

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1576

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1576.

Witness

Peg Duggan,
49 Thomas Davis Street,
Cork.

Identity.

Captain, Tomás Ceannt Branch, Cumann na mBan,
Cork.

Treasurer, Prisoners' Dependents' Fund,
Cork Branch.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan Activities, Cork, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY MISS PEG DUGGAN,

49 Thomas Davis Street, Cork.

I was born at Kilnap, about three miles from Cork.

I and my sisters, Sarah, Brigid and Annie, were taught to say our prayers in Irish by the Very Rev. Canon Martin Murphy, The Cathedral, Cork, and, as a result, we joined the South Parish (Cork) Branch of the Gaelic League in "An Grianain", Queen St., Cork, in the year 1912.

In 1913, when the Cumann na mBan was established in Cork, I and my sisters joined. The inaugural meeting was held in a hall known as An Dún, Queen St., Cork. The following comprised what might be called the nucleus of the first Cumann na mBan unit in Cork, so far as I can now recollect: Maire Ni Chuill, 'Birdie' Conway, Susie and Annie Walsh (sisters of Mrs. Tomas McCurtain), Nora O'Brien (Mrs. Martin), Madeline O'Leary (now Mrs. Sean Hegarty), Madge Barry, Mary McSwiney (sister of Terence McSwiney), Henrietta O'Flynn, Sheila Fennell, Madge O'Leary, May O'Leary and Miss Cashell.

Following the split in the Volunteer movement, caused by John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, in 1914, the Cumann na mBan also divided on the question of Redmond's policy exhorting the Volunteers to join the British army and take part in the war against Germany; we lost quite a few members (followers of Redmond), but, nevertheless, had upwards of 100 in the Cork Cumann after the split.

The first officers were: Mary McSwiney, Madeline O'Leary, Nora O'Brien, "Birdie" Conway and Maire Ni Chuill.

At a later date (prior to 1916) I remember that the Volunteers came to us and asked that a girl in the Cumann na mBan be appointed captain, the person to be appointed to be

an officer outside the governing body mentioned. I was appointed to this post as captain of the Cork Cumann.

We held regular weekly meetings in "An Dún", "An Grianain" Queen St., Cork and in the Father Mathew Hall, in whichever premises a room happened to be available. Lectures in first aid treatment were given by Dr. Sexton and, later on, by Dr. Saunders. We learned the Morse code from a Volunteer instructor, and were drilled by a Volunteer officer. We also had rifle practice with a .22 rifle in the Volunteer Hall, Sheares St., Cork.

The Cumann organised ceilis and concerts for Volunteer funds. I remember we organised an excursion to Bantry on one occasion (prior to 1916) by way of a cover for Volunteers who were collecting guns on the Cork coast. The Volunteers came back to Cork with us, getting on the train at different points en route, with the guns. I saw some of these guns myself in the railway carriages, but I do not know from whence they came.

When P.H. Pearse reviewed Volunteers in Limerick city in, I think, 1915, I went with a party of the Cork Cumann na mBan. After the meeting, on our return to the railway station at Limerick, we were attacked with stones, sticks and bottles by the pro-British (ex-soldier) element in Limerick.

I, with members of the Cork Cumann, also went with a contingent of Cork Volunteers to the funeral in Dublin of O'Donovan Rossa in August 1915. I took a wreath and was at the graveside with my sister Sarah, where I heard the famous oration given by P.H. Pearse.

On the occasion of a Manchester Martyrs commemoration held in Cork on 21st November 1915, Herbert Pim and Sean MacDiarmadha attended from Dublin and addressed a large number of Volunteers and Cumann na mBan at the National Monument at Grand Parade, Cork. We made green, white and orange badges

for the occasion which we sold for Volunteer funds. A concert organised by us was held in the City Hall later that night followed by a ceili in An Grianain, at which Pim and Sean MacDiarmadha attended.

Easter Week 1916.

On the Sunday of Easter Week 1916, the Cumann na mBan were aware that 'the boys' were going on a route march to the country, but we got no instructions to accompany them. On Sunday evening we went to "An Grianain" but got no news there as to what exactly was happening. I went on to the Volunteer Hall at Sheares St., Cork, where I met a Volunteer orderly on duty there. He was armed with a rifle. He had no information as to the return to Cork of the Volunteers at that particular time. I do know that the boys did return to Cork City later that Easter Sunday night, after I had called to Sheares St.

On Monday night, I went to An Grianain, but got no instructions. I reported there each night, but there was nothing doing. Next we heard of the surrender of the Volunteers' guns to the Lord Mayor (Butterfield). Not all of the Volunteers agreed to hand up their guns. We took away some of the arms of those who refused to surrender them and kept them in safe keeping. There was no military action taken by either the Cork City Volunteers or the Cork Cumann na mBan during Easter Week 1916.

I learned later that week that a Miss Foley from Dublin brought a dispatch to Cork City on Easter Monday. The dispatch came from P.H. Pearse, but what message it conveyed I cannot say. I understood that it was delivered to Miss Mary McSwiney, but what subsequent action was taken in regard to that particular dispatch I am unable to state. The Cumann na mBan in Cork City were prepared to 'go to the hills' if necessary during that period of the Easter Rising 1916. We were equipped

with strong boots, ground sheets and first aid equipment in case of emergency, but we were not called on to take part.

Following the Easter Rising, Miss Mary McSwiney and Nora O'Brien were arrested by the British and detained for a short time. There were no wholesale arrests in Cork City of Cumann na mBan at that time.

It was, I think, about the month of November 1916, or perhaps early in 1917, when Cumann na mBan was declared an illegal organisation by the British authorities. Following this announcement, a special meeting of the Cork Cumann was called. Mary McSwiney addressed the meeting and put it to the members to decide whether we should carry on, in view of the fact that our organisation had now been declared illegal and members would be liable to arrest and imprisonment. I have a distinct recollection of this happening. The vast majority of those present decided to carry on under the name Cumann na mBan, Craobh Corcaigh.

We now started working for republican prisoners in British gaols, making scarves, gloves and other comforts. We ran ceillis and other functions to provide us with funds. As the prisoners were released, we arranged reception committees, provided meals, accommodation and clothes for those returning home again.

A few weeks before Easter 1917, a question arose of having a ceili on St. Patrick's Day which, that year, happened to fall on the eve of Passion Sunday. I and others objected to this, as we considered the date unsuitable. Another meeting of the Cumann was called at which Mary McSwiney attended. She was in favour of holding the ceili on the eve of Passion Sunday and was very annoyed at her wishes being questioned by others in the organisation. She called for a new election of officers. This was held, with the result that

Mary McSwiney, Nora O'Brien and Mrs. Sean Hegarty (Madeline O'Leary) were removed from office and the following officers elected to take their places: President: Maria Murphy, Madge O'Leary, Henrietta O'Flynn, Lena Murphy and myself.

Following this difference of opinion, Mary McSwiney went to Dublin to Cumann na mBan headquarters and got permission to start a branch of her own. On her return to Cork she did get a branch going which she called "Craobh Poblachtach na hEireann". Some of the original branch went with her; the others remained with us in Craobh Corcaigh. We continued to hold our meetings in An Grianain, Queen St., Cork.

About mid-1917, directions were received from H.Q. in Dublin that each Volunteer company in Cork should have a Cumann na mBan unit attached (to work in conjunction). Craobh Corcaigh, with which I was connected, immediately began organising branches in the city and suburbs, as well as in districts outside the city boundary. Branches were organised in Douglas, Blackrock, Blarney St., Togher, Ballygarvan, Blarney, Riverstown, Courtbrack, Cobh, Carrignavar Whitechurch, Friars Walk and St. Luke's. Our own unit in Blackpool, known as the Thomas Ceannt Branch of Craobh Corcaigh, was brought up to about 100 strong. This branch held its meetings in St. Nicholas Hall, Blackpool, Cork.

When the organisation of branches was completed, a District Council of Cumann na mBan in Cork city was formed on instructions from Dublin. This Council comprised two delegates from each branch. The delegates elected their own officers - a president, secretary and treasurer. I remember that my sister Sarah was elected president and May Conlan secretary. Dublin H.Q. recognised this District Council as the properly constituted authority governing Cumann na mBan affairs in Cork city. Mary McSwiney sent two delegates to

this Council from her own branch, but she was not a delegate, nor, of course, was she an officer of the Council.

The Thomas Ceannt Branch, to which I belonged, worked mainly with E/Company, 1st Battalion, Cork I Brigade, Irish Volunteers. We were trained in first aid and signalling and were constantly active in organising functions to supplement Volunteer funds. The Cumann na mBan branches in Cork averaged about 50 each in number and, in all, totalled approximately 700.

We visited prisoners in gaol almost every day, bringing them parcels of clothing, cigarettes and other comforts. We cooked meals in Maria Murphy's shop in Washington Street, Cork, and these were taken to prisoners allowed to receive them.

A Prisoners' Dependants' Fund was started in Cork of which I was one of the representatives of Cumann na mBan on the committee; in fact, Maria Murphy and I were co-treasurers of the fund. We signed cheques on behalf of the committee, as it was considered too dangerous for the men to sign. The fund was used to send food to prisoners in gaol, to buy clothes and other comforts. Dependants of married prisoners were allowed a certain sum per week, the amount being decided by the committee of the Fund which 'passed' all payments. The first meetings of this committee were held in the City Hall Cork, and were presided over by Rev. Denis O'Flynn, P.P., Crosshaven. Other members were Sean Goode, Sean O'Tuama, Sean Jennings and two officer members of the Cork I Brigade, with Maria Murphy and myself. I remember Tomas McCurtain and Terence McSwiney being present at some of the earlier meetings.

As activity against the British forces increased and many Volunteers had to go 'on the run' to escape arrest, it was

the job of Cumann na mBan to provide for these men, either in the homes of Cumann na mBan or in houses of 'reliable' sympathisers. I might here state that my own home in Thomas Davis St., Cork, was a regular hide-out for men 'on the run' with the result that it was raided by police (one of many raid by police and military subsequently) and my sister Sarah arrested. She was sentenced to a month's imprisonment in Cork Gaol. Countess Markievicz was also in Cork Gaol at that time, together with Cumann na mBan girls from Killarney and elsewhere. These prisoners objected to wearing prison clothes and went on strike as a protest. They succeeded in their protests and were allowed to wear their own clothes.

In addition to visiting gaols, our activities now extended to the carrying of arms from place to place before and after ambushes carried out by the Volunteers. The arms were put in a safe place until next required. This was a feature of Cumann na mBan activities when the fighting intensified during 1920-21.

Formation of Clann na Gael in Cork.

During the year 1917 (I cannot be precise as to the date) a girl named May Kelly came to Cork from Dublin to organise a branch of Clann na Gael in Cork city. Whilst in Cork she stayed in my home. This organisation was a junior auxiliary of the Cumann na mBan and was on a par with the Fianna Boy Scouts. It was composed of girls too young to be members of Cumann na mBan. My sister Annie was seconded from Cumann na mBan to take charge of the new organisation, with the rank of commandant.

Clann na Gael elected its own officers and had its own funds obtained by collections and ceilis. They received drilling instruction from a Volunteer officer (Tadhg Sullivan) and had first-aid lectures. Their duties, broadly speaking, were to help the Cumann na mBan. The girls wore a distinctive uniform comprising a green blouse and green woollen kilt,

a brown brath with a Tara brooch attached. There were upwards of a couple of hundred young girls in the Clann na Gael in Cork.

Women's Citizen Army in Cork.

An organisation called the "Women's Citizen Army" was started in Cork in 1917. The organisers and leaders were the Misses Wallis of Brunswick St., Cork. The objects of this organisation were somewhat similar to those of Cumann na mBan, but it was not represented on the District Council to which I have already referred. Its policy leaned towards the labour side of the national movement for Independence, hence its name. The members wore a uniform like that of Cumann na mBan with the exception that they wore a blue brath. There was only one branch in Cork, not strong numerically. It continued to function up to the Truce of 1921 and for some time afterwards.

Further Cumann na mBan activities.

In addition to the activities already mentioned, we of the Cumann na mBan were allotted the job of handing out pamphlets at church doors after Mass on Sundays, posting bills at night and generally helping in the propaganda side of the movement. On one occasion when distributing pamphlets at the Cathedral on a Sunday morning, the R.I.C. came along and took the names of several girls engaged at this work; about eight or ten were subsequently arrested and sentenced to a month in gaol. Notwithstanding all this and the hazards attending this duty, the work went on without interruption despite enemy opposition.

To help the Sinn Fein candidates in the general election of December 1918, we organised an Aonach in the City Hall, Cork, from which we made over £900 which went to the election fund.

During 1919, my place of business was raided by military

accompanied by women searchers. I and my shop were searched, but nothing incriminating was found. My home was likewise visited and searched, but, again, the military failed to find any documents relating to our organisation. I was then served with a military order to close my shop. My accounts books were taken away by a military raiding party, but these were later returned to me. I was reluctant to obey the military order to close the shop, but, on the advice of senior Volunteer officers, did so. I then set up business in a stall in the Market House, Cork. This stall became a rendezvous for Volunteer dispatches which were handed in to me and later called for by ~~Volunteers~~ ^{Volunteers}. My premises in Parliament St., which were now closed, was used as an arms dump by the Volunteers. The keys were in my possession and these I passed on to men requiring them.

Murder of Tomás McCurtain, Lord Mayor.

It may be of interest to record my recollections on the night of 20th March 1920, when Tomas McCurtain was murdered by British forces in his home at Blackpool. My own home, at 49 Thomas Davis St., is almost directly across the road from the McCurtain's house.

On the night in question I met Tomas going in to town with his brother-in-law, Jimmy Walsh, who resided with him. On my way back home with my sister, I noticed, on the tram, R.I.C. men in civilian clothes. They went in the direction of Blackpool R.I.C. barracks, close by. That same night, a Constable Murtagh of the R.I.C. was shot dead at Pope's Quay, Cork. The two Volunteers who shot him came along to our house after the shooting. My sister, Brigid went to a house in Sunday's Well with one of them, whilst I went with the other to a house nearby. We took their two guns with us. I came home and, when Brigid arrived later, she passed the remark

that there were "some queer looking fellows" on Blackpool Bridge (the latter is very near McCurtain's house).

We went to bed and noticed the gas lamps being put out, my sister passing a remark: "There is old Keane putting out the gas lamps". This fixed the time at about 12.30 a.m. Very shortly afterwards, we heard a thundering knock at a door, followed by shots up and down the street. My sister Annie looked out a window and said: "They are at Tomas's house". Next we heard another few shots ring out and then a cry: "A priest, a priest, will someone go for a priest?". Annie and I jumped out of bed and put on coats over our night attire. We could hear a woman's voice crying: "A priest, a priest". We ran up to the presbytery attached to the Cathedral and met Rev. Father Burts, one of the curates. He was ready to leave the house and told us he had got a 'phone message from McCurtain's to say that Tomas had been shot. Father Burts did not know where Tomas lived and asked us to show him the way. The priest, my sister Annie and myself arrived at McCurtain's in a very short time and were met by Mrs. McCurtain who said: "Thank God, Father, you are in time". Father Burts heard Tomas's confession on the stairs landing. Tomas was lying there where he was shot, but was conscious. We were present while he was being annointed and, after the anointing, he died where he lay. An ambulance arrived and the ambulance men lifted the remains on to a bed in the house.

We all knelt down by the bedside to say the Rosary when a party of British military arrived, accompanied by uniformed R.I.C. Poor Mrs. McCurtain then got very excited about her brother Jimmy (who lived on the premises) in case he had any guns with him (Jimmy was a member of the Volunteers). The military and police searched every nook and cranny in the house, even to the bed on which Tomas lay dead, but they found

nothing. Before leaving, they disclaimed all knowledge of what had happened. My sisters, Sarah and Brighid, and I stayed with Mrs. McCurtain until morning.

On the day following the funeral of Tomas, I went over to see Mrs. McCurtain and brought with me a Volunteer officer from G.H.Q., Dublin, who had come down for the funeral and who had stayed in my house. The officer was a north of Ireland man named Eoin O'Duffy, who took a most prominent part in the fight for independence and in the setting up of the State in the years following the Treaty of December 1921.

During the hottest period of the fight my home in 49 Thomas Davis St. Cork, was a constant rendezvous for I.R.A. men. Plans were prepared (in our house) for ambushing of British military and police, e.g., the Whitecross ambush of 2nd August 1920. The night before the ambush Tom Crofts, who was in charge of the attacking party, and other I.R.A. men discussed the arrangements in our house. Following another ambush at Blackpool, our home was again raided by military and my father was taken out to be shot. He was, fortunately, released. My brother was arrested in another raid on our house and sent to prison in Spike Island, from whence he was transferred to Maryboro Jail until his release in the general amnesty of prisoners late in 1921.

I and my sisters devoted every spare moment of our time to harbouring wanted men, carrying ammunition and guns for the I.R.A., visiting prisoners in jails, providing comforts for them, carrying dispatches and, in general, assisting by every means in our power in the fight for freedom. We were engaged in these activities when the Truce of July 1921 came.

Before concluding this statement, I would like to put on record the names of certain people who gave wonderful help to us during the fight against the British. Many of these

families had their homes bombed and burned by the British as reprisals. Those which readily come to mind are: Mr. and Mrs. Casey, Blackpool House, Blackpool, Cork; Mrs. Ned O'Sullivan, Dublin St., Mrs. O'Sullivan (née Mamie Lucey), also of Dublin St. (her father was one of the first Sinn Fein Aldermen in the Cork Corporation), Mrs. Grace, 47 Thomas Davis St., Mrs. O'Sullivan and her son Jack, 48 Thomas Davis St., the Mannix family, Great William O'Brien St. (cousins of Archbishop Mannix, Melbourne, Australia), the Sheehan family, Great William O'Brien St., Mrs. Patrick O'Shea, Templemichael, Cork, the Manleys of Ballinaglough, Miss Manley of Madden's Buildings, the Barrys, Fitzgeralds and Mahonys of Madden's Buildings, Blackpool, and also Rev. Father Willie O'Brien, Catholic Chaplain to the Detention Barracks, who attended the executions of the boys captured at Clonmult and Dripsey, Co. Cork, and kept us in touch with I.R.A. prisoners taken by British forces.

Signed: Peg LonganDate: 14th Feb 1957Witness: O. Gorman

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