

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,681

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1681.

Witness

Miss Mollie Cunningham,  
Casement St.,  
Macroon,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

President, Macroon District Council,  
Cumann na mBan.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan activities, Macroon, Co. Cork,  
1916 - 21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2994.

Form B.S.M. 2

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BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,681

STATEMENT BY MISS MOLLIE CUNNINGHAM,

Casement St., Macroom, Co. Cork.

I was born in Macroom on January 27th 1897. I was educated at Macroom Convent School until I was about 16 years of age, when I went to serve my time as a dressmaker.

I joined Cumann na mBan in Macroom in September, 1916. The Cumann na mBan unit was organised by the local company of the Irish Volunteers, of which Dan Corkery was in charge. The pioneers in the organisation (Cumann na mBan) were: Mrs. Dan Corkery (President), Annie Murphy (Vice President), Mollie Lynch, now Mrs. Warren (Hon. Treas.), Mollie Cunningham - witness - (Secretary); Nellie O'Shea, now Mrs. Thade Murphy, was Captain. Some of the other members were: Hannah Callaghan (now Mrs. D. McCarthy), Kate Callaghan (now Mrs. Dan J. Sweeny), Maria Desmond, Bridget Desmond, Julia McSweeny, Nora Sweeny (later Mrs. Sheehan), Mary Looney, Annie I. O'Leary (late Mrs. Jerh. Murphy), Mary Ellen O'Connor, Annie and Julia O'Reilly, Lizzie Cullinan, Nellie Cullinan. The total strength of our unit (Macroom) of Cumann na mBan was about 90.

In the early stages we were engaged in collecting money to buy arms for the Irish Volunteers and to help the dependants of the prisoners gaoled after Easter Week. In addition, the organisation of our unit was being built up and we were taking part in the raising of funds through the holding of concerts, céilis and suchlike activities. These activities continued throughout 1917, during which time I joined Sinn Féin.

Early in 1918, with the approach of the conscription threat, we were engaged in making field dressing outfits

outfits for the Volunteers and in training our members in first-aid. The lectures in first-aid were given by a lady doctor who was doing locum in the dispensary in Macroom. I cannot recollect her name. The President (Mrs. Dan Corkery), who was a trained nurse, also took part in this work. My brothers, who were all members of the Volunteers, were at this time engaged in the manufacture of canister bombs, and part of my duty and that of my sisters, who were also members of Cumann na mBan, was to collect all available scrap iron and to advise my brothers of its whereabouts. The scrap was then collected by them and used in the manufacture of the bombs. Activities of this nature continued throughout 1919 and 1920 and our Cumann na mBan organisation was all the time growing in strength and efficiency.

As the Volunteers - now the Irish Republican Army - were daily seeking engagements with the military and police forces of the enemy, several new types of duties fell to be performed by the members of the unit, including the carrying of despatches, the transfer of arms, watching and reporting on the movements of enemy forces and suchlike.

At this time there were two companies of the I.R.A. in Macroom town - one - 'A' Coy - west of the Sullane river which ran through the town; the second company - 'B' - was based on the portion of the town to the east of the river. Small arms were not too plentiful and the duty of transferring those available from one company area to the other as they were required for operational purposes fell to me. It was nothing unusual for me to take two or three revolvers at a time from one company area to another. In the transfer I had to pass by the sentry at the lower gate of Macroom Castle and was liable to be challenged at any moment.

As my home was a "receiving station" for dispatches coming by rail to Macroom, my sisters and I were regularly engaged in the delivery of these messages to the appropriate officers or units.

When an enemy patrol of R.I.C. was ambushed at Lisarda on the Macroom-Crookstown road on August 22nd 1920, I was sent by the Battalion O/C, I.R.A. (Dan Corkery), to ascertain the result of the engagement. On this occasion one member of the I.R.A. was killed and another wounded. The enemy casualties were unknown. I was accompanied on this mission by Lizzie Cullinane (Mrs. Charley Browne).

By the summer of 1920, units of Cumann na mBan had been organised in Macroom, Toames, Crookstown, Kilmurray, Clondrohid, and Ballinagree. All these units were trained in close order foot drill and first-aid by members of the Macroom section. These units, which were all situated inside the area controlled by Macroom Battalion, I.R.A., were now organised on a district basis and a District Council to control the activities of the Cumann na mBan organisation in the area was set up. The officers of the District Council were: -

President - Mrs. Dan Corkery  
 Vice President - Miss Mollie Cunningham (witness)  
 Secretary - " Bridget Foley  
 Treasurer - " Annie Murphy.

At this time my home was being raided and searched two or three times each week by enemy military and police forces. They never found anything of an incriminating nature, although such items were often under their hands in the simplest places in my father's tailor shop.

Engagements between the I.R.A. and enemy forces were now a regular feature of the daily happenings. With other

members of the Cumann na mBan, I was now deputed to act as an intelligence officer and to report on the movements of enemy forces or those of their suspected agents. I helped in the removal of enemy military stores from Macroom railway station. Some of these stores were actually taken through my home, which adjoined the railway premises. All members of the Macroom unit were at this time engaged in supplying food to I.R.A. prisoners taken in by the enemy forces to Macroom. This was an everyday occurrence up to the Truce.

When an enemy raiding party surprised and captured a number of unarmed prisoners at Toames on March 5th 1921, one of the I.R.A. party was wounded. He was "Neilus" Foley, whose sister, Bridget, was secretary of Macroom District Council of Cumann na mBan. The wounded man was taken to Macroom Castle, where he died. His body was then removed to Macroom Workhouse. It now fell to my lot to arrange, in co-operation with the dead man's sister, Bridget, for the removal and burial of the remains.

At this period my home was receiving particular attention from the enemy. Enemy proclamations and orders, as well as inscriptions such as "Up the Republic", were posted or painted on the walls or windows. This was done to ensure that new enemy forces coming into the town would be attracted to it and so continue their series of raids.

As 1921 advanced, the intelligence work in the area devolved mainly on selected members of the unit, as the male I.O.s were unable to move around the area as freely as would our girls of Cumann na mBan. At this time we usually disguised ourselves by wearing heavier clothing and the hooded

Macroon cloak. In carrying out these duties, I and the others engaged had often to travel miles into the surrounding country to make contact with the Battalion and/or Column officers of the I.R.A. Often on these occasions I passed through enemy raiding parties, who were now being accompanied by lady searchers, but I always managed to get through unmolested.

The duty of lady searcher sometimes fell to our own members. On one such occasion two I.R.A. officers held up a young lady who was suspected of taking messages from Macroon R.I.C. to Carrigadrohid R.I.C. garrison. In company with Julia Sweeny, I was called up to search the prisoner. We tied handkerchiefs over the lower part of our faces and set about the job in a thorough manner. However, we failed to find any documents, so, having received a warning regarding her future conduct, the prisoner was released. On another occasion, a request was received from the Republican police in Rusheen to search the belongings of a lady who was suspected of pilfering from her employer. This job was again carried out by Julia Sweeny and myself, but we failed to find the missing property.

The normal intelligence, arms and dispatch carrying duties were continued by the members of my unit up to the Truce on July 11th 1921.

A short time before the Truce, the President of District Council - Mrs. Dan Corkery - fell ill and I was now appointed to fill the vacant post.

My rank at the Truce - President, Macroon District Council, Cumann na mBan. The strength of the Cumann na mBan units in the area was about 200.

Signed:

Nolly Cunningham

Date:

24-9-21

Witness:

P. Donnell