ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 216

Witness

Miss Louise Gavan Duffy,
95 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin.

Identity

Joint Secretary of Cumann na mBan
Dublin, 1914.

Subject

(a) Activities of Cumann na mBan Dublin 1914-1916.

(b) On duty in kitchen of G.P.O. during Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY MISS LOUISE GAVAN DUFFY

95 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.

I did not come to Ireland until the Autumn of 1907. I went then to the Gaeltacht and learned Irish. From the outset I was a Sinn Féiner, but I did not belong to anything. My brother was in the Sinn Féin movement.

I went to teach in Sgoil Íde, Mr. Pearse's school in Oakley Road, after I got my Degree. It was a girls' school. The year before, Mr. Pearse had gone out to Rathfarnham with the boys, and this school had been opened as a girls' school. In the summer I came back from the Gaeltacht, and I was going to have my Degree examination in the autumn of 1911. Mollie Maguire, later Padraig Colum's wife, was teaching in St. Ita's, she had been teaching there since the school opened. She said to me, "We are in difficulties as one of the teachers is leaving. Could you come?" I said, "I don't know much Irish, and what about this teacher?" Mollie Maguire said, "She won't come back. She fell out with Mr. Pearse". I did go there as soon as I got my Degree.

This school was closed down in the summer of 1912. It only lasted for two years. Mr. Pearse had no money to keep it going; any money he had he wanted it for St. Enda's. Actually there was a question of my taking over the girls' school and its becoming my property, but the only way Mr. Pearse could let me have it was with all its debts, and my family would not let me take it over. It was frightfully in debt. The pupils melted away. A number of the bigger girls came back and lived there the following year, some of them were attending College and were very devoted to the place and did not want to leave. It was owned by Mr. Pearse, but nothing happened in it. It was a sort of family digs I suppose.

Thomas MacDonagh never lived in Oakley Road, at least he did not live there while I was there. He was not married at that time. I think he was connected with St. Enda's. I did not know him except by sight and to speak to a little bit.

I did not open my own school until after the Rebellion.

I cannot account for all the years between 1912 and the Rebellion, but the first year after St. Ita's closed I made up my mind that I would have a school of my own. I needed a Teacher's Diploma, so I went to Eccles Street for the Cambridge Diploma and I spent a year there. I was digging with my friend Mrs. Dowling of Haddington Road, who afterwards received me in Easter Week, 1916. I went to No. 17 Eccles Street, and got my lectures and my Cambridge Diploma. That was 1913. There are three years to account for before 1916 and I can only account for two. I was a sort of Assistant in the Training College for two years, and I was Assistant in the Training College when the Rebellion broke out.

It was in 1914 that Cumann na mBan was started. I think I was down in Tourmakeady then and I came up to hear about Cumann na mBan. I think I was at the opening meeting in Wynne's Hotel in the Autumn of 1914. I think Mollie Maguire and I were the first secretaries of the Cumann na mBan. I think Agnes O'Farrelly was made President, and then she did something that offended us and we wrote to the papers about it. If I can find the letter I will send it in. We did not think her ideas advanced enough. She must have said something that we probably considered derogatory to Cumann na mBan and we were very indignant about it.

A person who was Secretary for a certain length of time was Miss O'Flaherty of Achill. She came over from London, where she lived, and was a paid Secretary. She was a most devoted person. I am certain she was paid, because she came to me one day and

showed me something I never saw before. It was a stamp book in which she took a note of every letter sent out. Of course, that would not make her a paid Secretary, it would only mean that she was accounting for the money that was in her charge. Perhaps she was not a paid Secretary, I do not know. Miss O'Flaherty was not very long there.

I am very hazy about the early years. I cannot remember where we met, because we had different rooms in the different years. I remember we had offices in No. 6 Harcourt Street, and I remember having offices in O'Connell Street, but that was later on when Miss O'Flaherty was Secretary. We met mostly in Dawson Street. We had offices in Dawson Street not long before the Rising, and twice I got locked up there by mistake, once with Saidhbh Trench, when we had to climb out the window and out along the gutter. We were afraid the police would see us and think we were breaking into the house. That was in 1916. I had a bag of buns that I was taking up to No. 17 for tea and we fell on the buns. We ate them then, as we thought we were going to be there all night. That was a Volunteer office. I think we met in Pearse Street as well, but it was not the ancient concert room. There was a coal merchant named Clerkin in the movement and it might have been in his place. It was in that direction anyway. We had different offices and I do not remember the succession of offices. We met in Mrs. Power's as well, I think. The time we got ourselves locked up, the Volunteers were always on the premises for hours at a time, and I think they had only gone home for their tea and locked up the place./

Shortly before 1916 I was asked to take charge of a sum of money; I think it must have been O'Rahilly who asked me to take it. Shortly afterwards somebody came to me for that money, and the second person, whoever it was, would have had a right to get it. Whether the second person was Mrs. Wyse Power

or whether I imagine that I would not like to say. It was a considerable sum of money, but I do not know how much. It was in a parcel and I did not open it. I think another section of the Volunteers thought they should have got it, and there was some indignation about it, although they did not say anything to me. I did not hold it very long. Very soon after the Rebellion I was asked for it by somebody who had authority to ask for it, and I gave it to that person, who may have been Mrs. Wyse Power.

There was growing activity coming up to 1916, and there was a feverish feeling that something was going to happen. I do not think it began in January, it might have begun in October.

I remember we used drill in Cullenswood House, Oakley Road. We did not drill with arms and we were never shown the use of arms. I do not remember having meetings there.

I was actually on holidays at Easter, 1916. No. 17 was closed down and I wanted solitude. I went to Haddington Road, where I had digs before. I went there on Wednesday or Thursday of Holy Week. Maggie Irvine was in the digs, and she told me that there was going to be a Rebellion. She must have told me because we were the only two women in the digs. She was very much in love with the man she since married, Joe Doherty. I think he was pretty high up in the Volunteers at the time and she was very worried. There were two Doherty brothers from Derry and she married the younger brother. She told me several times that there was going to be a Rising. She only got a hint. I think she came back later on the Monday morning and told me that there was a Rising. I said to her, "When you have been in Cumann na mBan as long as I have, you won't be frightened by rumours". She was not in Cumann na mBan at all. I was tired hearing rumours and I thought she was getting unduly excited about nothing. I went out to see what I could see. She must

have been out that morning herself and I assume that it was she told me because Mrs. Dowling would not know. Mrs. Dowling was elderly and very delicate.

I went down Haddington Road to Northumberland Road and I saw a wounded man being taken away. My first introduction to the bloodshed of 1916 was this man being lifted, I think, into a house. He was being carried to the corner house, which has steps up to the hall door, on the right-hand side as you go down Haddington Road towards Northumberland Road. It was actually in Northumberland Road. I do not know whether he was a civilian or a Volunteer, but he was not in uniform. There were civilians wounded, I think. This man may have been brought from the centre of the city, but I did not wait to find out.

I went on down past Westland Row and down Pearse Street. I do not remember seeing signs of anything in Westland Row. That would be between two o'clock and four o'clock, I think. I went along by D'Olier Street or Westmoreland Street and across the Bridge, but I do not remember anything special until I found myself at the G.P.O. I was not hindered in any way on my journey. I saw nothing unusual, except, I suppose, empty streets or crowded streets, I do not remember - empty more likely. I saw no sign of crowds collecting in O'Connell Street. I heard about the looting afterwards, but I saw no sign of it then, it was too early. I heard no shooting at that stage. I saw none of the dead horses or anything like that, and I saw no sign of Hopkins being occupied.

When I got to the G.P.O. I was let in. I forget who was on guard. I asked to see Mr. Pearse, he was the only person I knew.

Before I entered the post office I did not notice groups of people outside. I only remember the men on guard outside the door.

I was brought into the post office and I saw Mr. Pearse. He was as calm and courteous as ever. I now think it was very insolent of me because I said to him that I wanted to be in the field but that I felt that the Rebellion was a frightful mistake, that it could not possibly succeed and it was, therefore, wrong. I forget whether he said anything to that or whether he simply let it go. He certainly did not start to justify himself. I told him that I would rather not do any active work; I suppose what I meant was that I would not like to be sent with dispatches or anything like that, because I felt that I would not be justified. He asked me would I like to go to the kitchen. I could not object to that, and I went up to the kitchen at the top of the back of the building. He was at the bottom of the main building, in front. I suppose it was the public room, but I did not recognise it, it looked so different.

I suppose somebody brought me up to the kitchen, because I could not have found my way myself. When I got up there I was brought to Desmond Fitzgerald, who was in command there. There were a good many girls there, serving and washing up dishes. I did not know this Downey girl until I met her there. I cannot remember who the girls were. I only met them drilling. I knew their faces and probably knew their names, but I have forgotten them. I did not know many Cumann na mBan girls. I think Miss McNamara was there. I think Mrs. Fitzgerald was there, and I do not remember whether it was she or the person who brought me up introduced me to Desmond. Mrs. Fitzgerald went in to say goodbye to her husband and then went away. I do not think she intended to come back. I think that was the last I saw of her. She lived in Bray.

I think there was a woman named Fitzgerald there. I see her about still. She is tall and delicate looking. I am

not sure is her name Fitzgerald; I think she lives in Camden Street. She goes to our Church. I know she was in Cumann na mBan. I could not swear to her being in the kitchen then but I think she was. I am pretty sure that Sally McNamara was there, but I cannot remember any more. Brighid Dixon was in the post office with the Red Cross; they were on the left-hand side, the Prince's Street side, of the post office. That was where Connolly was hurt, I understand.

I suppose I began to wash up, or cut bread and butter then I did not see very much. We came down once or twice during the week perhaps, but we were very busy and we did not get invitations to come down. When we were not working we were resting. We did go to sleep, but I forget how it was arranged, whether we took shifts or not. I remember going to sleep on a mattress in one of the corridors.

There were a couple of prisoners there. One was a British officer, who just sat there looking glum. He was not asked to do any work, but the Tommies were washing up. There were two or three Tommies who were quite cheerful. I think they were in uniform; they were taken prisoners in the street.

Mr. McLaughlin must have been downstairs. I did not see him straight away. He was a medical student and he was with the wounded, looking after them.

I probably did not know one day from another. We did know when Friday came, but the other days were all the same. There was nothing outstanding until the fire came in front and we saw the flames out of the windows. From the back top windows we could see right across to the front because we were high up on the roof. We must have been above the main roof some way. We saw the fire on Friday morning, or it may have been Thursday evening. The flames were coming from the front

of the G.P.O., but all the width of the building was between us and the flames and we did not feel hot. We did not feel that the fire was in the same house as ourselves, and we did not feel any sense of danger. I suppose we thought in a vague way that it would probably come nearer, but it seemed a good way off. There were some explosions, I think, they also were in the street and seemed a long way off. We really were not in any danger where we were; I suppose we would have been in danger if we had stayed for a long time.

I thought we were going to stay in the building until we died. I thought we were going to retire into the cellars, but I did not ask and nobody told me.

We were told to evacuate the building on Thursday evening, that all the women were to go out under a Red Cross flag. Peggy Downey said she was not going, and the others said that they did not want to go. Peggy Downey was from Liverpool. We went to Mr. Pearse and said that we did not want to go, that we wanted to stay. I think that was Thursday afternoon, because the girls were to go out in the daytime. We went back and resumed our occupations, because Pearse said we could stay. He said he did not think he had any right to prevent anybody taking part in the Rebellion who wanted to stay.

On Friday morning we heard that they were evacuating the building and that we were to go with the wounded.

Before we left the post office we were in a front room downstairs taking messages from the men to bring to their friends and relatives. I had a notebook, but I was afraid to write anything in it, I only wrote their names and addresses. The messages were not exactly goodbyes, but that they were allright, that they had been in the post office all week and that they were leaving now and not to worry about them. These

were all the rank and file soldiers, and they did not know much more than I did. I remember with great admiration an elderly man named Turner. He was perhaps about fifty or sixty years of age, and he had three sons in the fighting, some of them were in the post office with him. He gave me his address in Summerhill. I do not think he was a Citizen Army man, he might have been, but he was not in uniform as far as I remember. I admired him because he was quite cheerful and pleasant, and I admired his wife when I brought her the message. She was not a bit perturbed, although all her menfolk were out. She was a great little woman and did not make a scene. Most of the women said when I called, "What do you mean? My husband, or son, was not in the Rebellion. He had nothing to do with the Volunteers". That is what they had been told to say, but Mrs. Turner did not say that. She was rather proud of them.

I did not get any instructions before we left the post office. Desmond Fitzgerald, I suppose, got the instructions which appeared to be that we were to go to Jervis Street hospital with the wounded men, and do the best we could. I do not know who told them to go out through Henry Street. There were holes broken through the walls. There is a yard at the back of the G.P.O., I think, and some men must have gone out beforehand and prepared the way. They must have climbed up the wall at the back, on to some low roofs, then on to the gable end and smashed a way in to the nearest house, from that to the next house and from that to the next house. They went through about three houses, and these houses were in Henry Street. There was a tiny little theatre in Henry Street, with a stage. I think it was the Coliseum. There was a refreshment room there too. I think Nancy Wyse Power said that was the first or second house.

I was not helping with the wounded man, but it must have

been a struggle getting him over the roofs. I think his name was Conroy. He was a big man, wounded in the stomach, and he was being carried in a sheet. I think we were in front of him, and there were four boys with cut fingers or sprained wrists there, who were not very much use as soldiers any more.

I do not remember whether Dr. Ryan was with us or not. He may have been with us for part of the way. I do not remember seeing him, but I did not know him in those days and I would not notice him. He was probably with us.

There was somebody carrying a Red Cross flag in front of our procession. We went into the variety hall, I think it was in Henry Street. We went into this place, it was supposed to be a place where we could rest, and went up to the refreshment room, which was all shut up. Somebody lit a light. We must have had Father Flanagan with us - they would not let him go back. He and Desmond Fitzgerald and whoever else was responsible got afraid that the men would partake of the innumerable bottles that were there, which would have been an awful catastrophe.

I would say that we did not go into Henry Street, but probably this building had an exit into Prince's Street. It was beside Mrs. Wyse Power's place, and probably communicated with Prince's Street from the back.

I think we were the last to leave the post office. We thought the men had left before us. We were so long waiting for the holes to be broken that we thought we were the last to leave on Friday evening.

When going through the buildings in Henry Street Dan McLaughlin got the clothes brush he so long desired. He picked it up from one of the tables. There was a meal on the

table. The people had evacuated the place.

We went through from Prince's Street to Abbey Street. We went through a very narrow passage that is there still, and down Abbey Street. It was in this lane, Williams's Lane, that we met a detachment of British soldiers with an officer, and they stopped us. I think it was Father Flanagan who pointed out the Red Cross flag, and the wounded men, and said that we were taking these men to Jervis Street hospital.

The British accompanied us to the hospital. We went into the hospital and the nurses received us very well. They immediately took the wounded men away and we saw no more of them. They were put to bed. The officer said that we, the women, could go in and lie on the floor in the waiting room for the night. I think there were seven or eight women. By this time it was late and quite dark. It took us a long time getting out. We were delayed a long time while the men were breaking through the walls, so that it must have been seven or eight o'clock before we left the post office. We spent the night in the hospital.

There were three or four men who were not wounded taken away by the British. That was the time that Desmond Fitzgerald asked me to go and see his wife and tell her what had happened up to then. I do not think any of the men who were taken away were kept. They spent the night being marched from one place to another, and eventually these men escaped.

Next morning we got a meal, a cup of tea and bread and butter, and we were told to go.

Somebody told us about the surrender. I do not know if there was a paper that morning, Saturday morning. I do

not remember how we heard, but I was quite certain of the news so that it must have been given by somebody. We never communicated with the men after we left the post office. I did not know when we were leaving that they were going to surrender; I thought that they were evacuating the post office and going somewhere else. I certainly did not have the impression that it was all at an end.

After we left the hospital some of the girls living on the North side of the city parted from us and went home.

I decided to go to Jacobs to see what they were going to do there. Peggy Downey was coming my way, as well as a little girl called Lily Murray of Montague Street. Lily Murray was a very pretty and flighty little thing and I felt she would get into trouble if we did not leave her home. She had not mentioned at home where she was going before she left. I think Peggy Downey was with me when I went to Jacobs, and I suppose Lily Murray was with us as we would pass Jacobs before leaving her home in Montague Street. I saw Thomas MacDonagh in Jacobs. Next morning Min Ryan and I went to Jacobs. I think I went to Jacobs twice, once on Saturday and again on Sunday. I think I went into Jacobs on Saturday and saw Thomas MacDonagh, and I remember he was not at all pleased with our news. I think that was the first intimation he got of the surrender. He did not believe that they had surrendered, and he did not believe that it was at an end. When I went to Jacobs I did not stay long. I think I must have said I would come back, and I went home to my digs then. Thomas MacDonagh was not ready to surrender at all. I am not sure whether that happened on Saturday or Sunday, because I went there on Sunday as well. Máire Ní Shiubhlaigh would know. She was the only woman in Jacobs - so Min Ryan said the other day. That is why she was so exhausted on Sunday, she was in a bad

state. The other women must have gone off before that.

When I was going home I walked along Leeson Street, and it was getting late in the afternoon. This is Saturday. It was then that Paddy McGilligan and Charlie McCauley saw me and announced that I was wounded, because I had a swollen foot and I was limping. I was very dirty, and was wearing neither hat nor coat. I must have been a very beautiful object.

I went to Haddington Road to my digs, washed, had a meal and slept there that night. The landlady came into my room with hot water for me and stayed talking to me. She was excited, and kept saying, "Do you think will Martin lose his pension?" Martin was a retired policeman. I thought she really meant, "Why did you come back to stay here?", but she was very nice. I said to her, "There is no reason why he should lose his pension. He had no connection with anything". The landlady kept talking, and interrupting herself to say, "Wasn't it grand that they held out for the week! Wasn't it lovely!" That was as much in her heart as the pension. She was thrilled with delight about the Rising, but Martin was the life and soul of her existence and was very important to her. He was like a child. He was a great,big,half stupid ex-policeman, and she was a little bit of a thing, but her word was law. She could twist him round her little finger and she adored him. The thought that he was going to lose his pension was nearly too much for her, but she was too thrilled to say much.

Next morning I went up to Min Ryan's place to see if they had any news there. There were about six or eight people in the room, but the only people I can remember were the Ryans, I do not remember who the others were. I really only remember Min, who was coming out with me. I did not know Phyllis very well at that time, I looked on her as only a

youngster.

Min Ryan and I decided we would go to Jacobs to see Thomas MacDonagh. This was about eleven or twelve o'clock on Sunday morning. We had been at Mass and had our breakfast.

When we arrived at Jacobs we were told that MacDonagh was out, that he had gone out to meet somebody. We were brought upstairs to see John MacBride. I do not remember who brought us up to see him. We sat with him in a room upstairs and had a little conversation with him. I cannot remember whether he was in uniform. I had never seen him before. I had the impression of a man between fifty and sixty.

When Thomas MacDonagh came back I said to him that it was all over, that it should not have taken place, that it was wrong and could not have succeeded. He said to me, "Don't talk to my men if that is the way you are feeling. I don't want anything to be putting their spirits down." We left Jacobs then and took Máire Ní Shiubhlaigh with us.

We went up by Stephen's Green, and the men out of the College of Surgeons were just being rounded up to be marched off. That was Sunday morning, before dinner time. These were the people who were looking so depressed and deplorable. Including the women, I doubt if there were forty in it. There might not have been more than twenty. I remember a small group standing four deep in the street outside Surgeons. We did not go as far as Surgeons, we went towards Harcourt Street. We saw a large crowd of loafers gazing at the people out of Surgeons; they were murmuring against them, but when the order was given to set

off a cheer was raised. The only person I remember there was Liam Ó Briain, and Mrs. Mulcahy spoke to him.

We met Michael Hayes in Jacobs, I think, either the first or second time. I had a little conversation with him, but I do not remember his state of mind.

That is my story of Easter Week, 1916.

I started my school in September, 1917, in St. Stephen's Green. It was not exactly an Irish-speaking school then; we did not teach through Irish at first.

The school was raided twice; once in the daytime and once at night. We had given latch keys to some of the Volunteers and they could have come in at night. Occasionally, I suppose they would come in during the holidays.

The first time it was raided the school was open. There was a way of getting into the back garden, through Iveagh House. They came in the back gate and over the wall, but they did not find anything. The raiders were distinctly surprised at finding the place full of little girls; we had a good many pupils. Mrs. Blythe was teaching there, and she got hold of most of the papers and told some of the pupils, whose parents she knew, to take them home. The young O'Donovans took home some of the papers. That would be about 1919, I think.

At Easter 1921, I think, I was in London, and I opened the paper and saw that the premises had been raided again. I got rather excited because there was nobody there; we were on holidays. I thought the door had been left open. I sent a telegram to somebody to go and look at the place. I came back and found that they had ransacked the attics, which were full of old newspapers, piles of old papers belonging to the Fitzgeralds, but nothing of particular value. We had a few

papers which we had put inside books and they were not found. They found nothing of any importance, but a pair of men's boots which must have been left in some room by a Volunteer. They brought the boots down and left them on the hall table, just to show they were there. The only people I remember who had keys were Desmond Fitzgerald, Dick Mulcahy and perhaps Mick Collins, and some of them might have come in while we were away. I had collected some jewellery that I had and brought it down to the office on the first floor. I was going to sell it. The raiders just cleared it out. There was not a lot in it, but there were two or three gold ornaments. They damaged the hall door. I put in a claim and an officer came and went all over the house carefully to see all the things which were damaged. I put in a claim for the jewellery, but they would admit to nothing. They made us an ex-gratia payment of five pounds. That was all.

Later on there were some interviews held in the house. We lent them the house. There was an interview there between Archbishop Clune and Mick Collins. That would be late in 1920, about October 1920, I think. A couple of other times Joe O'Reilly came to see could they have a room in the house for a meeting or to see somebody, and we did not know who came.

I remember the time the men escaped from Mountjoy - the big escape. We had said we would take some of the escaped prisoners, if necessary, and a man brought us an awful little boy who had not been in the Volunteers at all; he was taken by mistake. He was called "Cock Robin", but I do not know his real name. He came, I think, from somewhere round Talbot Street direction. He stayed with us for three or four days, and he was a nuisance. He was only about 17 or 18 years of age and it must have been awful for him to be shut up. We had to put him at the top of the house. It was a very nice room,

but it was a prison to him. Katie McHugh used to bring him up all his meals, and she was frightfully rheumatic. After a a few days, I remember, his only remark was, "Well, this was the hungriest day I ever spent in my life". Poor Katie was nearly dead from carrying up trays of food to him. He ran away one evening when we were out and we never saw him again. He was not even pretending to be a Volunteer; he was only a little boy who had been taken up by mistake. We afterwards told Paddy Fleming about him, and he said, "We had to take him with us because he knew the plans".

SIGNED Liam Ghabhánach Ó Dubhfaigh

DATE April 1 1949

WITNESS S. Ó Cuirrín

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