

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,628

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1628.

Witness

James Allan Busby,  
2, Woods Place,  
York St.,  
Cork.

Identity.

1st Lieut., Fianna Éireann, Cork City.

Subject.

Fianna activities, Cork City, 1917-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY JAMES ALLAN BUSBY,

2, Woods Place, York St., Cork.

I am a native of Cork City.

In the year 1911, I remember attending a meeting which was held in the Dún, Queen St., Cork, for the purpose of starting a branch of the Fianna organisation in Cork. Amongst those present at this inaugural meeting were Tomás MacCurtain, Seán Sullivan, Paddy Corkery, F. Rochford, Micheál Ó Cuill, Tadhg Murphy, "Fatty" Walsh, Jerome Busby (my brother), Christy Moynihan, and Seán Hegarty. Some of these men were prominent Volunteer leaders in the subsequent fight for freedom.

Some time after this meeting, Countess Markievicz came to Cork and addressed a meeting in the Dún on the aims and objects of the Fianna.

Subsequent to these meetings, a sluagh of Fianna Éireann, Irish National Boy Scouts, was formed in Cork City with Christy Moynihan as Captain. My brother, Jerome, and I joined up in company with about fifty other boys, including two lads named Seán Healy and Seumas Courtney. Both these two were later officers in the Fianna, and while prisoners in Cork Gaol they took part in the big hunger-strike of political prisoners which took place in that gaol in 1917. Seumas Courtney died sometime later in Kerry. A firing party of Fianna rendered military honours when he was buried at Monkstown, Co. Cork. Joe Reid, a Cobh Fianna boy, died from wounds received when a revolver he was cleaning, in preparation for Courtney's funeral, was accidentally discharged.

Prior to 1916 we drilled in the Dún, held route marches and went to the country in the summer for fieldwork at Blarney and elsewhere outside the city. At first our uniform consisted of a black short coat with a green kilt. This was later changed to a green shirt, blue short pants, saffron scarf and a green broad-brimmed hat turned up on one side. A white haversack was worn. The Fianna officers wore Sam Browne belts.

In the early days, i.e. prior to 1916, we had one sluagh only in the city and held our first public parade on the occasion of a religious procession at Wilton, about one and a half miles from Cork. About fifty Fianna boys took part in that parade. The captain of the Cork sluagh at that time was Christy Moynihan. We had a few shotguns and a few revolvers, the latter being bought mostly from British soldiers.

Prior to 1916 Liam and Barney Mellowes from Fianna headquarters in Dublin came to Cork on various occasions on an organising campaign. Here I should record the fact that, when the Volunteers split on the question of John Redmond's policy in 1914, there was no division at all in the Fianna, all of whom took the side of the Irish Volunteers under Eoin MacNeill. Up to the week of the Rising in 1916, the activities of the Fianna in Cork were mainly confined to drilling, first-aid and signalling training. Route marching and field training were also a feature of our activities.

On Holy Thursday, 1916, I went camping to Clashwood, Little Island, Cork, with Geoffrey Herlihy, then captain of the Fianna. On Easter Saturday morning, a message reached us to the effect that we were to report at once to the Irish Volunteer Hall in Sheares

St., Cork. When we reached the hall, it was a hive of industry; Volunteers were coming and going and there was a general air of tension as if something important was about to happen. I remember seeing the two Cork Volunteer leaders - Seán MacCurtain and Turlough MacSwiney - there. Guns and ammunition were being distributed to the Volunteers. I also saw a large number of croppy pikes being handed around.

Herlihy and I remained in the hall on Saturday night. On Easter Sunday morning we paraded in Sheares St. with the Volunteers, and together with twelve other Fianna boys we marched with the Volunteer contingent to Capwell railway station, Cork, where we took the train to Crookstown in West Cork. From Crookstown we marched to Macroom. On reaching Macroom we were addressed by Seán Sullivan, the Volunteer Commandant, who told us to return to our homes in Cork.

The party of Fianna was armed with revolvers and shotguns. (No Fianna boy carried a pike). We carried full first-aid equipment in our haversacks and a water bottle. My impression on Easter Sunday, 1916, was that we were going on manoeuvres. I (or the rest of the Fianna) had no idea that a fight was to take place, and I don't think that the general body of the Volunteers had any idea either.

On returning to Cork that Sunday evening, I reported to the hall in Sheare's St. and was told to report back again on the following Monday morning. I took my gun home with me.

On Easter Monday morning, 1916, I, with others of the Fianna, reported as directed to Sheare's St., where I was given a double-barrelled shotgun and told to take up guard duty between the two roofs of the Volunteer hall in Sheare's St. Three Volunteers named Walter Furlong, Seán Cross and Jerry Mullane, similarly armed, accompanied me. There were a number of Volunteers on the premises. In addition to men from the Cork City Battalion, there were men from Co. Cork, including a party from Cobh under Mick Leahy. There were also men from the Galtee Battalion, East Limerick, present. I cannot say whether Tomás MacCurtain or Turlough MacSwiney were there on Easter Monday, as I was on duty on the roof for the best part of the day until we were relieved at night by other Volunteers. We were told late in the evening of that Easter Monday that a Rising had taken place in Dublin and Wexford, but I cannot say from where this information came. I have no knowledge of any despatches reaching Cork from Dublin on Easter Monday, 1916, but they could have come without my knowing it.

On the Tuesday of Easter Week, a few Volunteers and Fianna left Cork on bikes to go to Dublin and join in the fighting. One Volunteer, Micheál Ó Cuill, did get as far as Dublin, where he was arrested by the British. I cannot remember what happened to the others.

We were in and out of the hall in Sheare's St. all Easter week, night and day, but we received no instructions. The next I heard was that an agreement had been come to between the Most Reverend Dr. Cohalan, Bishop of Cork, the Volunteer leaders, MacCurtain and MacSwiney, and the British military authorities, that the Volunteers should hand up their guns to be stored in

Lord Mayor Butterfield's store in the South Mall, Cork. A large number of Volunteers did not hand up their arms. So far as I can recollect, no member of the Fianna did so. A day or so after the arms being handed up to the Lord Mayor, British military raided the store and took the guns away. One Fianna boy named Liam Hennessy of Pope's Quay, Cork, was arrested (with many Volunteers) by the military and interned in Frongoch, Wales, subsequent to the events of Easter Week, 1916.

During the months following Easter, 1916, the Fianna organisation in Cork was kept intact and efforts were made to extend it in outlying districts convenient to Cork City. In 1917 we had approximately 80 boys on the rolls and it was decided to form two sluagh, one catering for boys on the north side of the river Lee and one on the south side. Tadhg Sullivan was O/C of the

Fianna at the time, with Eamon Lynch second in command. Dan MacSwiney was captain of the south side sluagh, in which I held the rank of 1st Lieut. We had about thirty lads in our sluagh. Our activities at this point consisted mainly in drilling, route marching, scouting practice and revolver practice. (We had a couple of revolvers in our sluagh). During 1917, on the occasion of a hunger-strike of Volunteer and Fianna prisoners in Cork Gaol, we used take food and clothing to those prisoners in the gaol who were there on remand and not on hunger-strike.

In 1918 the Fianna helped in distributing election literature on behalf of Sinn Féin candidates taking part in the general election of that year; bill posting and house to house collections for funds were carried out for the same object. The Fianna was strongly represented

in the newly formed Brian Boru Pipers' Band.

Late in 1918, or perhaps early in 1919, a Fianna representative from Dublin came to Cork and created a split in our ranks. A rival group known as the Citizen Army Boy Scouts was started in Cork. At the same time we had a girls' contingent attached to the Fianna known as the Clann na Gael Girl Scouts. A split also occurred in this organisation and a new group was started called the Citizen Army Girl Guides. The Misses Wallace of St. Augustine St., Cork, were amongst the leaders of the latter group. There was no difference in policy between the Fianna and the Citizen Army scouts. There was, however, a small distinction in the uniform. We wore a saffron scarf, whilst they wore a blue scarf. They had, so far as I can remember, about forty boys at the most in their organisation, but, to the best of my belief, it petered out about 1920. We maintained our numbers by active recruiting.

Early in 1920 I went to work in Middleton, Co. Cork, but retained contact with the Cork City Fianna, as I used return home to Cork each week-end.

In the month of June, 1920, I was cycling home from Middleton one Saturday evening, when at a spot known as the Mile Bush, which is about a mile west of the town of Middleton on the main Middleton-Cork road, I met a party of men playing bowls on the road. I was ordered off my bicycle and told to get inside the ditch. I was there only a few minutes when I saw a cycle patrol of the Cameron Highlanders approach from the west. The patrol rode in between the bowl players (all local Volunteers), who immediately set upon the Camerons, knocked them off their bicycles and took their rifles and

equipment. One of the military party, a corporal, whose name I was later to learn was Beaman, was somewhat behind the main party of military, and, seeing what was happening, he turned his bicycle and tried to get away in the opposite direction. Jos. Ahern, one of the Volunteer officers present, grabbed one of the captured rifles and fired at the corporal, who threw himself off his bike, held up his hands and surrendered.

In the meantime, a motor car came on the scene. I well remember the registration number - NE 53). The driver was ordered out of it and the captured rifles and equipment piled into it. I remember Jos. Ahern putting on the driver's white coat and, with another Volunteer, getting into the car and driving it away to the north-east. In the meantime, the Volunteer officer in charge, Jerry Hurley (known as "The Gaffer"), had lined up the military and proceeded to make them double up and down the road while the rifles were being loaded into the car and taken away. There were upwards of from twelve to fifteen of the Camerons in the captured patrol, so far as I can recollect. The Volunteers then cleared off with the bicycles, leaving the soldiers sitting on the roadside. I decided not to go on to Cork but to return to Midleton.

Early in September, 1920, I chanced to be walking along the main street in Midleton when a patrol of Cameron Highlanders came along and held me up at rifle point. I was taken to their Midleton headquarters - an old mill. At about three o'clock on the following morning, a few soldiers entered the room in which I was detained and proceeded to give me a bad beating. I learned that they had raided my 'digs' in Midleton and found my Fianna membership card. I was closely questioned about the Mile



Bush ambush and asked to disclose the whereabouts of the captured guns. I refused to answer any questions and was again beaten up. I was then thrown into a lorry, handcuffed, and, with a heavily armed military escort, taken to Cork Gaol. When the gaol doctor saw me, he said I was more fit for an operation than for gaol, so bad was my condition.

I was subsequently brought to Cork military detention barracks, where I was courtmartialled and sentenced to three years' penal servitude. Corporal Beaman, whose name I have already mentioned in connection with the Mile Bush ambush, was the principal witness against me. Five other Cameron Highlanders gave evidence of my being at the scene of the ambush. I refused to recognise the court. Volunteer Jack McCarthy of Cobh, Co. Cork, a prisoner with me, was at the same time sentenced to five years penal servitude for his part in the successful hold-up and disarming of a party of Cameron Highlanders at The Quarry, Cobh, some months previously. A Sergeant Major Bailey, accompanied by an officer, came into our cell one day and read out the courtmartial sentences to us.

We (McCarthy and I) were moved again back to Cork Gaol. From there we were taken by sloop to Cobh, and then by a destroyer to Pembroke Docks in Wales, and from there to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison outside London. There were with us, also, as prisoners, Dan McCarthy of Annascaul, Co. Kerry, and Jimmy Noonan, Newcastle West, Co. Limerick. We were handcuffed to a chain and marched through the streets of London wearing convicts' dress. From Wormwood Scrubbs we were taken, still handcuffed to a chain, to Parkhurst Prison, Isle of Wight.

There were quite a big number of Volunteers in Parkhurst Prison, including Maurice Crowe of Emly, Co. Tipperary, the Crawfords of Ballylanders, Co. Limerick, Mickey Gamble of Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, Joe Callaghan of Knocklong, Co. Tipperary, John and Paddy Dineen of Union Hall, Cork, and Tadhg Manley of Midleton, Co. Cork. (The latter is at present a T.D. for West Cork). Manley was arrested in Midleton (where he was a national teacher) some time before my arrest for taking part in the Mile Bush ambush, in which affair he did, as a matter of fact, play a prominent part. When we arrived at Parkhurst, Manley was 'on punishment', meaning he was in solitary confinement on a bread and water diet, for refusing to comply with prison regulations.

At first we all got a month's solitary confinement, being allowed out for exercise for a very short period each day. After a month we were allotted to various working parties within the prison. I was in the shoemakers' shop with Crowe of Emly. We refused to work, whereupon we were again put 'on punishment'.

In January, 1921, a big batch of Cork prisoners arrived, including Rev. Fr. Dominic O'Connor, the patriot Franciscan, J.J. Walsh of Cork, later to be Postmaster General in the Irish Free State, and those Cork men who had formed the bodyguard in the funeral of Turlough MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, who died as a result of a hunger-strike in Brixton Prison in October, 1920. Maurice Crowe of Emly was the prisoners' commandant.

In Parkhurst, there were upwards of seven hundred convicts of various types. The authorities wanted to place one Irish prisoner between every forty of the other

criminal type. We refused to agree to this and barricaded our cells. For this some of our lads were taken to what were known as the 'silent cells'. These cells were underground. Crowe applied to see the Governor of the prison and told him that we would tear the place down, brick by brick, if our lads were not released from the underground cells. We refused to associate with any convicts but our own lads, and when walking in circles on the exercise ground we arranged to break ranks and get together, whereupon the warders set upon us and rushed us to our cells.

I remember on one occasion, for three weeks running we gave what we called our "concert party". When lights were out at night, we kept up a constant din, shouting and singing Irish songs. At periods the warders tried to undress us to give us a bath; we fought them on this and refused to go for a bath unless we went in a party with our own lads. We also threatened to go on strike against the fortnightly convicts' haircutting. Everything that was possible to do, we did, to upset prison discipline and force the authorities to treat us as a group apart from the other convicted prisoners. Eventually the warders themselves threatened to go on strike because of the trouble we were causing them. Finally, the Governor agreed to 'house' us in cells all on the one landing and, after consultation with Crowe, our commandant, allowed us to remain together and not associate with the other prisoners. The Reverend Father Dominic wore prison garb and was detained in the hospital wing. His hair (or beard) was not cut and he was permitted to say Mass every day. Paddy O'Keefe of Cork,

the present General Secretary of the Gaelic Athletic Association, used serve Fr. Dominic's Mass. John McGowan of Knockmoyne, Boyle, Co. Roscommon, one of the Connaught Rangers who mutined in India and who was sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude, was also with us in Parkhurst.

After this we were fairly reasonably dealt with until our release on 19th January, 1922. We all attended a Mass said by Fr. Dominic at Peckham, Rye, and returned to our homes.

On my return to Cork, I joined 'C' Company, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade, I.R.A., and subsequently fought on the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War.

Signed:

James A. Busby

Date:

6 June 1957

Witness:

J. J. Orman  
(Investigator).

