

W. S. 1,267  
**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1267

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,267

Witness

Mrs. Margaret Brady (nee Sweeney),  
High Street,  
Ballinamore,  
Co. Leitrim.

Identity.

Member of Cumann na mBan,  
Cloone, Co. Leitrim, 1918-1921.

Subject.

Cloone Branch Cumann na mBan  
Co. Leitrim, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2573.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MRS. M. BRADY,  
High Street, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

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I was born and lived at Drumnamore, Co. Leitrim. My maiden name was Margaret Sweeney before I became Mrs. Brady. Some time about August, 1918, Paul Galligan from Cavan, who had taken part in the 1916 Rebellion in Wexford, came to the area and organised a branch of Cumann na mBan in Cloone. I joined this Branch, as also did my sister, Bridget, who is now Mrs. Doherty of Cloone. Mrs. Keegan, who was then unmarried and whose maiden name was Anne Mitchell, was our first President. The Cumann na mBan were not organised on a military basis like the Volunteers but just had branches in the different areas. There was no internal organisation inside the branch except for the appointment of President, Secretary, Treasurer and suchlike. Kate Healy was Secretary, and my sister was Treasurer.

We had about twenty members in our Branch, including Kate and Alice Keegan, Bridget Lyons, Kate O'Neill, Kate Lyons, Mary Anne Donoghue, Margaret Reilly, Kathleen Reidy, Kate McGovern, Margaret Sweeney, Kate Donnelly, Kate Doherty, Elizabeth Doyle and Rosanna Donnelly. There were others also whom I have forgotten at the moment.

The organisation spread rapidly throughout South Leitrim, and soon there were branches organised in such places as Aghvas, Coonageela, Barnacooles, Drumreilly, Mohill, Eslin, Drumsna, Gowel, Annaduff, Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore, Aghnasheelin, Corlahen, Drumshambo, Gorravagh and other places.

We paid a subscription of one shilling on joining and thereafter, I think, threepence per week. This money went towards a fund for the purchase of materials to make first-aid dressings, to buy wreaths to place on the graves of Volunteers or any of our own members who died or were killed. We also bought material to make flags and food provisions for Volunteers when they would be on some special duty.

Our Branch had been organised for some time prior to the 1918 general election, and we made a large amount of emblems and flags and such things for this campaign. On the day of the voting we took over a vacant house in the town of Cloone where we cooked and supplied meals to the Volunteers on duty that day. Meals consisted generally of cooked ham and tea. We also provided packed meals for some of the Volunteers, who had to go on duty to outlying voting stations, to take with them, and for the Volunteers who went as guards when the ballot boxes were taken to Carrick-on-Shannon. We enjoyed ourselves very much that day, personating voters. We voted for dead and absentee voters and also for people whom we knew would be hostile to Sinn Féin.

There were three funerals of Volunteers locally, and the Cumann na mBan members attended them and provided wreaths for the graves. We had parades or meetings of our Branch on the first and third Sundays of each month. We did drill movements at the instruction of some of the Volunteers, and Dr. Muldoon gave us lectures on first-aid work.

A boycott of the R.I.C. was now started by the Volunteers in an effort to compel the men of this force

to resign, and the Cumann na mBan members were active in having it enforced. We visited shops which supplied the R.I.C. with provisions, and instructed the shopkeepers that they were not to supply the R.I.C. with any goods. We kept a watch on such shops to see that this instruction was carried out. Generally, our instructions to the shopkeepers were carried out by them, and the R.I.C. were compelled to commandeer the goods they required, which, of course, at this time they paid for. Later on, when the Tans came, they often took the goods without payment. We also persuaded the people not to associate with them and, in this way, made outcasts of them in society. Only a few of the police, however, resigned as a result of all this.

A boycott of Belfast and Northern Ireland goods was also instituted at this time as a retaliation for the pogrom carried out by the Unionists and Orangemen in the North against the Catholic residents there. At this time Belfast supplied most of the goods coming to ~~Dublin~~ <sup>LETRIM</sup> County. The Volunteers raided trains, shops, vans and so forth, and seized and destroyed all goods supplied by certain "black-listed" Northern firms. As well as going to the various shops and warning the owners not to stock Belfast goods supplied by the black-listed firms, the girls of Cumann na mBan did a big amount of intelligence work in this respect and were able to keep watch on all goods coming into the area.

By this time, a Brigade organisation had been started for the Cumann na mBan in South Leitrim, and a Brigade Headquarters was established. My sister was appointed Brigade President, and Kate Healy was appointed Brigade Secretary. No Treasurer was appointed as the

Brigade did not handle any funds, each Branch retaining and handling its own funds.

Meetings of the Brigade were usually held at Gorva at which the Brigade President and Secretary attended as well as one or two delegates from each Branch of the Cumann in the Brigade area. At these meetings, advanced drill instructions were given and the delegates' duty was to impart what they had learned to their members. All Branches were given instruction in first-aid, and the provision of first-aid dressings, and were given manuals on first-aid. Each Branch was required to provide and maintain a supply of first-aid dressings at all times. To augment our small funds, we organised and ran dances. We assisted in collecting for Volunteer funds also and for the White Cross Society.

When the Column was started, we provided clean shirts for the men and knitted socks for them. We also organised billets for the Column and cooked meals for them. We held dances to entertain the Column. These were usually held in a field well away from the roads, and some of our members kept watch while the dance was in progress, to prevent surprise by the enemy forces. There was always a big crowd at those dances, and our attempts were much appreciated by the Brigade Staff and the men of the Column.

The enemy at this time were very active, raiding houses and staging hold-ups every day. One of the first of our members to come under their attention was Kate Healy. She was arrested and interned until after the Truce, being released in August, 1921. They found some documents or records of the organisation in her house.

A few days later, the enemy raided our house and made a thorough search of the place. They had with them two female searchers, one of whom I believe was a man dressed as a woman. During the search of our house, they stole some articles, including a watch belonging to my brother. They found nothing in the house that could be used against us, although if they had been a little earlier, there would have been despatches there, but my sister had just delivered them to the Brigade O/C, Seán Mitchell. There was also an amount of documents and other stuff concealed in a place at the back of the house, but they failed to find them.

On another occasion in 1920, members of the Brigade Staff were in our house and were counting money that had been collected to buy arms and ammunition. I was left outside the house to do scout. I saw the military and police coming and gave the alarm. I concealed the money in my clothes and returned to the front door. They inquired for my brother and then proceeded to search the house but, by this time, the boys had made good their escape by the back window. Bernard Sweeney of Ballinamore was one of the men in the house.

Seán Connolly came to South Leitrim in February, 1921. He came to our house on his arrival and had a meal there. My brother-in-law, Doherty from Cloone, was with him. He arrived back a few nights afterwards along with Seán Mitchell, the Brigade O/C. This was before the ambush at Sheemore. They collected a supply of bandages and first-aid material which we had concealed in the house.

Some material for the boys was being moved from Longford to our area, and it came in a pony and trap.

Kate Keegan and another girl had driven the pony and trap to Greagh crossroads. My sister, Bridget, and I met it there and took it over. We brought it to our house where Connolly and the Brigade officers took charge of it. The trap had rifles, land mines and bombs in it.

In the same month - February, 1920 - a Brigade Council meeting was held in our house at which Seán Connolly was presiding, and again I was on scout duty, protecting the meeting. Seán Mitchell, Joe Byrne, S. Wryne, J.J. McGarry were amongst the officers who were at this meeting.

Some of the men in the Column were suffering from itch - generally referred to as Republican itch, but which was really scabies. I went to Dr. Muldoon on several occasions for ointment which I applied and bandaged their hands for them. I also looked after the people in the houses in which they had slept. A few of the people had become infected also from using the same bedclothes. On one occasion I accompanied J.J. McGarry, the Battalion O/C, to the place where the Vice Brigade O/C, Seán Wryne, lived with a consignment of revolvers and ammunition. I acted as scout en route.

In November, 1920, I went with a despatch to Michael Brady, ~~Company Officer~~. While in his house that night, the military arrived and fired shots into the house first, and then banged on the door to be opened. I opened the door and they searched the house. The two Brady boys, Michael and Owen, had got out by the back door and escaped. A second raid took place in February, 1921. I was in the house. The military and police searched the house and threatened to arrest me if

I did not tell where the two boys were. I refused to tell. The boys' mother was also threatened. Everything that they could possibly break, they did so. There was a wedding in a house nearby where I knew some of the boys of the Column would be, as they had been invited. I left Brady's when the military had just gone, and went across fields in the darkness. The military during this time were firing shots and throwing up Verey lights. I went with all speed across the field and got to the house in time to warn them, and they all made good their escape.

On the eve of the ambush at Gortvagh we provided food and shelter for a number of the Brigade and Column officers, including Seán Connolly. We had prepared material and were ready to establish a first-aid station at Gortvagh where the Column had planned to carry out an ambush, but the death of Connolly and his comrades put an end to that project. While they were in our house, I was on scout or picket duty all night and did not go to bed. They left at daybreak for Gortvagh.

We got plenty of duty to do carrying despatches and were often engaged on this task both night and day, and in keeping communication with the Column. The Column usually hid out in the mountain region, or foothills, when not engaged in activities against the English forces. Straw, Longford, Drumreilly and Kinkeen were favourite places for the Column to billet in. By reason that we were girls, we could often get through the cordons while the enemy were carrying out round-ups, where a man or boy could not, and it was easier for us to fool them. In this way, we were often able to get through to the Column and the Volunteers, and tell them the enemy were coming, so that they could hide and avoid being caught by surprise.



It was very seldom that the enemy had lady searchers with them, and then only in very limited numbers.

When the Volunteers were preparing ambush positions, such as, placing mines in the road or blocking roads by felling trees across or cutting trenches through the road surface, the girls of the Cumann na mBan performed the duties of scouting the roads well in advance of the points at which the Volunteers had protection parties. In this way, we were able to give warning of the approach of enemy forces. In one or two instances where the girls were not on such duty, the Volunteers were surprised at their work. We kept watch on the enemy posts and observed their movements. When there was unusual activity, it was apparent that a raid or round-up was being contemplated, and we sent out warnings, as far as possible, to the Volunteers to be on the alert.

Although there were approximately four hundred girls in the organisation in South Leitrim and many of their houses were searched by the enemy, the only one that they ever arrested was Kate Healy. The girls were very keen on their work and got a good deal of enjoyment in eluding and foiling the enemy forces. Often they took revolvers and other arms from Volunteers during an encirclement round-up by the enemy and took them through the cordons to safety. Likewise, they regularly carried despatches through the enemy lines. On one occasion in 1921, I conveyed a dump of arms and ammunition from Shranadanagh to Crimlin, Ballinamore, without mishap. This would have been a very risky undertaking for men to perform, but the chances of a girl getting through would be at least one hundred to one, as odds. When Paddy Morrissey came down to South Leitrim after Connolly's

death, I carried revolvers and ammunition for him from Fenagh to my home.

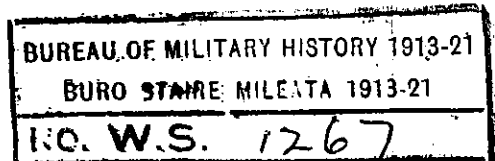
When Paddy Morrissey came to the area as a G.H.Q. organiser, he inspected all the Branches of Cumann na mBan in the area and expressed his satisfaction with our organisation. The Brigade Staff were holding a meeting in our house in 1921. I was again on scout duty and I was able to give the Staff early warning of the approach of a cycling party of R.I.C. and Black and Tans. They were thus able to get out of the house by the back. My sister, Bridget, took possession of all the documents belonging to the officers and hid them. We regularly did scout duty for the Column when they were moving from one area to another.

When the Truce came, we intensified our work in the preparation of first-aid material and also regarding our funds, and had the war started again, we would have been in a very good position to re-start our activities.

SIGNED: Margaret Sweeney Brady  
(Margaret Sweeney Brady)

DATE: 5 October 1955

5 October 1955.



WITNESS Matthew Barry  
(Matthew Barry) Comd't.