

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURQ-STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 776

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 776

Witness

Joseph Booker,
62 Lower Gardiner St.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion,
Dublin Brigade, 1917 - ;
Member of 'B' Company, 1st Battalion,
Glasgow, 1918 - ;
Member of I.R.B. Edinburgh, 1920.

Subject.

Provision and storage of arms in
various towns in Scotland, 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2104

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY JOSEPH BOOKER

*62 Lower Gardiner street,
Dublin.*

I joined B/Coy. 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade in April 1917. Frank Henderson was in charge of the battalion at the time and Paddy Daly was O/C. of the company. While drilling in a hall at the back of Clonliffe College, we were raided by the British military who burst in the door of the hall. Paddy Daly and some others were arrested. A number of the men including myself got away. For awhile we had no drill hall, but eventually were accommodated in a Gaelic League Hall on the North Circular Road.

I left Ireland to find employment in Scotland late in 1917 as my people also had a house in Glasgow.

Early in 1918 I got a transfer from the 2nd Battalion in Dublin to B/Company, 1st Battalion, Glasgow. Paddy Clinton was officer commanding the battalion at the time. The Volunteers in Glasgow were very badly organised and remained so until Joe Vize came over in 1920, reorganised the Volunteers and became O/C. of the Scotland Brigade. Prior to his arrival there had been very little done beyond the procuring of arms and ammunition by individuals.

When Joe Vize came he took me to live with him at 59, Southbridge, Edinburgh. He asked me to join the I.R.B. I agreed and was sworn in by Sean Nelson. I cannot remember who was centre at the time.

Joe Vize told me I was not to attend any Volunteer parades, but put me on the job of collecting and buying arms in different parts of Scotland, including Motherwell, Cowdenbeath, Wishaw, Paisley, Hamilton and Glasgow.

I had a dump on the premises of a man named Chambers from Derry who was in the coal business in Dorset St. Glasgow.

Although Chambers was not in the Volunteers he helped the movement in many ways. He often removed arms from his private house in 39 Bishop St. to the dump. For a while, I occupied the upper part of his private house where I used to bring some of the arms I had collected. The short arms I collected were usually brought to the dump in paper parcels and shopping bags. The rifles were dismantled and generally carried in sacks.

When Joe Vize was in Edinburgh in 1920, one of his contacts was the captain of a German ship which used to call at Leith about every ten days. The captain would bring from twelve to fifteen parabellums or "Peter the Painters" and ammunition, each trip. He would contact a barber whose name I cannot remember. He would in turn contact a Mr. Gordon, who, although not a Volunteer, was very friendly and used to buy guns for us whenever he got a chance. Mr. Gordon would send us a telegram when the ship had arrived. We were never allowed to have any direct contact with the captain or go near the ship. The arms were delivered by members of the crew to the barber's shop and collected by Mr. Gordon.

At Gordon's house we oiled and greased the guns and packed them in suitcases ready for dispatch to Liverpool. I used to bring some of the arms and ammunition to Liverpool. I generally handed them over to Steve Lanigan at Bootle. Any of the reliable men who were available were selected for this work. Patrick Mills, McKeever, Sean Nelson and Paddy Clinton are some of the men who made the journey. In some cases it meant the loss of a day's pay.

In the course of bringing arms and ammunition to Liverpool I met Neil Kerr and a man named Murphy who received them from us, but I always dealt with Steve Lanigan. He was Customs & Excise officer and had an arrangement with some members of the crew of the boats plying between Dublin and Liverpool that they would collect the arms and ammunition

packed in seed bags and he would pass them through the Customs barrier and on to the boat.

We were also able to send some arms and ammunition direct from Glasgow to Dublin through Archie Campbell and some of the crew he knew to be reliable, who worked on one of the Scotch boats. We sent small consignments from time to time. A lot of these were handed to Johnny and Paddy McDonnell, two members of the I.R.A. who carried on business as provision merchants in Sheriff St. Dublin.

Joe Vize also got a number of rifles from Hamilton Military Barracks as the result of a deal with the quartermaster there. These were safely transferred to Dublin.

I do not know the details of the deal

I visited Motherwell, but never stayed there. They had a purchasing committee there of which Andy Fegan was in charge. One of the reasons for this was to prevent the buying of arms by people who were coming across from Ireland seeking them without any authority from General Headquarters. Sean Healy from Cork was one of those who came across. Frank Carty from Sligo also came across and was arrested by the police in Glasgow early in 1921. On the night before he was to be tried, a meeting was called by D.P. Walsh at which arrangements were made to attack the prison van the following morning on its way from the prison to the Court in High St. Mick Carroll and I were detailed to notify all the men in the Glasgow area who were known to be available. We walked for the best part of the night calling at all the houses. The landladies in most cases were very indignant and demanded to know why we wanted the men at this time of night. I did not take part in the attack myself, but I had to provide the arms and a sledge for the men carrying out the attack. I delivered six automatics that morning to D.P. Walsh at the Ivanhoe Hotel, Buchanan St. In the newspaper report of the attack mention was made of a man getting out of a taxi and going into the Ivanhoe Hotel with

a parcel. An accurate description of me was given, even to the clothes I was wearing, but I wasn't identified. D.P. Walsh was arrested.

The attack failed due, I think, to the fact that Carty was handcuffed to one of the policemen. A police sergeant - Johnstone - who was on the van, was killed. As a result of the attack there was a round-up of Volunteers some of whom were charged with the shooting of the police sergeant. Father McRory of St. Mary's Church, who was at the meeting, was arrested and later released.

One of those sentenced was Sean O'Dare, who was killed in 1922 in an ambush by Frank Carty's column while serving as an officer in the National Army.

Collins, I was told, was greatly annoyed with Walsh over the loss of the arrested Volunteers in the attempted rescue of Carty, who was in Glasgow without authority.

While I was staying with Mr. Chambers in Glasgow, I was raided frequently and always on a Sunday morning, but no arms or ammunition were ever discovered. Chief Detective Noble knew very well I was dealing with arms but could not get any evidence and he could not directly associate me with the I.R.A. as I did not attend parades and made sure not to have any arms in the place for any length of time.

Chambers evidently wasn't suspected as he was never questioned about his own activities, nor were there any raids on his business premises.

I was eventually arrested. This was indirectly due to the attempted rescue of Carty. Two of those taking part in it - Sean Mooney and Jim Quinn - went on the run. One Saturday evening the police, who were on the lookout for them, followed some of their relatives on the train from Glasgow to Edinburgh.

The relatives called at the home of Mr. Gordon, where they knew the men had once stayed. On Sunday morning the police raided the house and picked up Sean Nelson and myself. Sean Nelson was on the run following the stabbing of a policeman. There had been a strike on in Glasgow at the time and police interfered with one of the meetings, when one of them was stabbed. After the general release of prisoners Nelson was re-arrested, tried for the offence and fined.

Mr. Gordon and his wife were arrested and detained in prison for about a week. Their daughter was sent to some institution while they were in prison. The police took possession of the house for the week and any Volunteers calling there were arrested.

Joe Furlong and Liam Mellows visited us occasionally and brought money for the buying of arms. We were not always successful in getting the arms through. When D.P. Walsh came over to speed up the purchase and dispatch of the arms, he decided to send them packed in cases addressed to firms in Dublin. The police discovered one of these cases addressed to Hammond Lane Foundry. The members of a North of Ireland family, named Doherty, whose house was used as a dump for the arms, were arrested. The son had been identified as one of the men who had sent the box.

On another occasion arms were sent in an egg crate by Lena McDonnell of Dundee, who was in the movement, addressed to a Mr. McGlinchey, who had a provision shop in Glasgow, and was a member of the I.R.A. A railway porter, who was attempting to pilfer eggs from the crate, found the revolvers and reported to the police. McGlinchey was arrested, but denied any knowledge of the affair. His explanation was accepted and he was released.

When Joe Vize was arrested, Henry Coyle took over. and decided to change the system of bringing the arms.

and ammunition to Liverpool. He bought a small lorry and brought the stuff by road. One evening, when on the journey to Liverpool, something went wrong with the lights of the lorry. Coyle was unable to repair the lights, so had to leave the car in a garage. While the repairs were being carried out, Coyle and James Strickland, who was with him, went off for a cup of tea. In the meantime, the garage hands, out of curiosity, examined the contents of the lorry and, having discovered its nature, notified the police. When Coyle and Strickland returned, they found a party of police awaiting them. In an attempt to escape Strickland was injured by the blow of a baton. Both were arrested. Strickland was sentenced to five years imprisonment and Henry Coyle to seven years imprisonment.

Henry Coyle had a rather original method of bringing rifles to Bishop St. He took the butts off the rifles, placed the rifles in a golf bag and screwed golf club heads into the barrels of the rifles. With the golf bag slung over his shoulder, and another person with him carrying the butts in a suit case, he gave the impression of a man going off for a game of golf, and a person carrying his suitcase to the station.

Signed: Joseph Booker

(Joseph Booker)

Date: 23rd December 1952.

23rd December, 1952.

Witness:

J. Kearns Comd't.

(J. Kearns) Comd't.

