

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21	
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21	
No. W.S.	854

W.S. 854

Statement by Mr. Seán Saunders,

19, Phibsborough Avenue, N.C.Rd., Dublin.

I joined the Fianna late in 1910 at 34, Lr. Camden Street. The officers in charge at that time were Seamus Kavanagh (O/C 'H' Company First Battalion Dublin Brigade I.R.A. during the Black and Tan period), Barney Mellows (subsequently Adjutant General Fianna), and Countess Markievicz (subsequently Chief of Staff Fianna). I remained at Camden St. until about 1913 and was then transferred to the Michael Dwyer Sluagh which paraded at Skippers Alley (where the main entrance of the Franciscan Church, Merchants' Quay, now stands). The officer in charge was Garry Holohan (O/C Dublin Brigade, Fianna, during the Black-and-Tan period).

During this period and up to the time of the Rising, the Sluagh engaged in routine training, including language, history, first-aid and physical training classes; outdoor route marches, scouting, signalling, extended order drill and arms drill. The uniform consisted of dark green hopsack shirt (or blouse); green slouch hat; shorts and stockings (in the case of the rank and file) and knickerbockers and puttees or leggings (in the case of officers); leather belt; water bottle; whistle and scouting knife. The uniform was paid for by weekly subscription and was purchased from Messrs. Whelan, Ormond Quay. Shortly before 1916

a Commando was set up, under the command of Garry Holohan, in the Michael Dwyer Sluagh for special arms training in preparation for the Rising. I was a member of this Commando, which was armed with long .22 Winchester rifles. Due to the confusion caused by the MacNeill countermanding order, we were not mobilised for the Rising and were, in fact, on a parade to the Dublin hills during Easter 1916.

On the return of the Republican prisoners from English jails subsequent to the Rising the Fianna was reorganised, and I was then assigned, with rank as Lieutenant, to the Second Battalion, Dublin Brigade, subsequently commanded by Liam Langley. Arising out of the death of Thomas Ashe, which was caused by forcible feeding in Mountjoy Jail while on hunger strike, there was a heavy influx of recruits to the Fianna in Dublin, and I was placed in charge of recruit training, with the rank of Captain, in the 2nd Battalion Headquarters, then situated at the O'Flanagan Club, Ryders Row (Capel/Bolton Street). The Dublin Metropolitan Police were particularly active against the Fianna at this period and I was arrested on two occasions, once at Milltown during an All-Dublin Fianna parade under the command of Hugo MacNeill, Theo Fitzgerald, Roddy Connolly, Seán McLoughlin and Garry Holohan, the majority of whom were, with me, detained for several hours in Donnybrook D.M.P. Station. On the second occasion I was in charge of a parade to Glasnevin Cemetery for the burial of a member of the 2nd Battalion, when I was detained in Mountjoy Jail for several hours.

At the Fianna Convention of 1918 held in the Mansion House, Seán McLoughlin, G.H.Q. Staff, proposed a resolution to the effect that the Fianna should oppose the threatened British Military Conscription Act "to the death". An amendment was proposed by Garry Holohan to the effect that the Fianna should oppose conscription "by every means in our power", and this amendment was carried. On the night on which the Conscription Act was to be finally voted on in the British House of Commons, units of the 2nd Battalion paraded with all available arms, under the command of Commandant Liam Langley, in the basement of a tenement house in Gloucester Street. The Battalion "stood by" for action until it was reported that the Act was not to come into force.

About 1919 and due to overlapping of military activity (raids for arms, etc.) by the Fianna and the I.R.A., an instruction was received from Dublin Brigade Headquarters, I.R.A., through Barney Mellows, Adjutant General of the Fianna, to the effect that the Fianna should not, as from that time, carry out any act of an armed military nature without first notifying the local I.R.A. Authority and receiving official authorisation. In consequence of this, the Fianna was entirely trained as a "nursery" for the I.R.A. and a considerable number of members of the Dublin Brigade were transferred for service with the I.R.A. Selected members of the Fianna were also actively engaged on the delivery of I.R.A. despatches and on Intelligence work, which included constant observation of British Military and Police depots in the various Battalion areas.

The 3rd Battalion, which I commanded from 1920 until early in 1921, was responsible for this duty in connection with Beggars Bush Barracks, headquarters of the Auxiliary (or Black and Tan) Division of the British Police Force, and reports on the movements of that body were regularly transmitted to the I.R.A. in the area.

I was appointed Adjutant of the Dublin Brigade early in 1921 and was sworn in to the Fianna Circle of the I.R.B. by Liam Langley, O/C 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, about that time. Meetings of the Circle were held once monthly, usually on Sunday morning, in the "Prince of Wales" hotel, 28, North Great George's Street. The Centre (or Chairman) of the Fianna Circle was Garry Holohan, O/C Dublin Brigade Fianna, and the Circle was regularly visited by a Centre from other Circles on behalf of the Supreme Council. Principal activity of the Fianna Circle was the carrying out of instructions from the Supreme Council for the infiltration of other organisations or societies, with a view to I.R.B. control of such bodies. We were, for instance, instructed to attend a meeting of a newly-formed Socialist Party of Ireland held at a house (not the Prince of Wales Hotel) in North Gt. George's St. and to vote for a supplied list of nominees for the Controlling Council of the Socialist Party.

The Fianna Circle of the I.R.B. consisted almost entirely of commissioned officers of the Dublin Brigade Fianna, including Garry Holohan, Liam Langley, Barney Mellows, Bob Conlon, Bob Daly, Seán Caffrey, Seán Harling,

Peter Byrne and Eamon Martin.

At the Circle meeting immediately prior to the acceptance by Dáil Éireann of the Treaty, a circular from the Supreme Council was read by the visiting Centre directing the Fianna Circle to support the Treaty. This was strongly opposed by the Fianna Circle, the majority of whom subsequently participated in armed activity against the pro-Treaty forces. Incidentally, the Dáil Courier Service was recruited almost entirely from the Fianna Circle of the I.R.B.

The headquarters of the Dublin Brigade Fianna were at this time situated in 35, North St. George's St. - owned by Professor Richard Graham, teacher of ballroom dancing. Up to the period of the Truce the Dublin Brigade Fianna were mainly engaged in the training and transferring of selected members for service with the I.R.A. Most of the work in this connection devolved on me as Adjutant of the Dublin Brigade - all applications for transfer and the granting of these being referred by the Adjutants of the various Battalions to me for checking and subsequent signature by Garry Holohan as O/C Dublin. During the Truce period training was intensified and an All-Ireland Training Camp was established at Reddin's of Artane under the control of Eamonn Martin as Director of Organisation and Training. Dublin Brigade Training Camps were held at James' Castle, Finglas, Dollymount, Portmarnock and at the Workhouse Loughlinstown. At this period the majority of officers of the Dublin Brigade were wearing Regulation Army Officer uniforms and were fully equipped and armed for training purposes. Arms instruction

classes formed the bulk of training, both in the Training Camps and at parades, in anticipation of resumption of hostilities with the British. The Dublin Brigade Fianna held a public parade at St. Enda's, Rathfarnham, home of the Pearses, during the Truce period, and this was inspected and addressed by Commandant General Liam Mellows and Commandant General Rory O'Connor on behalf of the Executive Council of the I.R.A. Other major Dublin Brigade parades included one at Croke Park, inspected by President de Valera and General Oscar Traynor, O/C Dublin Brigade I.R.A., and at Smithfield following on the "Report back to your Unit" order addressed to the I.R.A. and Fianna members who had joined the pro-Treaty forces and issued by the Executive Council of the I.R.A. subsequent to the split caused by the acceptance of the Treaty by a section of the Executive Council.

Practically the entire Dublin Brigade Staff, Officers commanding the Dublin Battalions and the vast majority of the rank and file of the Dublin Brigade Fianna, opposed the Treaty. Armed Fianna garrisons were formed at Dublin Brigade Headquarters, 35, North Gt. George's St., under the command of Seán Harling, appointed as O/C Dublin Brigade on the morning on which hostilities commenced, and other buildings in that vicinity during the week subsequent to the attack on the Four Courts, I.R.A. headquarters, by the pro-Treaty forces on 28th June, 1922. Fianna units also formed portion of the I.R.A. garrisons at Barry's Hotel, Gardiner's Row, and at the Hammam Hotel, O'Connell Street when Barry's was evacuated. I was in command of the Fianna unit at the latter two garrisons

and was arrested following on the evacuation of the Hammam on Friday, 30th June, 1922, and detained in various jails and in Gormanston Internment Camp up to December, 1923.

Signed: Sean Saunders
(Sean Saunders)

Date: 4th June 1953.
4th June, 1953.

Witness: Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.
(Sean Brennan) Lieut. Col.

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