

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,054

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,054.....

Witness

Miss Eilis Aughney
(Eilis Nic Eachnaidh),
72 Merrion Square,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Executive of Cumann na mBan, 1920.- ;
Secretary of same Organisation later.

Subject.

Organisation and work of Cumann na mBan,
1919-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.200.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY EILISH AUGHNEY

72, Merrion Square, Dublin.

It was about 1919, when I was doing my secondary teacher's diploma, that I became a member of University Branch of Cumann na mBan, being persuaded to this step by my professor, Miss Boden, who afterwards became a Dominican nun.

Eileen McGrane - afterwards Mrs. McCarvill - was captain of the Branch. I can't remember who the other officers were, but I think Kathleen McColgan and Kathleen Murphy, were also officers. The former is now Mrs. Barry, M.O.H. of Kilkenny, and the latter a doctor on the staff of St. Ultan's Children's Hospital, and wife of Dr. Paul Farrell.

We had branch meetings every Sunday morning at 25 Parnell Square. We did indoor drill and were taught First Aid by Dr. Dorothy Price and some medical students of the branch. Like all the other branches we paraded at funerals and such functions.

In September 1920 I got a job in Sgoil Bhríde in St. Stephen's Green under Miss Gavan Duffy teaching Irish and history and geography. Very shortly after that Máirín McGavock got me co-opted a member of the Executive of Cumann na mBan. With her I used to work at the office of Cumann na mBan, at, I think, 27 Dawson Street.

I remember once being mobilised with a few others in that year at Sgoil Bhríde for First Aid work on the occasion of a city ambush, but actually no casualties were brought in.

We used stick small posters up on all sorts of places such as lamp posts, gates and doors showing the activities of the Dublin Brigade. This was by way of propaganda for the Dublin Brigade.

I remember doing a house to house distribution of printed propaganda with Kathleen McGilligan in Grand Canal Street. We used to put the literature through the letter boxes or, if

if the doors were open, hand it to the people of the house.

During the long summer holidays my sister Honoria and myself were asked by the Director of Organisation - Leslie Price (I think) - to organise a branch of Cumann na mBan in our own town, Tullow. My sister, who was a medical student, gave them First Aid lectures and I did the drill and the other activities of a branch. The branch did good work after that and kept on even during the civil war when two or three of them were arrested. Either in 1920 or 1921 there was an attack on the local police barracks for arms when one of the Volunteers was wounded and brought to the house of my cousin, Eilís Dargan, and there attended by Honoria. We supplied first aid outfits to the local Volunteers all through the war.

During holidays I was delegated by the Executive to attend meetings of the Carlow District Council for the discussion of local problems and as a link with the Executive in Dublin. This work went on till the June of 1921. A great deal of it was routine work for the Executive at whose discussions I would have been present. All this work was voluntary, as there was only one paid secretary, who was at one stage Molly Hyland.

In the end of June 1921 I was sent down to Longford as Executive organiser. I spent a fortnight - a week in the south and a week in the north of the county. In the former place I stayed in a big house owned by friendly Protestants. I think the man of the house was a Volunteer. I got instructions from Dr. Dorothy Price to devote particular attention to First Aid as the fighting was fairly widespread in that county.

When I came back to Longford town I attended a meeting of the District Council which covered the Brigade area. Mrs. McKeon, a widow, was, I think, secretary of the District Council, and I stayed with her for a few days. Our meeting was held in a wood outside the town as the Auxiliaries were

very active. While I was there the Truce was declared.

As a member of the Executive I must have attended the annual Conventions, but I can't remember much about them. I can't even say where they were held.

During the summer of 1921 we resumed our activities in the branch in Tullow which held together faithfully, and we took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Truce to extend the organisation into the country villages. Also on our return to Dublin we did a good deal more field work under Commandant L. Kennedy. She was a great sort and we were afraid of our lives of her.

After the Treaty we lost some members from our branch, but the majority remained loyal to the Republic, and when the Extraordinary General meeting was called in February 1922, the great majority voted republican and when the new Executive met I think Sheila Humphreys and I were made secretaries. We carried on the work and kept the organisation going.

I think it was at that stage that each member of the Executive went down to various places in the country to contact the District Councils with a view to pulling the branches together where defections had taken place. I went to Carlow and met the District Council there and gave them a quantity of leaflets for distribution among the branches. This work went on until the Four Courts, and Sheila and I spent all our free time in the office trying to keep the organisation together and to counteract the discouragement caused by the split.

I went home on holidays towards the end of June and was only a few days at home when the fight started in the Four Courts. There was nothing doing in Tullow until the column under Tom Derrig and Ernie O'Malley arrived there after the retreat through Blessington and Baltinglass. Myself, my sister and the local Cumann na mBan worked with them for the week they held the town. They took over the Bridge Hotel and, later on, Major

Doyme's big house - the Abbey - on the edge of the town. My main activity was working with Tom Derrig to prevent communication between Tullow and Carlow where there was a Free State post established. The other girls of the branch cooked and kept house for the Volunteers.

The column left the town after a week and went to Myshall on the hills. After a short time there they retreated southwards.

We remained at home and I may mention the townsfolk, including our parents, were practically all hostile to Cumann na mBan because they adhered to the Republic.

A line of communication was established between Dublin and the south - I think Kitty Barry had something to do with it - and my sister and I were the contacts in Carlow County. As the dispatches arrived from the south Hon or I brought them to Dublin, but, strange to say, I can't remember taking anything back, though I do remember going to Carlow from Tullow, possibly with local messages. On the way back I was followed from the town of Carlow by a lorry of Free State soldiers who stopped to search me. I naturally refused to be searched by one of the soldiers, who was an impertinent puppy, but I suggested being taken back to Carlow Barracks where I knew the Volunteer in charge of the Free Staters, or to Tullow to the parish priest's house. I was so fed up with the impertinence of this Free State soldier that I suddenly thought of demanding the officer in charge. I found that he was a young fellow whom I had known in the Volunteers movement, called Lillis - I think he is now Colonel Lillis of the Defence Forces. I said to him: "Is this what you have come to?" He seemed a bit ashamed of himself and told me to go on to Tullow.

A small contingent of the Volunteers in the Tullow area - in the country parts - remained Republican, and we were asked to make first aid field dressings for them. I worked at this

with a chemist in the town - I cannot now remember his name - it might have been a Mr. Armstrong.

I remember going at one time at night to meet the commandant - Tommy Connell - who was afterwards killed, to get messages from him for somebody.

When I came back to town in September I resumed my usual activities in the Branch and as secretary of the Executive. We pasted up propaganda posters about 10 o'clock at night, always expecting a Garda to arrest ^{us} me.

During this time Hon and I and Jeanne Carragher from Carrickmacross were in touch with a small group of college Volunteers of the 3rd Battalion for whom we carried messages and guns if they were going on a 'job'. Bobby Bonfield was one of this group and his people were hostile so he had to rely on us. We used to collect messages for him at McCarthy's newspaper shop in Lower Leeson Street. It was while we were away on the Easter holidays that he came to collect a message himself and was picked up by a group of Free State soldiers or ~~detectives~~ that were said to be acting as bodyguard to Cosgrave who was doing the visits to seven churches on Holy Thursday. He was taken and questioned in the Shelbourne Hotel and they possibly found the message on him. He was taken out to the Red Cow Inn at Clondalkin and shot and his body was found a couple of days later.

At that time these lads used to dump guns or send us to collect them to where they had dumped them after a 'job'. One of the places where we collected a gun was at Mount Argus. This sort of activity went on till the 'Cease Fire', each day getting more heart-breaking and hopeless.

Signed:

Eilis Nic Eachnaidh
(Eilis Nic Eachnaidh)

Date:

29-12-54

29.12.54

Witness: _____

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