

Cover Sheet

WITNESS STATEMENT

CJ Act 1967, s.9; MC Act 1980, ss.5A(3)(a) and 5B; Criminal Procedure Rules 2005, Rule 27.1

Statement of **David Richard Edward Bicknell Q.P.M.**

Age if under 18 **Over 18** (if over 18 insert 'over 18') Occupation: **Retired**

This statement (consisting of: 6..... pages each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated anything in it which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

David Bicknell

Signature:

Date:

27-11-15

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

This statement relates to my career with Metropolitan Police, in particular my service with Special Branch (SB) and the dealings that I had with the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS).

I joined the Metropolitan Police in 1954 after having served, for more than five years, with the Sherwood Forester Regiment of the British Army, I left SB in August, 1985 for Central Service with HMCIC(Her Majesties Chief Inspectorate of Constabulary) and retired in 1988. In total I had 27 years service with SB holding all ranks from Constable to Commander. I have been asked to make a statement regarding interaction I had with the SDS during my career. Officers from Operation Herne visited my home address on the 29th of September 2015 to do this. Also present, at my request, was my daughter, [REDACTED]. The main reason she was present was to assist with communication [REDACTED] and also to allow her to have some insight into my police career for a family interest.

I joined SB in 1957 and filled a variety of roles. The mainstay of SB work at that time was against subversive elements that were considered to pose a threat to the State; these were mainly Communist, extreme Socialist, Fascist, and Anarchist groups and also included the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); because of the large demonstrations it organised. I conducted a number of covert operations against groups of this kind, for instance the squad I worked on would establish that a meeting of communists, or an extremist group was taking place at a particular venue and I would attend to listen and gather intelligence about their intentions or about specific individuals of interest. On one occasion I attended an event after

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the Notting Hill Riot of 1958 that had been advertised in the 'Daily Worker' then the Communist Party newspaper. I attended the meeting under the guise of a Nottingham businessman visiting London. Quite unexpectedly, I was asked to speak to the assembled audience about a recent riot in St Ann's in Nottingham, I was able to carry this off as I am originally from Nottingham and I had up to date information about the riot from local newspapers and my parents. As I had mentioned the 'Daily Worker' I was introduced as 'Comrade' and after my speech I received a round of applause from the audience. This sort of activity was fairly routine to SB officers but it was not supported by any elaborate cover story, false documentation or anything to add authenticity to the deployment. If I was pressed for a name I used a variation of my forenames and had an address of a friend I could use, if necessary.

At that time SB was around 120 strong and had a Deputy Commander as Head of the Branch who reported to the Assistant Commissioner (Crime). We were proud to be part of the Criminal Investigation Department. Many officers had served in World War Two in one of the Services some holding high rank: (Lt. Colonel: Navy Commander and Wing Commander) and we had an attitude of just getting on with business no matter what the circumstances.

In 1968 there were a series of major disturbances across Europe; this included an anti-Vietnam war protest at Grosvenor Square which resulted in a large scale riot. I was present at the Grosvenor Square riot and afterward I learnt that the US servicemen guarding the embassy were close to opening fire with their weapons if some of the more violent protesters had breached the Embassy perimeter. There was concern from senior members within the government that these events could get out of control and they wanted the police to take firmer action. Conrad Dixon, then, I think, a Detective Chief Inspector had the concept of deep infiltration of these potentially dangerous groups in order that we had pre-emptive intelligence about their intentions. This became known as the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS). It was funded by the Home Office. The existence of the SDS was known throughout SB at the time despite the tight knit nature of the organisation.

My direct interaction with the SDS came in June, 1974; surveillance and covert intelligence functions within SB were brigaded together under a new Squad known as 'S' Squad, this

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included the SDS. I was a Superintendent at this time in charge of managing this change. The Detective Inspector who was in charge of the SDS was Derek Brice, he resigned from the Metropolitan Police later in 1974 for personal reasons.

The SDS was about seven or eight officers strong, they were all volunteers and young married men. The reason that married men were favoured is because it was considered there would be less temptation for them to enter into inappropriate relationships with women. The maximum time that an officer was allowed to be a 'hairy' was two years, this was considered an absolute rule. The reasoning behind this was two fold; firstly, the officers deployed were capable and intelligent individuals and they could, in my view have run some of the organisations that they deployed into. We clearly did not want this, so a two year limit prevented officers rising to senior levels within the organisations. Secondly; it was held that officers serving more than two years in a deep undercover role would start to forget that they were policemen.

A two year limit on the deployment would prevent this occurring. I have heard that officers were deployed for as many as seven years in a U/C (undercover) role, in my view this is extremely unwise.

We met the undercover officers around twice per week when deployed in order to de-brief them and maintain supervision. I would go out and meet undercover officers; to this end I grew a beard in order to blend in. During this time I also ensured that the Head of SB, then a Deputy Assistant Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner(Crime), had a meet with the SDS officers. Clearly we couldn't be with them twenty four hours a day but during my tenure there were no reported issues with sexual impropriety.

I can recall that we deployed U/C's in the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Revolutionary Party, [REDACTED] ⁵ and the Troops Out Movement. The intelligence gathered would be fed back into SB. Depending on the nature of the intelligence it would be given to the Senior Officers of Uniform branch in order that they were able to plan and respond in a timely and appropriate fashion to forthcoming public protests and events. I cannot remember any instances that we were reporting on Members of Parliament. In my previous role as a

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Detective Chief Inspector I was a personal protection officer to Prime Minister Harold Wilson, after the 1974 Election, so was well aware of his paranoia about the Security Services.

During my time I cannot recall any U/C's being arrested. They had the sense to keep themselves out of trouble, though it would be unrealistic to expect U/C's not to blend in with the organisations that they infiltrated and there was always a possibility that they might be arrested. We were very conscious of 'agent provocateur' issues and not creating crimes or issues that would not have existed without our presence. This is one of the reasons that we did not want U/C's rising too high in the management of infiltrated organisations as they would then gain too much influence and be expected to take leading roles.

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The U/C's [redacted] would be provided with a vehicle, petrol money and reasonable expenses [redacted] as required for their role. They had to keep a diary to account for expenses and I would reject expenses that I thought were over the top. I recall one officer asking to be given more. I told him that he could always return to uniform if he wished. No U/C's had second jobs during my tenure.

The training for U/C's was informal, generally by word of mouth between experienced and new U/C's. There was no manual or formal training. When U/C's finished their deployments they would return to mainstream SB and get on with their careers. There was no formal care system or psychological provision for U/C's at this time.

In respect of the use of dead children's identities, I would like to say the following; I grew up during WW2 and in the Branch we had many officers that had served in the Second World War and I, personally, recall suffering from German bombing, people that we knew were killed or had been injured including fellow pupils at my school. We had an unsentimental attitude of getting on with the job, no matter what.

This was reflected in the use of dead children's ID's, it was a practical solution to the problem which we faced in creating plausible identities. The birth certificate is the root document used in order to obtain other identity documents. At the time we didn't consider the sentimental or

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emotional impact of this. I don't know where this practice originated and in my opinion it will be difficult to find out. In my mind it was akin to the Second World War film, 'The man who never was'. British intelligence created a false identity for a corpse in order to fool the Germans about the location of a planned invasion.

The SB relationship with MI5 was generally good at an operational level. We considered them to be the strategic intelligence advisors of the government. We undertook various enquiries on their behalf, such as tracing enquiries. At a senior level there was tension between MI5 and SB, this was due to the similarity of role and cross over of responsibilities. I remember having a 'cards on the table' discussion with MI5 regards their coverage of various subversive groups [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] in my view, our coverage was more consistent.

In respect of the intelligence that the SDS gathered, there was a reporting and dissemination process that went through the established SB system. Important intelligence or developments would be brought to the attention of the D.A.C SB, and the Assistant Commissioner(Crime). The Home Office Police Section would then be privy to matters of significance. However, there was no direct contact between the SDS and Home Office. All intelligence would have passed through appropriate reporting mechanisms and well maintained links.

As a Superintendent I was in charge of 'S' Squad for four to six months in 1974. The D.A.C. then came to the conclusion that the sensitivity of 'S' Squad warranted a Chief Superintendent being in charge. This ended my direct supervision of the SDS but I remained as Deputy for a few more months.

I was asked by officers from Operation Herne about the Industrial Section of SB and the Economic League. I do not have any knowledge of the Economic League. However I do remember something about the SB Industrial Section. I can say that SB spent time looking at subversive groups and individuals and inevitably they would be involved in strikes. We did not share information or intelligence lightly about any matter and it would only have been on a 'need to know' basis.

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We did not routinely share information with private companies, this was not permitted. If information was shared it would have been in exceptional circumstances.

We did share intelligence about subversives and subversive groups with MI5. I cannot say what they did with this afterward.

I was asked by officers from Operation Herne about examples of good and bad events that happened on the SDS. I can recall that [REDACTED]

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I also remember that one of the U/C's was called to a meeting in a pub while deployed with his target group, he was confronted with both his false Birth and Death certificate from his assumed identity and had to talk himself out 'post haste'. I had other plain clothes officers on hand to extract him, but they were not needed. Although it was anticipated, there was no adverse publicity at the time.

Almost thirty years have past since I retired from the Police Service and more than forty years since I was in charge of the SDS in a direct sense. Some of the fine detail may have been forgotten, however I can say that the SDS performed a valuable role in gathering intelligence against the threats that we faced in those years. It is fair to say that the Soviet Union was perceived to be a real and present existential danger to the UK for a significant period during this time. This is difficult for people to understand now. My daughter, for a time was learning Russian at school but I banned her from a school visit to the Soviet Union because of my SB position. A large proportion of our targets were extreme left wing parties which were believed to have had direct links or sympathies for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and could have acted as a 'fifth column' if the 'Cold War' heated up.

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