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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,193

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,193.....

Witness

Mrs. Bridget Doherty,
Cloone,
Carrick-on-Shannon,
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

President South Leitrim Cumann na mBan,
1919 - .

Subject.

Cumann na mBan, South Leitrim,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2486.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1193

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STATEMENT BY MRS. BRIDGET DOHERTY,

Cloone, Co. Leitrim.

My maiden name was Bridget Sweeney and I was born and lived at Drumnamore. About August, 1918, Paul Galligan from Cavan came to Cloone to assist in the organising and training of the Volunteers. He started a branch of Cumann na mBan in Cloone then which I joined. Our first President was Anne Mitchell, now Mrs. Keegan. Branches were soon formed in other areas then. There was no particular military organisation or suchlike. Anne Mitchell was President of Cloone Branch, Kate Healy was Secretary and I was Treasurer. We had about twenty members, amongst whom were Kate Keegan, Alice Keegan, Kate Lyons, Kathleen Reilly, Kate Donnelly, Rosanna Donnelly, Elizabeth Doyle, Mary Anne Donoghue, Kate Doherty, Margaret Sweeney, Kate McGovern, Margaret Reilly, Bridget Lyons and Kate O'Neill. There were some others also whom I cannot remember now. We paid one shilling on joining and a subscription of three pence per month towards a fund which was spent on providing materials for the making of flags and the purchase of wreaths and so forth and, of course, the provision of first-aid dressings.

We were well established prior to the general election in 1918, and for this we made and distributed a large amount of flags and emblems. On polling day we took over a vacant house in the village and in this we catered for the Volunteers who were on duty that day. That day we also personated extensively. We dressed

in different clothes and voted in the name of absentee voters. We bought the food stuffs required for this day out of our little accumulated fund. This consisted mainly of cooked ham and bread and tea. We packed food parcels for the Volunteers who were going out of the area on duty - such as the Volunteers who were escorting the ballot boxes.

Branches of the organisation had now been organised and were active throughout most of the South Leitrim Brigade area, such as Aghavas - President Mary Anne Cooney, later succeeded by Bridget Mary Kilkenny, Cloone, which was my branch, Cornagee - President Mary Joseph Creegan, Barnacool - President Mary Kate Kevill, Drumreilly - President Molly Dorrigan, Mohill - President Mary Downes, Edslin - President Mrs. Denny, Drumsna - President Mrs. Anne McWeeny, Gowel - President Miss Annie Guckin, Annaduff - President Annie Ellis, Carrick-on-Shannon - President Josephine McGrath, Ballinamore - President Mary Sweeney (a sister of Bernard Sweeney who was wounded and escaped capture at Gortagh), Aughnasheelin - President Mary Kate Moran. There was also a branch in Corlahen and, I think, Mrs. McManus was President there. Drumshambo had as its President Miss McManus and Gorra had Miss Murphy.

There may have been some other branches also which I do not remember now. There were many changes in the officers of the branches as time went on owing to marriages and other reasons. About the end of 1919 all the branches were organised into a brigade. I was appointed Brigade President and Kate Healy was appointed Secretary. We had no Treasurer as we did

not handle any funds. Branches handled their own funds.

Branches had weekly meetings or parades at which they were instructed in drill movements. This instruction was usually imparted in some field the same as the Volunteers, and members of the Volunteers acted as instructors. Meetings of the brigade usually were held at Gorya and were attended by two delegates from each branch in the area. At the brigade meetings advanced drill instruction was also given and the delegates were expected to instruct their own branches in what they had learned. All branches, as far as possible, were given instruction in first-aid measures. Dr. Muldoon took charge of this branch of instruction in the Cloone area. Each branch was supplied with books on first-aid and were required to make and maintain a supply of first-aid dressings.

To augment our funds we ran dances and held collections at the chapel gates on Sundays after Mass. Later on when things got very dangerous we held dances at the back of the hills, well away from the roads, where the enemy could not surprise us. Outposts were established to watch for any approach of the enemy. There was always a big crowd at such dances and on many occasions the column were entertained in this way. When they could not come to the dance we took the dance to them. We danced on the grass.

The enemy now began raiding extensively and one of the first of our members to gain their attention was Kate Healy. They arrested her and took her with them. I think they discovered some documents or records of the organisation in her house. She was

interned until after the Truce but was released in August, 1921.

A few days after Kate Healy's arrest they raided my house. They arrived at 5 o'clock in the evening. I was put into a room in my house where I was undressed almost naked by two female searchers. I am positive that one of the searchers was a man dressed up as a woman. During the search of our house they stole a watch belonging to my brother and also some money. I was just after delivering two dispatches to a man in the bog for Seán Mitchell, the Brigade O/C (I.R.A.), who was with the column. Had they arrived some time earlier they would have got them on me. As it was they found nothing and I was not arrested. There was an amount of papers and other stuff hidden out at the back of the house.

Seán Connolly came to South Leitrim in February, 1921. He came to our house on his arrival with a man who is now my husband. We gave him a meal and a fresh pair of socks. He was very tired, having walked all the way from North Roscommon to here. He arrived back a few nights afterwards with Mitchell. This was before the Sheemore ambush. I gave him a supply of bandages and first-aid material which I had in the house. I always kept a supply of this material concealed in the house.

Some material was being moved from Longford to our area for the Volunteers. This came by pony and trap from Longford. I met the pony and trap at Greagh Crossroads. Kate Keegan and another girl had driven it to there. My sister Maggie was with me

and we took over the vehicle there and drove it to my house where Connolly and the brigade officers were holding a meeting, and they took it over from me. The trap contained bombs, small land mines and some rifles.

We had prepared material and were ready to establish a first-aid station at Gorrugh where the Volunteers planned to carry out an ambush. Connolly's and the other officers' deaths at Seltan Hill put paid to this attempt. We got plenty of work to do in the way of carrying dispatches and were often engaged in this task both night and day and in keeping contact with the column which, when not engaged in activities against the enemy, were generally located in the mountain regions such as Straw, Longford. Drumreilly and Kinkeen were also hide-outs for the column. By reason of our sex we could get through very often with dispatches where men would not have a hope. The enemy did not always have lady searchers with them and then only in very limited numbers.

One night I was going to Captain Brady's with a dispatch for him, and when I got there I found the Tans raiding his house. They did not interfere with me. Brady escaped from the house that night. The Tans wrecked his house. When the Tans departed Brady came back through the meadows dressed only in his shirt.

When Paddy Morrissey from the G.H.Q. staff came to the area after the death of Connolly, he visited all our branches and tested them for efficiency in drill and first-aid. Many of the column men and men on the run developed "scabies" - an irritating skin disease - and worse still, they spread it amongst

the inhabitants of the houses they slept in and we had to procure the necessary ointments and treat them for this. In addition to this, we kept up a supply of food and clothing, parcels and cigarettes to the members of the I.R.A. from South Leitrim who were in jail or were interned. The parcels were sent by post and the contents were purchased from our funds. So in all we had quite a busy time.

During the boycott of the R.I.C. in 1919 the various branches of our organisation took an active part in enforcing the boycott. We kept a watch on the different shops that supplied them and where supplies were given voluntarily we reported the matter to Volunteer headquarters in the area. None of our members would associate with the R.I.C. and we discouraged all girls, as far as we could, from doing so.

One of the most important duties performed by the Cumann na mBan in the area was that of scouting for the Volunteers during road blocking operations and the preparation of ambush sites. When mines were being placed in the road we scouted and kept picquets well out from the site to protect our boys from surprise by the enemy. We kept watch on the enemy posts for indications of movements by them and warned the Volunteers of intended enemy movements. This again was a work that could only be performed by girls, as men would be quickly picked up. We also kept watch on where mines and dumps were located.

Kate Healy was the only member of our organisation that was arrested. We had about four hundred members in our organisation covering the brigade area. The

girls were very keen on their work and got a great thrill out of running the risks involved, and many of them could give the men a headline in this respect. We often had to carry revolvers and ammunition for the boys and we could get through round-ups and hold-ups where men could not. During the Truce we perfected our organisation and supply of materials, and had it broken down we would have been in a better position to resume our activities.

Signed: Mrs Bridget Doherty
(Mrs. Bridget Doherty)

Date: June 15th 1953

Witness:

Matthew Barry Comd't.
(Investigator)

(Matthew Barry)
Comd't.

