

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 855

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 855

Witness

Miss Madge Daly,
Lissadell,
Kill Road,
Foxrock,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

First President of
Limerick Branch of Cumann na mBan;

Sister of Edward Daly.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan activities, Limerick,
1913-1924.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

nil

File No. S.1275

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

9/5/1953

Dear Miss Kisson.

I
am sending you a copy
of "Limerick's Fighting story"
which contains an article
on Limerick's Cumann Na hEireann.

It will save me writing
another.

This is the only copy of
the book I have, and it
is out of print - so please
return it when you have

Note: Book returned to day with statement for
signature P.M.C. 4/6/53

Finished with it.

Kindest regards and
best wishes for your good
work.

Yours sincerely,
Midge Daly.

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855

Statement by Miss Madge Daly,

"Lisadell", Kill Road, Foxrock, Co. Dublin.

Gallant Cumann na mBan of Limerick.

Soon after the formation of the Volunteers, a branch of Cumann na mBan was started in Limerick City. The first meeting was held in the Gaelic League Rooms, and the majority of those in attendance were members of the Gaelic League, or were girls belonging to families who had carried on the Fenian tradition. A provisional Committee was elected, and I had the honour of being made President, an office which I held until 1924, except for one year, 1921, ~~after the death of my husband~~ when we unanimously asked Mrs. O'Callaghan to accept the position. She insisted on resigning at the end of a year of office. Following the inauguration, Mrs. Dermot O'Donovan was Vice-President; Miss Mollie Kileen, Honorary Secretary; Miss Annie O'Dwyer, Honorary Treasurer, and the Misses Tessie Punch, Maggie Tierney, Laura Daly, Una O'Donoghue, and Mrs. Michael O'Callaghan were on the Committee. I am quoting these names from memory, so that it is possible that I may have omitted ~~some~~ some. From its inception, ours was a large and active branch, and I can recall over seventy girls who were active members to the end. Classes were immediately started for First Aid, Home Nursing, Drill, Signalling and for instruction in the care and use of arms. For military matters we had the services of Captain Monteth ~~(sic)~~ ^{Monteth - 42} and other Volunteer officers, whilst we had four City doctors and two nurses who gave the First Aid and Nursing lectures voluntarily. In 1911, my uncle, John Daly, and some Fenian friends were

responsible for the erection of a Fianna Hall on the grounds at the back of our house, 15 Barrington Street, and there most of our activities were carried on. Designed by the late Maurice Fitzgerald, of Richmond Street, it was a lovely little hall complete with stage and seating accommodation. We arranged lectures, Irish dances and concerts, while many of our honoured martyrs came there to teach us the way to freedom. Terry MacSwiney, Seán MacDermott, Mary MacSwiney, P.H. Pearse, Roger Casement and many others, gave lectures which helped to keep active the various organisations, the Fianna, the Volunteers and the Cumann na mBan, during the black days which followed the outbreak of the European war. We always charged admission to these functions, and all members, except the Fianna, had to pay; in this way we helped the Volunteer Arms' Fund. Our classes were held in the hall, and we also had the use of a room from my uncle at 26, William Street, where the Committee met every week. When John Redmond forced his nominees on the Dublin Executive of the Irish Volunteers, the word went around that the women of his ideas should join, and, if possible, gain control of the Cumann na mBan. Accordingly, in Limerick, as elsewhere, large numbers joined who, if they held any national opinions, were supporters of the Parliamentary Party and had nothing in common with the original members. Soon after this development an election for a new Committee was held, and some of these new members made an all-out effort to secure election; a few succeeded. A short time prior to this, we had made over £130 from a Fete in aid of the Arms' Fund. At our first committee meeting following the election, the

Redmondite members enquired about our funds. They were informed that our collections were for the Volunteers' Arms Fund, and that we had handed over all the money to the Irish Volunteers for that purpose. The new members were very disappointed. We had the big majority on the Committee, however, and co-opted additional members of our way of thinking, so that we had full control. Following a few meetings, the opposition became dispirited by the course of events, and resigned in a body. They immediately started the National Volunteer Ladies' Association and set up in great style in expensive rooms in O'Connell Street. They soon faded away, however, as they had neither the faith nor the enthusiasm of Cumann na mBan. During this upheaval, we lost only one of our original members, and she returned a few months later. Our Committee remained practically unchanged during these years, up to 1924. We got some additional members, but those whose names I have mentioned were there to the end. Mrs. Clancy resigned the Honorary Secretaryship, and the Misses E. Murphy and Tessie Punch took over her duties.

The friendships formed with the members of the Committee are most precious to me. We worked together as one, each one doing all possible to help the organisation and to forward the cause, whilst never counting the cost. This applies equally to the rank and file, in which each girl not only carried out the task allotted her, but, in addition, let pass no opportunity of doing any national work that came to hand. As time passed, and the difficulties and dangers multiplied, the girls rose gallantly to the occasion, so that it was joy to work with them. A practice which caused us much fun was initiated soon after

the outbreak of the European war. We started First Aid classes under the Department of Education, and a number of our members passed the examinations. For each of our members who passed we were given a grant from the Department, and in this way we earned £48 which, as usual, was transmitted to the Arms' Fund of the Irish Volunteers. In that way the British Government was unwillingly subscribing to the funds of its enemies. The classes were confined to Cumann na mBan, and were held in the Gaelic League rooms and in the Fianna Hall. The Home Nursing classes were sometimes held in private houses. As the Rising approached, work went ahead with great energy and enthusiasm, and for a few weeks a group of girls was constantly busy in our house making First Aid outfits. Wholesale arrests followed the suppression of the Rising, and the Cumann na mBan then began collecting for the Volunteers' Dependents' ~~(also)~~ Fund (later the National Aid Fund), attending to the welfare of the prisoners and their families, and helping in every way to maintain the national morale. Crowds thronged the churches to attend the Requiem Masses for the 1916 martyrs arranged by the Cumann na mBan. The memory of one Requiem Mass stands out. On my suggestion, it was arranged by the Cumann na mBan, and through the special permission of the late Bishop O'Dwyer, it was celebrated in Saint John's Cathedral at dawn on the fourth of May, 1917, the first anniversary of the Rising. Hours before daylight Saint John's Square was packed by a dense crowd of people, which swelled as others joined it from the farthest ends of the town; from streets and lanes and the suburbs they came to honour the memory of our latest martyrs. As we hurried along

in the darkness, most houses were lit up, and every family seemed to be about and moving. When we arrived at the Church it was densely packed, and there was an immense crowd outside which could not gain admittance. The Volunteers were unable to get us to our specially reserved seats, and we had to hear Mass in the Sanctuary. The altar was crowded with young priests, the choir was splendid, and the impressive ceremony was altogether unforgettable.

Some Volunteers were released in the Autumn of 1916, and internees in Frongoch and other English jails were released on Christmas Eve, 1917. Limerick Cumann na mBan had collected a large sum of money to send parcels to these men. Those under sentence were not allowed any parcels. We got about five-hundred-weight of butter from local creameries, and this was sent with hampers of cakes, ham and all kinds of Christmas fare. I had been in touch with Michael Staines, who was in charge of parcels in Frongoch, and he asked me not to expend any more money on food, as huge parcels had reached them from all parts of Ireland. Accordingly, following the releases, we sent the balance, over £80, to Dublin, to be spent on the prisoners. We also sent regular parcels to the women prisoners in England. When release came unexpectedly, a few volunteers had to remain in Frongoch to re-pack the food and send it to Dublin for re-distribution amongst the prisoners' families. In June, 1917, all the sentenced prisoners were released, and then work started on the Sinn Féin campaign for the General Elections, in which members of the Cumann na mBan were busy helping in all constituencies.

Soon the jails began to fill again, as Sinn Féin and the latest resistance movement gathered impetus, and the Limerick Branch of Cumann na mBan had much to do attending to the needs of the prisoners and their families, visiting the jails, arranging for meals, and writing to prisoners' relatives. Sometimes, men arrested in the neighbouring Counties of Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary were brought to Limerick, and their people never knew where they had been taken until our members reported to them, a step we always took as rapidly as possible. A sergeant in William Street barracks always sent word to me when prisoners arrived there. Then Maura O'Halloran would prepare meals in our house and take them to the barracks. Strangely, she was never refused permission to see the prisoners or to give them meals, and stranger still, I never learned the name of the friendly sergeant. Time went on, and our activities became intensified as the men in the Columns and on the run had to receive attention; safe houses had to be found in which they could rest, and clothes and other necessities provided. Eventually, this part of our work was organised systematically. Our Committee met weekly, examined reports of all cases, received collections and, where needed, made grants to families of men in jail and on the run. The workers of Limerick gave splendid support to our fund during those terrible years. Every week we received considerable sums from the employees of Messrs. Clunes' Factory, Dennys' Factory, Evans and Company, Limerick Waggon Builders and Railway men, Bannatyne & Company, Abbey Boatmen, Shaws and Company, McMahon & Son, carmen at Messrs. Russells, and the workers at the Limerick Clothing Factory. We

had a grand group of girls at this factory, in which the workers had a grand national tradition. From these working groups we got regular weekly collections from £13 downwards. Cleeves Factory always headed the list. This money was generally handed into our shop in Sarsfield Street by Mr. Reddan. We also received help from individual workers and generous subscriptions from some sympathetic merchants and business people. On the whole, however, I must agree with John Mitchel's assertion "that merchants make bad revolutionists". The Sinn Féin Clubs also helped us by collections, some very generously. Many of our members were also in these clubs. Early in 1920, the Fianna Hall was burned down by Crown forces, and from that time onwards it was difficult to arrange general meetings. Still we maintained contact with all of our members and could mobilise them at a moment's notice. At the time of the burning of the Fianna Hall, we were not living in Barrington Street, but as I had rented from Messrs. Nash the plot of ground on which it was built, I was the nominal owner. I made a claim for compensation which came before Judge Pigot, who was very sarcastic and rude to me, and gave a decree for the smallest possible amount, £288. This sum, with interest, I returned to the Fianna later on. It was subsequently taken by the Free State Government in lieu of income tax which we had refused to pay to the British Government, and which we had paid over and over again to the Republican Authorities. The Fianna Hall was a loss to us and to the other City Republican Societies. We issued appeals for funds to the general public from time to time, calling on all the business houses, private houses and professional people.

The response was generous and willing, and I can only remember one business man refusing to give me a subscription. One such drive for funds, made in October, 1920, realised over £542 17 6d. Each pair of collectors was given a collecting book and a particular district to canvass. They worked hard, and always with good results. This was not easy, especially during the height of the Black-and-Tan War. We organised Flag Days in October, 1921, which realised £439 11 3d. for the White Cross. Through these activities alone we were able to assist the families of the prisoners and meet all of our other obligations, until the Truce. In July, 1921, we received over £200 from the American Celtic Cross through Mrs. O'Callaghan, and, in 1923, we got over £200 from the White Cross. I also got further large sums from the Limerickwomen's Association in America.

I think it was in 1921 that Cumann na mBan changed the constitution and arranged for more active co-operation with the I.R.A. Each branch needed a captain, who was specially trained for this work. In Limerick, we appointed Miss Mary McInery, and she proved a very satisfactory choice. She gave her whole time to the work until the finish, and was always cool and practical. She had a number of young girls working with her. During the years of the campaign we regularly got bundles of posters, leaflets and other literature from Headquarters. These parcels generally arrived by rail at our house, and were later distributed amongst the members of each district. They were then posted on walls or otherwise by night. We often went into the country and put posters on chapel gates. We also had our own special propaganda, and in

this connection Desmond Fitzgerald gave me a list of people outside of Ireland, to whom we used send reports of local atrocities committed by the British. I got a duplicator and, with Tessie Punch's help, sent out a large volume of propaganda. Later on I got a typewriter which I lent to Tessie Punch. This was taken from her house by Free State raiders and that was the last I heard of it.

The British had a special hatred of Cumann na mBan, and well-known members of the organisation had little rest. My own case was typical. We were raided regularly, our business place was set on fire, and our furniture seized for unpaid fines imposed by courtmartial. My sister was dragged out of the house one night, her hair shorn off and her hand cut with a razor. She was later courtmartialled and fined £40 for tearing down a military proclamation which the Black-and-Tans had put up inside our shop window. Shortly after our home was destroyed by British Military orders. (Still this treatment was mild when compared with the desolation and sorrow dealt to other members. In March, 1921, Michael O'Callaghan, ex-Mayor of Limerick, was shot dead in the presence of his wife. George Clancy, the Mayor, was also killed the same night in his wife's presence, and Mrs. Clancy was wounded in the wrist in a fruitless effort to save her husband. Thus two of our foundation members were dealt the cruellest blow that the Black-and-Tan fiends could devise. In 1921, we proposed Mrs. O'Callaghan as T.D. for the City, and her nomination was acclaimed with great enthusiasm. She was elected with a huge vote, and

*The house of
Another member
Mrs Birmingham
a widow, was
also bombed
about this time.
H.D.*

~~She was elected with a huge vote, and~~ proved a grand representative, incapable of being deflected from her high ideals. Rev. Dr. I. Cotter, a distinguished priest and author, aptly wrote of her:

Mrs. O'Callaghan, refined, cultured and learned, has ever employed all her great powers before her martyr's death, as well as since, in the emancipation of her country from the yoke of the despot.... She does honour over much to historic Limerick. It was never in a home where husband and wife so supplemented intellectual activities on behalf of their dear country

Mrs. Clancy had not been married many years at the time of her husband's murder. Both had always worked for the cause, and though life was then strenuous and dangerous, they had a lovely and a happy home shattered in a moment by the devilry of the British forces. Cumann na mBan did not waver under the increased terror, and the work went on as before. Sometimes wounded Volunteers were brought to the Limerick hospitals and, to the credit of the staffs, the men were sheltered and nursed, and never a word or hint of their presence reached the British. Whenever the hospitals were raided by the Black-and-Tans, the wounded men were safely hidden. The Nuns of Saint John's Hospital were particularly kind and helpful, and the Limerick doctors were also splendid. Irrespective of their political opinions, they went to the relief of our wounded, often at great inconvenience, and to the most out-of-way places. There was never a question of fees,

nor was there idle talk which would have led to the capture of the wounded.

When the Treaty was carried, Limerick Cumann na mBan lost some of its members, but the majority remained loyal to the Republic. During the Civil War, the Republican forces in the New Barracks were joined by Cumann na mBan who helped them in many ways. The hospital was in the charge of Nurse Laffan and Nurse Connerty, a Limerick girl home from New York on holiday. These nurses, with the nursing section of Cumann na mBan attended to the sick and wounded, whilst other girls helped with the cooking of meals and maintenance. When the Republicans evacuated the City, the girls remained in the barrack until the men had got clear, and then returned to their homes, still ready to undertake any duty required of them. Mrs. Hartney, an early and most active member, who went to Adare to help the I.R.A., was shot dead by Free State troops when crossing the yard of the Hotel there. Her husband was serving with the Republican forces at the time. She was a fine woman, with a definite Fenian outlook, and was a great worker. Some time previously, her home and shop in Davis Street were burned down. She left two lovely little girls to mourn her loss with her husband. Cumann na mBan arranged High Mass and a public funeral, and she was buried in the Republican Plot in the New Cemetery. From that stage onwards Cumann na mBan made the arrangements for the burial of the Limerick Republicans killed in the fight, as all the men were with the armed forces. It was the saddest period in our history, the comrades of yesterday fighting and killing one another. I was Trustee for the Republican Burial Plot. The

other Trustees were both on the Free State side. I had the Plot opened for the burial of all Republicans killed in the Civil War, and the Free State Trustees never made an effort to stop me, or to have Free State soldiers buried there - and admission that they had no right to do so, having deserted the Republic they had sworn to defend. Soon the jails were filled with Republican prisoners, and conditions in Limerick Jail were deplorable. ^{Our} ~~Other~~ girls did all they could to help the prisoners. In 1922 a number of members of Cumann na mBan were arrested outside Limerick Jail, where they had been waiting for prisoners who were supposed to be allowed escape. It later transpired that this was a plot to capture the girls, and, as far as I can remember, those arrested included Maura O'Halloran, Nellie Blackwell, N. O'Rahilly, Nellie Fennell, Josie O'Brien and Nannie Hogan, of Cratloe. They were held in Dublin jails for a long time, and went through hunger strike with Mary MacSwiney and Mrs. O'Callaghan, who had also been arrested. The conditions under which they were held in custody in Kilmainham and Mountjoy were appalling. I have a number of letters sent out secretly by Nannie Hogan, which describe vividly the brutality to which they were subjected. That was the most terrible and depressing period since the start of the fight. Yet, our branch continued to function until 1924, by which time most of the prisoners had been released. I look back now with pride and pleasure to my long association with these grand women of the Limerick branch of Cumann na mBan. I never observed a sign of pettiness, jealousy ~~(etc)~~ or personal ambition amongst them.

Margaret M. O'Leary

All worked for the cause to the utmost of their abilities,
giving of their time and means willingly, and upholding
their principles regardless of consequences.

Signed: Maighread Ni Dhálaigh
(Maighread Ni Dhálaigh)

Date: 6th June 1953

6th June 1953.

Witness:

S. Ni Chiosain
(S. Ni Chiosain)

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