

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILC TA 1913 21

No. W.S. 179

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S.....179.....

Witness

Elizabeth and Nell Corr, c/o. Henry Corr,
House Agent, 23 Chichester St., Belfast.

Identity

Members of Cumann na mBan, Belfast 1915-1916.

Subject

- (a) Cumann na mBan, Belfast 1915-1916.
- (b) Despatches between Dublin and North,
Easter 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

File No .. S. 1139.. ..

Form BSM 2

ORIGINAL

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ELIZABETH CORR AND NELL CORR, BELFAST CUMANN NA MBAN.

The Misses Corr were two of the six Cumann na mBan who travelled from Belfast to Coalisland, Co. Tyrone, on Easter Sunday. The names of the others are Miss Nora Connolly, Miss Ina Connolly, Miss K. Murphy. *and Mrs. Elia Woods* me

1916. On Saturday evening in Coalisland these girls heard that the Rising was called off. They went to Dublin and made contact with James Connolly in Liberty Hall on Sunday morning. I have got a statement from another of the six girls, Mrs. Kathleen O'Kelly (nee Murphy). Mrs. O'Kelly has told me that she has not seen or spoken to the Misses Corr for about 30 years. Mrs. O'Kelly's story and the Misses Corr's stories are remarkably consistent allowing for the lapse of all those years and the natural human inclination to romance on events of such historical importance.

(See Mrs. Connolly O'Brien's Book "Portrait of a Rebel Father" pages 382, 301).

Miss Elizabeth Corr is devoting some of her time to journalism and I consider her account of her experiences in 1916 fairly good. She had a very clear mind.

When I first interviewed her on the matter of getting her evidence she asked me if I had read Mrs. Nora Connolly O'Brien's book "Portrait of a Rebel Father". I told her I had not read it. She then said that anything she would put in her statement for the Bureau of Military History would be more accurate than some of the matter contained in Mrs. O'Brien's book. I suggested that she could refer to the inaccuracies in her evidence. She was not inclined to indicate the inaccuracies and has not referred to the book in her statement.

Mrs. Kathleen O'Kelly informed me that she did not read Mrs. O'Brien's book.

John Trebov.
7th September, 1948.

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

STATEMENT BY ELIZABETH CORR.

I think it was in October of 1915 that my sister (Nell) and I joined Cumann na mBan and also became pupils at the Irish College.

We had never been attached to any Irish Association, but were so disgusted with the pro-British feeling in Belfast that we felt we must do something about it. My brother (Harry) had become a Volunteer some time previously, and he proposed us for Cumann na mBan.

Our first meeting was in a room of the Ard Scoil in College Sq. North, and our names were taken by Miss Connolly (a sister of Joseph Connolly), and we did not know any of the members. Afterwards the meetings were held in one of the old military huts at Willowbank, and it was here that we met Nora Connolly for the first time. I think she had been away on a mission - probably to the States. She was President (or Captain) I imagine. Other prominent members were Miss Una Ryan (afterwards Mrs. Denis McCullough), Miss Kathleen Phelan (of Dublin) and Miss Roisin Walsh - all three taught in the Training College.

Other members I got to know were Kathleen Murphy, Teresa McDevitt, Mary Russell, Kitty Stewart, Brigid and Lena MacCamphill, Una McCrudden, Miss Serridge and Miss Kerr (teachers) Mrs. Danny McDevitt, Annie Ward, Winnie Carney, May Wisely (an old school friend) and Siobel Brennan and Ellis Allen. There were, I think, about thirty members who attended regularly. We were taught first aid and military drill. Rory Haskin trained us in rifle shooting at a stationery target. We were just about to practise at a moving target and to use a revolver when Easter Week came. (I won a second prize for rifle shooting just before Christmas).

During these months between our joining and Easter Week,

BC.

in addition to our drilling and first aid, we studied Gaelic, ran ceilidhe and helped with the "Defence of Ireland" fund, even collecting outside the churches on Sundays. We were followed around by police and G-men who, strangely enough, did not interfere with any of our activities. One girl (Nora Kelly) on her first visit to the huts on a very dark night asked the policeman (who evidently was keeping an eye on us) where Cumann na mBan met, and he escorted her to the hut, most politely.

It was about a month before Easter Week that Nora Connolly announced that at the next meeting she would ask the members to decide whether or not they would actually fight if it became necessary. After the meeting Nell and I told Nora that we did not need to wait - we were prepared to fight, and that was our reason for joining Cumann na mBan. However, at the next meeting Nora said that she had been advised not to press the matter. The next announcement was that the Volunteers were to mobilise in Tyrone on Easter Sunday, and Nora Connolly chose her sister, Ina, Kathleen Murphy, Eilis Allen, my sister Nell and me to accompany the first contingent of Volunteers (with Nora as our Captain) under the command of Archie Heron. We were to leave Belfast for Coalisland on Easter Saturday afternoon. A second Company would leave on Saturday night, and on Sunday morning a third contingent would leave, and with this third lot a second group of Cumann na mBan members were to travel, including Bridie O'Farrell and Alice and Kitty Ward (sisters of Annie Ward) who were not officially in Cumann na mBan, but had been well trained in first aid.

Nora Connolly and the five of us met the Volunteers at the Gt. Northern Station on Saturday afternoon - about 2.30, I think and the second contingent reached Dungannon at midnight of Saturday. So far as I know the third company did not travel on Sunday morning. I know Bridie O'Farrell and the two Wards were at the station, but were told everything was off.

B.C.

where we had some difficulty in being admitted as the sentry (armed) at the entrance did not know Nora. He called two others of the Citizen Army and they escorted Nora to her father's room. She roused him from sleep to hear her news and then called us to come in. Connolly was furious and cursed "that damned man MacNeill" whom he blamed for the whole thing. He said the other leaders must be told at once and he sent us out in twos, each pair with a Citizen Army man as guide, to get in touch with them. Ellis Allen and I were to see Thomas McDonagh, which we did after visiting three houses, in each of which our guide had to convince the householder that we were "all right" before any information was vouchsafed. Finally we came to a big tenement house where Thomas MacDonagh was roused from sleep to interview us. He was seriously perturbed and blamed MacNeill for countermanding the mobilisation orders on his men. He said an abortive Rising would be tragic. He told us that it had been reported to Headquarters in Dublin that not a man in the north would move. We said this was not true, pointing out that we had travelled with one Company from Belfast, a second one had arrived in Dungannon before we left it, and that a third was due to leave Belfast on Sunday morning. Nora Connolly and my sister Nell interviewed Sean MacDermott.

When we returned to Liberty Hall it was filled with people, including Madame Markievicz (and her dog) and several members of Dublin Cumann na mBan. We helped to get breakfast for the visitors (and ourselves), and I was fascinated in watching Madame eating ham with jam spread on it.

We went to 10 o'Clock Mass in the Pro-Cathedral. On returning to Liberty Hall we were told we were at liberty for the rest of the day, but to report back in the evening.

About five or six that evening we watched the Citizen Army draw up outside Liberty Hall. James Connolly was in uniform (for the first time, I think), as was Madame Markievicz.

B. C.

Liberty Hall that evening was a hive of industry. Messengers coming and going; hammering going on; talking, whistling, singing. There was one song I heard caught my ear. It was new to me, but Nora told me it had been written some years previously, but had just caught on, and everybody was singing it. It was "A soldier's song".

Finally we were sent off to Madame Markievicz's house where we were to sleep, and were told to report at Liberty Hall next morning at 8 o'clock. We were dead tired - practically sleeping on our feet, - and it seemed to me only an hour or so had elapsed when Nora shook me and said to get up at once as we were late. We swallowed a hasty breakfast standing at the kitchen table, and hurried out. There wasn't a tram in sight, so we had to walk. On the way we noticed on the hoardings the notice of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company billed to open that night in the Gaiety. (Needless to say, there was no performance that night or any other).

Liberty Hall was humming when we arrived. Joseph Plunkett was there, looking very ill with his throat bandaged, and his fiancée (Grace Gifford); Madame (in great spirits); members of the Dublin and Glasgow Cumann na mBan, Mrs. Connolly and her son, Roddy. Thomas McDonagh came in, looking very gay and debonair in his spick-and-span uniform, and very different from the very much perturbed man we had met on Sunday morning. James Connolly came from another part of the building, and said smilingly, "Well, girls, we start operations at noon today. This is the Proclamation of the Republic". It was still wet from the press, and we all read it with wildly beating hearts. "You girls will get back north at once and get in touch with the men there. Here is a dispatch which you will take with you" We wanted to take also a copy of the Proclamation, but he said it would not be wise to do so, as we might be stopped and searched, in which case we could destroy the dispatch, but it

B. C.

would be impossible to destroy the Proclamation, and it might give away their plans and spoil everything.

The dispatch was tucked behind the ribbon in Nell's hat, and we were sent off with the feeling that everything was going to be all right. Everyone was in the highest spirits, and Thomas MacDonagh would not say "good-bye" as he said we would all meet again after the fighting was over.

Rushing down the corridor, Nora stopped and opened a door to a room where Padraic Pearse was sitting writing. She told him we were off to the north and he said "Good-bye, girls, God bless you; don't desert the boys".

Then Sean MacEntee (in uniform) met us in the corridor, but we had not time to do more than smile and wave to him. Nora told us he had just got in from Meath with his men.

We caught, I think, the nine o'clock train, and noticed that there were many English soldiers and officers going off on leave, so the Castle hadn't a suspicion of what was in the wind. At the first stop, a girl who had been sitting near us walked round to the open carriage window, and said in a low voice to (I think) Kethleen Murphy and me "I wish you every success in your enterprise".

On the last stage of our journey (which was a long and wearying one) a Canadian soldier in the carriage looked at us curiously, and said he supposed we were going on a camping holiday. We admitted that we were. We were feeling hilarious in spite of our fatigue.

On reaching Coalisland we found that the demobilisation had been carried out so swiftly that there was no one in authority to whom we could deliver the dispatch. Nora sent Eilis Allen off to Belfast to deliver it to Denis McCullough, and Ina she sent off with a message for Dr. McCartan (who was, I think, County

B. C.

Commander). As the police in Coalisland had been inquiring at our billet about us, it was thought advisable to move us, so that night, in pitch darkness and pouring rain, a couple of the local Volunteers took us to a new billet somewhere in the country. Nell and I were in the house of Paddy Mor O'Neill. His household consisted of his wife, a grown up son who was a Volunteer, a daughter in her teens, and a small boy. Nora and Kathleen stayed with people called Corr (I remember that because their name was the same as mine).

It was very boring there, as we were not allowed to go beyond the end of the road, in case someone not in sympathy would see us. We heard all kinds of rumours - that Dublin had been burnt out; that the West was up; that everything was over, and all sorts of reports which were mostly false. One day Seamus Dempsey, a Belfast Volunteer, who had remained in Tyrone when the others returned to Belfast, came to us and said that the Tyrone men were going to fight and we got ready, but nothing came of it.

On Thursday evening Jim Murphy (Kathleen's brother) arrived and said he had orders from Headquarters that we were to return to Belfast, that there would be no fighting in the North. Nora refused to go to Belfast, and said she would find Ina (from whom there had been no word) and they would go to Dublin. Nora told us afterwards that Ina had been staying with Dr. McCartan's sister, who had been very rude to her, and she never could find out where Dr. McCartan was - probably he was "on the run". The two Connollys eventually reached Dublin, but that is not my story.

B.C.

On Friday morning Kathleen and her brother, Nell and I went on an outside car to Verner's Bridge station (leaving all our kit behind in our billets) and there got a train for Belfast. I was employed by the Belfast Corporation as a typist in the Central Public Library, and I was dismissed because I was a Sinn Feiner.

Signed: Elizabeth Corr

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Date: 14th Oct., 1948.

Witnessed: John Mc Coy.

Date: 14th Oct 1948

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I have been personally associated with my sister Elizabeth Corr, in all the events she describes in her evidence and I certify the same is true. It covers all I could say on the matter.

Signed: Nell Corr

Date: 15th Oct 1948

Witnessed: John Mc Coy.

Date: 15th Oct 1948