

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1682

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1682.

Witness

Mrs. Margaret M. (Peg) Broderick-Nicholson,
Rusheen,
Fr. Griffin Road,
Galway.

Identity.

Section Commander, Cumann na mBan, Galway.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan activities, Galway, 1917-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2986.

Form B.S.M. 2

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No. W.S. 1,682

STATEMENT BY MRS. MARGARET M. ("PEG") BRODERICK-NICHOLSON,

"Rusheen", Father Griffin Road, Galway.

I was born at 17 Prospect Hill, Galway, of parents with a strong nationalist outlook, especially my mother. I was educated at the Presentation Convent, Galway, where one of the nuns, Mother Brendan, who was one of the Joyces of Connemara, belonged to an outstanding Irish family. Well I remember after the Rebellion in 1916, a right good row in the playgrounds when an attempt was made by a number of girls wearing red, white and blue badges (which was usual during the 1st World War in the case of a number of people) to snatch our Sinn Féin (green, white and orange) badges. I may say they certainly got the worst of it, with the result that the Rev. Mother sent out an order that all badges must be given up. Mother Brendan was instructed to have the order carried out, and I refused to give mine up until all the red, white and blue badges were also collected. She did get them all, and when I gave her mine she said: "I have all the others, give me yours". I did so when she said: "I don't want to take it from you myself".

On the first evening of the Rising, I was on my way home when I noticed a number of shops were closed, including a number of shops that would not close normally on a Bank Holiday, which it was, being Easter Monday. I asked my mother what was wrong and she replied: "The boys are out in Dublin; there is a Rising". Some trouble was expected in Galway. I remember seeing some men with anxious faces who I afterwards knew were associated with the movement, George Nichols and Tommy Flanagan in particular.

In 1917, a branch of the Cumann na mBan was formed in Galway, which I immediately joined. Our duties consisted of weekly drill, with other nights devoted to lectures on first-aid by Dr. Brian Cusack, and other nights to instructional lectures in other subjects. I was later on appointed a section commander, which, I think, carried the rank of sergeant.

Our principal duties outside what I have mentioned in early 1918 were the continuous interruptions which we carried out at British recruiting meetings, moving through the people and singing national songs until the meeting collapsed or we were ejected.

I was asked by some Volunteer officers to take up intelligence work, which I did, and this partly consisted in keeping an eye out for R.I.C. patrols and the carrying of dispatches. I did a lot of work at the latter from the brigade to the various battalions at Gort, Tuam, Athenry, and Connemara. At this time I was very well known to the different officers in each area, having organised and taken part in concerts all over the county for the Volunteers. I was later trusted with carrying bundles of the Volunteer paper "An tÓglach."

We were working day and night in preparation for the very memorable general election of 1918. This being over, we started to drill and have exercises out the country. On one occasion when on a Field Day at Barna, we were being instructed by an officer from the brigade or battalion. I think his name was Sheils. We were marching back through the village when we met a Volunteer scout who said he thought there were a few R.I.C. outside the barracks waiting for us. Shortly afterwards two R.I.C. on bicycles approached us, dismounted, and walked along

our flanks. When we reached the barracks, I noticed a sergeant with six or seven men, who then made a charge out to arrest the Volunteer officer. We immediately pounced on the police. I remember getting up on one policeman's back and getting my two hands round his throat. He wriggled to knock me off and let his grip on the prisoner relax. Another R.I.C. man intervened and pulled me off. I grabbed the second fellow's cap and beat him on the head with the hard peak, and the other fellow swung round and struck me with his revolver on the side of the head, above my ear. I was half stunned and staggered against the wall, when someone shouted: "This is no time for fainting". I shook myself back to life, but by this time they had Sheils inside the barracks and came out firing shots in the air to frighten us, and using vile language. We collected all the stones, of which there were plenty, and broke every window in the barracks. We then reformed and commenced our march back very "brónach" indeed.

Early in 1920 I was attached to the Brigade Staff for the usual intelligence, dispatches, and now the delivery and collection of revolvers and ammunition from place to place for various jobs as they were required. I also conveyed dispatches from General Seán MacEoin to Brigadier Tom Reddington, and vice versa.

In the autumn of 1920 an attempt was made by R.I.C. and Tans to burn our house, which was saved by our neighbours although the Tans were firing shots all over the place. My brother, ~~Jimmy~~ was arrested and we had a very anxious time until we were informed he was safe.

I would like to mention that the Tans saturated every door in the house with petrol, also the ground floor,

evidently to burn us all in our rooms, closing every door carefully after examining the occupants instead of ordering everyone downstairs as was usual.

Some time afterwards another raid took place when they asked if I was in. I called down from the top of the stairs and said: "Surely I am allowed to dress myself". They replied: "No, come down as you are". I went down and snatched a coat from the hall-stand. My mother shouted after me: "Be brave, Peg". I thought at first they were going to shoot me, but they took me out and closed the door, then grabbed my hair, saying "What wonderful curls you've got" and then proceeded to cut off all my hair to the scalp with very blunt scissors. I might say they did not handle me too roughly, which is strange to say. There was no further comment until they finished, when they pushed me towards the door and said, "Goodnight". All spoke with English accents. I had to have my head shaved by a barber next day in order to have the hair grow properly. As I remembered it afterwards I should have gone 'on the run', as I was reliably informed that at least one R.I.C. man was seen to point me out to the Black and Tans. Also there was a publichouse in Eyre St. which was a happy home for the Tans, and the girls ^{of which} were warned by the Volunteers for publicly associating themselves with the R.I.C. and Tans. Nothing whatever was done to molest these girls. The whole family cleared out about the Truce and were not heard of since. I had the pleasure while 'on the run' of sleeping in the house next door to the infamous Bakers who had a hotel much frequented by the Black and Tans and who had close associations with the latter.

I visited Galway Jail to see Volunteer prisoners from country districts whose folk were always anxious about them. I often got parcels in through the guard. I remember one poor little soldier who suspected me but never gave me away, saying "Are you a mother, an aunt, or a sister of some of them to-day?".

Before concluding I would like to say the job I hated most was enticing British soldiers down the docks in order to have them relieved of their arms by the Volunteers, one of whom, an officer, happened to be my brother.

Signed: Margaret Gertrude Nicholson.

Date: Sept 27th - 1957.

Witness: [Signature]
(Investigator).

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