

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1631

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1631.

Witness

Charles Meaney,  
2, Ettieville,  
Magazine Road,  
Cork.

Identity.

Captain, 'H' Coy. (Cork City),  
Fianna Éireann.

Subject.

Activities of Cork Fianna, 1916-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY CHARLES MEANEY

2, Ettieville, Magazine Rd., Cork.

I am a native of Cork city. I joined the Fianna in Cork prior to the Rising of 1916, but when about 15 Fianna lads left the city for Macroom with the Volunteers on Easter Sunday 1916, I was not allowed to go with them as I was considered to be too young.

After 1916, we kept together and, later that year, so far as I can remember, the Fianna was divided into two companies, or sluaghs, as they were known, one for the portion of the city north of the River Lee, and one for the districts south of the river. We had about 60 lads in the organisation at that time, but their number increased subsequently to about 100 on the rolls.

During 1917 and 1918, our activities consisted of drilling, general training of a military nature, lectures in first aid and rifle shooting. A .22 rifle was used in the lectures on the rifle. We were also taught how to use a revolver of which we had just a few.

Our headquarters varied from time to time. We met in An Grianán, Queen St., Cork; a room in South Main St., Cork; in Drummey's premises, Pope's Quay, and in McGurk's in North Main Street.

During the general election of December 1918, we were very active in distributing election literature for Sinn Féin, posting bills (sometimes at night during curfew) and generally helping out in the intensive propaganda efforts by Sinn Féin which were a feature of that particular election.

We wore a uniform consisting of a blue short pants, green shirt, saffron scarf and green slouch hat. Fianna officers wore Sam Browne belts. When engaged on route marches we always wore this uniform, notwithstanding the ban placed

on the wearing of military uniforms by the British, sometime in 1918, so far as I can remember.

It was, to the best of my recollection, early in the year 1919 when, due to increasing numbers, it was decided to form three sluaghs in Cork city. These were known as the North Sluagh Centre Sluagh and South Sluagh. There would be on an average of from 30 to 40 boys in each sluagh. This was what might be called the 'paper' strength of the Fianna. Quite a number of the boys, because of their youth, would not be called on for any hazardous tasks, some of which I will refer to later. As a matter of fact, as the struggle developed in the years 1920-21, the really active members of the Fianna in Cork could be said to number not more than 30; not all of these were armed; indeed, it would be safe to say that there were, at the outside, not more than a dozen revolvers in the Fianna.

The use of arms by the Fianna in Cork was frowned on by the I.R.A. leaders in the city; possibly it was thought that we were too young and irresponsible and that independent action by us might in some way cut across I.R.A. plans. In any event, I have a recollection that an order was issued in 1920 from the I.R.A. in Cork forbidding the Fianna to use arms unless with the prior permission of the local Volunteer leaders. It is not to be understood from this that we were 'pulling against' the I.R.A., on the contrary, we acted in close co-operation with the city units, but the question of carrying and using arms against the enemy was regarded as one for decision by the I.R.A.

Notwithstanding this 'brake' on our activities, a few of us invariably carried a gun even when only engaged on scouting duty for the I.R.A. In my own case, I was, on one occasion, when carrying a revolver, held up by a few I.R.A. men from H/Company, 2nd Battalion, under their captain, Michael Leahy. The gun was taken from me, although I was well known to all

these men. Subsequently, the gun was returned to me by the Battalion O/C. at the time (late 1920) - Connie Neenan. It was never taken from me afterwards.

It would not be possible at this stage to detail all the varied activities of the Cork Fianna during the hottest period of the fight, i.e., 1920-1921. Generally speaking, the major activities might be summarised as follows: (1) raids on private houses for arms; (2) scout duty for the I.R.A.; (3) destruction of enemy stores; (4) enforcement of Belfast boycott; (5) attacks on individual enemy personnel; (6) dispatch carrying.

(1) Raids on private houses for arms.

These raids were carried out at night on the houses of pro-British people who were suspected of having guns. Three or four of us usually carried out these raids, one of us being armed with a revolver.

I remember quite well the first of these raids in which I took part. The house was one in the Douglas district of Cork and was occupied by a retired British army colonel. The date was 7th March 1920. It so happened that, when I was delivering bread to the house that day, I noticed a few shotguns inside when the door was open. I told some of our lads about the guns and, that night, in company with four other Fianna boys named Frankie Nolan, E. Keating, J. Gorman and ... O'Hare, we knocked at the door and were admitted by the housekeeper. We were wearing cloth masks. I, at least, was wellknown to the housekeeper, as I delivered bread daily to the house. We searched for the guns but failed to find them. While searching, the mask fell from my face and the housekeeper said: "I know you, Charlie Meaney". We left the house then. The following morning, about 3 a.m., a squad of R.I.C. raided my home. A Sergeant Gloucester was in charge. He came into my bedroom and struck me. I was ordered to get up and dress and was taken down to the Bridewell where

I found my comrades, Nolan and Keating also there. Head Constable Browne of the R.I.C., who was in charge of the Bridewell, knew me well and told me he would "look after me". He asked me if I had anything incriminating in my possession and I told him I had a toy revolver in my pocket. He took the revolver from me. When we were paraded next day for identification, to our great surprise, nobody from the colonel's house came to identify us. We were released the following day. I learned later that Head Constable Browne 'tipped off' some I.R.A. men of G/Company, 2nd Battalion, to visit the colonel whose house we had raided and tell him he would be shot if he, or his housekeeper, came along to identify us as the raiders.

One other instance of the many raids of this nature carried out by the Fianna will suffice.

One Saturday night (when curfew was at 5 p.m.) in company with four others I went towards Dunkettle, which is about 1½ miles east of the city on the main Cork-Midleton road, to the house of a Major Gubbins, ex-British army. We got into the house which was a big mansion, and first held up the servants with revolvers and locked them up in one room. We searched the place and in a top room under the ceiling, into which we got through a trap-door, we found a few sporting guns, gunpowder, bandoliers, field-glasses, an officer's uniform and Sam Browne belts. Most of the stuff was in a trunk which we removed. We waited outside in concealment until about 5 o'clock next morning, when a motor car came along; this we commandeered, loaded up the trunk and brought it into the city where the contents were safely dumped.

(2) Scout duty for I.R.A.

Many times we were called on to act as scouts for I.R.A. units waiting in ambush. Our job was to give warning of the approach of enemy forces. Military and police barracks were

watched and movements of troops, Black and Tans and R.I.C. duly reported to the I.R.A. Suspected spies were followed by us and their activity reported on. On several occasions, too, we were called, at short notice, to remove guns and ammunition from I.R.A. dumps in the city which were in danger of discovery by the enemy. On one particular occasion when an explosion occurred in an I.R.A. bomb factory in Grattan St., Cork, I was hurriedly sent for to remove some rifles, bayonets and grenades from the scene of the explosion before the military 'got wise' as to what had happened. I got a horse and van from Collins's in North Main St. and brought the stuff away safely through the city at night to Collins's place.

### (3) Destruction of enemy stores.

We frequently destroyed quantities of enemy stores being conveyed to barracks from shops in the city. As an instance, I will mention a daylight hold-up of a lorry with provisions outside Dobbyn's shop in Alford St. Four or five of us were watching near Dobbyn's, which, I might add, was very close to the R.I.C. barracks in King St. When the lorry was loaded we got on to it and drove it to Hardwick St. where we emptied the contents (jam and other provisions) into a store. The stuff was later distributed to the relatives of men in gaol.

On I.R.A. instructions we went to certain houses of loyalists in the city to take away bicycles for use by the I.R.A. Flying columns in the county. About six of us took on this job and in one day's raiding we got upwards of 40 bicycles, including eight which we took from the Telephone Exchange in the South Mall (very near the County Club, a rendezvous for enemy officers). We took the bicycles to a shed in Sawmill St. where they were repainted to prevent identification) by a man always there for that work.

(4) Enforcement of Belfast Boycott.

When an order was made by Dáil Éireann that all goods from Belfast should be boycotted by shopkeepers, the Fianna in Cork were very active in enforcing the order. Many shops suspected of stocking goods from Belfast were visited, invoices examined and the proprietors warned not to sell such goods. A humorous incident occurred on one occasion when we were examining files and invoices in Mayne's chemist shop. While three of us were inside in the office with the manager of the shop, four Black and Tans came in to make a purchase; one of our lads went out to the shop to serve the Tans. Having made their purchases, which Nolan, luckily, was able to lay hands on, they produced the payment which Nolan refused to take, saying: "It's on the house". The Tans left, mighty pleased with themselves, much to our relief.

In regard to this Belfast boycott, it was seldom we removed any goods from shops, as the invoices in most cases showed that the goods had been in stock before the boycott order was made.

(5) Attacks on individual military personnel.

Attacks on individual members of the enemy forces were a feature of Fianna activities in 1920-21. Three or four of us waylaid soldiers and Black and Tans who were sometimes in the company of girls, or, perhaps, leaving a publichouse in a drunken condition. Whenever the opportunity offered, we attacked them, took their equipment and, in quite a good few instances, got revolvers as well.

In Maylor St. one night, E. Keating, a Fianna boy, alone and unarmed, attacked and disarmed a Black and Tan. The same lad with another Fianna boy named Tommy Creamer disarmed a Tan outside the Courthouse one evening. On another occasion, in company with Frankie Nolan and a few others, we met up with a group of soldiers off duty in the city. We 'waded' into

them, beat them up and took their bandoliers. They were unarmed. Leaving the scene of the fight in which we were greatly outnumbered, we met a Volunteer named Mick Kenny who advised us to stand in a doorway and fire back at the military who were following us up. Nolan and I were armed with revolvers. We took cover and, as the soldiers approached, opened fire. They beat a hasty retreat. Next day we learned that one of the soldiers had been wounded in the neck.

(6) Carrying dispatches.

The carrying of I.R.A. dispatches was part of the routine work of the Fianna, but nonetheless important. Boys were available at all times to carry out this work in co-operation with Cumann na mBan, and, so far as I am aware, the job was done efficiently and quickly, without interference by the enemy.

Before concluding, I would like to place on record one further instance of Fianna activity in Cork city during the period when things were toughest (early 1921). As I have already indicated, the efforts of the Fianna were mainly concentrated on causing as much trouble to the enemy as was possible, having regard to our age, our numbers, the few weapons at our disposal and the reluctance of the I.R.A. to let us use what weapons we had.

In compliance with an order from I.R.A. headquarters in Cork to destroy all military equipment, stores and goods of any kind, whenever possible, we decided to burn the mail cars and trucks in the sheds near the G.P.O. Cork. On the face of it, this does not seem to have been a difficult or dangerous job, but the fact that at the rear of the sheds, barely 30 yards away, was the Imperial Hotel which always had a party of Black and Tans staying there, made the task both difficult and dangerous.



We decided to do a job on a Sunday morning when few people were about and most of the postal staff off duty. On the previous night, I got three two-gallon tins of petrol in O'Shea's bakery in Cobh St. and poured the petrol into bottles. That night, Frankie Nolan and I went out the country and slept in a field all night. Early on the Sunday morning we came into the city, met six others of our lads, as previously arranged, and the party of us proceeded to the rear of the G.P.O. in Oliver Plunkett St. We carried the bottles of petrol with us. Nolan and I were armed with revolvers. We knew that some postmen came on duty at 6 a.m. and when they did come and had opened up the place, we went in after them and held them up. We sprinkled the petrol over the lorries and over a number of three-wheeled bicycles with baskets attached. A lighted match was thrown on the lot and a terrific explosion occurred. All of us, including the postal officials, got safely away. The place was a blazing inferno and defied the efforts of the fire brigade for a long time to bring it under control. All the lorries were destroyed.

During the latter months of 1921, prior to the Truce, I had to leave my home at night and remain outside the city to avoid arrest. I was still active with the Fianna in Cork city when the Truce came in July 1921. I was then captain of H/Company of the Fianna. Frank McMahon was O/C. of the Fianna and Edward Murray, Battalion O/C.

In my estimation, the strength of the Fianna in Cork in July 1921, was approximately one hundred.

Signed: Charles Meehan

Date: 11 JUNE 1957

Witness: T. O'Connell

