

W. S. 1,344
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRSE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,344

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,344.....

Witness

Maire, Bean Mhic Giolla Phadraig,
16 St. John's Villas,
Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Adjutant, North Wexford Brigade
Cumann na mBan, 1920-1923.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford,
1914-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY (1913-21) 344
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STATEMENT BY MAIRE BEAN MAC GIOLLA PADRAIG
(née Moran)

16 St. John's Villas, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

I was born in a house in Church St., Enniscorthy, fourth of a family of six. My father carried on a tailor's business and what a father! When we were kids we used to say of dad - Ireland first, Ireland last, Ireland over all. Other children had fairy stories; we had history and ballads. We said our prayers in Irish. At that time there was no Irish spoken in Enniscorthy or taught at school, but knowing your prayers in Irish got you a lot of respect from the nuns who taught us. Our Rev. Mother was an aunt of Doctor Ryan.

Dad was a member of all organisations that helped to free Ireland. I don't know where they met, but I know our house was always full of men and certainly they were not customers. One man in particular came to sharpen scissors and I know he carried messages for the I.R.B. I distinctly^{-ly} remember the first meetings of Sinn Fein in town. They were held every Tuesday night in the Town Hall. I was still at school when Dad brought me to one of the meetings. Sir Thomas Esmonde was there, two girls - Mary Walshe, Brigid Rigby; - Richard Leary, Clonhaston; ... Kelly, Shannon; Mike Doyle, Irish Street; Paddy Fitzpatrick; Larry de Lacy (Sec.). There were about twelve in all present. Dad was chairman of the Town Tenants League. Evictions were many and he always placed a black flag on the house after an eviction and held a protest meeting. One night the police batoned the people and he was hurt, but he soon recovered.

When the Gaelic League was started in town, dad was a great supporter of it, but didn't attend the meetings much, but saw

we all attended.

Liam Royce (R.I.P.), Slaney Street, was a grand Gael; he formed a pipers' band and was the first to wear the kilt here, and his wife and sister-in-law - now Mrs. Seamus Doyle - were the first to wear the national costume. Dad started to make kilts and made them for some of the leading members of the movement. This brought a lot of noted people to our shop. Dad was very happy. He had a marvellous head for history and dates and wrote very good poetry and a lot of this was published. My eldest brother and sister were fluent Irish speakers. Dad and Mum saw to it that we six spoke, read and thought all for Ireland. Everything we wore was made in Ireland. My brother, Seán, was a very fine player of many instruments. We all could play and sing and dance.

Then Liam Mellows came to stay with us while he was organising Na Fianna Éireann. Seán helped him to establish the first branch in town. I was allowed to help with the organising, but Liam Mellows wouldn't let a girl join. Seán got the loan of a revolver and I was allowed to learn to use it, until one day I shot a hen belonging to Mum, so I had to stop. The scouts were a huge success and Liam and Seán were very proud of them. There were about 30 boys in the slough. Some of those boys took part in the Rising in Easter Week 1916.

Then came the Volunteers. Seán and my brother Liam went into the Volunteer movement, and Dad also. Then Cumann na mBan was formed in Dublin and I formed a branch in Enniscorthy. Mrs. Wyse Power addressed the first meeting; it was a great success; we had 100 members. Dr. Kelly and Nurse Hardy gave first aid lectures. My elder sister, Sighle, was drill instructor.

During this time I left school; I hated it anyway.

Mum didn't want me to leave, but Dad backed me up. I had lots of work to do for the movement. I was organising Cumann na mBan, giving lectures and holding first aid classes. I had been in Dublin and was introduced to Seán Connolly at Liberty Hall. I undertook to distribute the "Workers Republic" in Enniscorthy.

Larry de Lacy had a house in New Street; it was a home for all republican leaders. A friend of mine lived there also, a Mrs. Frank Green; her husband was also in the house. I met a lot of the leaders there and did a lot of important messages for them. Larry de Lacy was editor of the 'Echo' where the 'Irish Volunteer' was printed. It was sent from de Lacy's to Dublin. Liam Mellows often brought as many as he could carry when returning to Dublin.

Then came the split in the Volunteers and the Cumann na mBan. I got voting papers from headquarters to get the members to vote which side they were taking. I went to de Lacy's to talk it over with Mrs. Greene. Seán T. O'Kelly and some other men were there. They drafted out a speech for me for the meeting. Mrs. Green and I went to the meeting that night. I never saw a bigger attendance. Father Cummins was there too.

I gave my speech and asked any member that was against Redmond to stand on my side of the hall, but Mrs. Green and I were standing alone. It was my first big disappointment. I was heartbroken. When we told them in de Lacy's, they said 'Try again' and form a new branch". I did, and a few members came back.

Redmond and his followers had a big movement in the town and men and women on the Irish Volunteer side were few. About this time Redmond had a big recruiting meeting in

Wexford. The town was packed with his supporters.

I never knew what the big noises in de Lacy's had on hand. Mrs. Green and I were just told to do a thing and we did it. Anyway, we were to start for Wexford at 6 a.m. on the Sunday of Redmond's big meeting in a rowboat from Enniscorthy to Wexford, Larry de Lacy, Liam Mellows, Frank Green, Mrs. Green and myself. When we arrived in Wexford we met Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, Seumas Doyle and Bob Brennan. We were given leaflets to distribute. Wexford was crowded with people for the meeting and we got a very rough handling from the crowd. Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington got so badly beaten that she had to be attended by a doctor. We were stoned out of Wexford, but we had our reward. The Irish Volunteers got more members and we got back most of our women. Soon after, L. de Lacy's house was raided by police. Mr. Hegarty, Cork, was arrested. Liam Mellows and L. de Lacy got away. The Greens had to leave the country; they went to America. There was a housekeeper at de Lacy's; she was the most faithful old woman I ever met. I only knew her as Biddy. I believe she came from Bree. After the break-up there I gave more time to Cumann na mBan.

On the day of the Howth gun-running Mrs. Wyse Power addressed a meeting at Enniscorthy of Cumann na mBan, which helped to put the branch on a very sound footing. All the members of our family were engaged on national work - Seán drilling country units of the Irish Volunteers; Sighle helping to instruct Cumann na mBan of which Biddy and Kathleen were active members, and Liam was doing Volunteer work. Dad, as usual, was making uniforms and Mum was catering for any H.Q. members that came down. Our shop was used to leave messages and we delivered them.

The week previous to Easter Week was a busy one in our house. Guns that were stored there had to be delivered to certain men. On the eve of the Rising I cycled to Wexford with an important dispatch from Seumas Doyle to Bob Brennan. I remember my brother Seán meeting me on the Enniscorthy Bridge and giving me the revolver, the very same one that I shot the hen with. Looking back, I can see Seán handing me his precious revolver. "Mind it, May" he said, "I have it a long time, but use it if necessary" I got to Brennan's. Mrs. Bob Brennan and Miss Hegarty were getting ready to come to Enniscorthy by sidecar. I got a large parcel of ammunition and other things and brought them back on my bicycle. When I arrived home, things were beginning to happen. Seán brought the parcel to Keegan's, Irish St., and I gave him back his precious revolver. I was dead tired and hungry. I was sent to bed to sleep one hour, but I slept till 7 o'clock next morning. When I came downstairs things certainly had happened. The Volunteers had taken over the Athenaeum as headquarters and the tricolour had been hoisted over it. Mother and my sisters were making pots of tea. I went out on the street to see what was on. As long as I live, that morning sight will never leave my mind. A glorious day, Mike Moran (no relation) was standing at White's corner with a rifle covering the police barracks. Andy McKeever was at the other side of the street with a rifle. Dad with a can of tea and he feeding the sentries. He was an old man then with snow white hair. Nobody else about but an old man with a bucket of tea, two young men with rifles, and I knew then all our work was not in vain. We were on the road to freedom.

It was 7.30 a.m. People were coming from Mass. I knew then exactly what I must do. One of our members, May Hickey, was coming from Mass. I told her what was happening and I

went into our house and collected my two sisters, Kathleen and Biddy. We proceeded to the Athenaeum. Kathleen was attached to H.Q. in the office. Mrs, Brennan and Miss Hegarty were already there. Biddy, Mrs. Brennan and Miss Hegarty prepared the concert hall for use as an emergency hospital. May Hickey and I called in the rest of the girls. Then a kitchen unit was formed in the rink, under Miss Greta Comerford. Miss White was in charge of the emergency hospital. I didn't take part either in the kitchen or the emergency hospital. I was appointed dispatch carrier.

I knew what I would do when the real fighting started. I had a first aid certificate, but it's the rifle I would have preferred. My sister Sighle was married and her house was used as a rest centre. Herself and Mrs. de Lacy were placed in Mrs. de Lacy's house on the outskirts of the town. It was used as an outpost and food depot. Members of Cumann na mBan worked hard that week. I was sent to Wexford with an important dispatch to J.J. Doyle, Main Street, and another to Nick Murphy. J.J. Doyle told me about the British troops landing in Wexford. In fact, they were already in Wexford town and allowing no one out of town. I knew I had to get back to warn them in Enniscorthy. Just by luck, I got friendly with two soldiers who were on duty at Ferrycarrig, promising to meet them later that night. They let me pass. Little they knew my mission. The news of the troops so near acted as a tonic to some of our boys. It meant a fight, and how eager they were to fight!

All my family were working. Dad was on sentry duty. Seán in charge of a company of Volunteers that went to take over Ferns. Liam on sentry. Mother was in charge of a rest centre. Every member of our family fighting for the land we loved. Then the word came about the surrender. Seumas Doyle went to Dublin to confirm it, and, Oh! the sadness when he returned

with orders from Pearse to surrender. 'No fight. I saw men and boys that day who worked and drilled and dreamt of the fight for freedom break down. But Dad said "Surrender, but not defeat".

Things moved pretty fast then. The rats all came out of their holes to welcome the British soldiers. It was sad to see our brave leaders accepting death to save the rank and file. Then our men were arrested, Dad amongst them, also Seán and Liam, all sent to a British jail. Poor Dad, he looked so frail and so proud. Our house was raided and ransacked. My sister had twin boys and when the police were raiding her home, thinking there was only one baby in the cot. When one baby was lifted out, a policeman pulled up the mattress and killed the other little baby. Her husband had already been arrested.

Our Cumann na mBan kept faithfully together, collecting rifles and hiding them, looking after prisoners' dependants. Our house was being constantly searched. They took away all our money and food. We had a hard time, yet I never heard a grumble. One big D.M.P. man called to our house one day and gave me a bundle of letters to be delivered to the relatives of Seumas Doyle, Sean Etchingham, Dick King, Bob Brennan, Mick de Lacy and Seumas Rafter. Thinking they were to be executed, the friendly D.M.P. man smuggled them out. I was proud to know they sent them to me for safe delivery. The ones in town were easy to deliver, but Sean Etchingham's had to go to Courtown. The R.I.C. had left orders at the railway station that I was not to get a ticket to leave town. So I decided to walk to Courtown. I got there and had delivered the letter to Sean's mother when the house was raided. I was arrested, but released shortly afterwards. I got back safely to Enniscorthy.

Things were pretty bad in Enniscorthy. Hundreds of men were arrested. Their families had to be looked after, but the White Cross was started and helped a lot. The men came home and were more determined than ever. I went to Dublin and worked for a while with Dr. K. Lynn at Liberty Hall. A man named O'Neill, who had charge of a munition factory at Liberty Hall, helped in procuring more guns for us.

My people in Church St. still kept on working for the cause the men doing Volunteer work, and the girls with Cumann na mBan. We had a cellar under the shop where ammunition was kept. Any guns that came our way were stored there. Concerts were organised; we helped at them all.

The night previous to the attack on Clonroche R.I.C. Bks. we were very busy. It was the last night I saw my brother Seán (R.I.P.) alive. The next day he had to leave town and he went to Drogheda. I can honestly say there was no house that had more raids. The Tans destroyed everything of value we had. They even had women searchers for us, but nothing was ever got. My Dad was paraded around the town with the Tans on many occasion, but he was brave. It was beginning to tell on his strength and he was not able for it. Then, Ash Wednesday morning, 9th February 1921, when we came back from Mass, Dad took down the shutters from the shop and put them up again and down again. Of course, we all got on to him; but how right he was. Just then, Fr. Browne came in to tell us that Seán had been murdered by Black and Tans in Drogheda. Oh! my mother was brave. She didn't cry, but I knew her heart was broken. I never saw her smile again. Looking at Fr. Browne she asked: "It wasn't spy and informer, Father?". "No, thank God".

We went to Drogheda and saw his shattered body in an

outhouse at the barracks, covered by a sack, and Alderman Halpin's body beside it. God gave Dad and me courage; we never cried. Seán was married with a wife and a nine months old baby. His wife told us that Seán was 'on the run' and that night he had just come in to say goodnight to baby and herself when he was arrested. The officer told her to bring his breakfast to the barracks in the morning. She didn't know Mrs. Halpin, but met her the next morning, also going with her husband's breakfast. While they were waiting outside the barracks they heard about the murders.

Alderman Halpin was buried in Drogheda, and we brought Sean's remains home to Enniscorthy. The Tans treated us very badly. The funeral was banned. Only a few were allowed to go, but the town closed down and men, women and children turned out. Many were arrested and some hurt. My brother Liam had to leave town and still we were raided.

We all carried on the national work till 1923. Dad and Mum died in 1924. They had suffered too much. R.I.P.

Every member of our family has Service medals.

Signed: *Maire Bean Mac Giolla Padraig*

DATE: *25th Jan. 1956.*

(Maire, Bean Mac Giolla Padraig)
25th Jan. 1956.

Witness: *Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col.*

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

