

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1630

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1630.

Witness

George Hurley,
38, Wycherley Cottages,
College Road,
CORK.

Identity.

Member, Fianna Éireann.

Subject.

Fianna activities, Cork City, 1917-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2954.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY GEORGE HURLEY

38 Wycherley Cottages, College Road, Cork

I am a native of Cork. I joined the Fianna organisation in Cork city in late 1917. There were, at that time, about 100 members of the Fianna in Cork city. The organisation comprised boys of from 10 to 16 or 17 years of age who were considered too young to join any of the Volunteer units in the city.

At the time I joined, there were what was known as the north and south city sluaghs. The areas were those on the north and south banks of the River Lee. On the north side the boundary could be said to extend, roughly, from Mayfield to Clogheen, and on the south from Blackrock to Dennehy's Cross. The O/C. of the southern slough was Dan McSweeney, and Paddy Murphy was O/C. of the northern slough. Tadhg O'Sullivan was the officer in charge of the Fianna in Cork at that particular time. He later met his death at the hands of the Black and Tans when serving as an officer in the 2nd Battalion, Cork (City) No. 1 Brigade, I.R.A.

When the threat of conscription by the British Government occurred in mid-1918, a large number of boys joined the Fianna and our numbers swelled to approximately 200. We used a room in a hall known as An Grianán in Queen St., Cork, as our H.Q. at first, and, later on in that year, or early in 1919, moved to premises in South Main St., Cork. An Grianán was the official Gaelic League headquarters in Cork then. It was also used as a meeting place by the Irish Volunteers about that period.

It was, I think, late in the year 1918, or early in 1919, that it was found necessary, owing to the increase in numbers, to form a third slough in the city. This was known as the centre slough and covered an area in the centre of the city extending from the Custom House on the east to the Mardyke in the west. Frank McMahon was O/C. of this slough.

In 1919, our H.Q. was moved to the house of a man named Dromey in Pope's Quay, Cork, and, in 1920, to McGurk's in North Main St. Cork. This latter place served as H.Q. up to the Truce of July 1921.

The training programme of the Fianna consisted of drilling, signalling instruction and lectures in first-aid and in the use of the revolver and rifle. A .22 rifle was used for instruction purposes. Frequent parades took place and on occasions the boys marched out into the country where field training was carried on. A distinctive uniform was worn consisting of a blue short pants, a green shirt with a saffron scarf, and a green broad-brimmed hat. The officers of the Fianna wore Sam Browne belts. When on parade, the Fianna always wore uniform although the wearing of uniforms was prohibited by a British Government Order as early as 1918, so far as I can remember.

Comparatively few members had guns of any kind. The more senior boys did have revolvers, but to the best of my recollection, there were no more than a dozen revolvers in the hands of the Fianna during the period 1917-1921. The use of revolvers was discouraged by the senior organisation in the city, viz: the I.R.A. As a matter of fact, a direction was given to the Fianna by I.R.A. headquarters in Cork in 1920, that the Fianna was not to carry out any attacks on enemy forces by shooting, unless with the prior permission of the I.R.A. This instruction was, in the main, carried out, and, except for isolated (individual) cases, no organised armed attack was carried out on the enemy forces in Cork city by the Fianna.

In my early days in the movement, our activities, apart from drilling, general training and parading, were mostly concerned with what might be termed the propaganda side of the National Movement for Independence.

We pasted up posters concerning meetings, concerts and public parades. We helped in taking up collections of money for national purposes - prisoners' aid funds, Sinn Féin election funds and suchlike. Enemy posters - proclamations - were torn down. We attended recruiting meetings for the British army and created as much disturbance as possible. We distributed handbills advising men not to join the British army and helped generally in the type of activities suitable to boys.

As time went on and the struggle became more intense, so also did our activities increase. The Fianna carried dispatches for the I.R.A., helped in the removal from suspected places of I.R.A. ammunition and guns, carried out daylight raids on shops and vans containing provisions and various other goods being dispatched to military barracks in Cork. Scouting duty for the I.R.A. was of frequent occurrence, suspected spies were tracked and their movements reported to the I.R.A.; military stores in transit were held up and destroyed, and, on several occasions, our lads held up individual soldiers or Black and Tans and took their equipment. The Fianna was particularly active in enforcing the boycott of Belfast goods being sold in shops. Daylight raids were of frequent occurrence; goods were removed from shops and the owners warned that the practice of selling such goods should stop. The measures taken by the Fianna in this respect were very effective in 'tightening' the boycott campaign in Cork city.

Here I would like to place on record details of a brutal murder committed by the British on one of our members in Cork city. The unfortunate victim was a 17-year old lad by the name of Paddy Hanley, who lived with his widowed mother at No. 2 Broad St., Cork. He was the sole support of her and his sister.

At about 11.45 p.m. on the night of 17th November 1920, the residents of No. 2 Broad St. were awakened by the noise of the front door being broken open; a man rushed up the stairs and entered the bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Coleman who also resided in the house. The man was wearing a policeman's uniform, cap and goggles. He came to the bedside with a revolver in one hand and a flashlamp in the other. When asked by Mrs. Coleman what in God's name brought him there, he merely exclaimed "Hello", flashed his lamp on the bed, raised his revolver and fired point-blank into the bed. The bullet wounded Mr. Coleman in the arm. The assailant then turned and walked out of the room leaving Mrs. Coleman screaming. Paddy Hanley opened the door of his room when he heard the man rushing up the stairs. The man in police uniform had just come from Mrs. Coleman's room. Hanley, standing at his bedroom door, said: "Don't shoot; I am an orphan and my mother's only support". "Very well", replied the man, and, raising his revolver, fired at Hanley. The bullet missed him, but the man fired the second time, the bullet striking Hanley above the heart, killing him instantly. Hanley was in his night attire at the time.

This murder was by way of a reprisal by the British for the shooting of an R.I.C. sergeant named O'Donoghue by the I.R.A. earlier on the same night in the course of an I.R.A. raid on Lunham's bacon factory.

In a reprisal raid the same night by R.I.C. in the Grattan St. area of Cork, another Fianna boy - O'Brien - was shot in the mouth. He subsequently recovered from the wound. An I.R.A. man suspected of giving information as to who shot Sergeant O'Donoghue was later apprehended and executed by the I.R.A.

In late 1920, an A.S.U. of the Fianna was formed in Cork.

The O/C. was Stephen Walsh. The unit consisted of about 20 to 30 of the more senior boys. About 12 of these were armed with revolvers when occasion demanded. This unit comprised Fianna from the I.R.A. 1st Battalion area (north city) almost exclusively. It worked with the I.R.A. men from the 1st Battalion. On the south side of the city a smaller A.S.U. of Fianna was formed under the command of Frank Nolan. This unit co-operated with their I.R.A. comrades of the 2nd Battalion. The main purpose of these units (none of the members of which were wholetime) was to have lads available for any sudden call from the I.R.A.

Early in 1921, a Fianna Brigade Staff was formed in Cork. The following was the personnel: O/C. Frank McMahon; Brigade Organiser and Vice O/C. Jack Carey; Adjutant - Dan Scully; Intelligence Officer - Michael O'Leary; O/C. City - Edward Gamble.

The staff of the battalions and companies was as follows:
1st Battalion: O/C. Dan Mulroy; A/Company O/C. Stephen Walsh; B/Company O/C. Denis Woods; C/Company O/C. Con O'Leary D/Coy. O/C. Stephen Wall and later Patrick Lynch; E/Coy. O/C. Leo Cahill; G/Coy. O/C. Daniel Gamble; H/Coy. O/C. Peter Young
2nd Battalion: O/C. Edward Murray; Adjutant - John Roynane. B/Coy. O/C. Richard O'Leary; C/Coy. O/C. William Quirke; D/Coy. O/C. Sean Downey; E/Coy. O/C. Frank Nolan; F/Coy. O/C. Christopher Hurley; G/Coy. O/C. Richard Noonan; H/Coy. O/C. Charles Meaney.

Signed: 

Date: 7/15/57

Witness: 

