

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 419

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 419.....

Witness
Mrs. Martin Conlon,
342 A, North Circular Road,
Dublin.

Identity

Member of Cumann na mBan, Dublin, 1913 - .
Courier to Spiddal, Holy Week 1916.

Subject

Her ~~own~~ own and her husband's national
activities 1913-1921;

Easter Week, 1916, - Dublin.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. 1557.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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No. WAS. 419

STATEMENT OF MRS. MARTIN CONLAN, 342, North Circular Road,

(formerly 56 Cabra Park, Dublin).

I was married in 1910 and from that time on my husband and myself were in the McHale Branch of the Gaelic League, and after the establishment of the Volunteers, we were both in them, that is to say, I was in Cumann na mBan and my husband in the Volunteers. He will tell what Unit he was in. He was also in the I.R.B. and was very much mixed up with the National movement in all its aspects.

He influenced me. When I came to Dublin I was working in Joe McGuinness's draper's shop in Camden St., where the Star Furnishing Co. now is. I was three years in Dublin before I got married. I came from Glenamaddy, Co. Galway. I was more or less of a native speaker, as my mother and father knew Irish well. In that way I was always interested in the language and was anxious to join the Gaelic League. I joined it the week Micheal Breathnach died. That was before I married. All the members of the League were heartbroken over Micheal's death.

I attended the Central Branch of Cumann na mBan in 25 Farnell Square, although I remember attending meetings at another house in the Square where the Catholic Club now is. It was in the latter place that the vote was taken as to whether we would remain with Redmond's Volunteers or the other section at the time of the split. Mrs. Clarke and Miss McMahon were there; they were always very prominent. I liked those two and I always remember them.

I remained with the MacNeill Volunteers. We were all very excited about it. We were told to go to each side of the room; the Redmondite Cumann na mBan at one side and the MacNeill crowd on the other. I remember a funny incident connected with that occasion. There was a wizened-looking old lady who stood

in the middle of the floor, joining neither party. Someone at last asked her which side she was taking; she replied: "Neither; I saw one of our members who is supposed to be very national in her outlook going into a grocers' shop to buy a half pound of margarine". At that time margarine came from England and most people would be ashamed to be seen using or buying it. We all burst out laughing. The majority remained with the MacNeill Volunteers.

Some of us made our own uniforms. Mrs. Clarke gave us instructions about cutting them out. She cut out mine. We got instruction in first aid from Dr. Kathleen Lynn and Dr. McGrath. He examined us for our certificate. We did bandaging and first aid of all sorts. We were taught to shoot with a rifle by an ex-British soldier called Ryan who lived around in Phibsboro Avenue, I think. The hall in No. 25 used to be nearly full, so that there would be a couple of hundred. We did drill marching there and I went out marching with the Cumann na mBan whenever they went. The fact that I had a house did not seem to make any difference; we thought the other thing more important. We marched in uniform in the O'Donovan-Rossa funeral. That was a great day. I marched in a lot of funerals which I did not find easy, as I had a short step and had almost to run to keep up with the others.

We used to attend ceillis, plays, concerts, lectures and other functions at various halls all over Dublin for the furtherance of the aims of the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan - 25 Parnell Square, the Foresters' Hall at 41 Parnell Square, the Antient Concert Rooms, the Mansion House and Hardwicke St. Theatre. It was ^{near PC} there that Joe Kissane lived. It was a safe house for the Volunteers to go and discuss things. He was a cabinet maker who used to reproduce antique furniture. Sean McDermott used to stay there a lot. It was

chiefly there that Martin used to meet him. I remember attending a concert at the Antient Concert Rooms at which Eoin MacNeill spoke and I think some unusual incident took place, but I don't know now what it was.

My husband and I took part in an Irish play at the Rotunda ; concerts were also given there.

I remember a marvellous lecture on Wolfe Tone given by Padraig Pearse before the Rising to Cumann na mBan in the house that is now the Catholic Club. I thought afterwards he was preparing us for the Rising. It was very moving. I'd swear he did not see anybody in the room; he had his mind and eyes fixed on the vision he saw. We were nearly in tears. He talked about the sacrifices that had been made and would again have to be made for Ireland. He all but told us that a Rising was to take place.

Sometime before the Rising two cases of arms were delivered to our house in 36 Cabra Park, by Cullens, the carriers, who were in the movement. They came at 6 o'clock in the morning. We stowed them somewhere in the back, I think. After some time we got information from a friendly D.F.M. man from Mayo, called Carey, that we were to be raided. It was my husband who happened to be attending a play at Hardwicke St. Theatre that heard it. He brought a number of the boys with him from the theatre and got them to police the street until the arms had been removed. The arms were distributed to different places so that they would not be taken all together. The raid never materialised. I don't know whether it was a false alarm or whether the Castle people had been notified of the removal of the arms. We were informed that a hostile neighbour opposite had seen the arms being delivered by Cullens at the house and had notified the Castle. We were inclined to think that they had also notified the removal of the arms.

I should have mentioned an important event that happened a good while before the Rising, in 1915. Larry de Lacy of Enniscorthy had to go on the run when the office of the Enniscorthy Echo was raided - that was the time Sean Hegarty was arrested. He - de Lacy - spent the whole time, apart from a couple of weeks in the beginning, at our house in Cabra Park until he succeeded in escaping to America. While he was with us he went under the name of Blackwell and I think it was under that name he went to America. My cousin Tessy Doherty, myself and Art O'Connor, who, I believe, was the Judge who died recently, drove with him in O'Connor's car to Belfast where he embarked on a steamer for America. This was several months after he came to our house.

Some short time after de Lacy's fiancée, a sister of Stephen Hayes, who figured prominently in a notorious case in Dublin a few years ago, came to stay ^{with} us on her way to America. The police were still, of course, looking for de Lacy that time, and one day she and I went to shop downtown we noticed we were followed by detectives. We went into a picture house and about seven detectives were immediately planted here and there about the cinema. When we came out we separated - she was going somewhere else - and all the detectives followed her. As de Lacy had safely escaped there was no need to worry and Miss Hayes got off to America where they were married. Larry de Lacy is now living in Clare Road, Drumcondra. I think he was arrested in America because of his activities there.

My memory of Holy Week is that I was sent to Spiddal with a written dispatch. I cannot now say whether I got the message from Tom Clarke or whether my husband brought it to me. I know I went to see Tom about it, but I can't say whether it was before or after delivering the dispatch I saw him. I had £5 to give him, because I did not use that money

on the journey. I don't know whose money I used. I might have got more than £5 from whoever sent me and this might have been the change. Anyway when I went to give back the money to Tom Clarke there were too many people there and I did not give it to him. After the Rising I gave that £5 to some member of the Cumann na mBan, Effie Taafe perhaps, to give it to the White Cross.

I got no verbal message but was told to go as quietly as possible to Spiddal. I got the loan of a bicycle from somebody near the Franciscan Church in Galway and rode out to Spiddal. I met Micheal Thornton and gave him the dispatch. I had a good idea of what was happening from the general trend of things. Our house was always full of people, lads with guns, and I knew very well that a fight was going to start and that the message I carried was connected with it.

I asked different people where Micheal Thornton lived and one of them said "there he comes along the road". There was another fellow with him and they had hurleys in their hands and were evidently on their way to play a game. He brought me inside the wall and took the dispatch which I had hidden inside the sole of my stocking. He made no remark about it and I turned round and came back to Galway and took the train back to Dublin. I must have gone down by the mail train in the morning. I feel that it must have been after that journey that I went to see Tom Clarke and not before, and that it must have been my husband who brought me the dispatch.

People were coming and going to our house that week. Some day after that journey - either Friday or Saturday - I met Micheal O'Hanrahan and he asked me would I be ready to go to Wexford on a message if they wanted me to. I never laid eyes on him afterwards and I was not sent on the message.

I was at a Cumann na mBan meeting on Good Friday and we were told there would be a route march the following Sunday and that we were to meet at Palmerstown Place near Broadstone Station. When I came home from the meeting, the place was full of Volunteers. There were two of them sitting at the bottom of the stairs with rifles watching the sitting-room door where Bulmer Hobson was, and the kitchen was full of men. Hobson was not in the house before I went out to the meeting, as far as I can recollect. My husband told me it was Sean Tobin that brought him there. He - Tobin - used to live down in Hardwicke St. near Kissane's place. He was very prominent up to Easter Week, but then he disappeared and he took no part in the Rising.

I don't remember seeing Hobson at all and I don't know who fed him. Of course, he and the men who guarded him must have been fed in the house. The excitement and tension were so great that all those details were driven out of my head. I have a frightfully bad memory too. This state of affairs continued on Saturday. On Sunday night in bed my husband discussed the position with me and he told me that there was a likelihood of the fight coming off. He went out on Monday morning about 6 a.m., saying he would be back about 9. He was to get stuff for men who had to blow up Cabra Bridge. He was not back till about 12. He told me he had to wait a long time for them and he was very vexed about it.

I don't remember going out to the appointed place on Sunday, although I don't think I got a cancelling order. On Sunday night I was at home - Martin was out at some meeting - some of the lads told me that Hobson was giving them trouble. He was getting fainting fits and he wanted to get away. They asked me to go down to the Keating Branch to ask some fellow called O'Connell - it might be Murt O'Connell - to come up. I went down to get him; I could not find O'Connell, but I

found Maurice Collins. He came back with me and took charge of Hobson for a while. Hobson was still in the sittingroom there was no bed there and he must have been lying on the couch.

On Monday morning I went out before Martin came back. Mary + Lawless, who lived across the street, had called for me and we set off together. We met Martin coming back. He was very annoyed at being kept so late. Afterwards, I heard he took a bath, put on his uniform and took his rifle to go out to his battalion. He met Harry Meade on the way and they proceeded to Church St. Mary Lawless and myself went down to wherever was our meeting place. I think it was Palmerstown Place. After we were there awhile, we were told to go to the McHale Branch which was over J.J. Walsh's at the corner of Berkeley Road and Blessington St. We remained there some time and were then told to go home and that we would be notified if we were needed. We went home and stayed there that night. I can't remember whether Hobson was still there when I arrived. I don't think I saw any of the men round the place. Martin would know that better than I, as his memory is better and he would have heard all about it. I took two men from England, who came to our house and wanted to take part in the fight, down to Church St. One of them was Redmond Cox. I can't remember who the other was.

The following day I tried to get out several times and eventually I succeeded in the evening, although some people on the road had warned the soldiers not to let me, as I was dangerous. I was determined to be with the crowd, so I went down to O'Connell St. - somebody else must have been with me. I can't remember who it was - possibly Mary Lawless or Nora Foley. I met Brigid Foley. She and Dr. Tuohy had set up a sort of Red Cross Hospital in Upper O'Connell St. - I think there is a bank there now. About dusk I went past Trinity

College and as far as Stephen's Green. We went in to the College of Surgeons and saw the Countess Markievicz in her uniform, and several others. I can't remember who they were. We returned to O'Connell St. and stayed there that night. There was no talk of sleep; we were praying and crying; feeling worried about what was going to happen. We certainly never thought we would see our men alive again.

On Wednesday morning we went across to the G.P.O. and saw Connolly and Pearse sitting on mattresses in the main hall. We were talking to Connolly and told him we heard the Germans were coming up the Naas Road. He said no, and gave us to understand that we were beaten. We were heartbroken. The heavy gun from the Helga had begun on Wednesday morning and made us frightened and heartsick. Nora Foley and I decided to go to Church St. where my husband and Mick Foley were. The barricades were up when we arrived and we could not get through. We came home.

The British military came to raid the house. They found a bagful of Red Cross material, bandages, etc.; also a book with names in Irish. They were very nice to us. I was very anxious to get out to tell my husband what the soldiers had found. I got out in the evening time and made my way by myself to Church St. I saw him in the Father Mathew Hall where he was appointed Red Cross officer and was in charge of the sanitary arrangements there. He was at this time a Corporation employee either in the Sanitary Office or in the Rates Office. I stayed there till the end of the Rising, giving assistance all round, nursing the sick and preparing food for them.

On Thursday, the Volunteers took and burned the Linenhall Barracks and brought the soldiers to the Fr. Mathew Hall where they had to be fed also. My husband had to supervise the

burying of a horse that had become a war casualty. Then things were getting very hot and many casualties were coming in. One fellow - Hurley from Cork - who had come over from London to be in the fight, was brought in dying from a bullet in the head. I had to sit by him till he died.

On Friday night the Volunteers who were still able to fight were told to move into the Four Courts and they wanted to take the gun from Martin, leaving him still with the Red Cross. He gave the gun up to them and remained with us. That Friday night was terrible. The Church St. priests were with us and gave us general absolution and I think we received Holy Communion. The only lights we had in the Hall were little night lights. The bombing and the firing continued all that night and the next day till about 4 p.m. when the surrender message came from Pearse. Nobody believed it for a long time. We were told that anybody who could should get home. All the wounded in the Hall were taken on stretchers to the Richmond Hospital where beds were provided and they were well treated by the doctors and nurses. My husband and myself slept that night at my sister-in-law's house which was in Church St. I went home the following day, but my husband went into the Richmond Hospital where he stayed for a couple of days. From that on he was on the run and he escaped to England to his people over there. On the Sunday we both went to Mass in Church St. where we saw Micheal Foley and told him where we were staying in case he wanted anything while we were there.

After a week or two they started to shoot the leaders. The others were imprisoned in England and things were fairly quiet as far as we were concerned until the prisoners came home. Dermot O'Hegarty came home before the others. I did not know Michael Collins at all at that time. People were very depressed while the men were away, but their courage revived when they came home.

The next big event was Count Plunkett's election. I remember hearing them talking about him; that they were not sure whether he stood for the Republic. Our house was used for the election propaganda and we were all the time addressing envelopes and sending out leaflets. We were at that sort of thing from that on till 1921, people coming in and out working for elections, organising concerts, dances and anything that would make money for the Cause. My husband went down with the crowd to Roscommon to help at the electioneering. This was the first of the elections and there was great joy at the result. It encouraged them to put up a candidate for a vacancy that occurred in Longford. We were even more interested in that because Joe McGuinness was a great friend of ours. I went down to Longford for that and made the only speech I ever made. I spoke after Arthur Griffith who got tremendous cheers. Hadn't I great courage? The contest was so close that the excitement was tremendous. We were beaten in the first count and there was a recount and the victory was by a narrow majority. I'll never forget the excitement. Joe McGuinness was in prison at the time and our cry was "^{Put P.C.} Get him in to get him out". Mrs. McGuinness was a great friend of mine and we were always together.

The next thing was the election of de Valera in Clare. I did not go down for that, but my husband did. Then came the General Election towards the end of 1918. We were all sent out to work in connection with that. I was sent down to get Canon or Dean Macken of Dunmore, Co. Galway, to attend a convention, I think, at Clonbeirne. He agreed to attend, and his influence helped to turn the crowd in favour of Sinn Fein. I did not go to the meeting, but my brother did. I got great abuse from my husband when I came back for not going to the meeting. From that on we were never idle.

The I.R.A. used to hold quarterly meetings in our house.

Michael Collins used to be there; Kerr from Liverpool, Andy Lavin and many others. I would not see them all because at that time I had the shop which I opened in 1918, and not many of them would come into the shop; they would go direct to the house in Cabra Park, where we still lived until 1920. Michael Collins stayed there a few nights and I never slept while he was there for fear we might be raided.

We were never raided since 1916, until we had left the house and come to live here.

Sean Treacy, Dan Breen, Seamus Robinson, D.P. Walsh and many others whose names I forget used to stay there, but, thanks be to God, nothing ever happened. Martin was very quiet; he was not a talker and in that way he was not so much known to the authorities. He was friendly with the detectives, getting them to do things for the I.R.A., such as getting the numbers of the police cars and what the police were doing and where they were going. He was seen a good deal with the police and, therefore, the authorities did not suspect him.

As far as I know, there were no guns or ammunition in our house, except on the occasion I have mentioned.

One night, about 10.30 or 11, the Black and Tans were very officious evidently and a message came that any men in the house should clear out. D.P. Walsh and others were in the house and left, but Martin would not go. About 12 or 1 o'clock a knock came to the door and we thought it was the raid. Martin went down with his revolver, but someone outside said: "It is all right, Martin". It was, I think, Liam Tobin and Sean Ó Murthuile. They took Martin off with them and I think it was to my sister-in-law's, Mrs. Scally in Church St. they went. At 6 o'clock, at dawn, another knock came to the door. My cousin, May Crocker, who was living with us, went down. Someone outside said: "Let us in for God's sake, we have come

from a house in the N.C.Road that has been raided". May said we were expecting a raid, but she let them in. She put down a fire and made a meal for them. It was Michael Brennan, one of the Plunkett boys and another, whose name I don't remember. They had left part of their clothes behind them when they had escaped arrest through the roof of the house where they were staying. We were not raided then or on any other occasion when word was brought to us to expect a raid.

At some meeting Mick Collins handed Martin a letter that had been intercepted in transit through the post office. It was from someone advising the Castle to raid Martin Conlan's house in Cabra Park. It said he was very active in the national movement and that his wife, who had a shop in 342 N.C.Road, had sworn that all men in uniform should be done away with. The letter added that if the authorities called at these addresses they would surely get good results

After we sold our place in Cabra Park, the military raided No. 11 one night, but the numbers had meanwhile been changed and that was not the house we had been in. Some people called Fitzpatrick lived there and some of them were arrested and brought away for examination; they were then released when it was found that they were arrested in error.

During the Treaty negotiations in London there was a bazaar of some kind in Shelbourne Park to make money for some purpose and it was there I heard for the first time whisperings and rumours of traitors and treachery, and it was the first intimation I got that there was something wrong and that they were not satisfied with the men that had been sent over. When my husband told me that de Valera was not accepting the terms of the Treaty it was like a sword through my heart, but I thought that they were great enough to come to some sort of agreement that would prevent

a split, especially when they knew the consequences of the Farnell split and others that had taken place before. I think it a great pity that this calamity happened on account of the bitterness that followed it and divided into separate camps people who had been so united. They were all ready to sacrifice everything they had including their lives for the cause of Ireland. I looked upon all those men as saints.

Signed: P. J. Conlon

Date: 17. 8. 1950

Witness: S. M. Crossan

