

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 21



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ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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Statement by

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~~STATE~~ STATEMENT OF JOSEPH O'SHEA,
76, GREAT WILLIAM O'BRIEN STREET,
CORK.

PERIOD 1910 TO EASTER, 1916.

I joined the Fianna about 1910, shortly after it was started in Cork. There was one Sluagh in the City, and it had between 30 and 40 boys in it. There was a Committee of men in charge of it, consisting of Tomás MacCurtain, Seán O'Sullivan, Martin Donovan, Paddy Corkery, and, I think, Donncad O'Donoghue. I know the Committee was five, and Paddy Corkery was Treasurer.

Headquarters was in An Dún in Queen Street. The ages of the boys were from 12 to 15, but I do not think there was any actual upper or lower age limit. The members of the O'Growney Branch of the Gaelic League were responsible for starting the Fianna in Cork, and Countess Markievicz came to visit us several times. Bulmer Hobson was down also at the early stages. On one occasion we went to Glanmire Railway Station to see the Countess off after a visit. She kissed one boy and said, "That will have to do for all of you, I haven't time to kiss you all".

In the Summer of 1914 all the members of the Committee, who were then Officers of the Volunteers, were much too busy to give the same amount of attention to the Fianna, and the care of the Sluagh was handed over to Tadg Barry and George Osborne. Organisation was bad for a time and members went down to between 20 and 30. We left the Dún and used to frequent the Transport Workers' Union rooms in ~~Market~~ Quay. There was a man named Coveney employed there as caretaker, and he gave us a room free. We had a .22 rifle and a range had been fitted up there for use by men of the Citizen Army and we had the use of both. I think the rifle had been got and the range fitted up in expectation that the Citizen Army would develop, but I think it was not in existence at the time. We carried on there for a short period.

We moved from there to a room in Wherlin's Lane, Blackpool, which was rented and paid for by Liam O'Callaghan. He was a Solicitor's clerk, and he organised the Fianna in the North side of the city. We had about 15 members when we were there. When the Hall in Sheares' Street was opened early in 1915 the Fianna re-organised and were given a room there for themselves. I transferred to the Volunteers about that time.

Three members of the O'Growney Branch of the Gaelic League who took an interest in and helped the Fianna in 1912 and 1913 were Robaird Langford, Donal óg O'Callaghan and Miceal Ó Cuill. In 1912 or 1913 these three organised a group of the Fianna to go to the Palace Theatre to make a protest against the showing of a British Army recruiting film. We were to have got rotten eggs but they could not be got and we had to use good ones. About six boys went into the gallery, and when Miceal Ó Cuill blew a whistle signal in the pit we battered the screen with the eggs. Miceal was arrested and we were all thrown out. During the rest of the week the film was shown with the lights on.

Liam óg O'Callaghan and myself were at an O'Brienite meeting in the City Hall in 1914 with Langford and Miceal Ó Cuill distributing pamphlets. Liam óg and I were not molested but Langford got a fine pair of black eyes.

The Scoutmaster was always appointed by the Committee up to 1916. Walter Furlong was the first Scoutmaster; he was followed by Christy Moynihan, Seamus Courtney, William O'Callaghan, Sean Healy and Liam óg O'Callaghan, who was Scoutmaster in 1916. Moynihan joined the British Army.

Tomás MacCurtain tried to start a Fianna Band but it fell through. The Banba Pipers' Band existed at the time.

The strength of the Fianna in Cork at the end of 1913 was between 30 and 40. At the end of 1914 it was between 20 and 30. I do not know what the strength was at Easter, 1916, as I had then transferred to the Volunteers.

The boys paid a weekly subscription, but I do not remember the amount. This was the only source of revenue the organisation had. The boys also bought their own uniforms.

An American named Gibbons, who was in Cork on holidays, saw us marching in 1914. He came to Blarney with us and drilled us there. He was so interested that he returned to Cork the following year and paraded several times with us.

The training consisted mainly of drill and route marches. The route marches were held almost every Sunday. Tests were carried out in the following subjects:- First Aid, Semaphore, Morse, Knots and Scouting, but no badges were issued. The ordinary parades were held once a week in the Dún. The room was always open and members of the Fianna could attend the Sunday night lectures which were given in the Post Office room in the Dún. On one occasion there was a prize of 3/6d for the capture of a position, represented by a flag, at Blarney.

Week-end camps were held frequently. We had two or three small marquees, and about 10 or 12 boys usually took part in these camps. At a Camp in Healy's Bridge in 1914 the lady who owned the land came and invited us up to the house. Sean Healy, Liam óg and I went up. She was very kind to us and gave us eggs and milk free, but as Union Jacks and pictures of the Royal family were prominent in the house I think she must have been under the impression that we belonged to the Baden Powell Scouts.

The Cork Sluagh of the Fianna were the Guard of Honour for the Blessed Sacrament at the annual procession at Wilton Church every year from the formation of the organisation down to 1916. This was an honour which was very highly appreciated by all of us.

After the formation of the Volunteers the Fianna took part in the St. Patrick's Day and Manchester Martyrs demonstrations in Cork up to 1916. A party of Cork Sluagh travelled to Limerick with the Volunteers on Whit Sunday, 1915. Association with the Volunteers was always close, and a Volunteer Officer always inspected the Sluagh before public parades. I remember on one occasion when Seán O'Hegarty was inspecting officer, a lad named Hurley had brown stockings and Seán told him he would not be allowed to parade until he got black ones. The first Volunteer Camp was held at Rafeen. It was on a Sunday. The Fianna took the tents from Cork on Saturday evening on trucks belonging to

O'Neills the Painters, and erected them at Rafeen for the Volunteers. Captain Talbot Crosbie was there on a white horse.

A number of the older boys in the Sluagh, including Seamus Courtney, Seán Healy and myself, had transferred to the Volunteers before Easter, 1916. A number of the older boys had also joined the British Army. The following members of the Sluagh paraded with the Volunteers on Easter Sunday, 1916, and went to Macroom:-

Liam Óg O'Callaghan.
Jimmy Wickham.
Eddie Galvin.
Denis Galvin.
Jeremiah O'Callaghan (Liam's brother).
Liam Hennessy.
Frank McMahon.

The Fianna had no arms, except a few French bayonets, but the boys who paraded were supplied with arms by the Volunteers.

IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

I was one of the Fianna boys on duty on the stage at the City Hall, Cork, when the first meeting for the formation of the Volunteers was held. Christy Moynihan was in charge of us. We had lead-loaded soldier's canes, and when the platform was attacked by the A.O.H. members in the Hall we defended it as well as we could. The fight did not last long, and the attackers got up on the stage and injured the Chairman, J.J. Walsh.

The first march of the Volunteers was from the Cornmarket to Blarney and was held on a Sunday. It was headed by about six Fianna boys in uniform, with Seán Healy playing the bagpipes. The first march after the split was from Fisher Street to Bottle Hill. About 40 took part in it. It was on a Sunday towards the end of 1914. An old man, Gargan, who went out had to be brought back in an ambulance.

J.J. O'Connell from Dublin conducted a short course of training for Volunteers some time in 1915. He used to take us out in the evenings and do ordinary training. Organising marches to districts around the city were often held on Sundays. In September, 1915, members of all the four Cork City Companies took part in a march to Tracton. We left the Volunteer Hall in Sheares' Street some time about midnight on Saturday and marched to Lynch's, Tracton, where we got some hours sleep in a barn. Straw had been arranged for us. On Sunday morning we attended organising meetings at Nohoval and Ballyfeard and then returned to Lynch's for dinner, which was served on cabbage leaves. Afterwards we marched back to Cork. Almost 100 men took part in this parade.

After the split we were at a Feis in Carrigtwohill. There was a rifle competition in which the finalists were Lieut. Hill of the National Volunteers and Long of the Cork City I.V. Long won.

We were at the review in Limerick on Whit Sunday, 1915. A section of the local crowd was very hostile and we were battered. The rifles were put under guard in a store and an order was issued that we were not to go around singly but in twos or threes. One Cork Volunteer was arrested by the police and taken to the Barracks. When this was reported, Punch was ordered to take an armed patrol, go to the Barracks and demand the release of the detained man. He was to use force if necessary. He got his man without any trouble. The crowd was so threatening at the station when the Volunteers were entering the train for Cork that a section of Volunteers were issued with a few rounds per man in case the train would be attacked. A powerful Franciscan priest, who had been in Liberty Street, Cork, did great work in restraining the most aggressive members of the mob, and there would have been bad work in the station only for him. Tomás MacCurtain was in charge of the Cork Volunteers.

A party of Cork Volunteers on bicycles took the first Howth rifles to the Ballinadee Company. Those who went that day included Tomás MacCurtain, ^{Harry} Sean O'Sullivan, Seán Nolan, Fred Murray, Harry Varien, Sean ^{Murphy} Murphy, Jeremiah O'Driscoll, Din Boy Coughlan and myself. We took at least a dozen rifles; some had two. We met the Ballinadee men, who ambushed us, near Innishannon. There were two policemen with them. Seán Hales fell in his Company and we marched with them to Ballinadee. He ordered several halts to make the police get off their bicycles.

I remember Tom Hales was worried about ammunition for the rifles; we had brought none. At Kilmurray on Easter Sunday, 1916, the Cork men with Mausers had nine rounds per man. Three rounds were taken from each man to give to the Ballinadee men who had none.

The first Volunteer funeral was that of a lad named O'Sullivan from Barrack Street. His father joined the Volunteers immediately after the funeral, saying, "Ye have lost one man but got another". Coming back from the funeral a man named Coffey with a horse and covered car attempted to drive through the Volunteer ranks. J.J. O'Connell, who was running a training course in Cork at the time, sprang back and tumbled the horse and car into a shore.

A fully armed party of Cork Volunteers attended the O'Donovan Rossa funeral in Dublin.

There was a dump at Jack Murphy's stables in Chapel Street before 1916. Rifles and ammunition were kept there.

At Easter, 1916, I had a Section of 8 or 10 of 'D' Company to mobilise. I mobilised them all but only four turned out on Easter Sunday. The orders I had were that the men were to be mobilised for a two-day exercise and they were to parade with all arms and equipment and rations. Whatever about the men, every weapon and every round of ammunition was to be brought out. I did not know, and the men did not know, anything was on except the parade.

The Cobh men arrived in the Hall early on Saturday evening and they slept in the Hall that night. Phillips was in charge

of the rifle range and was arms instructor. McNeilus was Armourer.

On Easter Sunday morning I paraded with 'D' Company at the Hall. Four brothers, O'Sheas, of the Company had four rifles and none of them paraded. Liam Rabbett and my brother Jack were sent up to get the four rifles, and, as a result, they missed the train to Macroom. About 40 men of 'D' Company paraded. The Officers were:-

Captain : Christopher O'Gorman.
1st Lieutenant: Con Collins.
Adjutant : Liam Rabbett.

Dathi Cotter had been Company Captain, but had been transferred to, I think, the post of Battalion Signals Officer.

At the Hall Seán O'Sullivan distributed what he laughingly called six days' rations - 6 oxo cubes in a tin - to each man. First aid outfits were also distributed. The effect of collecting the arms was that all who paraded had rifles. They were mostly Martinis in 'D' Company, with some Mausers and a few service rifles. Nearly every man in the Company had a revolver also, mostly .22. They were for sale for about 5/- at the time. There was a good supply of .303 ammunition. I had a .303 Martini with a full pouch of 50 rounds and, in addition, had loose ammunition in my pockets. Mauser stuff was scarce, although Seán Murphy had said to Tom Hales at Ballinadee when Tom enquired about ammunition for the Mausers "We have lots of stuff".

Until we got to Macroom we had no idea that there was any change in the intention to carry out the two days' parade. The lads were tired going into Macroom, and some of them asked me to ask Chris. O'Gorman, the Company Captain, had we far to go. I asked him and he said "Our march is into Kerry".

At Macroom we were dismissed for a while and went for refreshments. It rained heavily. We were told by our own Officers that the manoeuvres were off and that we were to return to Cork by train. No reason was given and we knew nothing more than what we were told.

We returned to Cork on Sunday night and took our arms home. The men were instructed to stand to arms. I got instructions from C. O'Gorman to tell the men of my Section who had not paraded to stand by also, and I went round to all of them on Sunday night.

On Easter Monday I went to the Hall early. Seán Murphy gave me a box of matches and two tin cans with fuses to guard the back. I was relieved for dinner. When I came back, Din Boy Coughlan and myself were sent to the front room overlooking Sheares Street, supplied with rifles and ammunition, and given orders that in the event of the military coming we were to fire. There were probably other men on the ground floor but we did not see them. Seán Murphy was in the Hall all day Monday. The guard was maintained all the week, and some Officers were sleeping in the Hall during the week.

On the following Monday night the meeting in connection with the surrender of arms was held in the Hall. I have no recollection of the Bishop or the Lord Mayor being present. After the meeting I asked Tomás MacCurtain was I was to do. He said "Hand in your rifle and go up to Con Delaney and get him to bring in mine". Con Delaney brought it in personally. I handed in mine at the South Mall to the Lord Mayor's house. The revolver which Michael Barrett picked up there when he handed in a dummy rifle was Terry MacSwiney's.

Jimmy Guess had a model of Sheares Street Hall which he made, and may still have it.

The police always paid close attention to our exercises and parades. Maliffe and Carroll, particularly, were always on our heels.

- Witness: Florence Dowling

Joseph Shea,
76 St. Wm. Boner St.
Cook.

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