

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILITIA 1913-21

No. W.S. 777

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 777.....

Witness

Patrick Mills,
16 ~~James' Road~~, JONES' ROAD,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Motherwell I.R.B., Scotland, 1912 - ;
Centre of that Circle, 1917 - ;
Lieutenant, Motherwell Company, Scotland,
1918 - .

Subject.

Provision of arms, Scotland,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2105.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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Statement by Patrick Mills,

16, Jones Road,
Dublin.

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Due to my inability to earn a living in Belmullet, Co. Mayo, I left there in 1907 to seek work in Scotland.

I went to Motherwell where I met a number of older people from my own part of the country, including my uncle, John Mills. In 1912 my uncle and some of the others invited me to join the I.R.B. I agreed and was initiated into the No. 1 (Motherwell) Circle by Mr. Hugh O'Connor, who was Centre at the time. Mr. Canavan was District Centre and Mr. Mulholland the representative on the Supreme Council. A few weeks before the Rising Mr. Canavan died; Mr. Hugh O'Connor became District Centre and my uncle became Centre. There were no I.R.B. activities of any account before 1916.

Mr. Mulholland attended a meeting of the Supreme Council shortly before the Rising but did not pass on to us any definite information. On his return a meeting was held at which three Circles - two from Motherwell and one from Wishaw - were represented. He gave some hints about a Rising but did not mention any definite plans, or arrangements. As a result of this none of the members of these three Circles were able to take part in the Rising. The first intimation of the Rising the members had was the report in the papers on Easter Tuesday Morning. No Volunteer Organisation existed in Motherwell at this time.

Before the Rising we had visits from Sean McDermott and P.T. Daly.

After the Rising Mr. Mulholland was asked to resign and Mr. Andy Fegan became the representative to the Supreme Council. Hugh O'Connor resigned his appointment as District Centre and Mr. Mick Burke was appointed. My Uncle resigned and I became Centre of the No. 1 (Motherwell) Circle. I remained as Centre until the dissolution of the I.R.B. in Motherwell in 1922.

Towards the end of 1918 Joe Vize came over from G.H.Q. and organised the Volunteers in Motherwell. The 2nd Battalion was formed and (the 1st Battalion was in Glasgow), Paddy Clinton was appointed Officer Commanding the Battalion. William Doherty was appointed Officer the Motherwell Company. I was appointed Lieutenant and Joe Sweeney was appointed 2/Lieutenant. Patrick Hughes was appointed Quartermaster. The strength of the Company was about forty. At the beginning membership of the Company was confined to I.R.B. members but later non-I.R.B. men who were considered to be reliable were taken in. The strength of the Company then increased to about seventy. The Officers were selected from members of the I.R.B.

We had a small hall in Shieltmuir where we met and drilled with wooden rifles. The Company as a whole was not armed, though some individuals had revolvers of their own. From the Dumps of arms which we were collecting to send to Ireland we got revolvers for the purpose of demonstration and training in their use. The main activities of the Company was the collection of Arms, ammunition and explosives to send to Ireland. Prior to the arrival of Joe Vize to organise the Volunteers there had been no activities of note in the area.

During 1918 and 1919 I was mostly engaged in the

procuring of arms and ammunition. When these were obtained they were put in suit cases and two men or, if the consignment was large, three men took them to Liverpool. We usually left Glasgow by the 10.10 a.m. train for Liverpool and got off at either Bootle or Aintree station. At Bootle we handed over the arms and ammunition to Neill Kerr or his associate, Steve Lanigan. Neill Kerr and Lanigan arranged for their shipment to Dublin.

Joe Vize used to come over from Dublin and would sometimes stay as long as three months. On one of these visits early in 1919 he arranged a deal with a Quartermaster Sergeant in Hamilton Military Barracks, whereby he got 10 or 12 rifles and ammunition. We went to the Barracks late in the evening to a point arranged by the Quartermaster. Two of our members climbed over the wall got the rifles from the Quartermaster and handed them down to the remainder of the waiting members who carried them away under their coats. Joe Vize was in charge of the party. Some of the others taking part were Jim Byrne, Mick Burke, Edward Lucy, Charlie McMahon, Hugh McGrory and myself. The Quartermaster was charged with the offence and sentenced to imprisonment. On the signing of the Treaty Michael Collins insisted on and obtained his release.

Explosives were obtained in raids on magazines belonging to coal mines in the surrounding towns. No one was ever arrested in connection with the raids.

In other cases members of the Company working in mines carried out explosives without being detected. These explosives were mostly sent to Liverpool.

On one occasion I was sent to meet a man in Glasgow

and gave him a parcel which contained detonators, which had been obtained from the mines. The man was later caught on the Glasgow to Dublin boat with the detonators.

In October 1920 the 2nd Battalion carried out a night raid on a Territorial Army Drill Hall in Bothwell which is between Motherwell and Glasgow. Two Volunteers, one with a Scottish accent, were dressed up in Lanarkshire Constabulary Uniforms. These two men knocked on the door and when the caretaker asked who was there, they replied "Constabulary on duty". When he opened the door a little and saw the uniforms he was taken off his guard and admitted them. The party then seized the caretaker, tied him up and carried off thirty-eight rifles and bayonets, which were put into a small lorry and driven away by Henry Coyle. Charlie Magin was on the lorry with Coyle. The lorry had just been driven away when I heard a shot. I went around to some of the men who were on look-out duty in a field near the place. They pointed the position where the shot was fired. I rushed to the place which ^{was} a gateway where two other men were on guard and saw a policeman lying on the ground with a man standing over him and about to fire another shot at him. There was a strike on at the time and the police were on the alert for any suspicious movements. The policeman saw the two men in the gateway and had asked what they were doing out at this time of night when one of the men fired and wounded him in the arm. The policeman fell and the Volunteer, finding he was still alive was about to fire again. I advised all the men to scatter, warning them to keep to the fields and avoid the roads. The warning was not heeded by two men who were caught walking along the open road, armed with revolvers. They were sentenced to terms of imprisonment

on charges of possession of arms and wounding of the policeman. They were released at the general amnesty. If I hadn't come in time to the man standing over the wounded policeman they would have been charged with murder.

Following this incident, on the suggestion of Andy Fegan, a purchasing Committee was set up. Andy Fegan was in charge and the other members were - Mick Burke Jim Byrne, Barney Quinn and myself. The purpose was to provide money for the purchase of arms by any member of the Volunteers who was in a position to do so, to co-ordinate the purchase and dispatch of arms and ammunition through the proper channels to right quarters. This led to much better organisation. The members of the purchasing committee had the funds and authority to purchase arms. £3.10.0. was the price fixed for a revolver and £4. 10. 0. for an automatic. The money came from G.H.Q. through Joe Vize or Joe Furlong.

When Joe Vize was in prison Joe Furlong came in his place.

On one occasion he was asked by the police to account for his presence in Motherwell. He seemed to satisfy the authorities but D.P. Walsh was sent in his place for a time.

In Wishaw, a man, his wife and son, whose names I cannot just now recall, had done a lot of good work, in collecting arms in the area and storing them in their house. D.P. Walsh on one of his visits, against the advice of some of us, decided that the arms should be packed in a box, marked as machinery, and dispatched to Hammond Lane Foundry in Dublin. The consignment

was caught in transit by the British Authorities. The son was traced as one of the persons who handed in the box to the Railway Company. The Father, Mother and son were afterwards arrested and all suffered imprisonment.

The arms were taken out of the box by the British filled with some other material and sent on to its destination. It lay at the North Wall, Dublin, for about three weeks and as there was no sign of anyone calling for it the British Authorities took it away.

D.P. Walsh told me ^{that shalby} ~~just~~ before the Truce ~~that~~ a man named Carty from Sligo who had been on the run came to Scotland and had been picked up by the Police in Glasgow. He (D.P. Walsh) organised a party to rescue him from the prison van as he was being brought from the prison to the Court for trial. The van was held up but when it was discovered that the door was locked on the inside a shot was fired to break the lock. This shot killed a police sergeant named Johnstone who was travelling with the prisoner. The attempt failed and led to the rounding up of about 40 Volunteers. Sean O'Dare who had taken a leading part in the rescue was sentenced to death for the shooting but was saved by the Truce. D.P. Walsh was recalled and reprimanded by Michael Collins for the loss of the arrested men and dislocation of the organisation, through the attempted rescue of a man who had no authority to be in Scotland.

O'Dare became a Lieutenant in the National Army and was killed in 1922 in a fight with a party in Sligo led by Carty.

During the Truce there were no activities beyond the moving of arms and ammunition already on hand.

Mick Burke while he was in Motherwell as District Centre of the I.R.B. rendered great assistance in procuring and storing arms and ammunition. Although for two years it was not unusual for as many as four or five men to visit his house in one day, he evidently wasn't suspected as his house was never raided.

Signed: Patrick Mills
(Patrick Mills)

Date: 22nd December 1952
22nd December, 1952.

Witness: J. Kearns Comd't.
(J. Kearns) Comd't.

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