

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 20



ÉIRE

Telex 61018

RCINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,  
(26 Westland Row),

BAILL ÁTHA CLIATH  
(Dublin)

DOCUMENT W.S. 20.

Statement by

Tom Hales,  
Knocknacurra,  
Bandon,  
Co. Cork.

Dated

Undated.

On

National Activities 1907 - 1913.

Ballinadee Coy. I.V., 1914 - 1916.

---

5 pp. - Typescript - F'scap.

File S. 289.

ORIGINAL

11/6/20  
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913 21

No. W.S. 20

~~SECRET~~ STATEMENT OF TOM HALES,  
KNOCKNACURRA, BANDON, CO. CORK.

PERIOD: 1907 to early 1917.

PRINCIPAL UNIT: BALLINADEE COMPANY, I.V.

Ballinadee Company was the first Unit of Irish Volunteers to be organised in West Cork. At all times up to Easter, 1916, it was the leading Company in strength, in arms, in discipline and in organisation. At the same time that its officers were perfecting their own organisation they took the lead in building up and developing other Volunteer Companies in neighbouring districts, and their example and leadership were mainly responsible for the formation of many Companies from Ballinhassig to Clonakilty and from Kilbrittan to Ballineen. To Ballinadee all these Companies looked for guidance and help with the problems of their formative period, as well as for assistance in their training.

The men of Ballinadee who gave such an inspiring lead to West Cork were animated by the traditional Fenian spirit and doctrine, which had been handed down to us by my father, Robert Hales, and other older men from 1900 onwards. The spirit of the Land League days lived on in the district and it was revived in 1907 when the fight against the local landlords reached peak point. In that year attempted seizures of cattle by the Sherriff were an every-day occurrence. The farmers combined and organised to defeat the bailiffs. By means of scouts and signals, such as the blowing of horns, warning was given of their approach, so that in nine cases out of ten the Sherriff's men drew blank as the cattle had been removed off the land before their arrival.

On one occasion two of my father's cows were in Bandon pound, behind locked gates and guarded by twenty R.I.C. men. The Sherriff had arrived to proceed with the sale and removal to Cork. About twenty Ballinadee men, armed with ash plants, in a sudden organised attack, scattered the policemen, broke open the gate and rescued the cattle. The police used their batons freely, but the reliable ash plants, wielded by the powerful Ballinadee men, proved better weapons and soon rendered their hands and arms useless. The cattle were, by a pre-arranged plan, driven off to a destination from which the Sherriff never afterwards recovered them. This was an example of combined organisation and physical courage unequalled in those days. The plan was captained by my brother, Seán Hales, in co-operation with the O'Donoghues, Finns, McCarthys, Collins, etc., all of whom were afterwards the leading men in the Ballinadee Company. The above-named were the first in the assault on Bandon Pound; each had a special part allotted to him under the leadership of Seán Hales. Seán and a few others had, of course, a short-term holiday in His Majesty's prison afterwards, and several were on the run for some months. Finally the landlord gave way and came to terms.

The second and equally important physical force incident occurred also about 1907. An eviction notice was served on Jeremiah O'Sullivan, Droumkeen, Innishannon, who farmed a holding up to 200 acres. On the day fixed for the eviction the Sherriff and Agent arrived with a large force of R.I.C., but the Ballinadee men had prepared an elaborate plan of defence both inside the house and outside it. The first assault on the house by the Sherriff's men

and a squadron of R.I.C. was met by a fierce fusilade of everything but shot gun fire, and repelled. The Sherriff then withdrew for consultation with the R.I.C. Officers. The second part of the plan came into operation and the whole force was vigorously attacked by another party of defenders in positions outside the house. The Sherriff ran for cover, so did most of the R.I.C., some of them wounded and bleeding. The Agent came very near having his activities finished for good that day. The Ballinadee men who defended the O'Sullivan homestead had amongst them many champion weight-throwers and bowl players in those days, and their unexpected attack did terrible damage to the Sherriff's force. No second attack was made on the dwelling. Hence, to-day, Con and Mort. O'Sullivan are still in their father's old holding. Both of them were leading men in the Innishannon Company and I.R.A. column men. It was revealed afterwards that if Jeremiah O'Sullivan had been evicted that day he would never have gone back. His farm was in the estate of the old ascendancy, and he had purchased not long before.

In this district the finest material existed for a Volunteer Company - a community of sturdy farmers, young, intelligent men with independent minds and sound national instincts, many of them trained athletes of well above the average physique. All honour is due to them for the part they took in the Volunteer movement.

The Ballinadee Company was organised early in 1915 and the first public parade was to Bandon on the first Sunday in May. 24 men took part in it. The Company strength continued to grow steadily until at Easter, 1916, it was almost 100 men.

Terence MacSwiney took a great interest in the Company and came out to us frequently. Daiti Barry often came for a week, and Ernest Blythe was here for a few days during which we went on a Sunday parade to Ballinaspittal. Parades were held on two evenings a week and a route march on Sundays. These marches were usually to neighbouring towns or villages, and one of their objects was to encourage recruiting for the Volunteers. In this way Sections, some of which afterwards developed into Companies, were organised at Bandon, Kilbrittan, Gaggin, Kilpatrick, Farnevene and Newcestown, Aohill and Ballinaspittal. R.I.C. men usually accompanied these marches.

On one occasion early in 1915 we marched to Innishannon and met there the Cyclist Company from Cork City who brought us twelve Mauser rifles.

Seventeen officers and men from the Company took part in the O'Donovan Rossa funeral in Dublin, all armed with rifles. The Company also took part in the St. Patrick's Day demonstration in Cork City in 1916. On that occasion when we got off the train at Bandon on the return journey we were attacked by a mob of roughs from the town who threw stones and mud as we marched from the Railway Station. A halt was called, bayonets were fixed, and this had the effect of clearing the mob.

A big parade and exercises, in which all the local Companies took part, was held in Clonakilty in March or April, 1916.

On the Sunday before Easter Sunday, 1916, orders were given for the usual parade on the following Sunday, and instructions were given the men to bring rations for a two-day exercise. A general order for these Easter exercises had been issued by the Volunteer Executive in Dublin long beforehand.

On Wednesday, 19th April, 1916, I was with Tomás MacCurtain in his own house at Blackpool. He instructed me to take charge of the Battalion, comprising the Companies at Ballinadee, Bandon, Kilpatrick, Gaggin, Farnevene and Newcestown, Kilbrittan, Ballinhassig and Aiohill, on Easter Sunday, and to march to Kilmurray where he would meet us with the Cork City Battalion on the road to Macroom. We were to bring all arms and equipment. He made it plain that this march had a serious purpose. He said we were going to get arms, but did not say at what point. An attempt may be made to prevent our movements, and we may have to fight. But we were to get to the place where we were to meet him at all costs and not to fight unless attacked. He said arms were coming and we may have to fight for our lives. I was not to create unnecessary hardship or take out any man who did not know what was before him.

He did not tell me directly that a Rising was fixed for Easter Sunday, but rather left me with the impression that in getting the arms we may become involved in a fight, or that an attempt may be made to prevent us from moving to the place where we were to get the arms. MacCurtain told me that our destination on the march was Carriganamma, and that any further instructions would be given by himself or his command at or after leaving Kilmurray if any alteration was necessary. I had no direct information myself and no contact with Dublin at the time, so that I could act only in the light of the instructions given to me by MacCurtain as Brigade O.C.

Forty-eight Officers and men of the Ballinadee Company mobilised at Brown's Cross in the early hours of Easter Sunday morning. They were armed with twelve Mauser and eight Lee Enfield rifles, with about 150 rounds per man for the Lee Enfields and 20 rounds each for the Mausers, a few miniature rifles and about twenty shotguns. Nearly all had revolvers in addition and there was a fair supply of revolver ammunition. These were all picked men and they constituted perhaps the best armed, trained and equipped Company in the County Cork at the time.

We marched to Kilmurray, where we had 11 o'clock Mass. The Cork City contingent then arrived and Seán O'Sullivan took charge of the whole force. I was informed we were going to Macroom, probably by Seán O'Sullivan, but I was not told then that the parade was cancelled. It was at the bridge two miles East of Macroom I saw MacCurtain; I think MacSwiney was with him. He did not get out of the car but gave some instructions to Seán O'Sullivan. We went on into Macroom. Discussing the possibility of a fight with Seán O'Sullivan on the road to Macroom, he said, "the most we could do was to create a moral effect"

One man in my Battalion, - Hannon from Ballinaspittal, marched the whole way from Ballinaspittal to Macroom that day, which must be a record. There was a nucleus of a Section in Ballinaspittal but he was the only man to parade.

In Macroom, before the men were dismissed, Sean O'Sullivan held a consultation with the principal officers in regard to the advisability of proceeding to our original destination - Carriganinna - under such awful weather conditions (it was raining fair hell at the time.) He said that we would not go to Carriganinna, where other men were to meet us, because of the bad weather, and said that the enemy had refused action that day in not interfering with our march. Chris. O'Gorman and myself opposed the decision not to go on and urged him to proceed as arranged. The other officers took the line of least resistance when the matter was put to them in this fashion. Neither MacCurtain nor MacSwiney were present. Sean O'Sullivan said nothing about a countermanding order having been received, nor did he mention the loss of the arms ship. He announced the decision to return to our own areas and said the Cork City men were returning to Cork by train.

We came back on the train as far as Crockstown with the Cork Companies and stayed in the village until the early hours of Monday morning. It rained continuously until about 4 or 5 a.m. The Companies then marched back to their own areas. We were very disappointed.

On Easter Monday evening about 6 o'clock an order came from Cork, per Billy Crowley, to stand to. We mobilised in three or four houses and remained mobilised during the week. I think it was on Friday we next heard from the Brigade. This was an order to send in two horses and carts to bring out the rifles of the Cork City Companies. The horses and carts went in that Friday night but returned without the rifles, the men reporting that a change had taken place and some agreement come to about arms.

Michael McCarthy of Dunmanway came on Thursday or Friday and said "What is left of us west are willing to fight." I sent a message by McCarthy to Seán O'Hegarty in Ballingeary proposing a joining up of our forces and an attack on Macroom. When McCarthy returned to me after going to Dunmanway and Ballingeary he said he feared any attempt then would be hopeless. Things had gone too far and we would have no chance. I agreed.

I think it was on Friday that Pat Higgins came from Cork with news of the agreement to surrender arms. I was entirely against it; I would not countenance it and I refused to carry it out in this area. Liam de Rokste came on a similar mission on Saturday or Sunday and again I refused to agree. The Company had been mobilised up to this and I now took steps to ensure the safety of the arms. I left my own home and went to O'Donoghue's, Rathout, which was far less likely to be raided. I advised my brothers, Robert and William, to come there also and to bring the arms they had at home. Unfortunately they did not take that advice.

My brother, Sean Hales, was at a pig fair in Bandon on Tuesday, 2nd May, and had scouts on the watch for any movements of R.I.C. or military. He noticed the hasty movements of individual R.I.C. officers on seeing him. He was then on the alert at the top of the Square in Bandon. Suddenly a squad appeared about 150 yards from him. He knew their mission and made off at once across the fields westward. He sent word to me that we would all be arrested and to take no chances. This was double confirmation of my action and of my anticipation of what we may expect.

Sean was not arrested until five weeks afterwards. R.I.C. were raiding night and day for him. He chanced one visit home to see how things were and was captured.

Pat Higgins came again on Tuesday night, May 2nd, and brought me an instruction from the Brigade to disarm. We were to take no offensive action and cause no incidents. I refused to carry out any order to surrender arms. Next night (Wednesday), about 2 in the morning, Terence MacSwiney and Sean Hyde arrived at my house. I was at O'Donoghue's. Terry sent for me but I refused to come over and warned them that they were in danger of capture if they stayed in the house. I did not see Terry at all. My father told me afterwards that he also warned them not to stay in the house but Terry said an agreement had been come to and it was quite all right.

Early next morning the house was surrounded by about 100 military and a force of police; County Inspector Tweedy was in charge. My brothers, Robert and William Hales, wanted to resist, they had two Mauser rifles and some ammunition, but Terry would not permit it, and Terry, Robert, William and Sean Hyde were arrested. The two Mauser rifles were captured. There was another German rifle in the house which they did not get. The remainder of the Company arms had been put in places of safety. I escaped arrest and did all I could to keep the organisation together

Early in 1917 an enquiry was held in Cork into the action of the Brigade Officers at Easter, 1916. I was there, so was Mick Hyde, and most of the units of the Brigade were represented by one of their Officers. My accusation against the Brigade Officers at the time was that we had been left in a fog, that arms had been lost unnecessarily and that the loss of arms all over the South was due to the action of Cork. I felt that the same situation could arise again and that something should be done to ensure that the same confusion would not arise. I was hard on the Brigade Officers and both of them felt very keenly about it. There was no mention of the effect of the loss of the arms ship at this enquiry. Tomás MacCurtain said to me later, "If I live I will redeem 1916."

The Enquiry was carried out by Diarmuid Lynch and Dick Mulcahy.

The A.O.H. American Alliance had a few members in this area before 1916. They were good and they got a few rifles. There was no connection with the I.R.B. and no official I.R.B. organisation in the area before 1916.

There were 15 or 16 members of Fianna in the area before 1916. We did not take them out on Easter Sunday.

*20 - Tom Hales*

*Witness, Florence Donoghue.*

