ORIGINAL

ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 163

Witness

Patrick Rankin

Identity

Member of I.V. Derry, 1915-16.

Subject

(a) National events, 1907-1916.
(b) Easter 1916 - Dundalk area.
(G.P.O)

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.435

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

I, Patrick Rankin, was born in Newry in 1889 and I am a painter by trade. I became a member of the I.R.B. in 1907, (the month of the International Exhibition in Dublin) Before I became a member of the I.R.B. I was two years on the waiting list. I was sponsored by Robert Kelly, Newry, the Centre for Co. Down, and John Southwell, the Centre for Co. Armagh. The above took place in Newry. The following men were members in Newry:- George Cahill, Frank Patterson, James Morgan, R.I.P., Edward McCann, R.I.P., Seamus O'Hanlon, Lislea, Co. Armagh (went to New York, about 1906, was home on holidays in 1947)

There was Henry Murphy living in Castlewellan, Co. Down. I don't know what his position was in the I.R.B. Dead since. R. Kelly, Newry, would know this man.

Very little progress was made during these years 1907 to 1913. Our officer's reason was precaution and build up the I.R.B. either by good men or none, so from my own experience, the slow but sure medium was adopted.
1907. Our officers held meetings at Slieve Gullion Mountain, Co. Armagh. 1908, we held our meeting on Rostrevor Mountain, Co. Down. So our officers were taking plenty of precautions that no R.I.C. would know any of our proceedings.

In April 1913 I went to Toronto, Canada, and worked at my trade in that city until June 1914. There was no I.R.B. Society or anything near it in that city; the only live Irish organisatio there was the Ancient Order of Hibernians, but as I did not belong to this Order, I got no support to organise anything better. The A.O.H. did one good job in that city when "The Play Boy" was being staged by the Irish Company. They organised opposition each night at the performances. They were expelled by force on each occasion so the Order did something active.

We organised six Gaelic gootball teams and four hurling

teams during 1913. We all met outside St. Patrick's Church, Toronto, each Sunday after last Mass and as we were from every county in Ireland we were soon making progress for Irish Ireland and if I had remained longer in that city we would have made further progress. Our teams were not allowed to play any games on Sunday by order of the Toronto City Council so we had to practise each evening on reclaimed dump grounds belonging to the City Council. This ground was also used by baseball, rugby and soccer teams, but our Gaelic teams did very well and kept alive some Irish life for our fellow countrymen.

By order of the City Council all business houses had to remove all cigarette and chewing gum machines from the streets on Saturday nights and on Sundays the Salvation Army band played hymns on the streets.

Early in June 1914 I went to live in Philadelphia and joined the Irish Club (Clan na Gael) in that city which was composed of the most extreme of the I.R.B. , so I was quite at home. There were plenty of young Irishmen members also, but I felt very lonely for some time, and if Toronto is puritan in outlook, well, American city life makes one feel like heading for one of Dante's three lower regions. So to counteract this I joined the City National Guard after one month in Philadelphia. My friends in the Irish Club told me it was composed of the worst elements of the city, and would not advise members to join that organisation. I asked them how we were to train and prepare for the future.

I went to the rifle range every Saturday night and fired my course bringing home ammunition on each occasion, thus by Dec. 1914, I had accumulated over (600) six hundred rounds of Springfield ammunition in my lodgings.

As regards the complaint in the Irish Club against the National Guard officers and men, it was false, as I found from experience. They treated me as a man and a coming soldier and

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they were in all respects soldiers and men and were a credit to their country. Each Saturday there were several full time sergeants giving the other recruits and myself attention and advice which one would not receive in similar positions in the English Army. I reported such attention to the people of the Irish Club and anything that looked to me like America preparing for entry into the war. The Irish Club paid no attention to my reports.

About September 1914 Roger Casement came to Philadelphia and one Sunday he reviewed several hundred young Irishmen in uniform, but who had no rifles, etc. Casement addressed them for some time telling them they would be needed soon and to prepare for the occasion. He asked for each single man to go home to Ireland as they would be wanted there. The assembled men answered Casement with ringing cheers that they would.

As I had no uniform I was a spectator of this and I was delighted at the reception given to Casement and looked forward to getting quite a lot of new men for the National Guard and Ireland. But no, the following Sunday I started to canvass for recruits but could get no one. I asked them about the answer they gave to Casement the previous Sunday or how they were to fulfil it by only wearing an Irish uniform and no rifle, etc. That was the position up to December 1914. I approached the officers of the Club and they were as bad. No support for me. Like New York and Boston, here was a city with plenty of young men who could have followed Casement's advice , instead of Casement having to seek aid ~~aid~~ from Irish prisoners of war in Germany.

I informed the Irish Club, early in January, that I was going home to Ireland. They gave me a letter to John Devoy to be delivered in New York. Did they tell me what was in the letter? No. I was the first in Philadelphia to carry out Casement's request and they would not trust the man who was going to do his duty. I think they were glad to get rid of me, or so it seemed.

They did not even ask me had I sufficient money to take me home. As these people did not seem to be playing the game I never told one in the Irish Club about the ammunition I had at my lodgings in Philadelphia. Safety first!

How were our Irish Club members of the I.R.B. situated as regards their oath to the Order, and could these members not assert themselves, and, if not returning to Ireland themselves, see to it that the younger Irishmen did go. As things turned out all these young men were conscripted for the American Army when she entered the war in 1917. Would it not have been better had they heeded Roger Casement's advice?

I sailed from New York early in January 1914 and arrived in Liverpool. The Customs Officer who examined my trunk was very nice and asked me had I any firearms, etc. I handed him my 22 bore Stevens rifle, which I had purchased in Stephen Byrne's, Hill St., Newry, in 1909. I had brought it with me when going to Toronto in 1913. The Customs Officer thanked me for handing it up to him and remarked "if all passengers coming home from the U.S.A. did likewise, it would help and save a lot of searching". He examined my books which I had collected in Toronto and Philadelphia and as he was getting near the bottom of my trunk looking at more books, a brother officer called him and asked if he was nearly finished with me, as he required his help for other passengers. My examiner replied that he was finished and chalked my trunk. I did not delay about locking the trunk as I had my six hundred rounds of Springfield ammunition underneath the books in the trunk. The Customs Officer gave me a clearance sheet to be signed by Stephen Byrne in Newry, as proof of my buying the rifle from him. I got the form signed and Patrick Larkin, Queen St. Newry, R.I.P. (a crew member of the SS.Iveagh plying between Newry and Liverpool) took the signed form with him to Liverpool and in one week's time had the Steven's rifle to Newry for me. This rifle was very handy for carrying on one's person as it could be broken at

the trigger, the barrel going up one sleeve of the coat and the butt up the other. This was very handy when going for football; or hurling! practice in the Marshes in case one met R.I.C. patrols

Early in 1915 I went to Liverpool to work at my trade as trade was bad in Newry, and returned before conscription came in force.

Things in Newry and district were very low as regards Volunteers or I.R.B. The people did not seem to care about such things, and there did not seem to be any meetings of these organisations or any preparations being made for the future. The week before the Rising John Southwell, who was Centre for the I.R.B. in County Armagh, and who resided in Newry, asked me to go with him to Dundalk. We went there on our bicycles on Monday night and met Patrick Hughes and Donal O'Hannigan. The latter seemed in charge of arrangements and informed us that there was going to be a Rising next week. John Southwell was to organise and get his men from Newry, bring them to Dundalk and join up with the Dundalk and Louth men on Easter Sunday. J. Southwell promised them he would do his best. I was given orders to buy shotgun ammunition in Newry and deliver same in Dundalk as soon as possibl I accepted some money from P. Hughes or D. O'Hannigan and returned to Newry that night or Tuesday morning. Next night J. Southwell and I met Robert Kelly, Mary St., Newry, who was for some years Centre for the I.R.B. in Co. Down. R. Kelly said he would take no orders from Dundalk or Co. Louth. Meantime I got some friends who were not members of the I.R.B., to collect shotgun ammunition around the shops in Newry. The men were John Bolger, R.I.P. and John Marron, R.I.P. Before Thursday I completed the collection of six hundred rounds and brought them with me, by passenger train, on Saturday night to Dundalk.

Good Friday, 1916.

On Friday night, J. Southwell and I cycled to Dundalk to report progress. J. Southwell had no names or promise of men from Newry. We reported what R. Kelly had said. P. Hughes asked for

Kelly to come to Dundalk and we were told to tell Kelly the Rising was official and final. We went back to Newry that night and reported to R. Kelly. He still refused to take any orders from Dundalk. I asked in Newry if they had any word from the North or orders through the I.R.B. I was told there was no word, or orders. I asked R. Kelly, early in the week, would he go to Dundalk himself but he refused to go. At this time there was no cencelling order from Owen McNeill.

At a conference in Newry, Peter McCann, Schoolteacher, proposed that he should travel by train to Dublin and see Mr. Wyse Power to find out if the Dundalk report was genuine.

Holy Saturday, 1916.

Peter came back from Dublin after seeing some persons he knew but he could not verify the report. I told my Newry friends of the I.R.B. before Peter McCann left for Dublin that his journey would be fruitless as Peter was not a member of the I.R.B. and a person going into Dublin on Holy Saturday seeking information would be looked upon as a spy. Not that Peter McCann was a subject for suspicion, as he is one of the best Irishmen living.

Easter Sunday, 1916.

On Easter Sunday, after further chats with my Newry friends, my brother Owen - married and having a wife and 2 children - proposed that we cycle to Dundalk and procure some news. We left Newry about noon. Arriving in Dundalk we were informed that the Dundalk men were gone away in the Dublin direction. We cycled as far as Ardee as it was off the main road, therefore less exposed to police interference, etc. We inquired from people around Ardee if the Dundalk men had passed that way and they said "Yes, they passed several hours ago". My brother and I were strangers in this district so we presumed that the people took us to be R.I.C. or spies, looking for information, so we returned to Dromiskin, Co. Louth, that night and stayed with our aunt, Mrs. Parks, returning to Newry the following morning.

Easter Monday, 1916.

We met our ffriends in Newry and reported our experience. Peter McCann proposed that the three of us (Peter, my brother Owen and myself) should go to Dublin tomorrow, Tuesday, leaving Newry at 10.30 a.m. I was in a bad fix for once and agreed to this proposal of Peter's. I thought it over, one brother in the family was sufficient, and Peter McCann was better living for Ireland.

Easter Tuesday, 1916.

On Tuesday morning I left Newry before Owen or Peter arrived at our pre-appointed rendezvous, cycling via Dromalane Road, up Lanigan's Loanan which took me out where now stands Cloghue Church. I continued up the Dublin road until I came to Thomas O'Neill's place. He worked in the Mineral Waters Co. and is now living in New York. I got John Southwell's bicycle there as it was more free than my own, which was a Pierce of Wexford, and very heavy. I continued my journey along the main road by Connolly's publichouse, turning off at Jonesboro Church, through Moyara Pass into Dundalk, and thence by the Ardee Road to Drogheda and Balbriggan. It rained very heavily from I left Balbriggan until I arrived in Dublin about 7.30 p.m. (I carried a six inch revolver on my journey and, fortunately, I was not stopped by the police). I went to my sister, Mrs. Dillon, livin in Glengarriff Parade, N.C.R. and changed into her husband's clothes. I was very thankful for the change. After I had rested, my brother-in-law and I went down the city as far as the G.P.O. to see things for ourselves. We experienced no interference during our walk, but my brother-in-law was keeping a close watch on me. After an hour or so we returned to his house again I slept with my brother-in-law that night and placed my revolver and ammunition in a safe place in the bedroom, but in the morning they were gone.

Wednesday, Easter Week 1916.

I said nothing, but I would have great difficulty getting away from the house without raising the suspicions of those in

the house. I put my cap in my pocket and told my friends I was going into the yard to clean my bicycle. As soon as I got into the yard I cleared over a little wall into Innisfallen Parade, ~~then~~ thence to Dorset St. I was stopped by soldiers of the Royal Irish Rifles. This being a Northern Regiment I had to be careful. The troops were clearing all people from southwards to northwards of Dorset St. I asked someone to direct me to Parnell St. and they guided me down to Kennedy's Bakery in that street as there were no troops about I decided to procure some bread in the Bakery. While waiting my turn at the counter a young woman, of about 25 years, asked the assistant for six loaves of bread and they were papered up for her. The young woman took them and said in brutal fashion "you are paid" as she walked out of the shop. I asked the assistant if she had many customers like that and she said that was the first for that day. I proceeded to the Parnell Monument where a large crowd had collected. In the hope of getting some information before going to the G.P.O. I next moved down past the Rotunda Hospital into Moore St. as far as the Coliseum Cinema where a large crowd of people had gathered in the top windows of the houses. The people warned me of the presence of a man carrying a large sword. This man had procured a sword from the Wax Works and was under the influence of drink and was menacing the people going into the Coliseum in Henry St. I avoided the man with the sword and proceeded into the Coliseum after getting my bearings from a young dispatch man. There were barricades at the entrance to the Theatre with an armed Volunteer behind them. I approached the sentry at the barricade and was asked my name and where I came from. I replied 'Newry'. One Volunteer replied "Here is a man from Omeath". This man, P. O'Boyle, was working in Liverpool and came over with the boys before the Rising. He fought in the G.P.O. and was imprisoned later in England (He was drowned near Dublin some years ago, R.I.P.) I was taken in charge by Leo Henderson and given some bread and tea. He said "Take it now. God knows when you may get more". My tea was given to me in a silver tankard. In a short time I was brought before Tom Clarke who knew

me previously and he asked me had I any news of the North. I told him I had none. I think the old veteran knew as much as I did, but he never said a bad word about any man or county in the North. He looked about 30 years younger and seemed so happy you would imagine you were talking to him in his old shop in Parnell Street. He thanked me for getting through to the G.P.O. but he would have been delighted and happy to have had some hundreds of his own people from the Northern Counties present.

Tom Clarke introduced me to Henry O'Hanrahan who was in charg of the rifles and ammunition, and he issued a Lee Enfield and ammunition to me. Never will I forget the kind features of Henry he seemed so out of place in charge of such weapons, one could imagine him more at home in a library of books, but he had the heart of a lion which he proved in death.

My first duty on Wednesday was doing sentry for the Ring brothers (this family gave about five boys to the Rising) who were making entrances through several houses in Moore St. Later my job was on the roof of the G.P.O. with a party of men armed with rifles and home made grenades facing Nelson Pillar. We were to watch for any enemy approach on the G.P.O. especially during the night. About one o'clock in the morning a Dublin man, who was in charge of us, asked me to look out between the stone balustrades of the roof facing O'Connell St. and see if any enemy were coming. I had only time to draw back to my position when a bullet grazed his ear and mine, it was a very near shave as both of us were lying back on the roof. The shot came from Earl St. or the Amiens St. direction.

Thursday, Easter Week 1916.

At daybreak we were brought down from the roof to the interio of the G.P.O. to prepare for a siege by carrying P.O. bags of coal in relays of men, from the Post Office yard, and depositing them on the ground floor of the G.P.O. to serve as a barricade in the event of an attack. The men, carrying the sacks of coal, had to

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~~had to~~ pass a telegram vacuum pump which run from the ground floor to the ceiling. As the brass casing shone in the sun the sniper fired, when the shine was obscured by a passing coal carrier, through the ground floor windows from Earl St. direction the same direction from which I was fired on the previous morning on the roof. Our volunteers got his range and we were not troubled further. The men who were on the roof all night Wednesday and from five o'clock Thursday morning until midday carried bags of coal. (No person complained). The barricade was placed parallel with O'Connell St. on the ground floor about 15 ft. from the windows of O'Connell St. Work started at 6 a.m. on Thursday morning and continued to 11 a.m. same day. We placed a sentry at the Vacuum Pump and as each man passed it he stooped low. This undoubtedly saved many lives. No sooner had the barricade been completed than shells began falling on the G.P.O., starting numerous fires. About 11.20 a.m. we got orders to remove the barricade of coals to the yard again. As this took some time, we were ordered to rest for a few hours on a bed of bricks and mortar in what was once a room at the corner facing Nelson Pillar. Needless to say, we all slept the sleep of the just. That night we started work making holes in the walls of buildings adjoining the Post Office leading along Henry St. This work proceeded until the enemy were observed when we were ordered to cease work. This was about 3 or 4 o'c. on Friday morning.

Friday, Easter Week, 1916.

The remainder of the day was spent removing inflammable material from the vicinity of the fire which we tried hard to subdue with what means we had at our disposal. We had good firefighting equipment in the G.P.O. and also used buckets, etc. On Friday evening, between 6 and 7 o'clock, we fell in in Henry St. where we were to await orders. While waiting there, The O'Rahilly came out of the Coliseum and asked for 6 or 7 Volunteers to follow him to the basement of the G.P.O. and remove

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grenades and other inflammable articles from the fire. I was one of the volunteers and after removing the articles we were ordered back to our ranks in Henry St. The basement of the P.O. was like a lake of water which collected from the hoses used to put out the fire ~~later~~. The O'Rahilly was the last to leave and within a few minutes a rumour went through the ranks of the men that the O'Rahilly was killed. This rumour may have been wrong. I heard from others later that he was shot in Moore St. I went back to my former position in Henry St. which was No. 1 from the Nelson Pillar direction and Earls St. Whilst standing here about ten minutes I was surprised on turning to my right to see a young boy standing to attention. He told me he was 11 years of age and had been carrying dispatches during the week. He had a great head of curls and a cap on his head had a large hole in it. I asked him to come from the danger side on the right to the left side, but he said he was safe enough. I pushed him into No. 2 position for safety and to my surprise I discovered that instead of a rifle he carried a large cross on his right hand side. I forgot this young man's name.

About 8 o'clock on Friday evening we got orders to clear our own barricades in Henry St. and immediately our men moved into Moore St. in single file, seven paces apart, along both sides of the street. Upon reaching Moore St. we were met by rifle fire from the enemy who were behind barricades at the top of the street with their backs to the Rotunda Hospital. I was on the right hand path keeping the proper distance (all the men were very cool and correct). I was passed by a young volunteer, named "Lieut. F. Macken" just before I came to Moore Lane. As he moved past me he shouted "Oh, my God" and fell in my path. I caught him in my arms, but he was dead in a minute, shot in the centre of the forehead. I laid him down on the path and said a short prayer. The enemy who shot this young volunteer in uniform could just as easily have got me, as they took the man in uniform to be an officer, so they picked him off.

Would it not have been better, and fair to us all, to wait until it was dark? Then we would not have had our young Volunteers, who saved every penny to buy their uniforms, made easy targets for the enemy.

My companions turned into Moore Lane, and I followed suit. We went to the rear of the houses and tried the doors which we found were locked from within as the people had been ordered out previously. I found one door unlocked and called my comrades, five or six of whom followed me into the house. The kitchen table was set for tea with bread, milk sugar, etc., the owners must have had short notice, and my friends and I helped ourselves to a meal. Before making our tea we searched the house for concealed enemy, but all was well. There was very heavy firing all through the night and continued till near daybreak. We occupied one bedroom in the house and prepared our guard for the night. I proposed doing guard first while my comrades slept and this was agreed to and my friends were soon asleep in the one bed in the room. One of them, a young Dublin Fusilier (who fought well with us) was snoring so loud that he could be heard 50 yards away. I tried to waken him, but for fear of any enemy being next door, as there were Volunteers in one house and the enemy in the next, with crossfire all during the night, so the noise from my comrade snoring and the firing outside kept me from sleeping for a long time. I did not waken until early Saturday morning.

<u>Saturday, Easter Week, 1916.</u>

The want of sleep is dreadful. My snoring comrade told me next morning that he heard me alright but was in such a state that he could have killed me for trying to waken him. On Saturday evening we were told my one of our own officers whom I did not know and who carried a white flag, that we were to come out and surrender. We were marched out to O'Connell St. and halted between Parnell Statue and Nelson Pillar facing the Gresham Hotel where each Volunteer laid down his arms and ammunition in front of him. We were then eased off from our original positions to

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make room for further Volunteers and inspected by an enemy officer who was accompanied by about twelve aide-de-camps. When the officer came to me he stopped and discovered at my feet several rounds of dum-dum bullets, called me a dog and several choise names. I stared him but never answered for fear he would call me a coward. None of my comrades spoke up on my behalf as they were aware that he had moved from our original position. The officer eventually moved on while his aides were filling their pockets with small arms, etc. for souvenirs. I was saying my prayers as never before as he moved away. We were eventually moved into the lawn of the Rotunda Hospital, which was filled with our companions, and guarded by English soldiers and a few D.M.P. The Officer i/c. was a brute; he gave many orders to sentries, such as "if any Volunteer stood up or went on his knee he was to be shot". This officer was dressed in khaki and very drunk. We slept there the whole night; the weather was good, thank God.

Sunday, 30 April 1916.

When morning came there were three or four of my companions lying on top of me and others likewise. The church bells were ringing, calling the faithful. An old woman passed by saying "God bless you, boys". I thanked God for one kind person that morning. The enemy officer i/c. came along, drunk as usual; he took the rifle with bayonet from the sentry and went over to RR Henry (WILLIE) Pearse, who was close to the path, and cut the epaulette from his tunic with the bayonet. He discovered a small piece of paper which he read, and after doing so, tore it into fragments RR and threw them at Henry's (WILLIE) face. Henry (WILLIE) told us afterwards that the note concerned sending of rations to one of our outposts attached to the G.P.O. garrison. We surmised that the officer's plan was that some Volunteers would have objected to the officer's RR treatment of Henry (WILLIE) Pearse and then the brute would have used his gun.

About twelve o'clock we marched out of the Rotunda under escort, four deep soldiers and four deep prisoners - two lines of

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soldiers on our right and two on our left - down O'Connell St., the Quays, past Kilmainham to Keogh Barracks. During the march not one person was to be seen at door or window. Everything was silent except the tramp of free men and their escort, but we were aware that there were hearts beating the silence of Dublin's best As we arrived near the Barracks things began to get a little bit more sharper as Dublin's worst was let loose from their stockades the women being the worst. They looked like a few who were around during the French Revolution. One of my companions answered one of the women and a sergeant broke through our ranks and struck him on the breast with his rifle with full force saying "if you speak again I'll kill you". The women were allowed to follow our men to barracks, shouting to the soldiers "use your rifles on the German so and so's". Arriving at the barrack gate one of my companions collapsed from weakness, but came through on receiving aid. Inside, the English soldiers came along to meet our men telling ~~them~~ us ~~they~~ we were all going to be shot and to hand over any money or watches. I am sorry to say quite a few fell for this mean trick. One man beside me put his hand in his pocket to hand his watch over when I told him to wait until he was going to be shot. We were seated around the floor in the gymnasium when a party of "G" men arrived each with a large flower in the buttonhole of his coat. One would imagine that they were going to a wedding as they were all smiles. Two of the detectives stood close to me talking. One said to the other "Is that Daly?" pointing in the direction of Daly of Limerick. The other replied that he did not know whereupon the first walked over to Daly and asked him if he was Daly, and the brave man said he was, so he was removed from the gymnasium.

We were kept busy for the remainder of our stay in the barracks having our finger prints taken. The "G" men were told by an officer to hurry up the prisoners. Seamus Donoghue of Limerpool was double-jointed in the fingers; the detectives tried again and again without any success, so he told Seamus and the remainder of us to go to hell. As we left the gymnasium the

prisoners marched in single file between an English officer in khaki and a "G" man. Each man had to give his name and address. Dr. James Ryan was detained by the "G" man for some time after telling his name, address and profession. The "G" man would say "I have a charge against Dr. Ryan". The prisoners were held up by the persistence of the "G" Man, so the officer, in rage, said "I am in charge here, proceed Ryan". The prisoners then proceeded to the barrack square where already our comrades were assembled in single file. We fell in likewise. There were several English soldiers going along the line with baskets of biscuits; nearing the end of the line they ran short of biscuits and substituted bully beef. The soldiers told us if we had been able to hold out for another week, they, the English, would have been starving.

We were next marched to the Quays en route for England. A number of our men were illtreated on the boat and also during the passage to England. We were packed like cattle in all parts of the boat and we got a hostile reception when we arrived at Stafford. Of course, what could we expect from our enemy's people. Stafford Prison was a gaol for military prisoners during the war. Each of us was given solitary confinement for four weeks with one hour's exercise outside, going around the ring, which was of concrete, three feet wide. Each man keeping about seven paces apart and no talking allowed. We were watched by a sergeant on a raised concrete post. The first week it rained every day so we had no exercise, but headaches instead.

My clothes were taken from me on the second day for fumigation and each of us was locked up separately. We could not tell what became of our comrades, but I expect they got the same treatment as I did. I was given a light suit of dungarees which were very cold as we were not allowed underclothing.

Fifteen of us were then taken to the ~~Laundry~~ ABULITION on the ground floor of the prison; there, the staff sergeant of the prison

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ordered a Corporal Leonard of his staff to take a note of each prisoner's belongings. This N.C.O. stood to attention, saluting the staff sergeant, saying "Staff-Sir, I refuse to do this" then turned on his heel and marched away. I was delighted at this and said to myself "there goes one good Englishman". The staff sergeant was purple with rage but kept very cool and he was not stuck for long as two other sergeants did the needful. Several watches and about £15 were taken from us and a note of this was taken by the sergeant. We were then returned to our cells and locked up. We discovered later that this mean trick was not carried out on our fellow prisoners.

When we were released from solitary confinement we were exercising from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. At 11 a.m. each morning and at 2.30 each evening the O/C of the Camp would receive any complaints. He was usually accompanied by the staff sergeant against whom I lodged a complaint.— I made my case and should have seen the staff sergeant's face. I gave him the works with a vengeance and we received our money and watches next day. The O/C. was very just to us and acted as a gentleman.

Before leaving this report I must refer to our treatment while in solitary confinement. Our breakfast was served by our own men at 7.30 a.m. and consisted of cocoa and one slice of dark bread (not sufficient). Lunch 12.30 - cabbage water, 2 ozs. of horse flesh and one and a half potatoes (bad). 5 o'clock, cocoa and piece of dark bread. On Sundays we got our cocoa at 3.30 p.m. so that the English staff could get leave off and the prisoners had to wait until 7.30 a.m. next morning for something to eat. The horse flesh was as hard as plug tobacco and when your cell was opened next morning you had a shot with it at your comrades.

As we marched from our cells each morning for recreation we could see English prisoners in their cells who were doing terms for crimes connected with the war. Our men would be singing Irish songs and playing Irish marches on mouthorgans and you

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would feel sorry for the poor prisoners standing in their cells, but the obscure glass prevented them from seeing us.

Very often we could see these soldiers marching up and down with full kits in the blazing sun, and this punishment would go on for hours. There were Canadians, Australians and South Africans there and we pitied them.

We went to Mass each Sunday under escort. One of our priests was very nice while the other was the direct opposite.

Our laundry, which was numbered, was done each week by English prisoners. Despite orders to the contrary we put matches and cigarettes in our laundry each week for the unfortunate prisoners.

While in solitary confinement we had to scrub our floors which were of freestone and hard to clean, but our ground floor sergeant was very kind and asked us to sing some Irish songs which we did in great style, to the consternation of the sergeant on the upper floor, who would shout "silence", but our sergeant told us not to heed him, saying "I am in charge of this floor" , so the boys kept on singing, being joined by the men on the upper floor whose sergeant could not tell one from the other. It was a great change from confinement.

Our sergeant was married to a Dublin woman, so this Irish girl did some good deed for her fellow countrymen.

When we went to Stafford Prison first we were not allowed any reading matter, not even a prayer book or bible which would have been very acceptable indeed, and all pencils and pens were taken from us to make it more trying.

While in confinement, the sentry on his rounds would pause at each cell window nibbling at a banana to annoy us. He usually received a shower of orange skins from the cells above and would move off surprised, but not as much surprised as we fellows on the ground floor.

PB

Thanks to the staff the men on the upper floor were not searched for their money like us, the fifteen pilgrims. These men used to give the warder sergeant 2/- and he would bring in 1/- worth of oranges, etc. to the prisoners. I did not discover this until I left confinement, so you can see we had a black market even in those days.

Early in July we were ordered by our own officers to pack up as we were going to Wales. Next we proceeded to Stafford Station where we were told, first, to give a cheer for the Camp O/C., next in order, each good sergeant and, last of all, the sergeant who illtreated us. Michael Collins gave the signal by whistle and you should have heard the salvo for the former men, and the appropriate one for the latter who was present "Hell roast the sergeant". Of course, all the sergeants were aware of our intentions.

We arrived at Frongoch Internment Camp which consisted of a North and South Camp. I was confined to the latter which consisted of wooden huts, lately vacated by German prisoners of war. We were allowed to walk around or play football or hurling, but the grounds were not suitable for those games as they were very hilly, but it was a very healthy place.

One hut for receiving parcels and letters was in charge of an English N.C.O. and the prisoners signed for their parcels there One prisoner was informed that there was a parcel for him and duly signed the form. The sergeant opened the parcel and removed a large bottle of Irish whiskey, telling the prisoner that he was not allowed strong drink and retaining the whiskey. The prisoner gave him plenty of strong language in return and disappeared.

The sentries in charge of us were all men over age for war work and at night time you could hear them say "No.1, all's well" and so on.

The prisoners were not idle during the day or night as they

RR

had Irish classes and dances to attend. There was one good artist at the camp, Liam O'Ryan, and he sketched the interior and exterior of the huts and the surroundings. Each prisoner had his book to take/down songs and satire of the camp dealing with 1916, and those who were gone, R.I.P.

In the North Camp, which was called the Old Distillery, there were more Irish prisoners, but we were not allowed to visit them unless we received a special pass. Some men were released from both camps in August 1916. The men remaining in the North Camp were mostly from England, having been born there. At a Roll Call here one day a few good volunteers answered their names. They were immediately arrested and taken away for a draft for the English Army and the remainder of the prisoners were prepared for the next Roll Call. They did not answer when their names were called, though this was attempted day after day and the prisoners remained masters of the situation.

We knew some soldiers in an adjoining camp and when these men came to do guard duties at our camp they posted letters for us. This leakage was soon discovered by the authorities and our guards were changed. Our new guards were addressed by their O/C. as follows:- "Don't have any dealings with your prisoners. Your former soldiers were sent away as a disgrace to their regiment, so now, men, hold the honour of your regiment". No sooner were the new guards on than they would ask our prisoners if they had any letters to post home, so you see the Empire was beginning to fall to pieces.

Early in July 1916, Volunteers from the North and South Camps were brought under guard to nearby railway station and taken to London, arriving there about 6 p.m. and lodged in Wormwood Scrubbs to be tried by a Commission set up by the English Government. This was only a farce and a waste of time and money, bringing hundreds of men to London and then returning

RB

them to Wales, whereas the Committee of six could have come to Wales. After several days in London, we were examined and tried and returned to Wales.

About the end of August 1916 I was discharged from Frongoch Prison and returned to Newry.

Signed: Patrick Rankin

Date: 9/11/48

Witness: John Mc Boy.