

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 293

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 293.....

Witness

Mrs. Aine Heron,
Ardona,
Churchtown, Dundrum, Co. Dublin.
Identity

Captain Cumann na mBan;
Justice Sinn Fein Courts;
Co-Treasurer Pembroke Branch.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1915-1921;
- (b) First Aid Duty - Four Courts Easter Week 1916;
Despatch Work do.
- (c) Work for Irish Republican Prisoners
Dependents' Fund post 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1370.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY MRS. ÁINE HERON

"Ardtona", Churchtown, Dundrum, Dublin.

I was married in 1912, and had two small children when the Rising started.

I joined Cumann na mBan in 25 Parnell Square in 1915. Mrs. Clarke was President and I think Sorcha MacMahon was Secretary. Lucy Smith and Tom Byrne (who mobilised the Maynooth men in Easter Week) were my proposer and seconder. I attended meetings regularly twice a week. One night we would have drill and the other night first-aid instruction. We marched out for the first evening after dark and we aroused quite a lot of interest, as the public had not yet got used to the idea of women marching in step like soldiers. Nora Foley carried the flag. She was a great person, as was Miss Adrian from North County Dublin. The latter afterwards took part in the Ashbourne fight, and she succeeded in getting in and out every day to the G.P.O. with messages.

Previous to 1916 Micheál O'Hanrahan asked me would I take some ammunition to store it in my husband's shop in the busy part of Phibsboro'. A railway guard used to call regularly with a well-made parcel of the stuff, and it remained in the house all during 1916 and it was never called for, although we always kept the parcels ready in the shop. It was never found by the military who used to come in during Easter Week to buy oil and such things. They did not like being asked for payment. The officer said on one occasion, "You are charging rather a lot for the guns that are protecting you, aren't you?". My sister replied, "Oh, really, and are they protecting us?". He just scowled and walked out the door. Afterwards I

sent the stuff to the country to my mother, but I got it back at the time of the conscription scare in 1918 and handed it over to Tom Byrne.

I still have and will give to the Bureau the Certificate for First-Aid (Appendix "A") that I got from Cumann na mBan. It is made out in my maiden name as nobody was able to put Heron into Irish.

We mobilised on the Good Friday night and I thought we were going out that night as we were told to bring rations and other things. Although I never got any definite information about the Rising, I felt in my heart that it was coming and it was what I had been looking forward to always and I wanted to be in it, though the time was not really opportune for me as I expected a baby - my third - in August. My father's and my mother's brothers had all been Fenians. My mother's eldest sister when a girl had been asked to go to Liverpool with a bagful of golden sovereigns around her neck, to arrange the passage to America of her two brothers John and Willie Moran and other boys from Leixlip. These two boys afterwards fought in the American Civil War. I recently heard that John's daughter, who is keen on her Irish connections, still cherishes the chamois bag in which the gold sovereigns were carried.

To my disappointment I came home on Good Friday night. On Saturday night there was a ceili in No. 25 Parnell Square. Con Colbert was Master of Ceremonies. During the céili the band started to play "Tipperary" and a couple who were strangers got up to dance to it. The whole audience started to hiss, and the couple, thinking they were being hissed at, sat down in embarrassment. But Con Colbert apologized to them, explaining that this air, which was

associated with the War and the British army of occupation, was not allowed to be played at Irish functions.

On the Sunday I was very busy cooking extra food for the manoeuvres, but my husband, who was reading the Sunday Independent, told me I need not bother further as there would be no manoeuvres. But I said, "Who would mind the Independent?". I was mobilised for Sunday night and I turned up in Blackhall Street with my twenty-four hours rations, a waterproof coat, my first-aid outfit and everything else I had prepared. Chrissie Doyle and Mrs. Parker were the only other Cumann na mBan who turned out and we discussed the situation. We all agreed that it would be impossible to put off the Rising, as never again would the people be brought to the pitch of enthusiasm that they were now at. We mentioned the garrison of London-Irish at Kimmage, and other factors that would never again arise. After some time we parted, but we each agreed that we would await further developments at home as the Rising would have to go on.

On Monday morning Paddy Moran who worked at Doyle's Corner House, a very quiet lad but a very fine fellow, came to tell me that we were to mobilise. We went to the room over J.J. Walsh's shop, where there was a branch of the Gaelic League, Blessington Street I think, and found a good muster of Cumann na mBan. We left there and went to Blackhall Street, thence to Dominick Street. The Prior of the Monastery was away for the day, and the assistant Prior, who was sympathetic, gave us permission to set up our First-Aid Post in the Priory. We were not very long there when we heard the angry voice of the Prior, who had returned earlier than expected and who ordered us to clear out. We hastily and ignominiously retired, I leaving my waterproof coat behind me. By this time the Rising was in

full swing, but we were left without any direction and we just hung about marking time. We went finally to a little shop in Church Street, which was owned by a relative of either Mr. or Mrs. Martin Conlon. Miss Hayes and I spent the night there.

It may have been Monday evening we had our first casualty. Someone came along and asked were there any Cumann na mBan here? We asked what the wound was, and got the reply, "A deep cut in the thigh". Miss Hayes suggested that as I was a married woman I should take it on. It was Eddie Morkan who had cut himself with his sheath knife when jumping over a barricade. I dressed the wound and Eddie told me afterwards that the dressing lasted for three weeks and was finally taken off in Knutsford Gaol.

On Tuesday morning we got word to go to the Hibernian Bank at the corner of Abbey Street, where Captain Weafer was in charge. He was so careful that he had all the manager's furniture carried down to the basement so that it would not be damaged! In the evening a message came from the Four Courts that there was no First-Aid Station there and six of us volunteered to go there. On the way we called at the G.P.O. to collect some First-Aid material. We had made and put on Red Cross Armlets. I collected a ginger-beer bottle full of iodine and added it to my own outfit. When we emerged from the G.P.O. I felt scared for the first time. There was a crowd of drunken women who had been looting public-houses and other shops. They had their arms full of the loot. They were at the other side of the road and they called out all sorts of names at us, but they were too drunk to attack us. It was a shock to us and we marched away as quickly as we could to the Four Courts.

The only incident I remember on the journey was that

I met Mrs. F. Fahy who was going to park her cat and her canary with someone. She was then to come to the Four Courts where her husband was. As we would arrive there first she gave me a parcel of socks for him, as he usually changed his socks frequently.

When we arrived we got in without difficulty. Just at the gate I met a friend who was a chemist, and I asked him to come in and help us to set up the First-Aid Station, but he very emphatically declined. When we got in Frank Fahy asked us where we would like to set up our hospital. As the windows of the rooms were all sandbagged and dark, we said we would use the room where the glass dome was and we would put out a Red Cross Flag. Frank replied, "You may do so, but I greatly fear that the enemy we are fighting will have little respect for the Red Cross when it is ours". We then went down to the kitchen to clean up. We collected all the vessels we could find and filled them with water, as we were told the water might be cut off. While there, a Volunteer came in with a few big pieces of meat, and I took a large cauldron and put the meat in to cook, so as to have a good stew and plenty of soup. Up to this I think they had nothing but tea.

Joe McGuinness brought me to a store-room in the basement where quantities of drink of all kinds, cases of apples and other things were stored. He told me that later when they would go into action he would give me the key and make me responsible for the contents of the store-room. The drink was only touched during the week for two prisoners who were ill. One of these was a D.M.P. man who got cramps in his stomach. On the Monday while I had been in the shop in Church Street I had seen one of these D.M.P. men being arrested by two young Volunteers under the command of Piaras Biaslaí. The

latter searched him, and on reading a document which he took from him he gave a dry laugh and I often wondered what the contents were.

We spent the rest of the day preparing meals and washing up. On the Wednesday morning Joe McGuinness told me he had a message he wanted me to do. He asked me to go to his house, 41 Gardiner Street, where the books and documents connected with the First Battalion were kept. I brought instructions to his wife to dispose of these and to come in to him to the Four Courts as soon as this was done. I had also to carry a message to Cabra Park. While in McGuinness's we were informed that all the bridges - Blaquiére and Cabra - had been taken by the British, so I had to go along the canal and get across by the lock, reaching the house in Cabra Park with my message. As McGuinness thought all these bridges were still occupied by the Volunteers he got Commandant Daly to give me a pass, which I still have and will give to the Bureau (Appendix "B").

Getting back from Cabra Park I made my way down to Cabra Bridge, where I was held up by the military. I happened to see, standing at his own door, Florrie Green who was a friend of mine. I told the soldier who had held me up that I lived down there, but he would not let me pass without proof. I told him to call Mr. Green, who was a solicitor and would vouch for me. In that way I got through and down to my house and never got back to the Four Courts, as my house was surrounded on all sides.

We had no sleep and spent our nights moving from room to room. We could have no light showing. We were very anxious to get the children away to the country with my sister and we heard that a train was to leave Dublin. There were terrible crowds around the Broadstone. My

husband, who knew that Major Hammond had been in charge of the post and had been transferred to Portobello, used his name, pretending he was a friend of his, and he was ushered past the guard with the children to a first-class carriage.

On the Saturday of the surrender, I saw a group of Cumann na mBan, including Leslie Price, marching past our shop and I went out to speak to them. Leslie said, however, "We can't stop" - the street was full of military.

The next thing I remember was being called to a meeting at 25 Parnell Square by Sorcha McMahon, at which she read out the statement proclaiming Cumann na mBan an illegal organisation.

The work was then starting for the Volunteer Dependents' Fund. We found it very hard to get the necessary information. When we called at the houses sometimes the inhabitants denied all knowledge of the Volunteers in question, as they did not know us and they thought we might be setting traps for them. Gradually it became easier as the sympathy of the public had veered round to the victims of the Rebellion. Especially the Masses for the men of Easter Week did a good deal to give courage to all these people. They gave them the only opportunity they had of coming together and exchanging news from the various prisons.

My attendance at the meetings of the Volunteers' Dependents Fund dwindled off after a few months, as my confinement approached, and after that I went to the country to recuperate.

From that on, apart from attending functions to provide funds, I remember nothing of importance until the release of the prisoners and their return to Ireland in

June, 1917, especially those from convicts' prisons. They got a great reception. Many of them we did not recognise on account of the change in their appearance and their clothing. There was no great excitement until the conscription scare. The Cumann na mBan turned out and marched in a body to the Churches to sign the oath.

In 1918 we moved both shop and house to the South side, the shop to 7 Upper Baggot Street and the residence to 1 Belmont Park. The first shock I got a few days after I had gone to Belmont Park was Armistice Day 1918 when I came out and saw the whole neighbourhood decorated with Union Jacks. I met Philomena Plunkett, who consoled me by saying that things were not nearly as bad as they looked and that in some of the houses displaying the biggest Union Jacks we might get more votes than the Unionists.

I was immediately put to work on the Election Committee. Diarmaid O'Leary was Director of Elections for Pembroke. My house was particularly useful, being next door to the school which was the principal polling booth. Our efforts were crowned with success, somewhat to our surprise and to that of the candidate, Desmond Fitzgerald, and his comrades in gaol.

It was about that time that Ranelagh Branch of Cumann na mBan was founded, of which I immediately became a member. I did not attend it for very long, as I was sent to organise a branch in Ringsend, of which I became and remained Captain to the end. I was also co-Treasurer with Mrs Humphreys of the Pembroke Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Féin.

I was selected by the Pembroke Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Féin to act as Justice at the Sinn Féin Courts. The

Pembroke and Rathmines Courts combined under the Chairmanship of Erskine Childers. Mrs. Ceannt and I were co-trustees of the moneys of the Court. In fact, it was only a few years ago we handed over the last of the money to the Government when Seán MacEntee was Minister for Finance. It was about £11, I think, which was the sum left after paying all expenses of the Court. We felt it was time to bring the matter to a close in case either of us should die.

During the whole of the Black and Tan period I continued being busily engaged at these activities, as well as being a member of the Committee of the I.R.P.D.F. (Irish Republican Prisoners Dependents' Fund). Fortunately I had a good maid who freed me from all domestic preoccupations and anxiety about the children, of whom I had six.

My husband, who had a cycle shop, rented a stable with a loft overhead at the back of Herbert Street. The landlord was a Castle official who was particular to have a good tenant. The rent was paid by the Minister of Home Affairs, Dáil Éireann (Austin Stack). This building was used for manufacturing bombs, and the noise aroused the suspicions of the owner, who telephoned the Tans who came one Saturday morning in April or May 1921. The quantity of material, bombs, rifles, etc., was taken and they came straight to raid the shop. My husband had just left to come home to his lunch and was talking to Lipton's manager near the corner, and watched them carry out the raid - this was by no means the first. After a while the Tans left and the mechanic in the shop who was an I.R.A. man, came and told him they had gone to raid the dwelling-house. My husband came along, which I thought foolish but he thought they were going to arrest me. They took himself and the bicycle away in the lorry, not even

allowing him to give me the keys of the shop. He was taken to the Castle, where he remained about a week, thence to Arbour Hill. I heard from Seán Condrón, the Republican policeman, that everything was gone from the stable. I knew then that they had a good case against him. Austin Stack sent Henry O'Connor to me to say that as my husband was not a member of the I.R.A. I should get counsel to defend him, as the charge was a serious one. Meanwhile, the landlord of the rere of Herbert Street sent his man for the weekly rent and payment for the damage done to the premises. He did not get it. The trial never came on, and my husband was liberated at the time of the Truce.

Ambush in Pearse Street.

On the night of the day on which Michael Traynor was executed there was an ambush led by Sean McBride, who fought with a revolver in each hand. When the Black and Tans came along, Seán Dolan threw a grenade which burst and blew off his leg. There was a good deal of damage done to the Black and Tans, although I do not remember the details. Seán would have bled to death but for the prompt attention of a fireman from Tara Street, whose name I unfortunately cannot remember. He tied the leg with a cord, brought him in the Fire Brigade Ambulance to Mercers Hospital, where he told them he had taken him from under a tram. He was there 3-4 weeks when Seán Condrón came to me to tell me to get a safe house as he would have to be removed immediately. One of the students or young doctors had caught a nurse in the act of listening at the other side of the screen when he was confessing to the priest. She had already been noticed worrying him for scraps of information.

I went to Mrs. P.S. O'Hegarty who had previously

offered to take a wounded man, if necessary. We got a doctor and a nurse, the late Dr. McElhinney and Mrs. Darrell-Figgis. To show how good our information was we took him out on Sunday night - curfew was at 10 o'clock then - and carried him up the awful steps to the O'Hegarty house. The following morning at 6 o'clock Mercers' was surrounded by Tans and the whole hospital, including the womens' wards, were searched for a man who had lost a leg.

The whole O'Hegarty family, including Mrs. O'Hegarty's sister Dill and her mother, vied with each other in showing kindness to Seán. He was there about three or four weeks when Mrs. O'Hegarty came to me in great excitement and told me that the Tans had raided their bookshop in Dawson Street. I rushed on my bicycle to Seán Condron, who got a small two-seater car with a dickey and we removed him in broad daylight. As we crossed from Herbert Park to Ballsbridge we ran into a military patrol on foot. Seán had his revolver in his hand, but although one of the soldiers certainly saw it, he turned away his eyes, evidently saying to himself that discretion was the better part of valour. We had intended to go along Shelbourne Road to Pidgeon House Road, where we had arranged for Mrs. Byrne to take him, but we then decided to drive straight out towards Blackrock. We turned to the left at Merrion Gates, went along Strand Road, and brought him safely to the destination. O'Hegarty's house was raided that evening.

The new place became unsafe after some time. We then got in touch with the Reverend Mother who was in charge of the Pidgeon House Sanatorium, who gave him a hut. I felt great relief, knowing him to be now safe. He remained there till the Truce.

I would like to put on record Mrs. Darrell Figgis's

devotion and very great kindness. She used to dress Seán's stump which was septic, and looked after his comfort in every way, bringing him any little thing he needed. There was another I.R.A. boy in the Sanatorium and she was equally kind to him. In fact, the last time I met her was on the occasion of the removal of the remains of that boy, who died of T.B. in the Sanatorium.

During the Black and Tan period Jenny Nagle, who is now a doctor in England, and myself were appointed official visitors on behalf of Cumann na mBan and the I.R.P.D.F. to the prisoners in Mountjoy. We were allowed to interview the Commandant of each wing weekly and pass on any complaints they made about the treatment of the prisoners. When the prisoners were being released after the Truce we were given the use of Ierne Hall by the C.Y.M.S. Committee, for the reception of the prisoners. We took them in and, if they were going to the country, we gave them a meal and anything else they required. Eventually the I.R.P.D.F. had an office in the building and gave each man £10 to buy clothes and his fare after coming out of prison. I used to be there every morning about 5 o'clock because we used to have an average of seventy for breakfast. These were the people from the English gaols, a great many of whom were very weak and for whom we had to provide medical attention. We generally got a young doctor from the Mater.

SIGNED

Aine Heron

DATE

16-9-49

WITNESS

P. M. Crossan

