

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 333

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 333

Witness

Miss Aine O'Rahilly,
36 Aylesbury Road,
Dublin.

Identity

Sister of 'The O'Rahilly' ;
Member of Cumann na mBan 1914 - .

Subject

- (a) National activities 1914-1921;
- (b) Biographical notes on The O'Rahilly;
- (c) The Rising Easter Week 1916 -
G.P.O. and Northumberland Road.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. ...S. 1457.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINALSTATEMENT OF ÁINE NÍ RATHAILE,
36, AYLESBURY ROAD, DUBLIN.

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1. I was present at Wynn's Hotel at the foundation meeting of Cumann na mBan in the early part of 1914. I think Mrs. Wyse-Power with a group of women had already held small preliminary meetings to discuss the proposal made by Eoin McNeill at the Rotunda in November 1913, that the women should form an organisation to co-operate with the Volunteers, as the Ulster Women's Council was organised to help the Ulster Volunteers.
2. There were not more than a dozen women present but they represented all shades of Nationalist opinion. They decided to call the organisation The Irish Women's Council, in Irish Cumann na mBan. The Provisional Cttee. elected was Mrs. John McNeill, Mrs. Wyse Power, Mme. O'Rahilly, Miss Agnes O'Farrelly, Mrs. Tuohy, (Dr. Tuohy's wife), Mrs. McDonagh O'Mahony, Miss Gavan Duffy and Mrs. Padraig Colum (Molly Maguire) Of these Miss G. Duffy and Mrs. P. Colum were elected Honorary Secretaries.
3. At this time the objects of the organisation were as set out by Mrs. Wyse Power in the book called Leabhar na mBan namely, (1) to advance the cause of Irish Liberty (2) to organise Irish women in furtherance of this object (3) to assist in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defence of Ireland and (4) to form a fund for these purposes to be called a Defence of Ireland fund.
4. At that first meeting one of the women present, Miss Agnes O'Farrelly, suggested that we should start making

puttees for the Volunteers. I was disgusted. I came away and told my sister-in-law I was not going there again. Nevertheless, I attended First-aid classes given by the two Plunkett girls, Philomena and Fiona. My impression is that they were given on the ground floor of some house in Nassau St. Madame O'Rahilly used to be with me. My recollection of those classes is one of profound melancholy. The gloom of them was much worse than the tragedy of the Rising. I did not like the lectures about how to stop bleeding. We formed a camogie club, of which two of the Foley girls were members. We played a match on Holy Saturday, 1916 in Serpentine Avenue, and one of the girls was injured and they had plenty of bandages to give her first-aid.

5. I used to help Michael at his office work in connection with the purchase and distribution of guns. We always worked in his house. ^{Some of} The guns were kept in our house. They mostly came from Birmingham as did the ammunition and pullthroughs. On one occasion, when a lot of guns arrived we were to expect men from the country to purchase some of them. That evening a knock came to the door and I saw four men and thought that they were the men from the country, so I welcomed them. But they were G. men who searched the house and took away all the guns they found. Fortunately, as the house - 54, Northumberland Road - was very large, they overlooked one room on the return containing a big proportion of the guns. This was very fortunate as the same room contained a list of the quartermasters from the country who were to collect them. Our problem then was how to remove these guns. We decided we would form an orchestra. Various people, including the Plunketts and Diarmuid O'Loighaire came, bringing their instrument cases into which we fitted the

revolver\$. They were got away safely. That was the first raid we ever had, it was also the first occasion on which we had a quantity of arms delivered to the house. Michael Staines used to come to Michael's house regularly to arrange about getting guns. He would bring the money for them. He seemed to be a very earnest worker. I used to sign some of the receipts in Michael's name, if he was extra busy. One day, he told me as I had been working so well, that he would give me a treat. He took me one Sunday morning to Howth, and when we were near our destination he said there were guns being brought in. The yacht was in the bay and it was a lovely sight. The Volunteers were all there before us. Michael filled the car with ammunition so I came back by bus. He succeeded in bringing it safely into town but naturally not to his own or to any of the republican houses. He brought it to the house of a friend of very different politics and got it locked into the butler's pantry where he left it until he found it convenient to collect it. I should mention that he had brought his children to Howth a few days before that. It was afterward I realised that that first visit was for the purpose of exploring the possibilities of landing the guns without interference from the coastguards. He made the children play hide and seek near the coastguard station and in that way he got into conversation with the coastguards.

6. He used to be always followed by a G. man who waited quietly opposite the house whenever he came to see us.

7. He went to America about 1899 or 1900 and married a girl from Philadelphia, ^{Nannie} Annie Browne, whom he had previously met in Kilkee, where the family came to spend a holiday. At the time they married she was living in 5th Avenue New York.

Michael was a Medical student at the time. During another holiday at Easter, he went to Paris where the Browne family were staying. He did not want his parents to know, so he wrote a number of postcards saying he was working hard and he arranged that they would be sent home by a friend of his while he was away. Michael and ^N Annie kept up a correspondence and he went to America to see her, married her and after a nine months honeymoon in Europe got a job in the family firm. But he was always determined to live in Ireland and in spite of her family's objections he brought his wife and three boys back home, intending to settle down near Limerick where we lived. But we had just moved - in 1909 - to Dublin and he took a house here too.

8. Michael was very keen on Irish. He had studied O'Growney's books in America and continued to study Irish immediately he came back. He built a bungalow in Ventry which was then in the Gaeltacht and procured an Irish maid and nurse for the children. He joined the Gaelic League - the Cúig Cúigí - and he became manager of the Claidheamh Solua. He was always interested in efforts to achieve the freedom of Ireland and was constantly reading the history of the various risings. He adopted fully the Sinn Fein policy and he and Griffith were great friends and they worked together for a couple of years copying the Irish forms of place names contained in the field books compiled by O'Donovan, which were kept in the Ordnance Survey in Phoenix Park.

9. When Griffith started to publish the Sinn Fein daily, he asked Liam Bulfin and Michael to go to America to collect funds for it. They were about a month or six weeks there. Liam Bulfin died shortly after his return. People thought the trip was too much for him, but he had whatever disease killed him for a long time before that.

10. Michael became keenly interested in the Volunteers which he was largely instrumental in founding. His pamphlet, the "Secret History of the Irish Volunteers" gives a good account of the early years of the movement and especially of the circumstances that led up to the split. He was Treasurer from the foundation of the Volunteers to his death.

11. Some time before the Rising I made a remark about carrying out some task in a fortnight. He said in a jocosse tone "Ah! we'll all be either dead or in the Castle in a fortnight". Another day, Palm Sunday, his wife who always accompanied him to our house on Sundays was, lying down, as she was expecting a baby in a few weeks, and he came over without her. He started singing all the national songs - he had a lovely voice. He sang "Aghadoo" and he seemed deeply moved. Reflecting on these incidents afterwards, I concluded he knew then that the Rising was coming on.

12. Michael was very keen on having his uniform correct and well finished. I heard that when the British soldiers saw his body lying in the street with a new pair of top boots on him, they said he must have looted them.

13. Although I have inquired from all members of the family, not one of them is aware that he left Dublin during Holy Week. He complained of a cold and my sister, Mrs. Humphreys prepared a drink from gentian root for him, but he never drank it. On Monday when he had gone to the G. P. O. she went down to see him and her son Dick, a boy of 17 who was also there. She brought a number of medals of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and distributed them among the Volunteers. She went again on Tuesday. She was very brave because the bullets were flying all round, but she always had great courage. Michael and

Pearse made Dick go home with her that day. He spent the night with us, but early next morning he started out again after Mass and Communion in Haddington Road Church. He had great difficulty in getting into the G. P. O. building, because they had now fortified the place for a siege. He stayed there the rest of the week and we knew nothing more about either of them. When Mrs. Humphreys was in the G. P. O. on Tuesday she saw a small company of volunteers from, I think, Kilkenny, arriving there, headed by a man called Kelly, who afterwards became a doctor and went to London.

14. A short time after the surrender I went to Michael's house to take away his wife because we were told the house was going to be attacked by the separation allowance women, who had gathered around the place. We all went to Paddy Gleeson's place in Dundrum. I can not remember how we got in because there was nobody there. The table was laid and Paddy's egg was half eaten on the table as if he had left in the middle of the meal. A day or two after I returned to 40, Herbert Park and found a note on a scrap of paper on the floor; "Real well and happy". It might have been from Michael or Dick. The signature was not clear. We afterwards got a note from Desmond Fitzgerald to say that Dick had been arrested with himself.

15. From our house in Northumberland Road we saw everything that happened there during the week's fighting. We saw the Volunteers fortifying No. 25 on Monday. I was on the street during the morning when two girls came along carrying two heavy cases. They must have been Cumann na mBan as they recognised me, but I did not know them. They asked if I knew where Paddy Doyle was. They told me they had ham and other food in the cases for him and the other Volunteers. Indeed, I often wondered afterwards how Paddy's dead body was found in

Lansdowne Road, if he was one of those fighting in No. 25. I brought the girls over to that house and knocked. The door was not opened but a reply came through; "I am Lieutenant Malone". The girls made themselves known and were admitted. I did not see them coming out again.

16. In the afternoon a Company of G. R's came marching along the street past the house after a route march. The poor old things were carrying their rifles, but we did not then know they had no ammunition for them. The Volunteers held their fire until the G. R's. were in front of 25. Suddenly a volley rang out. Several of them fell, but I only remember one not getting up. Some of them took shelter behind the trees. Then they turned down the laneway to get to Beggar's Bush barracks. The garrison with difficulty got them over the wall with ladders.

17. On Tuesday nothing happened. On Wednesday morning the soldiers came along, as it seemed to us, in their thousands, and again the garrison in 25 held their fire until they were level with the house. Fire was opened on them and they fell like flies. The soldiers were bewildered and began to fire at the houses on our side of the road, not knowing where the firing was coming from. A lot of the firing was directed at our house for the neighbours informed the officers that we were Sinn Fein sympathisers. The soldiers had no notion where they were, they kept asking was this Africa. The fight continued till about 7 o'clock. The military were unable to make a direct attack on No. 25 on account of the way the steps are situated in that house. At last they made a charge on it and rushed up the steps, but I think by that time there was no one in the house but the dead body of Malone.

18. In the middle of the fighting when the bullets were flying and the road strewn with the dead or dying, Fr. Wall of Haddington Road came along on his bicycle. He was visibly frightened, but he left his bicycle against a railing and went from one body to another administering the Last Sacraments. He was a grand man. When I went to him after the surrender, not knowing Michael's fate, and asking him to pray for him, he already knew he was dead, having seen his dead body. He tried to break the news by saying he was afraid he had been killed. I replied; "You don't know Michael, whoever was killed, he has escaped". I think it was next day I heard of his death. My sister had been told by Fr. Dominick of Clarendon St. that she had better order two coffins, that her brother and probably her son had been killed. I think that was on Thursday. She went down to the Morgue and identified Michael and also Paddy Shortis of Ballybunion. We buried him in Glasnevin. My sister, myself and Austin O'Donoghue (now Justice) were the only people at the funeral. Later his body was moved to the Republican Plot. We got a permit to take a hearse with the body to the family tomb at Lislaughlin Abbey, Ballylongford, but we were urgently asked by the Republicans to leave him in Glasnevin where he was the only one of the leaders buried, all the others executed were buried in Arbour Hill. Mr. Mitchell, the ^{husband} ~~Manufacturer~~ of rosary beads came to Mrs. O'Rahilly after the Rising and told her it was he picked up the body and brought it to the Morgue. He was driving a Red Cross Ambulance.

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19. Austin O'Donoghue and his brother Henry were two converts that Michael had made to Sinn Fein. Henry was in the fighting in the Hibernian Bank with two grandsons of

Daniel O'Connell. Miss O'Connell, their aunt was along with them, cooking for them, and looking after them.

20. Some time later we put an advertisement in the paper for tidings of his watch which with any other valuables he had, had been taken while he lay dead in the laneway off Moore Street. We offered a reward. We had a reply from a man in Longford - a school teacher, I think, telling us that he had seen a soldier, he may have been one of the Scottish Borderers, in a public house, showing a watch which he said to those present had belonged to O'Rahilly. He said there was a gold chain and signet ring attached to it. He described the crest on the ring, which was our family crest. We never got any of those things back.

21. A little girl called Veale aged about 12 or 13 years to whom I used to teach Irish, was killed during Easter Week by a soldier, who aimed at her as she stood at her window in Haddington Road, looking out through binoculars. After the fighting was over, I noticed an ambulance taking another dead body from the corner house in Haddington Road. I think it had been buried in the garden for some days.

AFTER THE RISING.

22. A lot of people who were not in the movement at all came together to help the dependants of those who were executed or imprisoned. My sister and I gave some money, and I was put on the Committee. Mrs. Wyse-Power said the Cumann na mBan gave whatever money they had. It continued for a couple of years. Sceilg was an important man in it. We used to have visits to the Republican graves in Glasnevin. I had charge of looking after them.

23. I do not seem to remember anything special about the war during the subsequent period. I know that we were frequently raided and a lot of our things - jewellery and

valuables were stolen. All the time we had people on the run. Dick Mulcahy was with us often. On Bloody Sunday he came to us in great anxiety looking for a safe house for him for that night. Mrs. Humphries walked with him, arm in arm to a hay loft belonging to a monastery near Donnybrook. When we built this house we had one of the rooms camouflaged after construction by Batt. O'Connor, principally to harbour Cathal Brugha, who was on the run too. The camouflage had to be added after the house was built because the military kept watching it during construction.

During 1920 & 21 the Cabinet of the Dail occasionally met at our home 86 Aclaby Road to which we moved in 1920.

Signed; Ainead Reilly
Date; 2/1/1950.

Witness;

Seán Curran

