

Hurley, Charles (Charlie)

by Maurice Cronin

Hurley, Charles (Charlie) (1893–1921), Volunteer organiser and commandant west Cork brigade 1920, was born 20 March 1893 at Baurleigh, Kilbrittain, Co. Cork, fifth child of three sons and four daughters of John Hurley, farmer, from Baurleigh and his wife, Mary Fleming from Barryroe, Co. Cork. He was educated at Baurleigh national school and was successful in civil service examinations. He was employed in 1914 as a clerk at Haulbowline dockyard, Queenstown (Cobh), Co. Cork. After a year he was promoted to a Liverpool depot, which he refused because acceptance would have entailed conscription into the British army. Following a long illness in 1916, he went to work at McSwiney's corn merchants, Bandon, where he befriended Liam Deasy (qv). There he became associated with Sinn Féin, the GAA and the Gaelic League.

Late in 1917 he was employed at McCarthy's general merchants, Castletownbere, where he became involved in organising the Volunteers, becoming first captain of the Castletownbere company; on the formation of the existing companies of the Beara peninsula into a battalion of the Cork brigade, he was selected as battalion commander. Unarmed, he led attacks on a British patrol boat, *The Flying Fox*, berthed at Castletownbere, and on naval stores in the area, capturing rifles and ammunition. He established a primitive munitions factory in an unoccupied farmhouse in the Eyries district where he also stored all captured arms. He led a public parade of all Volunteers in Castletownbere on 17 March 1918. Arrested in August 1918 on a charge of unlawful assembly, he was imprisoned in Cork gaol. When arrested he was found to have in his possession documents relating to military installations in the Beara peninsula and a plan for destroying Castletownbere police barracks. On release from Cork gaol he was rearrested, court-martialled and sentenced to five years' penal servitude at Maryborough (Portlaoise) gaol.

Released on compassionate grounds in November 1919, after the deaths of his brother and mother, he returned to west Cork. Appointed vice-commandant first (Bandon) battalion in February 1920, he became commandant west Cork brigade after the arrest of Tom Hales (qv) in August 1920 until March 1921. He was actively engaged against British forces in the districts of Bandon, Clonakilty, Skibbereen, Schull, Bantry and Dunmanway; in many of these incidents he was the officer who planned and led the Volunteers. He was in charge of the capture of Howes Strand coastguard station in June 1920, which led to the greatest seizure of arms and ammunition in the whole west Cork campaign, making possible the formation of the active column that developed as the war progressed. This victory gave an invaluable fillip to morale by proving to the country that Volunteers were capable of imposing their own particular type of warfare on the enemy. He commanded the flying column while Tom Barry (qv) was ill in December 1920 and between 5 and 12 January 1921

he inspected the various companies to examine the effects of the excommunication decree of Bishop Daniel Cohalan (qv) on anyone taking part in ambushes. He was seriously wounded at the Upton railway station ambush on 15 February but escaped capture and spent the rest of his days recuperating in that area between Forde's farm of Ballymurphy and O'Mahony's of Belrose, the local headquarters.

Hurley was shot dead on 19 March 1921 while attempting to escape from a British army raid on the Fordes' house, as the Crossbarry ambush was about to commence. As the British army did not know his identity, they placed his corpse in the Bandon workhouse (latterly Cottage Hospital). Nurse Babe Crowley and other staff members switched his body with one of the inmates who had just died. Cumann na mBan whisked away his remains to Kilbrittain, and his comrades buried him secretly, with military honours, at the family grave at Clogagh cemetery, Timoleague, Co. Cork. The first anniversary of his death was marked with a parade from Kilbrittain to Clogagh cemetery where a large crowd took part from both sides of the treaty divide. To perpetuate his memory, on 16 May 1971 the Bandon GAA named its new grounds Pairc Chathail Uí Mhuirthíle, Charlie Hurley Park.

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Bandon GAA programme, 16 May 1971; *Bandon Hist. Jn.*, 1993, 1997, 2001; Tom Barry, *Guerilla days in Ireland*, (1981); P. O'Farrell (ed.), *Who's who in the Irish war of independence* (1997); Liam Deasy, 'The Beara Peninsula campaign', *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 21:3 (1966); Liam Deasy, *Towards Ireland free* (1973); personal information: local people Kilbrittain