

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 31



Éire  
Telefón 61018

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,  
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIAIH  
(Dublin)

DOCUMENT W.S. 31.

Statement by

BULMER HOBSON -

15th October, 1947,

on

NA FIANNA ÉIREANN

1902 - 1914.

13175

File S. 36.

STATEMENT BY

MR. BULMER HOBSON

ON

I.R.B. AND IRISH FREEDOM.

A copy of this statement was sent at Mr. Hobson's request to each of the following, and any comments received in the Bureau as a result are registered <sup>in the archives of the</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>Bureau</sup> ~~and~~ filed, as ~~individual documents~~:

<u>Name.</u>	<u>Relevant</u> <u>File</u> <u>Register No.</u>
Dr. P. McCartan	S.65
P.S. O'Hegarty	S.49
D. McCullough	S.62
P. O'Ricin	S.32
S. O'Connor	S.53
S. Fitzgibbon	S.54
Captain R. Mentcath	S.50

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5.31

FIANNA ÉIREANN

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

I. FOREWORD.

There were two distinct organisations, both for boys, which bore the name Na Fianna Éireann, both founded by me but on different dates, one in Belfast in 1902 and the other in Dublin seven years later.

II. FIANNA 1902.

The earlier one, confined to Belfast, was founded on 26th June, 1902, at a mass meeting of junior hurlers assembled at the Catholic Boys' Hall, Falls Road, Belfast. The meeting was convened by me, and I acted as Chairman.

The purpose of the organisation was to serve as a Junior Hurling League to promote the study of the Irish language and to make the boys sound nationally.

I was elected Chairman, Richard McDaniel Vice-Chairman, Thomas Aquinas McKenna and Arthur Robin as Honorary Secretaries, and Thomas Collins as Honorary Treasurer.

I have in my possession the manuscript minutes of this body from 22nd June, 1902, to 2nd December, 1903.

The members wore no uniform, and as far as I can recollect there was no provision for drilling or any other type of military training.

The organisation was called <sup>na</sup>Fianna Éireann, the playing field was called Cnoc Aluinn, and each branch

took the name of one of the Warriors of the Fianna, e.g., Oisin, Fionn, Oscar, Caoilte, etc.

At the date of the formation of the Fianna in 1902, I was then nineteen years of age; I was not then a member of the I.R.B.

The Fianna continued to exist for many years with various efforts from time to time to infuse new life into it. In the "United Irishman" of the 1st December, 1906, a notice appeared to the effect that the Fianna had been started in Belfast and that I was President. I have no recollection of the matter to which the notice refers; it may have been one of the attempts to revive the organisation. Remnants probably existed up to 1909 when the new body of the same name was established in Dublin.

So much for the earlier body.

### III. FIANNA 1909.

Early in August, 1909, in Sherrard Street, Dublin, in the house of Frank Moloney, brother of Miss Helena Moloney, I told the Countess Constance Markievicz of the organisation which I had founded some years before in Belfast, and she suggested that a boys' national organisation should be started in Dublin on the same lines.

On my explaining that the chief difficulty was one of money, she said that she would rent a hall at her own expense. This she did, the hall chosen being in 34 Lower Camden Street, Dublin, formerly the home of the Irish National Theatre Society.

Notices convening a meeting of boys to be held at 34 Camden Street on the following Monday (16th August) to form a National Boys' Organisation to be managed by the boys themselves on national non-party lines appeared in "An Claidheamh Soluis" on 14th August, 1909, and in other papers at the same time, and the meeting was duly held in that place and on that date. A brief report of the meeting appeared in "An Claidheamh Soluis" on the 21st August, 1909.

About one hundred boys attended in addition to Countess Markievicz, myself and some other adults.

I presided and was elected President of the organisation. Countess Markievicz was elected Vice-President and Pádraig O Riain as Secretary.

In my opening speech, I stressed that the control of the organisation should be wholly in the hands of the boys themselves. When the election of officers was taking place at the meeting, there was obviously a certain reluctance among the boys against the election of the Countess to office, principally on the grounds that she was a woman, and I had on many occasions to point out privately that they could not accept her financial help and refuse her membership or office. This feeling against the presence of a woman in the organisation continued in varying degrees of intensity for many years and probably never completely disappeared.

A story which has been told that there was an open protest at the inaugural meeting by some of the boys against her election may be true. I have no recollection of it.

Present at that meeting, in addition to those already mentioned, were:-

Con Colbert, who was executed in 1916,

Michael Lonergan, now in the U.S.A.,

and probably

Samon Martin, now employed in Irish Sweepstakes Ltd.

The militant character of the Fianna is indicated by the first three clauses of the Constitution of the Fianna as amended by the Árd-Fheis 1913 - Fianna Handbook 1914, page 167.

#### Object.

To re-establish the independence of Ireland.

#### Means.

The training of the youth of Ireland, mentally and physically, to achieve this object by teaching scouting and military exercises, Irish history, and the Irish language.

#### Declaration

I promise to work for the Independence of Ireland, never to join England's armed forces, and to obey my superior officers.

In an article by Major H. L. Murphy entitled "Countess Markievicz", which appeared in An Cosantóir of June 1946, it was stated that Pádraig Pearse and Roger Casement were associated with the foundation of the organisation in 1909. This is not correct. Both of them came in time to develop a benevolent interest in the body, but they were neither associated with its foundation nor were they connected with it officially at any time.

At this time, 1909, I was an ordinary member of the I.R.B. but that body took no part in the promotion of Fianna Éireann and was not consulted regarding it. It

was nevertheless my personal aim to recruit suitable members of the new Fianna into the I.R.B., of which I subsequently became both Dublin Centre and Leinster Centre.

A few weeks after the foundation of the Fianna, I went to Belfast where I stayed for a year, returning on and off to Dublin, and while I was away the Countess was elected President in my place. During my absence I continued to maintain my interest in the Fianna and on my return to Dublin I resumed my active association with it.

The Fianna were mainly self-supporting from the boys' subscriptions, but they were helped by gifts of money from Roger Casement and by funds raised by me in various ways, and sometimes in a small way by the I.R.B. through me.

As already stated, however, the I.R.B. had no direct connection with the Fianna.

As the boys grew older, certain selected ones were recruited into the I.R.B. at the age of 17 and upwards, and after my election as Dublin Centre of the I.R.B. in 1912, I formed a Special Fianna Circle of the I.R.B., the members of which continued as members of the Fianna, which was, of course, an open organisation. Included in the members of that Fianna Circle of the I.R.B. were, as far as I can remember:

Con Colbert,	Paddy Ward,	Eamon Bulfin,
Eamon Martin,	Michael Lonergan,	Liam Mellows,
Barney Mellows,	Frank Burke,	Paddy Houlihan,
Garry Houlihan,	Pádraig O Riain,	and probably
Archie Heron.		

The head of that Circle was Con Colbert, who was executed in 1916.

In preparation for the formation of the Irish Volunteers in October 1913, arrangements were made about July of that year by the Dublin Centres Board of the I.R.B., which was presided over by me, for the military drilling of its own members in order to be ready to take over the military control of the new body. Drilling took place chiefly in the house of the Irish National Foresters, 41 Parnell Square, Dublin, where Pádraig Ó Riain's father was caretaker. Members of the Fianna circle of the I.R.B. who were themselves highly trained, acted as instructors. These included Michael Lonergan, Pádraig O Riain, Con Colbert and probably Eamon Martin.

After the formation of the Volunteers in 1913, some of the older members of the Fianna passed into that body. Co-operation between the two organisations was always close, but at no time prior to the Rising was there any formal affiliation.

#### IV. ARMS.

Prior to the formation of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 there was no serious effort to arm the Fianna. Side arms, i.e. bayonets, were common, but there were no firearms. On the foundation of the Irish Volunteers, five members of the Fianna became members of its Provisional Committee on my suggestion, viz., Pádraig O Riain, Con Colbert, Eamon Martin, Michael Lonergan and Liam Mellows.

#### V. HOWTH GUN-RUNNING

The Fianna played a very important part in the landing of arms at Howth on 26th July, 1914.

I was in charge of the landing. I anticipated vigorous police opposition and as a precautionary measure got some 200 oak batons about ~~three~~<sup>two</sup> feet long made, with which to arm the Volunteers. These were made at night by carpenter members of the I.R.B. some time beforehand, <sup>they were fitted with a leather strap to fasten to the wrist.</sup> I felt that it would be too serious a risk to allow rifles and ammunition to get into the hands of untrained Volunteers.

The batons were brought to Howth in a trek-cart by the Fianna, of whom there were some 200 under the command of Pádraig Ó Riain, and distributed to the Volunteers at Howth.

The rifles, when landed, were distributed to the Volunteers, but the ammunition, except for some 2,000 rounds, was sent separately to Dublin. These 2,000 rounds were brought back in the trek-cart by the Fianna, who were at that stage the only body with sufficient discipline to be entrusted with ammunition.

#### VI. OFFICIAL JOURNAL

On the question of an official journal of the Fianna, I have no recollection that there was any. There may have been a typed or manuscript paper circulated by hand among the boys, but I have no information on that point.

#### VII. OFFICIAL HANDBOOK.

My own recollection of this, I am not insistent however, is that the Fianna Handbook was first published about 1910-1911. There is a copy in the National Library dated 1914, but none of earlier date.

The question, therefore, of an earlier issue awaits confirmation.

The following is my clear recollection of the circumstances connected with the first issue, whether that occurred in 1910-1911 or 1914.

It was compiled by the Secretary, Pádraig O Riain, to whose work the success of the organisation was in a large measure due.

It was printed by Patrick Mahon, 3 Yarnhall Street, Dublin, better known as Paddy Mahon.

Arrangements for publication were made by the Secretary, Pádraig O Riain, with Messrs. E. Ponsonby, Ltd., 116 Grafton Street, Dublin, agents for Government publications, who undertook the work in the belief that the book was an ordinary <sup>British</sup> Boy Scouts' book, the title on the spine being "Irish National Boy Scouts". When he realised its true nature, however, Mr. Ponsonby refused to publish it, whereupon, at Pádraig Ó Riain's request, I went and saw Mr. Ponsonby, who interviewed me in the presence of his solicitor. I insisted that the contract, though only a verbal one, could not be repudiated and it was finally agreed that the book should be sent back to the printers to have a new title page with Ponsonby's name omitted, and that Ponsonby should pay a sum of £10 to the Fianna by way of compensation for the delay, and pay the printer for the additional work involved.

The following are minor points about the Handbook:-

- (a) On the outside of the cover is a drawing of Cuchulainn signed "E. Art MacMurchadha". The artist was Eddie Morrow of Belfast. I have the original drawing, which is pen and ink.
- (b) The 1914 issue is not dated but the frontispiece by Countess Markievicz is initialled "C. de M. 1914".

- (c) The inscription on the title page shows that it was published by the Central Council of Na Fianna Éireann, 12 D'Olier Street, Dublin, which was my office.
- (d) The handbook contained, in addition to the official text -
1. An introduction in English by Countess Markievicz.
  2. An article in Irish "Filleadh na Féinne" by "An Craoibhín Aoibhinn", Dr. Douglas Hyde, President of Ireland 1938-1945.
  3. An article in English "The Fianna of Fionn" by P. H. Pearse.

Prior to the issue of the official handbook the Fianna relied on existing British publications, including the War Office Drill Manuals and the Baden Powell Boy Scouts Handbook.

From the foundation of the Fianna in 1909 to the Rising in 1916 Pádraig Ó Riain was the dominating personality in the Fianna. He had a natural capacity for leadership and did an enormous amount of work, and was to a great degree responsible for its success.

I hope that it will be possible for the Bureau to get statements from him and from other members whom I have mentioned.

*Pauline Ashman*

15 October, 1947.

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Witness

*undoubtedly*

Director Bureau of Military History