

W. S. 1,345
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,345

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,345

Witness

Maire, Bean Mhic Giolla Phadraig,
16 St. John's Villas,
Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Adjutant, North Wexford Brigade,
Cumann na mBan, 1920-1923.

Subject.

Cumann na mBan, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford,
1914-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2653

Form B.S.M. 2

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SECOND STATEMENT BY MÁIRE BEAN MAC GIOLLA PADRAIGH
(Nee MORAN),
16 St. John's Villas, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

Activities of North Wexford Brigade Cumann na mBan
From 1914 to 1923.

A branch of Cumann na mBan was founded in Enniscorthy in 1914 by Mrs. Wyse Power and Maire Moran (now Mrs. Fitzpatrick). It had a membership of one hundred. The Ferns branch was formed in 1915 with a membership of twenty, but, by 1916, that number had dwindled to eight.

The Enniscorthy branch activities during 1914 included attending first-aid lectures, given by Dr. Kelly, and drill instructions by Mrs. Sighle Lynch (nee Moran). During 1915, the membership was thirty-eight. Twelve members received first-aid certificates. From November, 1915, to April, 1916, there were twenty active members. On Easter Sunday, 1916, the members got the order to stand by and be ready to mobilise at short notice.

On Monday and Tuesday of Easter Week, 1916, a member was doing despatch work from Enniscorthy to Wexford, and on Wednesday she brought guns and ammunition from Wexford to Enniscorthy.

On Thursday, Cumann na mBan took up position in the Athenaeum, which had been taken over as headquarters by the Volunteer force, and established there an emergency hospital and a kitchen. The

officers in charge were:-

Emergency Hospital - Miss M. White.
Kitchen - Miss Greta Doyle.
Despatch Rider - Máire Moran
(Mrs. Fitzpatrick)

The membership had increased during the week to fifty. Some members worked in the kitchen, others in the emergency hospital and one as clerk in headquarters office. Mrs. Lynch (nee Moran) and Mrs. de Lacy were in charge of a provisioning station on the outskirts of the town.

About ten girls were sent to Ferns with the Volunteer unit, and there joined with the Ferns Cumann na mBan in preparing a temporary hospital and kitchen. They stayed there until verification of the order to surrender was received, when they were recalled to Enniscorthy.

The Cumann na mBan, immediately after the surrender, collected and dumped the arms, and helped the prisoners' dependents.

During 1917 and 1918, they helped the White Cross and collected for same. They also worked on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidates in the parliamentary and local elections.

During this period, every parish in North Wexford was organised, and, by 1919, twenty-seven branches had been established in north Wexford and a small part of south Wicklow. This was the area covered by the North Wexford Brigade, I.R.A.

The Cumann na mBan was organised territorially on the same basis as the I.R.A. Hence the Cumann na mBan brigade area was the same as the I.R.A. brigade area. The brigade area was divided into four districts. Each district corresponded to the I.R.A. battalion area. Branches of Cumann na mBan were formed in each area in which there was an I.R.A. company.

During 1920, Miss Maire Comerford became Brigade O/C, and Maire Moran (Mrs. Fitzpatrick), Brigade Adjutant. They continued to hold these ranks until 1923.

The Brigade Council was composed of the Brigade O/C, Brigade Staff and the Commandants of the four districts. Similarly the District Commandant and the Captains of the branches formed the District Council.

The following is a list of the branches in each of the four districts:-

No. 1 District - Eight branches; 109 members.

Ballindaggin; Ballycarney;
Marshallstown; Kilttealy;
Kilmyshall; Bunclody;
Enniscorthy and Blackwater.

No. 2 District - Six branches; 95 members.

Rathnure; Poulpeasty;
Enniscorthy No. 2; Caim;
Killanne and Clonroche.

No. 3 District - Ten branches; 139 members.

Ferns; Clonee; Camolin;
Ballygarrett; Kilanerin;
Riverchapel; Gorey;
BooLavogue; Monageer and
Castletown.

No. 4 District Three branches; 53 members.
Carnew; Askamore and Craanford.

All branches were engaged in first-aid work, collecting for I.R.A. funds, organising concerts to raise funds and collecting for Dáil bonds.

Activities also included paring ammunition and making field dressings. One member carried the Dáil bonds and money from Enniscorthy to Dublin, and despatches to and from Dublin. The Brigade O/C, Miss Comerford, gave instructions in the use of the rifle.

In 1920 the British military took over the courthouse in Enniscorthy and occupied it. The number of R.I.C. was greatly increased.. The town and country were full of spies, and almost every girl in the movement was known to them which made the work of Cumann na mBan extremely difficult.

The part of Enniscorthy town east of the river Slaney was in the 2nd Battalion area, so, in order to make it easier to keep in touch with the 2nd Battalion, the Enniscorthy branch of Cumann na mBan was divided and a second branch was started in the part of the town which was in the 2nd Battalion area. This branch was known as Enniscorthy No. 2 Branch. It had a membership of thirty. Miss Annie O'Neill was Captain of the branch which was of great assistance to the I.R.A. Miss O'Neill was laundress in the Mental Hospital, and, as she had charge of the keys, she was able to keep and feed wanted men. She also stored guns and ammunition.

The twenty-seven branches in the four battalion areas were working splendidly. North Wexford was being constantly patrolled by soldiers, Black and Tans, R.I.C. and spies.

The general activities of the branches were scouting and housing the columns, keeping dumps and doing intelligence work. These activities were by no means easy to carry out. North Wexford is a network of by-roads connecting the main roads, which made the movements of I.R.A. columns very difficult unless well scouted, and Cumann na mBan were skilled at this.

Reprisals by Black and Tans were being constantly enacted. Houses were burned, men arrested and beaten. Cumann na mBan were always on the spot to help the sufferers. District council meetings were held occasionally, so that all branches were well linked up. Some members were instructed not to appear at branch meetings, as their homes were safe refuges for I.R.A. men. Such members concentrated on intelligence work.

From July, 1921, to June, 1922, all branches were still in existence, and activities were: election work, collecting for the I.R.A., selling Republican papers and holding concerts.

On the outbreak of the Civil War in July, 1922, the Enniscorthy branch members, with some of the country branch members, helped the I.R.A. during the fight in Enniscorthy. They were divided into two lots, one lot doing the cooking for the men on active service, the rest in the emergency hospital where they had to attend the wounded and dead.

And the end of the week, an active service unit was formed, consisting of twelve girls who were willing to do any duty at any hour, night or day.

When Mr. E. O'Malley's column, which had been in Enniscorthy during the week, moved to Newtownbarry, members of Cumann na mBan scouted for the column. Mrs. Mary Skelton, Captain, Killane branch, stayed to help the column while it was stationed in Newtownbarry.

As all members helping the active service unit in North Wexford had service during the War of Independence, they were of the greatest importance to the I.R.A. Their work consisted of:-

Despatch work between Headquarters, Dublin,
and O/C, 3rd Eastern Division, and
between O/C, 3rd Eastern, and Brigade O/C,
between Brigade O/C and columns;

Keeping of ammunition dumps;

Moving dumps;

Carrying arms, ammunition and explosives to
Brigade O/C.

Sheltering and keeping armed men and officers;

Attending the sick, dead and wounded.

There was an excellent line of communication from Dublin to Headquarters, 3rd Eastern. The unit carried all important despatches, sometimes cycling twenty and thirty miles.

The first of the A.S.U. was arrested in March, 1922, and later three more. Branch members were busy,

helping the Active Service Unit. They also knitted and washed for the column.

After the Cease Fire in 1923, members were active, helping prisoners, their dependants and collecting for them.

The Cumann na mBan in North Wexford, from 1920 to 1923, had a hard and difficult task. They had to put up with the hardships of constant night raids and, in some cases, were left homeless. Their menfolk were being imprisoned and some shot. Country branch members had to replace their menfolk in the fields. Very often, they had to leave their beds at night, so that the men in the columns could have rest and sleep. They also washed for them and attended the sick and injured.

SIGNED: Maire Bean Mac Giolla Padraig
(Maire, Bean Mac Giolla Padraig).
DATE: 25th Jan. 1956
25th Jan. 1956.

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WITNESS Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col.
(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.