

W.S. 666

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEANTA 1913-21
No. W.S. <i>666</i>

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.**.....666.....

Witness

William Hales,
Knocknacurra,
Bandon,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Bandon Company, Bandon Battalion,
Irish Volunteers, 1918.

Member of I.R.A. Cork.

Subject.

The German Plot, May 1918.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.1539.....

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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THE GERMAN PLOT.

KNOCKNACURRA - 18TH MAY, 1918.

(From) BALLINADEE, THE 3RD CORK BRIGADE:
THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE: W.M. HALES.

CHAPTER II.

On the morning of Saturday, 18th May, 1918, a cloud of gloom hung over the Irish Capital. Dreadful reports reached from the City, and were slowly coming in from the Provinces: 'That the strong arms of the National Movement for the complete Independence of Ireland: Sinn Féin; were being taken: the citizens realised, not in ones or twos, but in dozens, in fifties - had any strong man, or men, defied or eluded the iron grip of foreign domination'.

On the bare walls of Dublin the citizens first saw the Proclamation of the new Viceroy, Lord French :-

'PROCLAMATION'.

'Whereas it has come to our knowledge that certain subjects of His Majesty, the King, domiciled in Ireland, have conspired to enter into, and have entered into, treasonable communication with the German enemy'.

"And whereas such treachery is a menace to the fair fame of Ireland, and its glorious military record, a record which is a source of intense pride to a country whose sons have always distinguished themselves, and fought with such heroic valour in the past, in the same way as thousands of them are now fighting in the War'.

'And, whereas, drastic measures must be taken to put down this German Plot, which measure will be solely directed against that Plot.

Now, therefore, we, the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, have thought fit to issue this our Proclamation, declaring, and it is hereby declared as follows :-

"That it is the duty of all loyal subjects of His Majesty to assist in every way His Majesty's Government in Ireland, to suppress this treasonable conspiracy, and to defeat the treacherous attempt of the Germans to defame the honour of Irishmen for their own ends.

That we hereby call upon all loyal subjects of His Majesty in Ireland to aid in crushing the said conspiracy, and so far as in them lies, to assist in securing the effective prosecution of the War, and the welfare and safety of the Empire.

That as a means to this end we shall cause still further steps to be taken to facilitate and encourage voluntary enlistment in Ireland in His Majesty's forces, in the hope that without resort to compulsion, the contribution of Ireland to those forces may be brought up to its proper strength and made to correspond to the contributions of the other parts of the Empire."

Now was the test of the Irish people: 'Would the eloquent phrases of Lord French deceive them, or the military despotism of Bryan O'Mahon subdue them, and throw them off the rugged path of Irish nationality'. They had not yet established Dáil Eireann, the only Supreme Court the Irish people would recognise for an undivided Ireland: many of their members were taken and the Irish party were at Westminster.

Newspapers and reports proclaimed - De Valera arrested in the early morning at Greystones and placed aboard a cruiser at Dún Laoghaire. Arthur Griffith arrested at home in Dublin, and likewise such other known leaders as Countess Markevitz, Dr. Dillon, William Cosgrave, Joseph McGrath, Henry Mellows, Alderman Cole, Tom Hunter, Seán McGarry, Dr. Hayes, Joseph McGuinness, Seán Milroy, Darrel Figgis and P. O'Keeffe - all without a struggle, and in silence. But the Irish people were to prove solid while yet the leaders were united.

Down from Ulster came the news that Seán McEntee and D. McCullagh were taken. From Galway came that F. Fahy, G. Lyons and Joe Reilly were taken. In Cork City Tadgh Barry alone was taken; from Kerry were brought in: M. Fleming, Sugrue and Spillane; from the Midlands and West were taken G. Nicholls, Dr. Cusack, T. Ruane, Coleman Garvie, S. Jordan, V. Trayers, G. Geraghty and Brian O'Higgins; from Cavan, Desmond Fitzgerald, James Dolan and P. McMahon; Frank Lawless was taken at Swords; from Tipperary came in P. McCann and Drohane: Brennan Whitmore was taken at Enniscorthy, Joseph McBride and Moane were also brought in; from West Cork came the first report of a struggle and the capture of T. O'Driscoll, James O'Brien, Fineen O'Sullivan, P. O'Hourihane, Stephen Barry and George Bohane, the wary Bernie O'Driscoll escaping. Kent and several were in Cork Jail.

In Dublin, Michael Collins escaped the raiding party set to capture him; his timely warning caused the escape of his great comrade, Harry Boland; Michael Collins's escape at that time and

the other physical force leaders of the Irish Volunteers throughout Ireland, was destined to affect the whole course of events as far as the destiny of the fighting forces was concerned.

Now were nearly included all members of the Executive of Sinn Féin, and the Mansion House Conference seemed the only body now to direct the people in opposing Conscription, when the first bright ray of news was reported this eventful weekend: it was the desperate struggle and escape of an Irish leader, in the person of John Hales, Knocknacurra, Ballinadee, near Bandon, from armed Crown Forces acting under the Viceroy's Proclamation. Eagerly the people scanned the meagre news of the "Independent" and "Cork Examiner", 20th May:-

"BANDON INCIDENT -
POLICE SUSPENDED".

"A force of armed police motored to Knocknacurra, Bandon, to effect the arrest of John Hales, a prominent Sinn Féin leader. The latter, however, succeeded in escaping after a struggle. Two constables have been suspended for refusal to obey orders during the proceedings, and a third has handed in his resignation."

"CORK EXAMINER", TUESDAY MORNING, 21ST MAY.

"The constables suspended on Saturday at Bandon were subsequently dismissed by wire from Dublin Castle. They were: Constable Tom Kineally, stationed at Bandon, and Constable Jeremiah O'Sullivan, stationed at Innishannon, Co. Cork. Both are natives of Kerry."

The people realised that one strong arm had defied the foreign domination and was free to direct and lead in the dark day that was at hand. Here was no trick, no illusion, but a strong man bidding defiance to the enemies of his country and prepared to die rather than submit: an example to his comrades to be faithful even unto death, and a lesson to his foes.

Easy for the people to imagine that struggle as it was for those who were present to describe it. Ten police constables (under Sergt. Brennan, a native of Clare), sturdy and regular in their tread, moving out silently in the grey mist of a May morning: there is scarcely daylight to see their polished carbines as they move along the lonely road and approach the farmhouse - no need to fear scout or sentry, for the Viceroy's

Proclamation is not yet out. Silently they approach, the barking of a faithful sheep dog, and they have the house surrounded. Peacefully are sleeping the wanted man and his young cousin, Michael Fitzgerald, the only other occupant of the room. In the third room leading off the corridor upstairs, the parents of Seán Hales, as he is better known, are sleeping; Robert Hales, Senior, despite a serious illness, still retained part of his great physical manhood of earlier years. In the fourth room of the house, at the extreme end, is the Sister of Seán, Margaret Hales; with her is her young cousin, Hannah Fitzgerald. The brothers of Seán - Tom Hales and William - are out but not far away.

The previous night, 17th May, Seán Hales and his two brothers, Tom Hales and William, are in the kitchen of the old home at Knocknacurra. Robert Hales, junior, is not with them; he is away from the family circle for some time past. It is past 11 o'clock and all the other members of the family have retired to rest. Seán is reading a book at the table as was his custom at night-time when nothing of importance was demanding his attention. Tom rose abruptly from his chair at the fire and addressed his elder Brother:-

"Seán, don't sleep here to-night: I am going out, too. If the military authorities at the Castle decide on action against us, you are a marked man for arrest, and decided I believe they have already to round up the leaders of both Sinn Féin and the Volunteers".

Seán closed the book.

"Yes," he said, "the time has come again when it is a danger to sleep here. I will go out later."

"Come with me to-night", Tom said to his brother, William, and both departed into the night for Flynn's cottage within the townland.

The blows of the rifle butts on the doors of Knocknacurra disturb the peace of that May morning and awaken the family from slumber, and to the realization of what those blows on the doors portend. Admission is given by the father of the wanted man and John Hales is ordered to yield himself a prisoner. He looks into the faces of his foes and his answer comes - plain to the police officer and men surrounding the bed on which he lay :-

"If you take me it will not be alive".

His foes hesitate: they fear that sixteen stone of brawn and, moreso, the indomitable will that is behind it - they are Irish still, but French's order must be carried out, and they appeal to the father. All no use. The wanted man must be handcuffed and taken. Four men, assisted and directed by their Officer, attack the prisoner lying in the bed, a grim struggle ensues: batons and rifle butts are used, men fall panting to the floor, and the weight of four men - two others are trying to hold the feet - cannot put those wrists together.

Madge Hales and her cousin are on the scene long before

this: their courage had been proved before now under circumstances as grave, and of resource they were not lacking, but what to do and how to act for the man for whom they would have freely given their lives to save. The first opportunity came when the young cousin of Seán Hales - he was not yet fourteen years - got out of the room in the confusion, and through the police to the hall: here his sister whispered the message :-

"Get out at the back and make for Flynns, the others are there - quick."

The constable outside the house is getting uneasy: time is going and one of the police force in the room is disabled. Another appeal from the police officer, Brennan, to surrender: the answer - "No".

Another struggle - a last effort to bring those wrists together ends in failure, and injury to the Officer of the Force: the bars of the bed are wrenched from their sockets. Seán's great strength and endurance are telling against his opponents: he is injured in one arm, but awaits the opportune moment to make the final effort to break through the police force in the house.

Meanwhile, the youth, Fitzgerald, has aroused the brothers of Seán at Flynn's cottage a short distance away. Tom Hales is hurriedly lacing his boots in the cottage kitchen: he pauses in his kneeling position - thinking - and suddenly springs to his feet:

"Come on," he says to William: "We will try a rescue: You come on, too, Mick Flynn, and get that shotgun: our arms are in the haggard and can't be got to".

Mick Flynn and his brother were Volunteers.

"You are all mad", exclaimed Pake Flynn, the father of Mick, "and will get shot or arrested". However, possessed with natural bravery, he did not object to his son joining the rescue effort - he worked for the Hales' family. The two brothers with Flynn left the cottage and moved to the main road running westward: the Hales's home is within a hundred and fifty yards of this road. Opposite the house and moving some distance apart they were fully exposed to the police sentry in the yard on the rising ground, as was the plan of action. Here Tom Hales ordered Flynn to hold his position on the road, while he and his brother, William, worked their way from the right and left, and now, unobserved, to close proximity to the scene of action. The youth, Fitzgerald, as arranged, got back to the house unnoticed.

The sentry reports the movement on the road and two constables are sent out to guard against this new danger.

The guard in the room is now changed. Constable Kineally and O'Sullivan are there with the Sergeant and another policeman. All is still now - it is the calm that predicts the storm and it is broken by Kineally :

"Here, O'Sullivan", he speaks to his fellow county man: "We never joined the Force for this work against our own Irishmen, I am going to throw down this rifle - look", observing the men

on the road through the window, "Blood could be shed before this is over". "I will follow you", O'Sullivan replied. Kineally moved across the room to Sergt. Brennan at the door. "Sergeant Brennan", he said, "I refuse to do further duty here. I did not join the Force for this work; here is my rifle". After Kineally had spoken, O'Sullivan followed - "I, too", he said "refuse further duty here: take charge of this rifle". They both left the room and walked from the house, at peace with themselves, and the family so rudely disturbed that morning. (A third policeman followed their noble example two days' later).

Sergeant Brennan goes out to replace the two men who had refused duty. It is at this moment that Madge Hales insists on entering the room and speaking to her brother - "This is granted" - and leaning over the bed she succeeds in whispering to Seán: "Make a dash when you hear me close the door of the middle room - the others are outside: we will do our best".

She feared the arrival of reinforcements - and military at that - there was no time to be lost. She departed from the room and Seán heard the given signal. "Fleet as the Geraldine he bounded from the bed - the guards within the room failed to block his exit at the door. He took by surprise the Sergeant and two Constables returning to foot of stairs - he was in the midst of them before they had time to realise what was taking place. The door slammed by the sister of Seán was more than a signal: it cut the corridor off from Aherne, the injured policeman in the struggle, and his comrade: their exit was now delayed after the escaping man - (Madge and her cousin held the knob on the outside) and gave Seán this advantage in forcing his way through the remaining police below.

Seán seized Sergeant Brennan who made a last effort to stop his rush at the door leading into the kitchen. He threw the heavy Officer to the floor, wrenched his carbine from his grasp - the other two men grappled with him to protect the fallen man. The tide of war was now fast changing. With true chivalry, the father of Seán - Robert Hales - rushed and seized the muzzle of the loaded rifle directed at the officer, and commanded Seán to rush into the open and get away. The wanted man got past the remaining guard, and to his freedom.

Seán and his father now sleep side by side in Innishannon Churchyard under the shade of the old ivied tower. There his maternal ancestor, five generations before, Fitzgerald (Fitzmaurice from Naas to Kildare, first joined the Hales' family. His old comrades, visiting the grave, recall from the scenes around, his very favourite song "The Wild Hazel Glen".

(Signed)

William Hales
(Wm. Hales)

(Witnessed)

C. Saurin
(C. Saurin)

LT.-COLONEL.

Date: 1st April 1952

