

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 752

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 752

Witness

Miss Mary Rigney,
Rere Lodge,
Woodbrook,
Bray,
Co. Wicklow.

Identity.

Member of Cumann na mBan, Dublin,
1917 - ;

Treasurer, and later Secretary of
Ard Craobh, Sinn Fein.

Subject.

Dispatch work
by members of Cumann na mBan, Dublin,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2076

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Miss Mary Rigney,

Rere Lodge, Woodbrook, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

For 14 years up to 1917 I was working in the Great Northern Hotel, Bundoran, and although there were some nationalists in the town I was not in touch with them and was not connected with the movement for independence. My people lived in Clontarf and I used to come back there for the winter, as the work in Bundoran was seasonal.

It was in 1917 I joined Cumann na mBan, Central Branch, 25 Parnell Square. My sister who was already a member introduced me and Mr. McArdle, who was a member of the I.R.B. and worked in Liberty Hall and had been out in the 1916 fight, vouched for me. I acted under orders from Cumann na mBan and carried out all duties assigned to me. I got my certificate for First Aid. It was Phyllis Ryan examined us. There were a whole crowd of us and we all got 84 or 85 marks. I continued all duties in 1917 and 1918. In 1918 I joined the Sinn Féin Club in No. 6 Harcourt St. as an ordinary member and was asked to come on the committee. Then I was appointed joint-treasurer of that club which was the Árd Craobh of Sinn Féin and remained in that position until I was arrested in 1921. Patricia Hoey was the Secretary. Mr. Hannan from Lauderdale Avenue who worked in Jacobs was joint-treasurer with me. After I had served my sentence in 1921, I was appointed Secretary in succession to Miss Hoey.

I was actively engaged in work for the general election in 1918. I prepared election literature for distribution in the South City constituency - Stephens Green area - addressing envelopes and franking them with the Sinn Féin rubber stamp in my home.

I continued to attend all the time my classes and meetings of Cumann na mBan in Parnell Square. Máire Deegan was my Commanding Officer and I carried out ordinary club duties. Early in 1920 I began to carry out special duties as courier, notifying justices of the Sinn Féin Courts to attend meetings.

We were mobilised for all sorts of parades such as funerals and general outings of Cumann na mBan. I remember getting up one morning at $\frac{3}{4}$ o'clock, calling for Madge Clifford and Kathleen Boland at the Crescent, Clontarf. That was the time Harry Boland opened the window, put his head out and shouted "Up Cumann na mBan". It was a wild thing to do and we trying to do the whole thing very quietly. It was an impressive sight to see all the girls moving into the empty streets from all the different points. The Committee had arranged for a special early Mass at some church - I think it was Mount Argus. We were going on a route march to Templeogue and we were to carry a morning's rations. When Mass was over we got into a field and ate our rations. Máire Deegan, Eilis Ryan and many others were with us. I don't think Madge Kennedy was there on that occasion, at least I don't remember seeing her.

We came out from the field on to the road and we were told to "fall in" and we marched towards Rathfarnham. We passed a constabulary barracks and the

tramping of the feet of at least a hundred girls drew the attention of the police. I saw the curtain of the window being gently lifted as we passed and a remark was passed by one of our members, "Well, they'll be after us now". We weren't very long passed when we discovered that there were two of them on bicycles behind our lines. When we came down to the dismissal point near Rathfarnham we got the "Halt" from our Commanding Officers to dismiss and we had to fall into lines for that. A lorry of soldiers on their way to Islandbridge Barracks passed us and slowed up at their turning point. I'd say it was a golden opportunity for our officers to show off their military proficiency. At the word of command we stood at attention and we all felt very proud of ourselves. We then broke our ranks and went for the trams at Rathfarnham, swarming all over them inside and outside. We got a great greeting from the tram drivers and conductors when they saw the police following us. They told us we were great girls. Eventually we reached our homes in time for our lunch. This is an example of a general mobilisation in which all the branches took part. Of course we had our own branch route marches as well.

During a period I was a delegate from the Harcourt St. Sinn Féin Club to the Comhairle Ceanntair. We used to meet in a room over an Italian ice cream shop in Harcourt Road. The proprietor was a supporter of ours. I cannot remember his name. I can't say exactly how often we had these meetings. On one particular occasion it was when curfew was the law - we were delayed past the usual time for leaving the premises. I lived in Clontarf, and on ordinary

occasions I was able to get the tram from the Circular Road to the Pillar where I would usually get the last Clontarf tram. On this occasion there was a very important matter to be discussed. Mrs. Nix had given shelter to one of the men on the run at the time. He stole her gold watch and she reported it and Seán McGlynn who was Chairman of this meeting brought the matter up for discussion. I was so engrossed that I did not notice the time until Mr. Hannan reminded me of it. I rushed out without waiting to hear the end of the case and saw the tram turning down at Kelly's Corner. I took all kinds of short cuts to get to the Pillar myself. I arrived there in time to see the last Clontarf tram turning into Earl St. I was unfortunate in having a new pair of shoes on and I looked to see if I could get any conveyance to take me home as I knew I could never walk that distance. Just below Hickeys of Earl St. I saw a jarvey with a side-car and I hailed him. I asked him would he drive me to Clontarf, as it was coming near curfew hour. He consented but when we got to Fairview Corner he flatly refused to go any further, as he had to get home before curfew himself. At this particular time British troops were quartered in Dollymount. I got off the car and started to walk home. I tried to run but could not do so, my shoes were too tight. I had in my possession at the time my rollbook of the Sinn Féin Club with the names and addresses of all members. This was more important to me than my tight shoes and sore feet, as the book would give valuable information to the enemy if I was arrested and the book captured. At Howth Road corner I decided I would take off my shoes and run home in my

stockinged feet. I was very uncertain how to protect the club book if I saw any of the military coming and finally decided, if I did see them coming, to walk up the path to the hall door of one of the houses, as if it was my own, until the military had passed. My next thought was that I was very near the Clontarf Police Station and that there were always some of them at the Barrack corner which was sheltered by a high wall. They knew me by sight as they had seen me working on the election and it might interest them to find out why I was going home in my stockinged feet carrying my shoes in my hand so I decided to put them on again and walk past the barrack as best I could. The police were there all right but did not stop me, they merely said "Good night". I walked on until out of their sight, then decided to take off my shoes again, as I thought all danger had passed and I was not far from home. I had just decided to stop at a shop door and take off my shoes when I saw approaching me four D.M.P., each carrying a rifle. I walked on coolly and the Sergeant said "Good night" and I said to him "Would you mind telling me the time, please. I am afraid it must be near curfew time. I missed my last tram coming home from a party and I hope the military are not about". The Sergeant said "Don't worry, they have not come out yet and if you do meet them, they will probably bring you back to us and you'll be all right". They passed on and I took off my shoes again and ran for bare life until I got to my own gate with no soles on my stockings. Just as I got inside my own door and closed it a military lorry flew past on its route from Dollymount to Dublin. Something must have intervened to prevent me finding out what was the end of the affair of the watch. It may have been my arrest.

I was sent by order of Arthur Griffith during the months of November and December 1920 as a guard to Michael Collins' headquarters in Mespil Road, Dublin. My duties were to answer the door and cook for Michael Collins his lunch and his tea. It was Miss Hoey's house, No. 3 near the Leeson St. end of Mespil Road and he went under the name of Mr. O'Brien, if anybody inquired about him. Miss Hoey's mother, Mrs. Clive Howard was an out and out Britisher and had no suspicion of who her lodger was. Patricia told me that her mother would not hesitate to go around to the officer on the bridge and offer information about Michael Collins for the £1,000 that was on his head.

While he was there working - he did not sleep there although there was a bedroom at his disposal, which he furnished himself - his messengers visited him with despatches at various hours during the day. I was told by Miss Hoey that I need not worry about these men coming and going, as each of them possessed his own latchkey in order to avoid any delay on the steps. They had instructions never to knock. The house was a very suitable one. It could never be surrounded. It had a long garden front and back and there was a high wall at the bottom of the back garden and in case of a raid Michael Collins could get out of a backroom window into the garden, get over the wall at the end of the garden and drop into a wooded park. I rather think the house was detached. The front railing was protected by corrugated iron which shielded a great portion of the house from the view of the passers-by. I slept there for the two months in the basement bedroom intended for Michael Collins. This was a blind in case of a raid and intended to prove that no man

occupied the place.

Collins worked in the front room and thus had a close view of anyone who might come in by the front gate. Should there be a knock at the hall door I was to answer it. In case of spies who might come as professional beggars etc. the door was never to be left open for one moment. Should it be anyone who would require a delay, I was to close the door and slip the latch till I came back. I did the shopping for Miss Hoey to prevent unnecessary callers. Her mother went to London to her son. Incidentally she sold various articles of value to provide money for the good-for-nothing son who was trying to live on a grand scale in a flat belonging to his mother in London. He was a Clive Howard and all Miss Hoey's patrimony was being spent on him. Miss Hoey also supported a stepsister - also a Clive Howard - who was deaf and dumb. The atmosphere of the place nearly drove me crazy, as there was continual friction between Miss Hoey and her mother till the latter went away. Mrs. Clive Howard was a very extravagant woman.

In the upstairs living room and downstairs kitchen of No. 3 Mespil Road, the late Batt O'Connor had made hiding places for papers, ammunition, guns etc. in the panelling over the windows. There were sliding panels which were not perceptible except to someone who knew them. Coming in from the back garden facing you was a door leading into a cubby hole under the stairs. The back wall of this cubby hole had shelves on which were old tins, boxes, cleaning materials etc. which are normally kept in such places. This wall could be opened by pressing a spring and behind it was a large space which was capable of hiding an amount of important papers.

In the evening the typist, a little red haired girl whose name I can't remember used to put in all the papers connected with Mick's work and close the camouflaged door. This was to forestall any search during raids. There was a raid early in 1921 but nothing was found. Patricia told me all about it afterwards when she was arrested and brought to Mountjoy. She was discharged as nothing could be proved against her.

I left Mespil Road at Christmas and did not go back there. Mrs. Clive Howard had come home at that time. Patricia gave me a whole pile of papers to take home with me to Clontarf, some of these I tied up and for safety, I put some of them into the oven of an old kitchen range which we never used, some more on the kitchen floor with a heavy trunk on top and the rest were in a potting shed in the garden covered with flower pots and other rubbish. In spite of the raid on my place they were never found.

On Sunday 30th January 1921 about 12 o'clock I was busy making up my roll and other books for our Branch meeting on Monday night at Harcourt St. I saw a lorry of military pass the house on towards Dollymount, but as this was not unusual I took no heed of it but went on with my books. There were four of my sisters and an invalid brother who was in bed, as well as myself in the house at the time. I had finished my work and went to the kitchen to see about lunch when there was a terrific banging on the hall door. I went out and opened the door and was confronted by a military officer and men. The officer asked me if I were Mary Rigney. I said yes. He asked me if I were the householder. I said yes. He said "Do you take

responsibility for all who are in the house. I said yes. He then ordered his men to search the house, which they did in a casual way. They came back and reported that there was nothing found. They were about to go away when one of the party came downstairs and produced two or three revolvers which he had found in the attic over the bathroom. The officer turned round to me and said "Now, we'll tear the house to bits".

I had an old aunt much older than my mother, who was also an invalid and occupied a bedroom on the ground floor facing the hall door. When I was going to the kitchen earlier I had opened her door and placed my little rollbook in her wardrobe which was beside the door. Before the military started to search I asked the officer not to interfere with my aunt's room, as she was very frail and any excitement might mean her death. In reality she was not a bit afraid and we often laughed about this raid afterwards. He agreed. Now I expected that he would go back on his word and search that room closely as he would all the others. I went to my aunt's door to assure her that she need not worry as the officer had promised not to interfere. While I was speaking in a loud voice to her I quietly opened the wardrobe door, lifted the little roll book and stuck it into the front of my blouse. I picked up my little dog Rory who had followed me and held him up in front of the book. After a thorough search of the house the officer demanded to see all the other members of the family. I called my sisters to the drawing room. He took their names. During this time the hall was crowded with his men who were seated on benches and chairs in the hall. During all this time the military lorry was at our gate and the officer told me to get

ready to come with them. I said "I am not going in the lorry with your men". He said to me "Have you got a telephone here". I replied "No". "Do you know where there is a telephone in the vicinity" and although I did, I said "No". He sent two of his men out to look round the locality for a telephone and ring Dublin Castle to tell them to send out a car. "If we don't get a telephone" he said, "you will have to travel in the lorry". I said "You have no women searchers with you and you can't lay a hand on me". He then sat down at the piano and said "this may amuse you". He started to play "God Save the King". I went into the hall and saw all the soldiers there. I asked them why they were not standing up to attention while their national anthem was being played. As I stood between the hall and the drawing-room the little dog shifted his position and the shape of the book inside my blouse was exposed. The officer turned towards me and seeing it said "You need to be searched". I said "I don't have to repeat myself, you have not any women searchers with you and you are not going to do it". He then said to one of the soldiers "Keep her under observation until we go".

Still holding the little dog in my arms I went up the stairs and kept calling Margaret my sister. The soldier stayed at the bottom of the stairs watching me. When I got to the third step from the top my sister Margaret came out of her room to the landing. I spoke loudly so that they could hear all I said, "Margaret, will you take Rory and look after him for me". She leaned forward to do so and I pointed to the book and said in a whisper "Pat", meaning Miss Hoey. Taking the dog and the book at the same time she stuck the book

down the front of her own dress. Of course I had my back to the soldier below who followed his orders and did not let me out of his sight. I turned to come down the stairs and called back to my sister "Don't forget Rory and 'pat' him now and again. She had jumped to my meaning immediately and went to Miss Hoey with the book as soon as it was safe to do so.

By this time the car had arrived at the gate. I was told to get ready and come along which I did.

During the raid an I.R.A. boy, Robert Young, who had been in the Rising and in Frongoch with the others, arrived at my house, although he must have seen the lorry at the gate and must have known that a raid was on. He had worked at Pigotts with one of my sisters. On reflecting on the matter afterwards I thought it strange that an I.R.A. man should walk boldly into a house that was obviously being raided, as at that time the British authorities were out to capture any man connected with the movement. I also thought it strange that he was not questioned or interfered with in any way by the military. I always had my suspicion that he could not be relied upon and I did not conceal my feelings towards him. The military took away the revolvers and whatever ammunition accompanied them. I must say I was very much surprised when they were first produced to me, though I did not show it. I wondered how they came to be in the house and my sister told me when I came home from Mountjoy that they were Bob Young's.

I went out to the motor car while the soldiers filed into their lorry. There were two plain clothes men in the open car - I suppose detectives from the Castle. The military officer told the detectives to watch me

well and see that I did not discard anything. I felt quite happy in the thought that I had nothing to discard. We drove to the Castle yard and I was ushered into a long, narrow passage. It was dark and the rain was falling heavily. Standing in the passage just outside the door of the room to which I was being brought was a figure which I took to be a woman. She had an open umbrella and as I passed her I looked straight at her face. She immediately lowered the umbrella in front of her face and I could not identify her. I was brought into a large guard room which seemed to be crowded with military. They immediately started to question me about Cumann na mBan, members of the Volunteers whom I might know and especially Eamonn Martin and his wife. I did not answer any questions of any kind and then an orderly came in, spoke to one of the officers who told two soldiers to escort me off outside and take me to Mountjoy. I was brought in the same car with the same two detectives who got the same warning to watch me closely.

I was searched in Mountjoy. Nothing was found.

MR. for I was taken to the North Dublin Union in an armoured car ~~after~~ my courtmartial on the 12th February and sentenced to two years' hard labour, commuted to nine months which I served in Mountjoy where I knew all the other women prisoners and became friendly with them. I have a list of these which you can copy. I obtained it from Mountjoy.

When I left the prison I brought out a lot of letters and messages from the other women and some suggestion from Ethna Coyle about the projected escape from Mountjoy.

The women prisoners had told me they wanted to send out various things from the prison, such mementoes as spoons and other items of kitchen equipment, and I promised to make arrangements to have them sent for. So when I was back home about a week, I asked my sister Joe to take an attaché case and pay a visit to Ethna Coyle in Mountjoy. When she was admitted a warder took the attaché case from her, saying she was not allowed to take it into the prison. A wardress, Miss McLaughlin who was a grand woman and did all she could for the women prisoners, took hold of the attaché case saying "I'll mind this till the lady is going out." While Joe was visiting Ethna Coyle Miss McLaughlin, ^{with} ~~took~~ ^{was present and filled} the attaché case ^{with mementoes} ~~to the prisoners, who filled it with all the things they wanted to send out.~~ She then brought it back to the prison entrance and handed it to Joe when she was leaving.

This is all I have to tell and I am afraid it is not of any great importance.

Signed: Mary Rigney

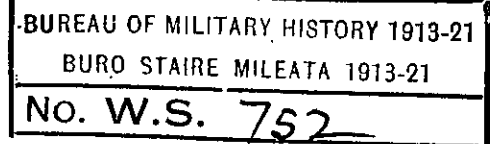
Date: 20th November 1952.

(Mary Rigney)

20th November 1952

Witness: S. Ni Chiosain

(S. Ni Chiosain)



Mountjoy Prison,

9th June, 1950.

Members of Cumann na mBan in this prison in 1921.

<u>Name.</u>	<u>Date of trial by Courtmartial.</u>	<u>Sentence.</u>
Eileen McGrane	16th May, 1921.	4 years P.S.
Mary Rigney	12th Feb., 1921.	2 years.
Annie Coyle	28th Feb., 1921.	3 years P.S.
A. Cooney	29th April, 1921.	3 months.
Mrs. Llewelyn Davies	14th June, 1921.	Discharged.
Lena Sharkey	9th May, 1921.	do.
Una Sharkey	9th May, 1921.	do.
Aileen Keogh	8th Feb., 1921.	2 years.
Patricia Hoey	1st June, 1921.	Discharged.
Cecilia Toolin	21st April, 1921.	6 months.
F. Brady	15th June, 1921.	2 years.
Bridget Brady	12th July, 1921.	2 years.
Molly Hyland	Discharged 25th July, 1921.	
Linda Kearns	11th March, 1921 (Belfast)	10 years P.S.
Kate Crowley	29th June 1921 (Cork)	P.S. for life.
Madge Cotter	do.	do.
Lily Cotter	do.	do.
