the house of some religious order but it is very vague to me and perhaps Bulmer would be able to throw light on that. If he went it must have been on a short visit. My impression is that he was with us the whole week. We stayed at Woodtown until our marriage. When B & I arrived John McNeill was not there, He was staying at the Priory at "Orloch" He returned to Woodtown Park that evening.

Arthur Griffith came out early in the week on Tuesday or Wednesday. He was worried about the whole thing and wanted to know could John do anything to stop further bloodshed. John, Arthur and Bulmer were in the Study discussing the situation. Neither James nor myself was present. Of course nothing could be done then. It often puzzled me what Arthur Griffith thought John McNeill could do in the circumstances. He did not stay very long. I don't know how he came I suppose on a bicycle.

We had a horrible feeling listening to the big guns shelling the city. John looked very badly, I remember, but he did not talk much. Bulmer too, was very upset and depressed. At the end of the week somebody came out and told us that O'Rahilly was wounded and dying and that he kept calling for water. It must have been somebody who had been in the fight that told us this. This had a bad effect on my nerves and I had a sort of collapse. James McNeill sent for Dr. Charlie McAuley who came out and gave me morphia. He came up again to see me after an hour and had to give me another injection as I was wide awake. I can't remember when Desmond Fitzgerald came out to Woodtown. It must have been Friday or Saturday. He was going somewhere up the hills to some cottage. He had called at Seán Lester's digs on his way out. I don't know for what. He was accompanied by Dr. Seamus O'Kelly's wife. I think he had a meal and she and I went up some of the way with him. Then she

went home and I don't remember any other visitor, though I think others came to see John. It must have been on the Monday or Tuesday that I went in to Bulmer's flat which was in a terrace off Marlboro Road. I went through his things to see if there was anything incriminating as we knew there would be a military search. I made a parcel of his Volunteer cap and a few other things, I think, but am not sure, that there was a revolver. I found a copy of the Constitution of the I.R.B. and pinned it inside my dress. I was going to burn it, but it occurred to me that there might not be another copy in existence. Anyway it was burned at Woodtown as Margaret did not want anything of that kind in the house which belonged to James McNeill.

Our Marriage.

Bulmer's flat was raided by the military on the following day but I think they got nothing of any importance. They took away a letter from Fr. Killian of Carlow which was addressed to me and contained the question, "Was your fiancé ever baptised?". They must have thought it a code. In fact, I had asked Fr. Killian to get the dispensation from the Pope to enable me to marry Bulmer who was a quaker. I had a lot of difficulty about my marriage. In the end I went to see the Archbishop. I did not see him, but his Secretary Fr. Curran whom I knew. I told him that if I did not get the dispensation I would get married in a Registry Office. My own Parish Priest, Fr. Ridgway of Sandymount, had put endless obstacles in my way. At last I got the dispensation and was married in the Sacristy of Rathfarnham Church on the 19th June, 1916. I afterwards heard that Fr. Ridgway was severely reprimanded by the Archbishop.

The day we were married James McNeill gave a breakfast for us and Fr. Behan who had assisted at our wedding. On the same day Bulmer went to stay with Mrs. Hutton in Dartry who was looked upon as absolutely safe as she was not mixed up in politics at all. I stayed on in Woodtown and I went with James a couple of times after dark to see Bulmer who stayed some weeks at Hutton's

John McNeill who was very worried over the executions, went in one day it might have been the Wednesday after the Rising was over to see could he do anything to stop them. He was kept there. He was sent off to England after getting a life

sentence. After some time Fr. Behan took Bulmer on his motor bike to Marino, outside Belfast, where his home was. We stayed there for a year till the amnesty. Fr. Behan though not much of a nationalist, proved a true friend. He kept Bulmer's papers for him all that time. Bulmer never went into Belfast during that year. After the amnesty Bulmer and I were going to a garden party at his old school in Lisburn and had to go through Belfast. When we arrived at the railway station he was arrested by the police and brought to the Barracks. The whole party of us, himself, his mother, his sister and myself spent the day in the Barracks. We went out to lunch and sent lunch in to him. The police got in touch with the Castle and they got a telling-off, "Release him at once". I have nothing more to tell that would be of any importance to

SIGNED Claire Hobson
MRS. BULMER HOBSON
(Claire Grogan)

DATE June 7th 1952

WITNESS P. W. Grogan

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1813-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1813-21
No. W.S. 685

1. When sending out the 'document' to Volunteers, de Loughrey in the country, what sort of a letter accompanied it?
2. Where did I meet Bulmer after he was released from arrest in Conlan's and how did we get out to Woodtown?
3. Did Eoin McNeill leave Woodtown during Easter Week to go to the house of some religious order? If so, how long was he away?
 1. None.
 2. On Easter Tuesday B.H. sent word to C.H. at Ryan's, Clonliffe Road, where he thinks C.H. stayed that week-end and C.H. went to B. H's. flat and together they walked out to Woodtown.
 3. When B.H. and C.H. arrived at Woodtown on the Tuesday John McNeill was staying at the Augustinian Priory at "Orloch" (or Orlock) near Rockbrook. He was sent for and returned to Woodtown that evening. He had spent one or possibly two nights there.