

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 385

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

**STATEMENT BY WITNESS**

**DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 385**

**Witness**

Mrs. Sean Beaumont (Nee Maureen McGavock),  
59 Dartmouth Square,  
Dublin.

**Identity**

Member of Executive of Cumann na mBan 1918 - .

**Subject**

- (a) National activities 1916-1921;
- (b) Cumann na mBan, Dublin, 1918-1921;
- (c) Recollections of Bloody Sunday, November 1920.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil

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Statement of Mrs. Máirín Beaumont (McGavock),  
59 Dartmouth Square, Dublin.

It must have been early in 1916 that I became associated with the Volunteer Movement. I was then attending the University and living in Dominican Hall.

A couple of us went to an upstairs room in Dawson Street one day and gave in our names. We attended a few first aid lectures given by Miriam Plunkett. That was my only contact with Cumann na mBan before the Rising. Of course, I knew Ginger pretty well right from the time he came home from America. He was introduced to my friend Josephine Aherne and myself by the Paddy McGilligan.

On one occasion in the course of 1915 he and Godfrey O'Donnell asked us to store two violin cases containing ammunition and revolvers. We kept them in our room in the hostel for some time, including, I think, the Christmas holidays, 1915, and they were called for just before we went home on our Easter holidays, 1916. Ginger and others, such as Colm Ó Lochlainn, whom we knew fairly intimately, talked so openly of a coming fight, that we thought it could not be serious and paid little attention to them.

I and my friend Joe Aherne spent the holidays at my sister's, Mrs. Joe Connolly, in Belfast. We would have gone up ten days or more before Easter.

I seem to have an impression that Colm O'Lochlainn was in Belfast some time in Holy Week and that he gave us in the greatest secrecy an inkling of his expedition to Kerry and that it was connected with a Rising, as I have a distinct recollection of a feeling of disappointment when he afterwards turned up in Belfast with the bad news of the failure of the Kerry expedition and the loss of life that it caused. I cannot remember that he was with us in Easter Week but I remember him being there afterwards for some time. Percy Reynolds also came to Belfast after Easter Week and stayed with a Mrs. McNamee.

I think it must have been Holy Saturday afternoon that my brother-in-law, Joe Connolly, went to Dublin. His intention was to take part in the Rising which he must have known was coming off. His reason for going to Dublin instead of with the other Belfast Volunteers to Coalisland was that he had only just married and had recently opened a business in Belfast and he thought that if he survived the Rising he could afterwards resume his business without risk of detection by the Belfast police.

It is funny that I cannot remember his return from Dublin, or what news he brought; it may be that I went home to my mother's in Glenarm and was not in Belfast at all when Joe Connolly and Colm O'Lochlainn returned. I remember discussing the situation with Fr. Fullerton, the Curate of St. Paul's, and a strong Gaelic Leaguer, who frequently visited my sister's house. He was terribly disappointed at the news.

I think Colm spent a considerable time in her house. He was certainly there after Joe's arrest and was hanging round for some time.

Archie Heron was employed in Joe Connolly's business and I think he set out to walk to Dublin <sup>or somewhere</sup> <sup>M.P.</sup> to join the Rising. He did not dare to go by train as he was well known. All the other Volunteers came home from Coalisland frightfully disappointed at the cancelling of the manoeuvres. I have no recollection of subsequent events in Belfast. I cannot remember even Joe Connolly's arrest. I do remember my return to Dublin, probably in the middle of May, because we travelled up with a Canadian officer in uniform, the nephew of the McCarmy's of North Antrim, who were well-known Nationalists and friends of Casement and F.J. Biggar. We drove on a hack across the ruins of Dublin to Dominican Hall and he went on to stay at Colm O'Lochlainn's. He was on his way to the Front and when he went back he was killed instantly. When our friends at Dominican Hall saw us arrive with a soldier in British uniform they were horrified and we were very much ashamed.

The first thing I recollect after my return is going to a Mass for Joe Plunkett at Whitefriars Street.

Somebody in the University, I think Eileen McGrane, started to organise a branch of Cumann na mBan at the University. We were not allowed a separate branch at first but had to join up with Inghiní na hÉireann.

Before that the only activities that gave scope to our enthusiasm, were picnics and aeridheachta for providing

funds for the Prisoners' Dependents. We also visited the prisoners where our friends were interned. I remember going with Mrs. O'Lochlainn to see Count Plunkett in Richmond Barracks. I saw Muriel Murphy (later Mrs. Terry McSwiney) on that occasion.

From October, 1918, the bad 'Flu raged so violently that nurses and doctors were scarce and Cumann na mBan offered the services of its members who had Red Cross training, as voluntary nurses. We established a bureau in 6 Harcourt Street to which the public could apply for nurses and advertise the fact in the papers. Naturally there was no political distinction as regards the people we nursed. Two of our members were constantly on duty in the bureau and it fell to my lot to be one of them on the night of the Armistice, 11 November, 1918, when the Sinn Féin Headquarters were attacked by British sympathisers who were making in the streets. The windows were broken by the excited mob and things looked ugly for a time, but Harry Boland and Simon Donnelly who had collected a scratch garrison restored order by firing over the heads of the crowd.

Among those we helped to nurse were many Jewish families who afterwards showed their gratitude by subscribing to our funds and voting for our candidates at the election.

Our girls did excellent work in this way after their day's lectures and studies by staying up at night nursing and relieving those members of families who had been on duty with the sick all day.

The election followed hard upon this and we were all engaged in making it the success it turned out to be. We made out lists of voters in every street and distributed them to the girls who made it a point to obtain a personal interview with every householder, and, if possible, every voter. The constituency I worked for was Pembroke and the candidate Desmond Fitzgerald, and the work we put into it was more than justified by the result which surprised ourselves.

During 1919 and 1920 we continued our usual Cumann na mBan activities - drilling, first aid and home-nursing. We were lectured at various times by Dr. Dorothy Stopford (Price), Dr. J.C. O'Carroll (21 Westland Row) and Dr. Frank Morrin. These lectures were given, I think, amongst other places, at the Cúig Cúigí Branch of the Gaelic League.

During all this time I was teaching at Sgoil Bhríde at 70 Stephen's Green, which was a great centre of political activity and a meeting place for many well-known republicans. We used to meet Ernest Blythe, Desmond Fitzgerald, Liam Mellows, Piaras Beasláí and others there in connection with Volunteer and Cumann na mBan business. Despatches used to be left there for us to be forwarded through town and country by lines of communication organised by Cumann na mBan.

The establishment of these lines was the result of a request from G.H.Q. of the I.R.A. which found the post utterly unsafe. Leslie Price organised a reliable system of communication which consisted of Cumann na mBan

girls walking or cycling from branch to branch in the towns and villages. The best line of communication was the one to Cork through Celbridge. To test its efficiency she cycled every yard of it herself as far as Cork.

It was some time in 1920, I think, I was appointed to the Executive of Cumann na mBan. As our organisation was developing, each of the younger members of the Executive went often at week-ends to hold District Council meetings. I remember holding one in Bruree where we had an excellent District Council which comprised delegates from all the branches in the area where the flying columns were active.

There was a good deal of hardship connected with these journeys, as sometimes we had to spend nights without sleep as we were afraid or unable to get into hotels, which was my case on this occasion. We had, of course, to be back at our work on Monday mornings. Another obstacle to our activities was curfew which was imposed at a very early hour in some towns where the I.R.A. were active and those were chiefly the areas that were visited by us.

I remember the morning of Bloody Sunday. Joe Aherne and myself walked down from Ranelagh where we lived, to University Church for, I think, 9 o'clock Mass. Everything was quiet and we noticed nothing unusual on the way. When we came out from Mass there seemed to be suppressed excitement and somebody spoke of shooting in Pembroke Street. Later in the day we heard of the raid on Desmond Fitzgerald's flat in Pembroke Street, which was right opposite the service flats where the British

Intelligence Officers were shot. In the evening we went to McGilligans', Lower Leeson Street, where we found Desmond hiding. The McGilligans got word that they were to be raided and we took Desmond home with us to 51 Lower Beechwood Avenue where we had rooms in the house of Seamus Moore, afterwards T.D. for Wicklow.

Desmond stayed with us for three months. At that time he was Director of Propaganda. We insisted on his remaining indoors on the Monday, 21 November, 1920, as all the bridges were held by the British military, and I still remember his humiliation at the reproach - entirely undeserved - in a note from Mick Collins, "What is all this digging in about?".

We had a raid from the Regular Army in Moore's one night, on an occasion when Dan O'Donovan was there "on the run". We were questioned closely about our Gaelic League activities. They were about to take away some of my Cumann na mBan equipment and only returned it when I said it belonged to my dead brother. Dan O'Donovan's alibi as a Commercial Traveller satisfied them completely.

To this house too came Ernie O'Malley after his escape from Kilmainham, with an ugly wound in his leg, which I remember Joe Aherne dressing every afternoon after school as we were afraid to bring a doctor. I notice she gets no credit for that in his book "On Another Man's Wound" nor for the part she played later after the collapse of the Civil War when as wife of James McNeill in London, she brought Ernie safely in



her car to Croydon Airport on his way to America.

These are a few incidents that occur to me as being characteristic of the type of work that fell to the lot of us members of Cumann na mBan. It is unnecessary to multiply examples.

SIGNED Mawein Beaumont

Date 10 May 1950.

WITNESS

J. M. Cowley

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