

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 267

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S....267.....

Witness

Mr. Seamus Pouch,
35 O'Curry Road,
Fairbrothers Fields, Dublin.

Identity

Captain Sluagh Brian Boru 1916;
Brigade Adjutant Dublin Brigade 1918-20;
Assistant Q.M.G. 1920-Truce.

Subject

- (a) National activities - Fianna Eireann 1909-1916 ;
- (b) Howth Gun-Running 1914;
- (c) Jacob's Factory Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY SEAMUS POUNCH

35, O'CURRY ROAD, FAIRBROTHERS FIELDS, DUBLIN.

Towards the end of 1909 I joined An Cead Sluagh of the Fianna or National Boy Scouts of Ireland. The object of the Fianna was the establishment of the Independence of Ireland. Each boy on joining had to make the following declaration:

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

To attract recruits a boy stood outside the Hall at 34 Lower Camden St. with a flag and answered queries and directed boys inside. The flag was green with a harp on it, but later the Fianna got its own flag, which was sky-blue with a sunburst and the words "Fianna Eireann" inscribed on it. Many joined and fell away, but those who remained formed a close comradeship and became the nucleus of the Irish Army and were destined to see a free Ireland, the hope and aspiration of centuries.

I remember the night two young men presented themselves as recruits; we were surprised to see two young men in long trousers wanting to join and fight for Ireland. One was Liam Mellows and his friend - French. The sincerity of these recruits was remarkable, and soon we realised they meant just what they said. Liam was a very fatherly type, and gave us history lectures, and soon took part in our Executive meetings and was appointed full time organiser for Ireland at his own request, and for this job, for which he hardly got his expenses, he left his own employment. From this post he took a similar one with the Volunteers after their formation, and was appointed to lead the West of Ireland in the Rising.

The leading figure, of course, was Countess Markievicz, who provided the rent of 10/- per week for the sole use of the Hall, 34 Lr. Camden St. for the Fianna. Then there was Bulmer Hobson, Padraig O'Riain and Con Colbert.

Drilling and scoutcraft went on apace and soon the Fianna were

the most specialised group in the various public functions and got the headlines in the newspapers for smartness and general military technique.

Amongst the leaders a small group used to meet constantly at Surrey House, Leinster Road, the home of the Countess, and there were introduced to every personality of repute who visited the house. In fact Surrey House soon became a meeting place for these boys - "Madam's Boys" - as they were introduced to personalities and amongst the Fianna were dubbed the Surrey House clique. Members of the clique were Patsy O'Connor, Harry Walpole, Jack Shallow, Eddie Murray, Andy Dunne and myself.

Padraig O'Riain compiled a Fianna Drill Text Book with the help of the Countess and others and it was a complete guide for Fianna Branches. Con Colbert compiled a complete course of Drill Commands and soon all commands were issued in Irish in An Cead Sluagh.

Dr. Dunlop was engaged to teach us First Aid on behalf of the newly formed St. Patrick's Ambulance Brigade. The usual examinations followed and a large number of us secured our certificates and badges.

For a time the Fianna organised a city postal round and undertook safe delivery of letters for which receiving depots were established in each district and usual rates paid with each letter handed in for delivery. The main point in this was to deprive the British Post Office of revenue. The receiving depot in my area was Doyle's, Newsagents, Charlemont St.

Many public displays of camping and field drill were served up, usually at big open air fetes and rifle drill and bayonet exercises were performed with dummy rifles and sword drill with single sticks. Signalling and first aid displays were included. In all these events the Fianna displayed a keen knowledge and the public viewed Ireland's young soldiers in training for the event-

ful day when their knowledge and training would be put to the vital test of battle.

The Fianna were always welcome at St. Enda's College, by permission of Patrick Pearse, who clearly foresaw the role of the Fianna would take in the resurgence of Ireland.

During one of the Fianna Camps in the Three Rock Mountains a young man named Doyle from Glencullen was drowned in a large quarry hole where we were accustomed to swim. The Fianna lads made an improvised raft, pushed it into the middle and continually dived from it down in dangerous ledges until after three hours succeeded in retrieving the body. Three gold medals were awarded by the people of the district for their bravery and endurance. Eddie Murray, one of the Surrey House clique, was a recipient, as was also Harry Walpole. The third recipient was Tommy Crimmins.

The Countess painted my portrait in oils, sitting on a stile holding a Howth rifle. She was to touch up one of the feet, and asked me to return it when next she was painting. I did so, but before it was done, the Rising took place, and my precious portrait was never seen since. It was a most unfortunate thing for me, as I would have had a very valuable keepsake only for this incident.

Fianna were constantly attending ceildhthe, meeting all the important people, young and old, connected with the movement including the Volunteers who came back from England and who had their headquarters at Kimmage - Ernie Noonan, Blimey O'Connor, John Good, etc.

The first important attack on Government police came about during the 1913 strike, when police went out of hand and used batons recklessly. One of our clique, Patrick O'Connor, R.I.P., died as a result of a baton stroke received when he was attending to a fallen citizen who had received a blow of a truncheon. O'Connor died suddenly at his tea some months afterwards due, we believe, as a result of the blow he received while attending to this man. He was a member of Surrey House clique. We took part in several clashes with the police and always eluded capture because of our training

and loyalty to each other.

One of the biggest battles occurred at Butt Bridge in the height of the labour trouble, 1913. We rolled ship gangways and barricaded the bridge and used several crates of empty jars as missiles and defied the police to storm the position. When the police attacked from the other side our scouts tipped us off and we retreated in good order and mixed with the emerging crowds from the Queen's Theatre, and all escaped without any casualties.

Captain White about this time organised the Citizen Army and, strange as it may seem, he met the police at Butt Bridge with a bodyguard of Citizen Army, but suffered a bad beating and his small force was routed. In Surrey House afterwards he tried a hoax on the Surrey House clique by pretending he was a British agent, and put us all under arrest. I produced a Browning automatic and turned the tables and kept him prisoner until Madame arrived to end the hoax and granted him his freedom. He told her that if ever he wanted a trusty bodyguard he knew where to collect it.

During the first World War we were all pro-German and celebrated in style every German victory. We built and erected a wireless receiving set in Surrey House, and received war news, but a lot was coded and of no use to us. We got an expert in, but soon the police discovered it and we decided to resist any police raids and actually manned our posts at front and back, armed and under the Countess's leadership, determined to use sufficient force to repel any attempt to enter the house.

The expected raid did not take place and were disbanded about 1.30 a.m. Later a post office official called and was bluffed about the wireless on the pretence that it was only Boy Scouts experimenting and was of no use at all, so the aerial had to be disconnected and that was the only penalty imposed.

The growth of our rival Scout Organisation, the Baden Powell, was kept in subjection by the Fianna who dubbed them pro-British, and on one occasion when a big display was planned by an invasion of

Liverpool Scouts whose camp site was in Crumlin, and whose advance guard arrived to prepare the ground, the Fianna led by some members of the Surrey House clique, including myself, attacked the camp and ordered them home, captured flags and military equipment and returned anything else found not be strictly of military description. This resulted in big newspaper headings and the cancellation of proposed invasion. Police arrived, but as usual we were out of reach and no arrests followed.

We operated a small printing press in Surrey House and printed anti-recruiting leaflets and posted them throughout the city. The compiler of the leaflets was unknown to us. Michael Devereaux set up the type and we did the printing. During the Royal visit we undid a lot of festive decorations and generally opposed any attempt to let the visit pass off quietly.

The funeral of O'Donovan Rossa was a great display of Fianna strength. Afterwards the Surrey House clique was introduced to O'Donovan Rossa's daughter in the Gresham Hotel by the Countess. The oration of Father O'Flanagan at the City Hall made a big impression on the Countess which remained with her to the end. She was full of praise for him and he won a warm place in her heart.

Under the guidance of the Countess was staged several plays of Irish character, all helping to revive the love of Ireland and the hate of England again in the Irish people and generally rouse the rebel spirit.

We held our own hurling league, also and sports held their proper balance in our strict military training. Boxing was a prominent item in the early days of the Fianna. I remember once having an impromptu bout with Con Colbert; he had no knowledge of the game at all; the round lasted five minutes non-stop and at the end I was exhausted. He was a little dynamo and attacked with terrific energy from start to finish. I also had a wrestling bout with him at another period and, in spite of his great strength, I held my own and scored a beautiful Flying Nelson throw. His

strongest rebuke was to call one a "pick axe".

We had our Pipe Band and were at every national engagement during these days. At the Mansion House, 1915, when a man whose name I cannot recollect, gave an oration at a Manchester Martyrs celebration concert, while on the run, the Fianna caused a thrill of excitement by parading in full uniform a company, armed with .22 American rifles as a guard of honour on the platform, giving the 'present' when the speaker appeared. I was in charge of this Coy. The Fianna smuggled in 100 of these rifles from America.

When things warmed up and public processions were prohibited, also wearing of uniform, the Fianna laughed and carried on. On one memorable occasion we paraded the whole Dublin Battalion at Fox & Geese, Clondalkin, arriving under their Coy. Officers in full uniform and then proceeded to march into Dublin. Several police detachments were sent out to stop or intercept us, but they were completely outwitted and we actually arrived at the G.P.O. where we were dismissed, and all arrived home without incident, much to the disgust of the police.

On another occasion some boys were arrested in Rathfarnham for wearing uniform and their companions, mere juveniles, attacked the police barracks and broke the windows with stones and other missiles. Only one of the attacking party, George Pope, was captured. He was charged and sentenced to a month for the attack.

During the Limerick riots in Irishtown, when the Volunteers visited the city, the Fianna were there in force, camped overnight and paraded Irishtown the following day in uniform and, as usual, got away without any incidents.

The British Cadets had a camp at 3 Rock Mountains; the Fianna challenged them to a battle and arranged for use of everything short of firearms, but they refused to accept the challenge and we were not troubled by their presence afterwards.

During the riots preceded by the public burning of the Union Jack before the Royal visit, the Fianna were in the forefront and

and suffered no casualties. The start of the Volunteers at the Rotunda was a big day for the Fianna. We were there in force taking names and later supplying training personnel, until at a later stage further instructors were forthcoming. We had our representative on the Executive Council of the Volunteers, Eamon Martin, and of course Bulmer Hobson was the Secretary.

The Howth gun-running was our first big field-day. The Fianna had their trek-cart and marched back proudly loaded with Howth guns and ammunition. When the Military came to intercept the Volunteers the Fianna insisted on bursting open ammunition cases and loaded the Howth rifles and prepared to give battle, and Liam Mellows and Eamon Martin actually opened fire on the British troops with automatics. The battle did not develop; the Volunteers broke, but the Fianna held fast to their arms and suffered no loss of arms or any casualties. Shortly after the Howth gun-running I was instructed by Liam Mellows to go to Mountpleasant Avenue where I would meet a man named Murphy, and accompany him in his car to St. Enda's, Rathfarnham. We were to go late at night and without lights. On arrival at St. Enda's, Micheal McRory, who was at the gate, asked us for the password which was 'Sarsfield'. There was a large number of cars of all sorts in the grounds. Inside St. Enda's were the drivers, most of whom owned the cars. Charabancs had left the city earlier that day for Kilcool where the gun-running was to take place. The guns and ammunition were to be brought in the charabancs to St. Enda's and taken from there in the cars to various places in the city. At 4 a.m. we got word that the charabancs had broken down at Bray. We were instructed to go there with all possible speed and bring the arms and ammunition to the pre-arranged places. When we arrived in Bray we found the Volunteers had the police hemmed into the barracks. I got three bales of rifles and two cases of ammunition. I think there were about 12 rifles in each bale. I escorted them to Mountpleasant Avenue. I was armed with an automatic and under orders to bring the car safely to town and I did. Liam Mellows was instrumental in placing me in possession of this weapon. I bought it myself, but he arranged with the dealer to sell it to me. I always

carried a spare clip, and on several public parades carried it in a case on my belt openly.

The formation of Cumann na mBan was brought about when the Countess asked the Surrey House clique for a volunteer to train and drill the Inghinidhe na hEireann who were forming women Volunteers. I volunteered, and the first meeting of women and girls I attended was held at Holohan's, Wickerwork Factory on Merchant's Quay, and numbered over 200. I sorted them out and gave them the first drill instructions. I continued and took the work seriously. I completely organised and trained them, directed their training and wrote training notes for the Irish Volunteer paper. So successfully was this work accomplished that when the volunteers Inspector of Training (General O'Connell) afterwards came to direct their organisation, he found his plans were already in operation in detail. I appointed the officers to take charge after a special examination for that purpose, so that they could work independent of outside control on the same lines as the Fianna. The following were the officers appointed:- Miss Walsh (Mrs. Martin Murphy) Captain; Rose McNamara, Lieut.; Margaret Kennedy (later Senator), Lieut.; Miss Hampton, Quartermaster. I was honoured by them at a special ceilidh when I received a gold medal suitably inscribed and presented on their behalf by the Countess. Other branches were formed thereafter and modelled on the lines already in force.

I included signalling, semaphore and morse in my instructions, and stretcher drill. Special lectures were given by doctors and nurses in first aid and hygiene. They were fully organised, trained and equipped for the 1916 Rising and proved their worth, and turned out in large numbers at almost every outpost.

The first time we tried out the big Howth rifle was in the garden of Surrey House, and we satisfied ourselves of its deadly accuracy. But, owing to the big explosion, we had to desist as the quiet neighbourhood of Rathmines was getting excited at the big bangs. We tried out smaller rifles at Clifton Terrace, Ranelagh, the residence of Con Colbert, and did not attract so much

attention as the explosions were not so big.

It was now approaching the big day and we were very active in every possible way; the excitement was in the air.

Early in 1916 Jim Connolly took up residence at Surrey House and he had a beautiful Mauser rifle at his bedside. We often fondly handled it and studied its mechanism. He had the plans for the attack on Dublin Castle and Madame told a few of the clique that if Connolly was arrested before the time came, she was to carry out the attack as planned. The plan for the attack on the Castle was a simple straightforward one. I saw the plans at Surrey House but did not study them very closely as I knew I would not be connected with it, as the attack was to be carried out solely by the Citizen Army. As far as I remember, the City Hall was to be taken first so as to give cover to the attacking party. The Castle was then to be rushed through the lower and upper Castle Yard entrances. I do not know how many men were to be employed in the attack. This plan was used as a training manoeuvre some weeks before Easter. The Citizen Army had this project in hands.

The Fianna training brought the boys into close contact with the Volunteers of the city, especially the ones of their local units and, as they grew up, were transferred into such units fully trained and equipped. The older or senior members of Fianna were also in charge of Volunteer companies and thus we find Con Colbert, Sean Houston, Eamon Martin, Garry Holohan, Liam Mellows and others fully occupied in Volunteer circles and much in the same way I was very active with the Cumann na mBan up to the day of the Rising, the only difference being that while they formed a permanent part of the Volunteers and fought as such, I had definitely arranged and trained the Cumann na mBan to take the field as a unit under their own officers, and I made them fully understand this position, as I told them I would be out with the Fianna and Volunteers and would not be able personally to direct their effort.

This will explain fully how it came about that the Fianna were so strongly represented in every post and fire point of the 1916

Rising. It is recorded that the Fianna were everywhere and upheld the best traditions of the Fianna of old.

Padraig O Riain, our general secretary, was on a mission to Belfast when the Rising took place, and marched back to Dublin to participate with a detachment of Belfast Fianna.

Early in 1913 I was promoted to the rank of Lieut. and early in 1916 I was transferred to Sluagh Brian Boru, Dolphins Barn, and promoted to the rank of Captain. I was not a member of the I.R.B. I was asked by Eamon Martin, Con Colbert and Martin Murphy on different occasions to join, but declined to do so on conscientious grounds. My attitude was understood by Con Colbert, Eamon Martin and Liam Mellows.

My part in the 1916 Rising was, briefly, as follows:-

I was paraded at Hardwicke St. on the Sunday. I did not know then that I was to be detailed for action at Ashbourne. The parade was cancelled and we were told to wait further instructions. Jim Connolly was determined that whether Volunteers went out or not he would strike a blow, and that once he raised his flag on Liberty Hall it would not be lowered without a fight. The Volunteers in conference decided to strike and demonstrate in arms Ireland's desire for freedom and a success in arms was not expected, but the result from the action was expected to save the spirit of the Nation from decay. Monday morning a few of us went to Volunteer Hqs. in Dawson St. for news. It was closed. On the way back I met Garry Holohan on his bike. He seemed in a hurry and he told me to parade with the nearest group and bring my gun and all ammunition. I was accompanied by Fred Shelly and Paddy Byrne both of A/Coy. Fianna. We arranged to meet with equipment and the first group we met was at Stephen's Green, West, under Comdt. Thos. McDonagh, and Major McBride also fell in under his command (in civilian attire) when he heard that we were going to fight. We moved off and occupied Jacob's Factory. I was in a party detailed by Comdt. T. Hunter to take over tenement houses in Malpas St. and prepare them for action. I was in

full Fianna uniform, wearing my Sam Brown and armed with my Browning automatic and 100 rounds of ammunition. We knew our work and soon got supplies of water, ready loop holed the walls, looked after communication. Our job was to break up any attack launched by the enemy troops advancing from Wellington Barracks. Some of the people were very antagonistic towards us, partly from the fact of being put out of their homes and mostly because they were of a pro-British type, soldiers' wives and relatives. That evening we were recalled to Jacob's Factory as we were not engaged in fighting up to this. I met Dick McKee in New St. for the first time, and we discussed the position to that point.

When we entered Jacob's we were addressed by Comdt. McDonagh who gave us all the details of the Rising and plans and read the Proclamation. Included in the plans was the arrival of 5,000 German troops and arms. We were detailed to our positions and I found myself under Captain Colbert defending the Peter St. entrance of the Factory, including the dispensary and keeping the Adelaide Hospital under control. We were not attacked here, but we made every preparation for the attack; fire hoses were laid and then we settled down to usual routine on duty and off duty spells, got the feel of our surroundings and received couriers hour by hour with details of the fighting which was now in full fury. We had the caretakers held as prisoners and took guard in turn day and night; they were treated well and had no complaints.

The weapons we had were mixed and represented every class of gun and revolver used by Volunteers; to this was added tin can bombs to be used in case of a close attack from roof and windows on enemy troops.

While exploring a cold-storage compartment we had a narrow escape; the door was self-locking and could only be opened from outside, our party was all inside, the door was swinging close and only for Volunteer Watson Lake of the 3rd Battalion, who promptly backed his Howth rifle butt in the door jamb, we would have been frozen to death.

The first casualty was Volunteer O'Grady; he was shot from a house in Leeson St. by troops. His party were sent out from Jacob's to reconnoitre. He was brought back by his comrades, but he could not be saved; he died after he was attended to by the Adelaide Hospital, opposite.

I was detailed to lead a second patrol to obtain supplies of potatoes, bread, etc. I was handed a warrant signed by Thomas McDonagh, headed - I, as an officer of the Irish Republican Army, is duly authorised, etc.

Enemy troops were in Georges St., in Mercer's St. and Portobello Bridge. I left the factory and as I knew this area to an inch I posted a man at each contact point with instructions to fire a shot if enemy appeared so as we could not be surprised. I commandeered lard from Cavey's, Wexford St. and potatoes from Quinlisk's Stores, Cuffe St., and several trays of loaf bread. As my armed men could not meet a sudden attack and carry in supplies acquired, I conscripted civilian help for this purpose and marched the convoy to Jacob's, withdrawing my outpost men on the way back. I reported to H.Q. on returning and Major McBride questioned me as to the conscripts, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy the incident. I got permission to reward the conscripts with two loaves apiece for their services. Next patrol I joined went to the College of Surgeons with supplies, and the British troops in Mercer St. at Mercer's Hospital, ran into cover when we were sighted and we got to our destination without incident. The Countess was here, but as she was asleep when I arrived I did not have the pleasure of a chat with her. Seamus Kavanagh of Fianna was also there, but was sick and could not be seen. On returning we had an alarm. I was dispatched to the biscuit loft to direct fire on Bride St. junction as British troops were advancing from St. Patrick's Park. Captain Murphy of the 3rd Battn. was in charge of this point and when the troops appeared he gave the order 'open fire' and the party were stopped and put to flight in disorder.

During a lull in the fighting in Jacob's we held a miniature

ceilidh - Volunteers and Fianna, Cumann na mBan, Clan na Gael Girl Scouts, represented by Capt. May Kelly, who formed part of the garrison, participating, and was a real welcome break in the serious business we had on hands.

The snipers were constantly attacking troops from every angle and causing a lot of confusion to the enemy before they were finally located. Portobello Bridge became a no-man's land for British sentries or troops.

An improvised tricolour was made by Derry O'Connell, a tailor of 3rd Battalion, from material obtained in factory and hoisted over the building.

The youngest courier was a member of the Fianna, Tommy Keenan, who came to Jacob's with dispatches and by his youth and innocent appearance he had no trouble in getting around. He afterwards approached me to get him into the A.S.U. He is a typical example of the spirit of the Fianna of the period.

During our occupation two priests, one from Church St., came to visit the garrison and heard confessions. On Sunday we heard rumour of surrender and finally Comdt. Thomas McDonagh and staff paraded the garrison and informed us of the order to surrender, received from Comdt. General P.H. Pearse. We at first resented, but he said we must obey orders and lay down our arms and surrender to the British when they arrived later on. He said we would be all right, but with him and other leaders it would be different, but they were prepared for what was coming in the fight for the Republic. I dumped my gun with the rest and it was the saddest parting I can remember. We were told if we liked we could make a break, so I took advantage of this and got as far as Camden St. where I was met by a young Fianna member from Caed Sluagh who invited me to his home, as troops were at Harcourt Road and I could not possibly reach Charlemont St. in uniform and I was wearing puttees. I was only in the house when troops appeared at the entrance to Camden Court and fired rifle shots hoping to draw me into the open. Next morning Tom Gaffney

called to my home, collected a long trousers, put it round his waist and I put it on in his house, and when the guard was changed at Harcourt Road I went through with a net bag as if I was out shopping. The British military were in occupation next door to where I lived and once home I was safe as they never expected to find a rebel so close to their quarters. I had to lie low for a few weeks; then my employers changed me to a different branch for safety as they knew I was in danger, as I was too well known in my usual place of employment to be safe. I had a few close escapes when recognised by police. I learned how awkward it was now to have appeared so prominently and so often in uniform in the years leading up to the Rising.

In reference to goods commandeered from Quinlisk's, for which I endorsed warrant, a few years afterwards I offered payment for same in exchange for this warrant which was signed by Thomas McDonagh. In lieu of payment Mr. Quinlisk signed a full receipt for goods accepting warrant as payment. Thus I can claim to have paid the first bill due by the Republic. This receipt is not available now as I cannot remember what I did with it.

After the surrender two Fianna officers, Con Colbert and Sean Houston, were executed by the enemy for their part in the Rising. All the others were interned except a small handful who escaped. I was amongst these and, being the senior officer of Fianna free, I soon contacted the others and also those whose age prevented them from taking part in the fight and soon the organisation was meeting again. We visited Skipper's Alley and retrieved our trek cart, the one used in Howth gun-running, and put it into safe keeping for its sentimental value. We also collected and destroyed lists and such correspondence found lying around, so as to keep them from falling into enemy hands.

No. 6 Harcourt Street was our new headquarters and when the

general release came the Fianna was well on its feet and running as usual, determined to continue the fight until freedom was won.

Signed:

Paul J. J. J. J.
Séamus O. K. K. K.

Date:

15th June 1949

Witness:

Seán Brennan Comdt.

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