

M. S. 933

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUIO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. / 33

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 933.....

Witness

Seamus Reader,
71 Pidgeon House Road,
Coastguard Station,
Ringsend,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Fianna Eireann, Glasgow, 1911 - ;
Member of I.R.B., Glasgow, 1914 - ;
O/C. Scottish Brigade, 1920 - .

Subject.

- (a) Purchase of arms, Scotland, and their des^apatch to Ireland, 1916-1921;
- (b) Organisation of Scottish Brigade, 1919.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 283.....

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SECOND STATEMENT BY SEAMUS READER,
71, Pidgeon House Road, Coastguard Station,
Ringsend, Dublin.

Joe Robinson and I were released from Reading Gaol on Christmas Eve, December, 1916. The authorities gave us railway vouchers and passes to Glasgow. We remained in London for a few days where we were the guests of the London Irish. When we arrived in Glasgow we were advised by the I.R.B. to change our addresses so as to avoid being re-arrested, should the authorities decide to do so. I was sent to Mrs. Mooney's, Hinchaw Street, Glasgow, and remained there for a few days. After a week or two in Glasgow we went to Dublin. On our return to Glasgow we got a tremendous welcome from the I.R.B. and Republicans. I was invited to house parties and ceillis all over Scotland. It was conveyed to me that in some of these places there were still detonators as they had continued during the time I was in gaol to collect them for me. Later I collected the detonators and brought them over to Dublin. I delivered them to Nora Myles at 500 North Circular Road. She was later Private Secretary to Larry Ginnell.

Early in 1915 I was appointed a "B" in my circle of the I.R.B. After the Volunteer and Fianna conventions held later that year in Dublin, the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. decided to change the "Bs" in some circles. I was not changed. The "B" man in each circle was picked because of his military knowledge, and if he did not possess any he was expected to acquire it. A few times a year the "B" man gave a lecture to his circle on military affairs. Sometimes this meant reading from a military textbook or an article on revolutionary activities in other countries. The "B" man was also the mobiliser of his circle.

In January, 1916, I was elected Scottish Divisional "B". Subsequently my election was ratified by Seán McDermott. Early in 1917 Joe Robinson reorganised "A" Company, Glasgow. The meetings were held in the Sinn Fein Hall, London Street, Glasgow. The Glasgow Circle of the I.R.B. also met in this hall. During this time many concerts and ceillis were held for the purpose of raising funds for the prisoners. These were well supported, as there was a tremendous amount of sympathy and enthusiasm for the Irish Cause. The Gaelic League of which there were three branches also helped in these concerts and ceillis. The Sinn Fein organisation also increased its strength and became very strong.

When Robinson was in Ireland after his release he heard a great deal of criticism of Eóin McNeill and the others who did not take part in the Rising. Naturally Robinson turned his mind to what Scotland did. Accordingly he came to the conclusion that his I.R.B. Circle had failed, as he believed that a larger number of men should have been sent over to Dublin for the Rising. He heard about Tom White who was a member of the Scottish Divisional Board and who did not take part in the Rising and who did not give a satisfactory explanation to Joe Robinson for not having done so. At one of the I.R.B. meetings Robinson called them cowards. Before he started this row there was a scheme being talked about, that wherever there was a branch of Sinn Fein or a circle of the I.R.B., to use these clubs and circles to form companies of the Volunteers. In that way we could organise the Scottish Brigade especially with the assistance of the I.R.B. Circles. Following this row Robinson withdrew from our Circle. Three others who had taken part in the Rising - Friel, Carmichael and Paddy Moran - supported Robinson and withdrew from the Circle. This had a bad effect. I did not agree with their tactics as I thought I had more information than they. I remained on in the Circle as I was still a Divisional "B" man.

Following this split Robinson did not use the facilities placed at his disposal by the Circle for his work in connection with the reorganising of the Volunteers. Liam Gribb6n and he rented a hall in Risk Street, for the use of "A" Company. I attended all "A" Company parades. I approached McDonnell, Centre, and McNeill, Sub-Centre, about Robinson's action. They said, "It will make no difference, we will go ahead with our scheme for the organising of the Volunteers if you will form the first Company". We started straight away, and out of our Circle we formed "B" Company. Out of the Govan Circle we formed "C" Company. We wanted to get four Companies organised so as to have a Battalion in Glasgow, and later to organise the outlying districts. J. Carney was a member of the Govan Circle; although he had not taken part in the Rising, he was elected Captain of "C" Company.

During the 1917 period I brought to Dublin over one hundred detonators. My young brother brought over stuff on two occasions - also Friel and Carmichael. We delivered them to the Citizen Army. We also went to Andy Clarkin's, 204 Pearse Street, then called Great Brunswick Street, as his house was a usual calling place. Seamus Robinson, Joe Doherty and others stayed at or visited this house. Two boys, Michael Carroll and Seán Nelson, were sent over to Dublin by Joe Robinson with a consignment of stuff. They went to Belfast where there was some mix-up and they were arrested with the stuff on them. The boys were later released. Joe Robinson was arrested in Glasgow and sentenced to ten years for his connection with it.

I also reorganised the Fianna in London Street, Glasgow. Following Robinson's arrest Alexander Carmichael became Captain of "A" Company. He was still antagonistic to the I.R.B. Seán McGarry and Frank Kearney came over from Dublin in 1918 to try to smooth out matters. As a result it was agreed to work together. Four Companies had now been organised, "A" Company, "B" Company, "C" Company and "G" Company (Anderson). We had formed another Company in Anderson: that gave us

a Battalion later to become known as the 1st Battalion. The Battalion Council was formed in 1918. It was composed of Company Captains. I was elected Battalion Commandant.

About this time M. Callaghan, a member of "A" Company, was captured bringing stuff over to Dublin.

In 1919 Joe Vize was sent over to Glasgow by G.H.Q. to supervise and direct the purchase of arms etc. He formed a committee to help him and this became known as the Purchasing Committee. Other members of this committee were myself, Pat Clinton, a Lieutenant in "B" Company, and Pat O'Neill. Both were members of the I.R.B. Vize also visited the I.R.B. Circles in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland. Paddy Moran was grumbling about the Battalion the Council of which had only met occasionally. After Vize's arrival in Scotland he presided at the meetings of the Battalion Council whenever they were held. I continued to organise the Volunteers and we formed another Company in Coatbridge. It was known as "D" Company, and it went into the 1st Battalion, which now had five Companies:

"A" Company in Rusk Street,	Captain Alec Carmichael.
"B" " " London "	" Seamus Reader.
"C" " " Govan	" Carney.
"G" " " Anderson	" Seamus Fullerton.
"D" " " Coatbridge	" Phil Graham.

Pat Clinton came over from Dublin about this time and helped the I.R.B. Circles to form new Companies and organise extra Battalions. An Officers' training class was also formed about this time. A man named Tom Wilson acted as Instructor for a while.

Vize travelled a good deal in Scotland in connection with the purchasing of arms. He even went as far as Edinburgh to select men as purchasing agents. The men selected in most cases were members of the I.R.B. His principal men were Burke of Motherwell, Andy Fagan of

Blantyre and Thompson of Edinburgh. The funds for the purchasing committee came from Ireland. Vize, who had been in the British Merchant Navy, was an ideal man for the job. He had contact among seamen and people who worked on the Docks. The purchasing committee was distinct from the Scottish Brigade, but the Scottish Brigade was subservient to it. At the beginning the members of the committee were all I.R.B. men. It had the authority to engage at a small weekly wage anyone who could help them in their work. The usual prices we paid for arms were as follows : Rifle £4. 0.0., Automatic £3.0.0., .45 Revolver £2.10.0. In 1920 Vize was recalled to Dublin and he was replaced by D.P. Walsh as G.H.Q. purchaser for Scotland. The organising of the Volunteers continued and we now had five Battalions which formed the Scottish Brigade.

1st Battalion: "A", "B", "D", "F", and "G" Companies.

2nd Battalion: Motherwell, Wishaw, Craignew, Hamilton, Blantyre, Bellshill, Morsend, Burnbank.

3rd Battalion: Faikart near Grangemouth, Denny, Stirling.

4th Battalion: Dundee.

5th Battalion: Dumbarton, Donnure, Alexandra, Wrenton. Clyde Bank was Irish centre.

I was elected Brigade O/C and remained in that position until October, 1920, when I became I.O. and Director of Organisation for Scotland. Carney replaced me as Brigade O.C.

I paid visits to all Companies in the Brigade area to supervise the election of officers and to select men suitable to undertake the purchasing of arms. At this stage the strength of the Companies in the different Battalions was as follows:-

1st Battalion : "A" Company - about 35 men. (Fairly strong).

"B" Company - about 80 men. (Very strong).

"C" Company - Govan - about 30 men.

"E" " - Tollcross - about 10 to 15 men.

"F" " - Clydebank - about 20 men.

"G" " - Anderson - about 50 men.

"D" " - Coatbridge - about 10 men. (Very small).

- 2nd Battalion: About 150 men in all districts.
- 3rd Battalion: Very small in numbers, about 20 men, each Company.
- 4th Battalion: Glasgow, Greenock and Port Glasgow, about 10 to 12 men each.
- 5th Battalion: Excepting Clydebank, a small group, about 20 men.

In most cases the I.R.B. were members of the Volunteers.

A message was sent to me from Countess Markievicz to know if I could do anything about supplying arms etc. to independent Brigades in Ireland. There was a very serious complaint that Headquarters in Dublin were not distributing the stuff fairly. The complaint was so bad that we agreed to allow the Brigades that were complaining to purchase anything they required provided they did not cut in on the G.H.Q. source of supply or raise the price by paying more than the purchasing committee.

Following this decision Healy came over from a Cork Brigade, Henry Coyle on behalf of Mayo and Sligo Brigades. Later Coyle became attached to the purchasing committee. Towards the end of 1920 purchases became so heavy that we found it necessary to appoint a Brigade Transport Officer. Mike Callaghan was appointed. His principal job was to transport the arms etc. to Liverpool for shipping to Dublin. All the purchases at this time were being sent via Liverpool. The Battalion Officers in Glasgow appointed to assist in this job were Fullerton brothers, Michael Callaghan, Burke, A. Fagan, James Fagan, Joe McCann, James Quinn and Charlie Strickland.

It was then decided to organise an area in Dundee. This was an area of its own. The principal men connected with Dundee were Dempsey, Paddy Hyland. Edinburgh - (Leith) Paddy Thompson.

Late in 1920 a circular was sent out from the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. It was read out at a meeting of my circle asking the members to give their allegiance to the Supreme Council to stand fast,

and to follow the Supreme Council as changes were about to take place. I told Liam Mellows about it. He told me that there would be another circular sent out and warned me that there was hedging going on, that there was a danger of a split. He asked me to make sure this would not occur in Scotland. He did not give me any further information about the trouble.

At the time of the hunger strike of Terence McSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, there was great excitement in Glasgow. A telegram was sent over from Sinn Féin in Ireland to Sinn Féin in Glasgow asking for demonstration and protests against the continued imprisonment of McSwiney. It got into the hands of McDonnell who was Head Centre of the I.R.B. and Chairman of the Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Féin. At that time I.R.B., Sinn Féin and Volunteers were very much mixed up. McDonnell gave the telegram to Tom Wilson who was an officer in Sinn Féin and an officer in the 1st Battalion, & to ^{who} Kearney/was an I.R.B. man. The telegram was discussed between them and the wording of it was to the effect "calling for immediate action to be taken by the Glasgow Irish as the Lord Mayor was dying".

Wilson called a meeting of all the Volunteers he could get his hands on. Sinn Féin also held a meeting. I did not know till the following day what had happened. Sinn Féin agreed that they would try and call a strike as a protest. Wilson said at the Sinn Féin meeting that they would have a big demonstration in Georges' Square. At that time it was necessary to have a police permit to hold a public meeting there. He said he would call out the 1st Battalion to act as stewards and protect the people. The Battalion Council was notified to have a meeting, and it was only then I heard about the telegram. It was late when I got to the meeting and action had been decided on. All the officers were there. I asked what it was all about. Kearney was addressing the meeting and he had already asked them had they any suggestions to offer. I addressed the men, admitting I had never

heard anything about it. I asked for the telegram. On reading it I said, "How did you get this, this is for Sinn Féin and not for the I.R.A., but seeing that you are going to blow up public buildings, you must have material to do so. The best thing to do is to wait until we get explosives to blow up those places with". I decided we would have to do something, as the meeting appeared anxious for action. For some time I had been reconnoitring a magazine at Robroyston which was about five miles from the centre of Glasgow city. I had already made a rough sketch of the place and noted the positions and the entrances and the number of watchmen on duty. I decided to carry out a raid on it the following Saturday night. I knew I could get a good supply of detonators and explosives there. I told the meeting to mobilise on the following Saturday night and that we would have night manoeuvres, so as to practise movement in the dark. I also told them there would be no smoking, and that we would have no way of cooking, but they could bring anything they liked in the line of sandwiches and refreshments. I detailed six men to dress in old clothes so as to resemble miners. These six men and I were the only ones who were armed. About 110 men turned out. We proceeded in small groups and travelled across country. When we arrived near the Magazine we reassembled. I explained the job we were going to do. I told them that each man would be responsible for the stuff he would get, as we could only guarantee protection while out in the country. We then proceeded and crossed the railway so as to be free from the road. When we reached the Magazine wall we cut the barbed wire which surmounted it and then climbed over the wall and into the Magazine. We held up the night watchmen and workers and seized a large quantity of detonators and explosives. The raid which was a complete success was carried out without a hitch. None of the stuff was recaptured notwithstanding the intense police activity which followed. Later the stuff was sent to Dublin.

Sinn Fein decided to call a strike, but it was a failure. Again there was overlapping taking place between the Purchasing Committee, the I.R.B. and the I.R.A. Some Brigades in Ireland were still grumbling that they were not getting sufficient arms etc. from G.H.Q. Representatives from Brigades in Cork, Sligo, Mayo, Tipperary, the North and Dublin Citizen Army, had come to Glasgow to purchase arms etc. for their respective Brigades. G.H.Q. in Dublin must have got to know about it, as D.P. Walsh was questioned by G.H.Q. about it. The representatives of the Brigades had interfered with the work of the Purchasing Committee.

After Lord Mayor McSwiney's death there was a big influx of men to the Volunteers.

Frank Carty, who was in Glasgow to purchase arms for the Sligo Brigade, was arrested. There was great talk that Frank should be rescued. At a meeting of the G.H.Q. Purchasing Committee at which Dan Branniff, who was over from Dublin to smooth out some I.R.B. finances in connection with purchases of arms, and D.P. Walsh who was in charge of G.H.Q. purchases and members of sub-committees of the G.H.Q. Purchasing Committee, were present; it was decided to make an attempt to rescue Carty with the use of firearms.

On the 3rd May, 1921, I got a summons to go to Tom Elliott's house in Glasgow that night. When I arrived there Liam Mellows, D.P. Walsh, two Wexford men Flusk and O'Connor, and Tommy Elliott were already there. Walsh was explaining to Mellows that some of the 1st Battalion (Glasgow) officers and also the Brigade O/C. John Carney had decided to attempt to rescue Carty from the custody of the Glasgow police. Mellows asked me rather sharply what was my position in this affair. I said I knew nothing about the plans the Glasgow officers had made. Mellows was against this rescue, and advised strongly that it should be called off. He said it would create police activity, and that some of our arms etc. might be captured, and that it might cause a disruption in the supply and

transport of arms to Ireland. Walsh told Mellows that arrangements had gone too far to be cancelled, and the rescue would have to be carried out. He said the Glasgow officers were determined to carry it out, and that if he asked them to cancel it there would be a terrific hubbub. I had already explained to Mellows that the Scottish Police was an unarmed force, and if they were attacked we might lose the support of the Scottish people.

In order to give Walsh an excuse for calling off the attack I suggested that the attempt should be postponed until Carty was handed over to the R.I.C. escort which would be over shortly to bring him back to Ireland, and that the rescue should be attempted when they, the R.I.C., were bringing him to the boat. Walsh agreed to this and said he would go to the meeting which was being held that night at Campbell's house, Abercromby Street, to make the final plans for the attack, and ask the officers to agree to it, and tell them he was acting on the advice of another G.H.Q. officer.

Mellows, who had just arrived in Glasgow to straighten out some matters in connection with purchases, asked Walsh if he could give him an account of the war material already purchased by the G.H.Q. Purchasing Committee, and the amount that was still in the area. Walsh said that at the moment he could not. I told Mellows that I had already approached Callaghan who was Transport Officer on this matter, and that Callaghan had told me that he knew where all the stuff was, but he did not know how much as it had not been checked. Mellows instructed me to go to Pat McCallum who was Treasurer of the Glasgow District Council of the I.R.B., and tell him that he (Mellows) was in Glasgow checking on war materials. McCallum's sister-in-law, Sarah O'Keane, who was an officer in Cumann na mBan, was also to be told. I arranged to call to Mellows the following night. Walsh and I left Elliott's house together.

I parted with him at Bridgeton Cross and went on to McCallum's and delivered the message.

The following morning, 4th May, 1921, I was in Tom Elliott's shop. Shortly after 12 o'clock noon, Tom Quirke came in and told us that an attack had been made on a prison van in High Street and that a number of people had been killed. Elliott and I were amazed to hear it as we firmly believed that in accordance with Mellow's advice the attempt to rescue Carty would be called off. We learned afterwards that one policeman was killed and another wounded. Intense police activity followed particularly in the area surrounding Campbell's house in Abercromby Street. Hundreds were arrested, questioned and later released. Nearly all the members of the Purchasing Committee were arrested and detained, including D.P. Walsh, Dan Branniff, Carney, Fullerton Brothers and Andy Fagan of Blantyre. This resulted in the complete collapse of all purchasing activities, and in the police raids that followed three or four dumps were captured. I did not go to Elliott's house that night, as arranged, to see Mellows as I feared that I might be overshadowed by the police and so lead them on to Mellows. Elliott told Mellows I would not be calling and explained to him my reasons for not doing so.

The following day Mellows told me he would have to leave, and he instructed me to take over immediate control. He told me to locate whatever dumps were left, and to take any steps necessary to preserve them. I summoned the officers of the other battalions to a meeting to elect an emergency Brigade Staff. Within seven days we had a Brigade Staff, and three days later the first meeting of the Brigade Staff was held.

The following were the Brigade Staff and Council :-

Brigade O/C.	..	Myself.
Adjutant	..	Charlie Diamond.
Quartermaster	..	Jim Fagan.

Assistant Quartermaster	..	Seán Healy.
1st Battalion	..	Myself
2nd Battalion	..	Joe Sweeney (Motherwell)
3rd Battalion	..	John Sweeney (Falkirk)
4th Battalion	..	Sean Wilson (Greenock)
5th Battalion	..	Charlie McHugh (Dumbarton).

I was arrested three days afterwards and brought to Duke Street prison. I was charged with the murder of a policeman during the attack on the van. I told them that I was in Elliott's shop when the attack took place. The charge of murder was dropped. I was then charged under the Firearms Act, and was fined £20 or, in default, 30 days imprisonment. The fine was paid for me and I was released. I was in custody for 10 days altogether. During the time I was in Duke Street prison D.P. Walsh asked me to do anything I could to get him out as he believed he would be hanged. He said to me, "Go to Dublin; tell them the position, that we will be hanged here". D. Branniff and McCarra were arrested in Campbell's house where the plans for the attack were made. They remained there waiting for the result of the attack. On my release from Duke Street prison I sent Walsh's message to Dublin.

In the confusion which followed the arrests and capture of some dumps, people were anxious to get rid of any 'stuff' they had. They were instructed by Callaghan to take it to a store in Green Street, which we used as a clearing station for munitions. The place soon became overstocked. Callaghan sent word to me requesting me to get the stuff cleared as soon as possible. With the assistance of Gerry Frewen, Flusk, O'Connor and Murray, I procured a hand-cart and removed the stuff to Mrs. Murray's, Crown Street. Eventually I had it shipped to Dublin. It was taken to Phil Shanahan's and, I understand, the No. 3 Tipperary Brigade got the bulk of it.

About the 3rd July, 1921, I went to Motherwell to talk to B. MacCluskey concerning the dispatch of some nine revolvers to the North of Ireland. MacCluskey told me that he sent the revolvers in milkcans to P. O'Neill, I.R.B. Centre, Donaghmore, County Tyrone, via Belfast. He also said that he was waiting on word from P. O'Neill, and that they would pay G.H.Q. for them. I told him that I would have to go to Tyrone to investigate the matter further, and make a report to Dublin. I also told him that I did not know the county centre for Tyrone, nor my way about there. MacCluskey said that if I could wait until the 9th instant his cousin Una McKeown would be going to Tyrone and she would put me in touch with O'Neill. I agreed to this and I left Glasgow on the 9th and arrived in Belfast on the 10th. I proceeded to the Falls Road to locate P. Dempsey who lived there. The tram on which I was travelling ran into a sectarian melee. The conductor told the passengers to lie down on the deck that the area was to be cordoned off. Nearly all the passengers decided to remain on the tram and return back to the city. We got back to the city without further incident, and I went to the railway station to inquire the time I could get a train to Donaghmore. I was told there were no trains to Donaghmore, but that a Ford car was going there. The driver agreed to take Una McKeown and myself for which I paid him £2. That night (10th July), I had a talk with Peter O'Neill of Donaghmore. He was to put me in touch with the others the following night. I stayed in O'Neill's house that night.

At about 6 o'clock the following morning O'Neill awoke and told me to get up and have breakfast as a priest would call to take me to Dungannon, as the priest said that if I remained in Donaghmore there would be activity by the "B" Specials. The priest arrived later and drove me to Dungannon station where I got a train to Portadown. I changed there to a train for Dublin.

I arrived in Dublin about dinner time on 11th July. The Truce had already become effective since 12 noon that day and the people were preparing bonfires at the street corners to celebrate it.

I went to Kennedy, 3 Langrishe Place, Summerhill, and arranged to stay there for the night if necessary. A number of blind men lodged in this house and it was, therefore, considered a fairly safe place to stay.

I called at 112 Capel Street and left word with Miss Hegarty, sister of Seán Hegarty, that I was in Dublin and to let Liam Mellows know as I wanted to get in touch with him or other members of G.H.Q. to discuss with them matters concerning the purchase and supply of arms etc. in Glasgow, and the pending trials of D.P. Walsh, D. Braniff and officers and men of the Scottish Brigade.

I also called at 40 Avondale Avenue where Liam Langley's mother lived to make similar enquiries. I spent the next two days in Dublin, during which time I visited Phil Shanahan's, Foley Street, McGloughlin's, O'Connell Street, and Delaney's, 71 Heytesbury Street, and then returned to Glasgow.

(Signed) Seamus Reader
(Seamus Reader)

Date: 6th March 1954
6th March 1954.

WITNESS: Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col.

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

