

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. **W.S.** 1,573

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1573.....

Witness

Mrs. Brigid Ryan
(née Brophy),
63 Tullow Street,
Carlow.

Identity.

1st Lieutenant, Carlow Town Branch, Cumann na mBan,
1918-1921.

O/C, Carlow Brigade, Cumann na mBan, 1921-1923.

Subject.

Activities of Cumann na mBan,
Co. Carlow, 1917-September, 1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2890.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MRS. BRIGID RYAN (Née BROPHY)

63 Tullow Street, Carlow.

I was born in Ardattin, Tullow, Co. Carlow. Both my parents were strong supporters of Parnell. Ancestors on both sides of the family fought in the Insurrection of 1798. Three of my great-grand-uncles were murdered by the Yeomen, with some 360 others in Carlow military barrack, and were buried in the Croppies' Hole in Graiguecullen. It has been handed down in my family from generation to generation that, shortly after the murder of the insurgent prisoners, a woman walked all the way from Tullow and planted three elm saplings on the Croppies' Hole, one for each of her three sons. They were still growing there, and are now huge trees. It is believed that the woman was Mrs. Maher, the mother of my three great grand-uncles.

Soon after leaving school, I came to Carlow, and started a café. In 1917 I attended a meeting at which the Carlow town branch of Cumann na mBan was formed. About eight or ten girls joined at the initial meeting. Miss Brigid Laffan was elected Captain. The branch continued to increase in strength, and subsequently I was appointed 1st Lieutenant, and Miss McKenna, now Mrs. E. Quigley, 2nd Lieutenant. Mrs. Annie Murphy was Adjutant, and Mrs. Geoghegan, Quartermaster. At the Truce, we had 110 member in the branch.

Parades were held twice a week, and the training included foot drills, lectures on first-aid, etc.

I assisted at the organising of branches in several parts of the county, and eventually there was a branch of Cumann na mBan in almost every parish in the county.

The Cumann na mBan was organised territorially, on the same basis as the Volunteers. We had a branch, or at least a section, in every area in which there was a company of the Volunteers. Our district area corresponded to the Volunteer battalion area, and similarly our brigade area was the same as the Volunteer brigade area. There was close co-operation between the officers of both organisations. Miss Brigid Laffan was elected Brigade O/C as well as being Captain of the Carlow town branch.

Our activities included carrying despatches, arms and ammunition, intelligence work, cooking and supplying food for I.R.A. men who were on the run, and also for members of ambush parties. We also collected money for the prisoners dependents' fund, collected for the Dáil Loan, visited the I.R.A. prisoners and supplied them with such comforts as warm clothing, cigarettes, tobacco, papers, etc.

Soon after the formation of the branch, my home was used as a meeting place for the brigade and battalion officers of the I.R.A., with the result that it came under enemy surveillance. As a matter of fact, my home was the first in Carlow town area to be raided by enemy forces. I remember well, it took place on a Sunday night, and naturally it created a great deal of excitement. It was carried out by R.I.C. and military, and, although at the time I did not even dream of the place being raided, - it came as a complete surprise - I was able to conceal a .22 revolver which was in the house at the time.

When the Dáil Loan was floated, I was appointed to take charge of the collection of it in the Carlow town branch area of Cumann na mBan.

I also carried arms and ammunition to Volunteers

who were to take part in planned ambushes and barrack attacks. I might mention here that, after the attack on the R.I.C. barrack at Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow; some of the arms used in the attack were brought to me, and I concealed them.

A few other girls and I were threatened by R.I.C. and British military that we would be shot for distributing propaganda pamphlets. Shortly after that, I was told by the R.I.C. that my house would be blown up and that I would be blown up with it.

Members of Cumann na mBan did quite a lot of intelligence work, and several times they got information of intended raids by enemy forces. On one particular occasion, I got word of the intended arrest of the Vice Brigade O/C and another officer. I gave this information to the officers concerned, and they succeeded in evading arrest.

Several times during 1921, I got ammunition from British military, and handed it over to the brigade active service unit. I also brought arms and ammunition to Volunteers who were going to take part in the attempted ambushes at the "Long Mile" and at the Royal Oak, and later took the arms and concealed them.

During the latter part of 1920 and until the Truce, my home was constantly raided. Most of the raids took place during the night, but still it was used for the manufacture of buckshot and as a receiving centre for despatches.

One night early in 1921, ^{Miss}Miss Bowen, an organiser from G.H.Q., was staying with me. We had just retired when the house was raided by police and military. They were accompanied by lady searchers, and, although I had

sedition documents, they failed to get them.

During this period, I guided Lieutenant Michael Fay to the place where the brigade active service unit was billeted. He was later captured by enemy forces, and brutally done to death. When the Brigade Adjutant, James Lillis, was arrested, I collected his documents and property, and handed them over to his successor. I also visited a prisoner, Patrick Sheppard, in Carlow military barracks, and obtained information from him as to where he had arms and ammunition dumped in his area, and conveyed this information to the brigade officers.

On another occasion, I visited Liam Mannering who was a prisoner in the same barrack. He told me of a Volunteer who was to be arrested. I passed on the information to the Volunteer, and he avoided arrest.

One day, my home was fired into by Black and Tans, and later British military and Tans were approaching my house with the intention of burning it. They were accosted by Rev. Fr. Killian (later Parish Priest, Edenderry, Offaly), and he persuaded them not to do so.

Following the shooting of an R.I.C. constable, I was ordered by the O/C, A.S.U., to leave my home, as he expected it would be burned as a reprisal. Shortly after I left the house, enemy forces arrived and broke in the door, and wrecked the interior of the café and house.

I volunteered for active service, and was instructed to be prepared at twenty-four hours' notice to report for duty. I also visited prisoners at Hare Park internment camp, the Curragh, Co. Kildare, and supplied them with food and clothing.

During the Truce period, I was appointed Receiver

of Supplies for the brigade training camp at Ducketts Grove, Carlow. I continued to assist at the collection for the prisoners' dependents, and continued to visit the Carlow prisoners in gaols and internment camps. I also reorganised the Cumann na mBan in the Carlow brigade area, and was appointed Brigade O/C.

During the Civil War, I made all the arrangements for the funerals of I.R.A. men who were killed in action, and was responsible for the raising of funds to defray the expenses of same. I procured guns and ammunition from Free State soldiers, and handed them over to the 1st battalion, A.S.U., I.R.A.

I also obtained useful information from Free State soldiers, and forwarded it to the Brigade I.O.

I was in charge of communications from General Headquarters, Dublin, to Carlow Brigade, and from Carlow Brigade to G.H.Q.

I guided Headquarters officers from 3rd Eastern Division to the Carlow Brigade area.

On several occasions, on instructions from the Brigade O/C, I conveyed messages from Carlow to Divisional Headquarters in County Wexford.

I was in charge of the firing party over the grave of Commandant Seamus O'Toole who was killed in an engagement with the enemy in 1922.

I continued to collect funds to help the prisoners and the prisoners' dependents.

During all this period, my home was continually raided by Free State troops. I was all this time in close contact with the I.R.A. active service units, and helped to supply them with food and other necessities.

I was arrested on 16th March, 1923, and was released on 27th of the same month. I immediately resumed my activities, and was re-arrested on the 12th May, 1923. I was on hunger-strike for nine days in June. During the time I was in prison, my home was broken into by Free State forces. They wrecked the interior of the café and dwelling apartments, and looted the contents. I was released in September, 1923.

SIGNED:

Brian Ryan

DATE:

7th Feb 1957.

WITNESS

Deán Brennan. Lieut.-Col.

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