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STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

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Identity

Member of Fianna Eireann, 1909 - ;
" " I.R.B. Dublin 1915 - ;
" " 'F' Company, 4th Battalion Dublin Brigade Irish Volunteers, 1916.

Subject

His Prison experiences 1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY ROBERT HOLLAND

Hollybrook House, Naas Road, Inchicore, Dublin.

Part I (Pages 1 to 30).

I will do my best to give you a picture of my experiences as a prisoner in this prison called Knutsford.

We arrived here on 4th or 5th May, 1916, after a very weary and sickening journey in the hold of a cattle-boat, hungry and thirsty. I have already mentioned that a large percentage of the men who participated in the Insurrection were brothers or cousins. As we entered the gates of the prison we could see that already there were a number of other Irish insurgents in residence, as they were up at their cell windows.

We were marched into the Main Hall and the order was given to form "double file" - brothers and relations getting together. My brother Dan and I stayed together. We were then checked in and marched off to our respective wings, "A", "B", "C", etc., etc. Each wing had three tiers of cells and you climbed a steel spiral stairs to "2" and "3". There was a narrow walk by the cell door about three feet wide, and an iron railing on each landing. There was a wire mesh from side to side to protect anyone on the main floor from getting a wallop of anything from overhead and to prevent anyone attempting suicide. All cell doors were steel-lined both inside and outside. The door was also fitted with what was known as a spy-hole; it was about 1½ inches in diameter and on a swivel. The door opened into the cell. On the outside wall your number was on a black steel plate and just beside that there was a recess in the wall about 12 inches by 6 inches on the inside wall. This space was filled in with thick muffled glass, and a gas jet was fitted behind that glass.

The inside fittings were as follows:- a bell, it was a small crude piece of bent steel and when you pulled this your number stood out on the wall outside and a bell in the centre of the landing, on your wing, would ring. I might mention here that inquisitive guests on their first or second day rang their bell oftener than was necessary. You had a small wooden form to sit on and a permanent table. The latter was a piece of wood, set in the angle of wall just under the muffed glass window. You were also supplied with three bed-boards about one foot wide nailed on three batons about 4 inches thick, two blankets, an aluminium wash-basin, a small pail for water, a chamber, a mug, a plate, a spoon, a knife and fork, all of very crude patterns, also a small vessel for holding salt. That was your furniture and fittings. You were responsible for their maintenance and cleanliness.

We in E-3 wing were most unfortunate, as we were overlooked for a mattress for the first three weeks.

As I stated before, my brother Dan and I stayed together and we marched off in single file down "E" wing and up two flights of stairs. He was put into E-3-10, I into E-3-11, and the doors locked. I had a look all around, and scratched my head. It was my first time in gaol, and believe me it took some thinking out. This bed business was lying against the wall and was about six feet long. - the cell was about six feet by nine feet - so I decided to put it down on the long wall and spread out the blankets. They were like two bath-towels, only not as wide or as long.

I lay down, and after a time I heard knocking on the wall on both sides of my cell. I pounded on each side

wall in answer back. Poor Con Butler was on my left, in E-3-12. After about an hour my cell door opened, and a Sergeant in the uniform of the Garrison Artillery stepped into my cell. He very roughly shouted at me to get up, and asked who told me I could go to bed, and also my name, age and religion. He then ordered me to fix my bed and not to lie down until I heard the bell ringing. I pointed out that bells were ringing all the time and asked had the bed bell got a different sound. He said, "I will soon put a stop to the bell-ringing" and that I would easily know the night-bell. Some time passed and I heard a cell door open near me and then some knocking on the wall on Dan's side. I answered back and a voice shouted, "Who is in there?" I answered, "Bobbie, your brother". I then heard, "I'm not your brother. I am Liam O'Flaherty. Your brother Dan has been put into the cell I was in between my two brothers. They are dividing all the brothers - the Kavanaghs, the Powers, the Youngs and the Troys. This is not as good a cell as I was in. The other had a wooden floor, this one has flagstones which are very cold."

I shouted back, "Get them to turn on the heat and ask for a few extra bath towels". Then Con Butler, on the other side of me, chimed in, "What is wrong with that fellow? Does he think we are in a hotel or a sanatorium to recruit our health. Tell him he is not in the Dublin Corporation Rates Office now; that the box thing in his cell is his swivel chair and that he can use the water-pail as his waste-paper basket. Tell him he might as well sing sorrow as cry it, and to make the best of a bad lot".

O'Flaherty shouted, "I heard you, Butler. It's a pity your mother did not put you in the Salvation Army instead of I.R.A. You could have given a sermon in Foster

"Place and it would have been easier than the Cooperage in Guinness's Brewery". That was the kind of cross-talk that went on from cell to cell.

I put up my bed-board to the cell back window and climbed up to look out. Two small diamond-shaped panes could be opened by a swivel rod. There was a piece of ground under me, V-shaped, and I got the impression that the prison was built in a star design. In the wing opposite me a large percentage of the occupants were up at the windows talking to one another. I then learned the name of the prison and that it was used solely for the military, that our wardsmen or guards were, in fact, prisoners themselves, and our wardsmasters were N.C.O.s who were suffering some disability and were unfit for active service and the Governor was a high-ranking officer.

About noon-day all cell doors were opened, and English or Cockney accents said, "Put your pot and plate out". This went on down the wing. As soon as you put down the pot and plate your door was locked. A short time later I heard some shuffling going on out on the landing and the doors opening and banging. Then my cell door opened and a Sergeant of the Field Artillery, whose name I afterwards ascertained was Tousle or Towesle, said in a very Cockney accent, "Get down to it. Take all you can out of it". It was difficult to understand, but we afterwards came across all the English, Scotch and Welsh Counties' slang. The one I got hardest to understand was a Sergeant Tom Guernsey. He pronounced the Irish names, but we could not make head or tail of them. Here are just a few of the names he made violent attempts at, his face twitching till we thought he had St. Vitus dance - Mulcahy, Kavanagh, Mulhearne, O'Riordan, McGuire, O'Loughlin, O'Donovan, Byrne,

Burns, Bryan, Brophy. When these names and several others were called out we stood star-gazing till one of the group made a guess, then he would say, "Do you Irish not know the King's English, Scotch and Welsh?" The sound was certainly far removed from the spelling.

After dinner we got a lecture as to the Prison rules and etiquette. We were to stop talking and banging on the walls and to keep down from the cell windows, as the punishment for breaches of Prison discipline was very severe. In fact we were led to believe that the War Office had given the Governor special instructions to treat us rough, as we were Sinn Féiners and a special tribe of Irishmen minus tails.

Our first dinner consisted of the following - in fact they varied very little during my whole stay at this Prison - in a small net-bag, two fair or three small, black, brown and green potatoes, it did not matter about the colour, that was only a minor detail as I never took the time to take them out of the bag. They were on a round tin lid that fitted over a cylinder-shaped can, in which was about one pint of soup. The vegetables were either lentils, peas or beans. Sometimes you would be lucky and get a small piece of meat, but very often only a small piece of bone; this you would suck for hours, and perhaps for days. At the finish of dinner your cell door was opened again and you left out your dinner-can, also your aluminium tea-mug on your plate, so that same would be ready for what was known as your tea, which consisted of 6 ozs. of bread and one pint of chicory, with very little milk in it, if any, but certainly no sugar, as at the time the cant in Dublin was "How are you off for sugar, Duckie" - "Up to my eyes in tea", so prisoners could not

get any as Britain was at her nearest point to starvation from the middle of 1915 to 1917 as she ever was or will be again. That is the easiest way of explaining the very, very poor quality of prison fare.

The young men got it very hard. I went down on my knees and, like all the others, wet my thumb to pick up the crumbs off the floor; I ate the lime out of the wall. When I got my supply of salt each week, I would let it all down, then drink my pail of water and suffer the cramps which I certainly would get. Mick O'Riordan told me he used to hide a bit of his breakfast bread every morning and after about fifteen minutes he occupied hours of his time, moryah, looking for it. He did the same stunt at tea-hour, and he said he got a good kick out of this and it helped him pass the time.

I might mention that it was the start of the summer, and as weeks rolled by the weather got hotter and we up on the upper storey were sweltering.

Each day, to occupy my time, I counted the bricks in the cell in every shape and form. I knew the exact amount in each of the walls and looked forward to a mistake in the count so as to have an excuse to count them again. I found a small nail, and under the table on the wall I made a calendar in case I would lose count of the days and months. I made a sundial on the cell floor, and by guessing that the mid-day meal was at 12 o'clock, after a month was able to give a very good guess at the time of day and evening.

I spent hours and days watching an odd fly on the wall, how he would walk vertical and perpendicular on the wall and ceiling. What joy or liking he had for my prison

cell. I would shut the little pane of glass to keep him in and then get sorry for him when he would go to the window. I would let him out, bid him "good night" or "good morning" and wish he would come back again. Some of the prisoners went demented, and I would say were never the same again. Others, a bitterness set in, which will never be subdued till all the ruling classes of England get their own prescription meted out to them.

While I was up at the window one day, a lad in the cell opposite me shouted across was I hungry, and I said "I could wipe my nose with the skin of my belly". I told another that I would even chance eating a picture of "The Last Supper". We would all laugh, then I would know I was not the only one breaking the rules of being up at the window.

I well remember our first Saturday evening. At about four o'clock, somewhere in the village a Fancy Fair band struck up, "You were the first one to teach me how to love" and a lot of other musical ditties of that time. It did not play on Sunday, but it was there for the next week. E-3 wing was in solitary confinement for twelve days, and we knew that the other wings were getting exercise, but, believe me, it was an utter impossibility to keep men apart or to stop them from communicating with one another, for when you have time on your hands and time means nothing to you when in gaol, it is of course a very, very slight comparison to the length of Eternity, means and opportunity, devices and brain work, all find a way.

One man on my end of the landing would ring to get to the latrine. When there, although divided from the pot on either side, he would know who they were. The conversation would be like this: "Who is on my right or

left" - "where are you from" - "where were you in the scrap" - "anyone killed" - "who was in charge" - how many were with you"- "are you long here" - "we are going to be left here" - "where are we going next" - "I wonder how all are at home" - "what happened to the men they picked out in Kilmainham" - "did you hear any news?". That conversation I went through hundreds of times - I knew it by heart. I adopted this method of telling them as questions were put. "We are being released next Wednesday". "Who told you that?". "The warder". "How does he know?". "The Sergeant told him". "We are going to get better grub". "What!". "Yes - porridge and cheese every second morning - cabbage and bacon, two days a week". "Who told you that?". "The Guard". "How does he know - he is a prisoner himself". "I don't know", - he said the Sergeant told him". "We are going to get a bath and our hair is going to be cut". "That will be fine". "Was it the same Guard who told you that?".

Ah! well, it passed in the time and you might as well romance in lavatory as in your cell - "we'd better get out and let in some of the others". The first weeks in prison were spent in this way and it is hard to credit that it had a very soothing effect and that a lot of real information was gained amongst us.

I learned all that happened in the two sections of the South Dublin Union Garrison, also all about the battle at Ashbourne and in fact, before the middle of May, we knew all that had taken place in the country during and after the insurrection - of the fate of the men they termed our leaders - of prison sentence of the group of less important. We got this through small groups who were being picked up in Ireland and were still being transferred

to Knutsford Prison. I was examined by a Medical Doctor about the third day. He was from Kerry and sympathetic towards me and from his conversation I gathered he was an Irishman or of Irish parents. About the same time one morning, I had a visit from a Catholic Clergyman. He asked me if I wanted to confess. I told him I would be very glad to, although I received the Blessed Sacrament about two weeks previous. His first question was - did you kill any of His Majesty's troops?". I said, "yes". "Are you sorry?". I said, "yes, sorry that I did not kill enough". He said, "I will not give you Absolution". I said, "alright". He left, and I thought of the "Croppy Boy". Thank God, that did not trouble me, but that man caused a lot of trouble which unfortunately he was never able to repair, and I am sorry to say he never got the chance, as some of the men interpreted his personal view as the Roman Catholic view in general.

The monotony of prison life was broken for a few in each Wing, but for others it must have been most monotonous. We had no kind of work to do in the first month and after when asked to do it, we point blank refused. During this time I and a few others in our turn washed our landing each day and as we would be scrubbing outside a cell door when the guard was not looking, we would tap on the door and the usual - "who is in there?". A - "So and so, who are you?". "Bobby Holland". "Oh! is that you, Bob? Did you hear anything?". "Yes, we are going to hear Mass on Sunday". "That will be good". "Any news of home?". "Yes, our people are being looked after". "Who told you that?". "So and so". "How did he hear that?". "He has just arrived from Dublin or Ballaghadereen or Cork or Wexford, etc. etc.". "I was told that by so and so from the other end of the Wing,

while I was changing my bucket of water at the wash-house - or he received some visitor who had some influence with the Authorities and the information came down along the usual channels. It is unbelievable to the outside world how we, in prison, got and could get, our information so quickly and accurately, in spite of all the precautions that were taken by the Authorities. Some men got jobs in the cook-kitchen, others in the library. We had a visit from Alfie Byrne - he was at that time a M.P. at Westminster. He gave us our first few woodbine cigarettes which I was very thankful for - in fact, my first smoke sent me reeling around my cell.

While getting a fresh bucket of water one morning, I had a conversation with Jack Saul. He told me had a visit from a sister and a friend who were school-teachers in Manchester. During their conversation a guard stood by - his duty was to see that nothing relative to prison business was discussed. The visitor must be a relative. In spite of the guards the visitor was able to convey to him in Irish that the leaders had been executed, that the country had failed to respond and that the reports which we had heard on the week of the insurrection had been only wishful thinking. That all the men who had been deported - their homes had been raided, and in a good many cases sacked by the British Forces - R.I.C., D.M.P., and the mob element of West British which exceeded ninety per cent of the population of Ireland at that time. She told him that the whole insurgent force did not exceed 800 - that anyone who had previous connection or sympathy with the Irish Volunteers were being arrested and deported along with a great many people who had been arrested for looting - that he was to be careful and if possible to give the tip to

the rest of us, not to have any confidential conversations with any prisoners who might be put in our way, as it was suspected that informers were being sprinkled in all the prisons looking for a secret organisation known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Authorities knew that they had them all under lock and key but were not able to segregate them. They also knew that their members of the rank and file were even more important and dangerous than the men they had executed. As soon as I could tip off the others I did so, and although we had our little jokes and wise cracks, we kept a watchful eye on the main point.

I might here mention, that one of the Saul's way of killing time in his cell, was - he would throw a button up and let it hit his head, close his eyes and feel all around the floor for it. One day I climbed up to have a squint out and I saw three soldiers standing, one on each corner of an angle in the vacant space between the two Wings, and in the middle, walking aimlessly about was poor Mick O'Riordan. He would pick up a little piece of paper and walk slowly down to a corner - drop it - brush his two hands together and walk back and repeat the same thing again. The soldiers were laughing at him, but I broke down and had a good cry. He had been with me all through the insurrection. They had his head shaven completely bare and he had a beard that had been nicely trimmed - he looked a most pitiful sight.

The thought went through my mind - how many others were in his condition and would my mind go next, or was it already well on the way. One could hardly believe such things could happen with such clean living men - both in mind and body - in the twentieth century, especially by a country professing and proclaiming to be a champion of right and justice and who was up to her ears in a war to

protect small nations - moryah. At this particular moment there are more Englishmen imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison as conscientious objectors - imprisoned for not fighting for their own country - than the number of Irishmen who participated in the fight for freedom for theirs.

We will leave this and get back to prison discipline. Some time after Alfie Byrne's visit - one morning my prison cell door opened and a Sergeant told me we were going to get exercise. He warned me as follows : when you hear the order - "one pace to the rear", step back and be facing your cell window - do not look to either right or left - you will turn and when marching down the staircase, keep seven paces behind the prisoner, via front of you. The same applies when on the exercise ring". My heart went up in my mouth - I was going to be out in the fresh air again and although the pangs of hunger had never been satisfied, I was overjoyed when the order came. I heard a lot of men stumble and immediately thought of the older men - were they gone cramped or was there anything physically wrong - I dared not blink an eye. Now the order came - right or left - I strained my eyes along the line in front of me on both sides to get a glimpse of my brother Dan - all these men over 20 years of age were unrecognisable - some needed hair-cuts badly. Others had their heads shaved like Mick O'Riordan - but all had beards, some very patchy, others very nice. I found it very difficult to recognise some men who formerly had a slight sandy appearance - they now had red beards. Men that I knew as only slightly grey had almost white beards. Some, whose clothes had gone verminous, had had them boiled or fumigated - all their clothing had shrunken - some worse than others. Some of them had the ends of their pants just below their knees. Those who wore blue materials appeared like tigers or piebald horses -

those in brown materials appeared in every shade of gold. With the facial and clothing changes it was hard to make a lot of them out. One man I will never forget is Brendan Whitmore. He was a Commandant in the "scrap" and I had previously met him in Wexford with Con Colbert. I knew him well - his blue serge suit looked like an unpopular candidate on an election platform where the audience had a plentiful supply of rotten eggs and had excellent shots. He had the loveliest little French meg that I have ever seen and while I had heartfelt sympathy for some, I was greatly amused at others. I was very lucky as I was not old enough, just yet, to grow hair on my face and was looked upon as being the kid. I am very very grateful from the bottom of my heart, to the prisoners in Knutsford who acted, both as father and mother to me, such as Paddy Byrne, Joe Downey, Bill Kelly, not forgetting old Joe Bowman - Dan and Billie Troy, Ned O'Neill and Mick O'Callaghan, who at anytime they could, gave me, at great risk to themselves, a little bread out of their very very meagre ration. I am quite sure they had often carried it in their pockets waiting a chance to slip it to me. It is to these men I am glad to show my heartfelt appreciation for all the care and good advice to keep me out of trouble - for the anxiety I must have caused them. Also to leave some slight knowledge to future generations of the fight they had for freedom and that they will appreciate and not throw it away lightly and have respect for previous generations who handed down the freedom-loving spirit to those who eventually won it.

After getting the order "right or left turn - quick march", down the stairs and out into a piece of ground that had two rings - the outer ring would in my mind be in the

circumference about 100 yards; the inner, 60 yards. An armed guard with fixed bayonets were placed at intervals about every 20 yards. They had instructions not to allow us to communicate with one another. There was at one side of the yard a latrine which had accommodation for about 12 men, all in separate compartments. It had a 14 inch board on a hinge about waist-high, so that anyone outside had almost a full view of the person occupying each pot. Only a few moments passed when that law was fully occupied and with your head down, you had a quick "confab" with the neighbour on each side. One could not but notice how brothers aimed to get near each other and how the occupant on one side moved out quickly to let them have their chat. The inner ring was put at the disposal of the older men or any of the younger men who were in indifferent health - the rest of us were put at the "double" and hopping exercise by one of the Sergeants, and in this way we spent the exercise hour. We were then all brought in and locked up until the next day.

Two incidents happened me at these exercises which I will relate. When going up to my landing one day, Con Butler who was in front of me, as he was ascending the stairs, said, under his arm, "I wonder how are Missus and kids at home?". I looked up and replied, "Ah!, Con, they will be alright". When I reached the top landing the Sergeant said, "3-11, stand to the left". Con was standing about five paces to the right of the entrance to the stairs. The rest of our comrades passed us by with sympathy on their faces as they must have guessed we were in some trouble. All were locked up and the Sergeant said, "3-12, down to the ground floor". As Con went down to the second landing I was told to follow. When I reached the ground floor, Con had been brought to another

Wing. The Sergeant left me in charge of an armed guard and only a few moments later a door opened in front of me and I was called in by my prison number. Inside I stood at the right-hand side of a writing desk at which was seated a high-ranking officer of middle age. The Sergeant was speaking when I entered, and through a door that was just closing and opposite the one I had entered, I saw Con Butler's back.

I then learned that the officer was the Governor. He spoke to me and said, "you are being charged with communicating with prisoner E-3-11. That is a very grave breach of prison rules, which you are aware of - what was your conversation about?". I said, "I had no conversation- the Sergeant added "Sir" - then I said "Sir". I was then told to step outside and I heard another door open and shut. I thought of the old tricks played by British agents on the Invincibles, of making one man give away on the other. Minutes passed. I was brought in again. The Governor said, "E-3-11, you did have a conversation". I said, "no, Sir". "Well, he had a conversation with you coming up the stairs". I said, "no, Sir". He said, "you are an R.C.". I said, "no, Sir". "But you are a Roman Catholic". I said, "yes, Sir". I did not know what R.C. stood for at that time. The Governor threw a black-covered book in my direction on the writing desk. "That is one of your prayer books. Will you swear on that?". I said, "I suppose it is". "It is", he said, "and no suppose - have a look at it". I looked at it and nodded my head. He asked "is it?". I said "yes". "Then do you swear on that book, you did not have a conversation with E-3-12". I said, "yes, Sir". "Do you swear on that prayer book he did not communicate with you?". I said again, "yes, Sir". He then ordered E-3-12 to be brought in.

Con Butler entered. "E-3-12", the Governor asked, "what was the conversation you had with this prisoner?". Poor Con was dumb for at least a minute. He then hung his head and repeated the conversation. The Governor asked him what my answer had been, but he could not repeat it. The Governor looked at me, gave me a short lecture on an Oath and said he would make an example of me. I was sentenced to fourteen days' solitary confinement in the basement. As I left the office I could hear poor Con sobbing and I can state here now, that any time I met Con in after life, he would put his arms round me and nearly start crying again. I honestly believe that Con would willingly have given his life for me - that he suffered a million times more than I did and that he had acted with the best of intentions. I only relate this episode to show the prison law and justice.

I will give a detailed account of my experience in what is known as the dungeon. I was marched down along E.1 Wing - when about three-quarters way I saw the top of an iron hand-rail in the centre of the ground floor. I had my armed guard and the Sergeant. As I approached, an iron grid was lifted by an orderly - in his hands was a large key; he gave it to the Sergeant, and I followed him down some stone steps along a passage. He opened a cell door, outside was in semi-darkness, but inside it was completely dark. I stepped in and the door was locked. After about ten minutes I could see the outline of three walls and a door and what seemed to be up about twenty feet, a spy hole. A streak of light, which I thought was a yellow cane, hit just over what I knew was the door. It at first seemed a solid substance and in fact, I made a foolish attempt to feel it. That was the light I had for the next fourteen days. But worse was still to come.

It is difficult to believe, but true. As the first day went by, I imagined that the cell seemed to get brighter until darkness really fell and the spy-hole faded out. I had already seen the bed-board and three blankets. I lay down and tried to say some prayers, but I particularly noticed that this cell was very cold. I awoke several times - it was pitch dark. Each time I woke I would look where I thought the spy-hole should be. It must have been hunger that was waking me up as I had neither dinner nor tea the day before. At last the ray of light came and each minute it seemed to get stronger. I never remembered the Sun taking so long to rise. Eventually, I heard in the distance - seeming miles away - the sound of a horse galloping on very hard ground. It came terribly fast and like the shot of a gun, a key was inserted in the lock. A guard took away my slops - left me my washing water and told me he would bring back my ration. He returned in about 15 minutes and handed in my ration. It consisted of a 12-ounce loaf of a brown and white substance which tasted of sour pollard, the usual 1-gallon can of water. The amount of bread looked good to me, as the pangs of hunger that I had on the morning I entered the prison never had been satisfied, as the ration was just short that little extra that would have made a world of difference. What worsened the position was that after each meal I would be hungry. That was the thing - perpetual want of food was maddening to me - the thoughts of home and full and plenty of the good food I had wasted. I spent hours thinking of cakes and parties I had attended. If only I had a little of what was left over after those now, how I would have appreciated it. The more I thought of these, the hungrier I became, and when I did sleep I dreamed the most fantastic things - with the main point in my dreams - grub.

Here I now saw visions of a good feed of bread. No matter if it was musty, sour or hard - it was a big lump of bread to me and that was all that mattered. When my keeper told me it was a 24-hour ration, I took little notice. He banged and locked the cell door. I immediately got down to my feast. I ate it all and drank more than half my water ration. I was full for the first time - I got the hiccups - I lay down and dozed asleep. Waking up, the ray of light still in my cell, I began to wonder what I could do to occupy my time. The light was insufficient to count the bricks of the wall or the rivet heads of the door. I spanned the wall with my left hand - then with my right - the same with the floor. I would stand with my back to the door and if the Sun was shining well, would watch the dust pass through the ray of light. I would blow my breath-then watch the quickening effect it had on the dust as it rose. The big volume that could be made by rubbing one foot on the floor - then the two feet, and so on, till my cell got black dark again. I then got hungry - lay down and went asleep - woke up - still black dark, and hungry. This went on for what seemed days - would I ever get more bread! Would that ray of light ever come through the hole again! I would try to spare the next ration. I did - but it was all the same. I tried by every manner and means to eliminate - even for a short time - the pangs of hunger, but to no avail. Try as I might, hunger always had more hours to its credit out of each twenty-four, till I had my sentence served.

Days and nights seemed to change to weeks and months. One has no idea of the length of time sitting in semi-darkness, then blackness. I thought a hundred times I would go mad - then I would wish to be mad, anything to replace the hunger and loneliness and darkness.

How much can a human being stick before he dies? I was sorry I had not been killed in the fight. I was glad that others had been executed - they had been relieved of prison torments. I wondered what had happened to the other prisoners. After the first few days the cold of the cell seemed to be less intense. My hands and face became moistened - the hair seemed to grow very quickly - as I rubbed my jaw, I could feel sweat and hair. Now I would take three steps from end to end. I could not count - could not sit for any time - lie down - get up again - hours unending - day, night - all the same. I lost count of time - often thought I had been forgotten. If I could only die quickly! I thought I had been there for months. As the keeper handed in my last bread ration, he said, "released tonight".

Some time after darkness I heard rumbling noises coming down along the passage. My door was opened. I could see down along the passage a large yellow or golden ball of light. It seemed like a rich coloured water-melon. Although I knew it was only a gas jet, that is what it seemed like. With my keeper was a doctor - a civilian. I was put sitting on a chair with my back to the door. He then bandaged my eyes with gauze and finished it off like a cap - typing it under my chin. He told me on no account to take off the bandage and he would be with me in the morning. I was then led down the passage - brought upstairs to a cell and given a meal of bread and chickory, the same as I'd had before, but this time it tasted lovely. My cell door was not locked and I could plainly hear footsteps. I had my first good sleep and had to be wakened for my breakfast meal. That evening the doctor removed some of my eye bandage and I knew the lights were on. The same was repeated the third and fourth evening till I was eventually brought back

to my old cell - E-3-11. As my cell door closed the wall on either side was tapped - I returned the tapping. On the following day I was brought out for exercise and put into the inner ring with the older men as I was unable to keep the quick pace set by the younger ones. When I appeared, all eyes were centred on me - I moved over to the latrines - went in and the first man to speak to me was Mick Lynch - "How is Bob?". "Well". "That's good, let them see the stuff we are made of".

That was the type of conversation of all who got the chance to speak to me. I might mention here that Mick Lynch was at this time 25 years of age and 6 feet in height - had sandy wavy hair - very athletic - had a straight and quick walk like a physical drill instructor. He was the envy of all British Army personnel in the prison. We often heard them say, "a young man like him - if he had joined the British Forces, he would have attained a high rank". He had a real soldierly appearance and looked as if it would be impossible to get him down. In civilian life he was an official in the Finance Department of the Dublin Corporation and was the organist in John's Lane Chapel.

His appearance as he went around the ring belittled him very much as this is how he appeared to me. His sandy wavy hair was some inches over the collar of his coat. He had a most magnificent sandy beard. If it had been trimmed the one length and had no second colour it would have been perfect and would have beaten any picture of any one of the "Three Musketeers". His black coat had been fumigated and faded in large spots - the sleeves had greatly shrunken and the cuffs were at his elbows. He had a pair of riding breeches that suffered from the same complaint and his long woollen stockings had been boiled to over-

length socks. He wore boots - but believe me, his appearance was not funny compared with others. His stately walk took all the humour out of him and we all knew he was not yet mad and as he afterwards proved a good Irish soldier. He commanded the Fingal Brigade in the subsequent fight.

Another man I might mention - a similar type - and one who in the later fighting gave his life - Dick McKee. He had fought through the insurrection in the uniform of a Lieutenant and as he walked around, his erect carriage - his raven black hair and his bright blue eyes, he was also the envy of the British troops. Johnny Barton had picked him out in Richmond Barracks along with Mick Shields and through some mistake had put them back with the rest of us, only to have had the trouble of looking for them again. But Barton never got the chance.

Changes had taken place in the meantime. Prisoners were allowed to receive and send a letter - all letters being censored by the Prison Authorities. Some time later we were allowed to receive friends. The Irish sympathisers in England formed an organisation which applied for permits to visit certain prisoners in certain districts. They had lists of our names compiled and individuals visited once a week their particular charges. Relaxations extended as time went by. One morning each prisoner was given a form or questionnaire - it went something like this.

Did you know what the Irish Volunteers, Citizen Army, Hibernian Rifles, Clann-na-Gael, Fianna or Cumann-na-mBan were originated for?. Would you have joined them if you had known they intended taking up arms against His Majesty{s Forces? Did you ever hear of a secret organisation known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood?

Do you know any members of that organisation? Are you a member? Did you willingly take part in the Rebellion? Will you, if released, give an undertaking to cease membership? Did the Leaders make known to you that they were preparing for a rebellion, and had you knowledge before Easter Monday, April 24th, 1916?
Answer these questions and give a guarantee to be a law-abiding subject of His Majesty, and your release will be forthwith and no one will know your answers.

I have no hesitation in saying that not one of the forms was filled in. All the usual tricks were employed - men were released in every district as decoys, but it had not the desired effect. We knew England's game too well. All down her history she had devised methods that some of our ancestors fell for, in all good faith. But this generation could teach her some brand new tricks. We were sober and educated - knew our stuff and knew every trick in her bag - even the ones she pulled out in subsequent years - her foxy days were over - she might chance them and sometimes succeed, but we knew them.

The three Power brothers were released one morning. They were from the Inchicore district. We were told they had gone home. We only wished them luck - not one of the remaining 31 ever budged or swallowed the yarn that they had filled in the Form. After all, if 31 signed the justification of the execution of Con Colbert, it would matter little if only three refused. Men in all districts were released but the main body never had them under suspicion and it afterwards proved correct as some of them were subsequently hanged or killed in the "scrap" that followed in the years that were to come.

A few days later the whole prison garrison was paraded in the exercise compound and the Governor addressed us. This is an outline of his speech :-

> "Irishmen, your country has always responded to the call of His Majesty, the King. Irishmen have always held the highest ranks in His Majesty's Armies and Navies down through the ages. You men have some military knowledge and a good standard of education, as I know, from the letters I have personally censored. You could be well placed in the Army, and after this War could find a new and better life in some of Our Majesty's Colonies. It is not mine or His Majesty's wishes to keep you here. You are here of your own free will. Do you men wish to stay here?

Just as he said that, as if by electricity, all to a man shouted, "yes" and I think the roof went up and the walls must have sprung out and in. He was dumbfounded for a minute and then very vexed and said :-

> "Before you came here, this prison was a workshop or factory and produced war work, such as sand-bags. You men must find it very monotonous in your cells doing nothing. If any of you like, and I am sure you well wish it, to be taught how to do this work, I have men here at my disposal who will instruct you in such work. That is only a little thing I ask and I am sure you will willingly respond".

But he got the opposite answer - a big "No". That tore it. He then tried to humiliate us with - "some of you men have asked me to release you to join His Majesty's Forces", and a voice shouted - "what do you want us to do about that - isn't that what you want?". We were then all marched into our cells again and we all thought that the concessions we had been granted would be withdrawn.

Days passed. I received my first letter from home, which said there was a chance of sending a parcel of food and newspapers - the first opportunity they would be sent. I might mention here - we were never again asked to join the British Army or to carry out any work to assist in the war against Germany. The method adopted to deliver letters to us was this - while we were on exercise, one of the Sergeants would call our name and number. As a point of interest I do hope the Museum Authorities will succeed in getting one of these envelopes. Here is what it would be like :-

Knutsford Prison, Essex, England.
R. Holland - E-3-11. Home Office
No.1896. War Office No.1432, and a
"Passed by Censor", blue stamp.

As you see, no space was left vacant on an ordinary envelope - it took the Sergeant some time to make it out. We looked forward to this treat every day. His face would become distorted trying to pronounce such names as, Mulcahy, Mulhearns or Liam O'Flaherty. "We knew King's English" he would shout. It never once struck them to get one of the prisoners to call them out. By the way - the National Museum have my certificate in the "1916" section - it is the only one that was saved.

The second incident that occurred to me in the recreation ring which I previously mentioned, was this.

I slipped off the ring when a place was vacant in the latrine. As I sat down, Joe Bowman, whom I could see as I entered, was in the next cubicle, asked me had I heard from home and had my mother sent me any papers. I said she had. He asked would it be possible to get a look at them or how could I manage to give them to him. I thought a while and got an idea. "Joe", I said, "when you are going in- walk on up to E-3-11 and I will go into your cellE/-3-7. They will not notice our switch over and tomorrow we can change back".
"What is your excuse if you are caught?", asked Joe. "You are only just out of the black hole and I would not like to see you get another run". "Our answer, if caught, is this - "whichever of us is brought before the Governor first can swear that when we went to our respective cells, the other fellow was already in it, and as we are not allowed to speak to each other, we were not or thought we were not, breaking any rule".
I might remind the reader that we had to keep seven paces distant. We worked this plan. I dropped into E-3-7 - Joe into E-3-11. I must say E-3-7 was as neat a cell as any in the prison. Bowman was a man in the early forties and a rock of sense. He was a fitter on the G.S. Railways and to occupy his time in prison, had polished his utensils to a silver sheen. He had a white dado which stood out about a foot from the wall all around the floor and it certainly looked spick and span. I came to the conclusion that Joe had spent all his time in decorating the cell.

Dinner was served and after my dinner my cell door opened. In walked the Sergeant. He scrutinised all round the cell. My heart went out through my mouth. I thought I was caught, but he only tapped me on the shoulder and said, "your cell is a credit to you, my

lad - I must congratulate you". He left, but in a few minutes marched in again with Mick O'Callaghan. "Now, my man, that is what a cell should be like - have a look at it - it is the cleanest cell in E.3 Wing - a credit to the boy, and I would say the youngest boy in the whole prison". He brought in many others including Joe Bowman, whom he referred to as a "dirty old pig". How we were ever to exchange places again, I could not make out. Would our letters give us away. At least sixteen in our Wing knew each other's cells. They all wondered how far we would go before it was found out. I had to keep the cell in this condition.

After another few days, when in the latrine, Bowman sat next to me. "Hey, Bobbie, you got me into a nice jam", he said. "You got me into it", I said - "you wanted to read the papers". I did not get a look at one of them - the Sergeant stood over me while I tidied up your cell and all the papers were taken by him. He said he would tell my mother when we got out - if ever." As time passed we got more concessions - parcels of food arrived from home, visitors became more frequent and they brought food with them.

Then the time came when all the prisoners in one Wing were brought out to one or other recreation square and allowed to talk and walk around together - we were even allowed into one another's cells. When in the exercise ring at twelve o'clock we would say the Angelus, and every day we had a Rosary. This went on until eventually we were sent in small groups to the Internment Camp at Frongoch, Wales. We were accused by the guards as being responsible for the sinking of the "Leinster" by our prayers and also for the sinking of the "Hampshire" with Kitchener on board her. In fact one day one of the

soldiers in charge had an argument with me and accused us of having Chinamen as military leaders in the Rebellion. I asked who had told him that. He said, "who was Sinn Féin, and could we not get any one else as leaders". We also had in the prison, two drunks, who had insisted on joining our ranks as we were marched down Cork Street and The Coombe on the Sunday evening of the "surrender". We also had for some weeks an unfortunate seaman, a Swede, who was picked up in O'Connell Street during Easter Week. He had endless trouble convincing them he was not an Irishman as he could not speak a word of English.

The visitors who called on us had all the men in uniform nearly in rags by insisting on getting souvenirs - all buttons vanished after the second day of visitors. While a Wing of prisoners would be in the yard, after we had the concessions, all our time was spent discussing the events of the Rebellion week. A very frail old man - Jim Cooper - in his early sixties, I would say, and the last man on God's earth you would expect to take up arms or even be in the vicinity of a gun - bent and stooped of shoulder, very timid, and of a distinctly shy disposition - he spoke with a very refined Dublin accent and a slow drawl - he belonged to the Methodist Church - was a member of the Citizen Army and an ardent disciple of James Connolly, whom he frequently referred to, and I have no doubt must have been a very close friend; he made no friends in prison - always keeping to himself and was very hard to get a chat with. He seemed to have a slight smack for me, apparently on account of my youth, and I had a liking for him because of his age. He had no friends in this world and seemed to think himself out of place. Perhaps because ninety-nine per cent of us were Roman

Catholics - all credit to him, for when we were saying the Rosary, he would join in and would say, "it may do me good - it certainly can't do me harm". He had swallowed the whole programme of National Socialist Republicanism, hook line and sinker, and must have read every and any book on that subject - he knew it from A to Z and seemed to be a self-taught man. Unfortunately, he, like many of his predecessors, who fought for the freedom of our country, got a pauper's grave in the years that followed. Moggie Comerford, Bob Oman, Jim Judd are just a few of the many, and sad to relate, their deaths occurred under two different self-governments, who both had used the national records of these men as part of their election slogans. However, that is for another generation, but I cannot let it pass.

Jim Cooper told me he had been with James Connolly in the G.P.O. and in the retreat from that building; that they had made a tunnel down along Henry Street right through the Coliseum Theatre and beyond the Wax Works. His stories were centred around the latter building as he was stationed on a landing after passing through it. He enjoyed the remarks of the men as they would come through at intervals. One said, "there are three or four fellows behind there and they are taking things very easy". Another - "there's a Bobbie standing on a landing in there and he is afraid to move. I told him to follow me but he is too full for words. You ought to give him the bend that the place is on fire". Another - "I think the Cumann na mBan have converted some of that building. I came through into a dressing station. I shouted at them as I passed, but none of them answered. Some one must have been badly wounded and is dying". Another - "there is a poor kid in a cot in the next house - you ought to have it shifted".

These are some of the remarks addressed to him as men and women from the blazing G.P.O. passed through the Wax Works. He said that fifty per cent never stopped to ascertain why the figures did not move. I can well believe that as these people were escaping from an inferno - the whole street was blazing. He told me he saw Connolly was very badly wounded. That is all I know of poor Jim Cooper - May he rest in peace.

In Knutsford we had another character - Tom Walsh, a Citizen Army man also and a stone mason by trade. He took part in the attack upon the Upper Castle Yard from the roof of the Mail Office. He was a very heavy man - at least 16 stone weight - and would say, "I could hide my head, but not my backside". It was always a worry to him. Walsh was a native of Co. Cork and a lovely whistler, which I am sure made him most conspicuous. He died shortly after the Thomas Ashe hunger-strike which occurred a few years later.

Another character was Phil Shanahan. He and Moggie Comerford were great friends. Phil owned a pub and Moggie owned a perpetual thirst. Another was Seán O'Casey. In his plays "Juno and the Paycock" and "The Plough and the Stars", O'Casey used Moggie as a character or at least it was Moggie gave him the ideas.

Moggie and Phil were neighbour prisoners, and when we were granted concessions, they played all the old familiar tricks. They were on E-2 landing immediately below us and would invite anyone on our landing to visit them, saying that Phil had got a pig's cheek and some stout from a friend in Manchester. This was an easy trick to fall for, Phil being a publican in Dublin. The cell door was left ajar and you were invited in.

As soon as you pushed the door a bucket of water was stuck on your head - "You are now baptized a T.T." That worked on many occasions although it was a trick as old as tea.

Further Gaol experiences continued overleaf.

I got very sick but was still able to eat my rations and while on exercise I told Liam O'Flaherty. He advised me to drop off the line and tell the Sergeant. I did as advised and was conducted by a military orderly to a day or ante-room until the doctor arrived. I was stripped naked and examined by him. This was my second examination since my solitary confinement and was on friendly terms with the doctor. He told me I had a slight body rash, that it was the effect of the water and that the irritation would go away in a short time.

I can here state that it never did go away. In fact, I got a dry eczema, which I will carry to my grave. He gave me a glass of white medicine, probably a mixture of quinine, as that is what the taste was like. This dose was repeated for the next few days.

The doctor had a conversation with me that I think deserves recording although I knew absolutely nothing about the subject. In fact, I was a little frightened when it was all over. He spoke something like this - "I must admit that you men from Ireland have puzzled the medical men in attendance at the prisons to which you have been allocated in this country. We have been in communication with each other and they have all had the same remarkable experience as I. I have examined more than 600 of your men and in no case have I come across the slightest taint of venereal disease. We cannot understand this. Why, in the town outside the prison, I have four clinics weekly for men and women. The population is not any greater than of this prison.

I have in the hospital at this very moment fifteen per cent of the Army personnel being treated for V.D. and I do not like the idea of you men being in the hospital on account of this. I think you men are absolutely marvellous and I find it hard to believe that such a body of men could get together. It has given me a different opinion to that which I previously held, of Irishmen. Ithink it a great pity you did not use different methods to attain your freedom". He asked about my home and comrades - also their home life - what kind of sport we went in for?.

I told him that in Kmutsford at that moment we had the making of an All-Ireland Gaelic Football Team - at least 20 each of "Geraldines", "O'Toole's" and "Keating's" G.F.Cs. - a good number of "St. Sylvester's" and a good sprinkling of "Strandville", "Distillery" and "St. James' Gate Association Football Teams - that hurling was well represented and there were some county, past and present champions in different branches of sport. I also told him that if he tried the other prisons he would find that as far as the insurgents were concerned, they were a similar type and that never in my life had I heard anything appertaining to V.D.; he said he could well believe all I told him.

When I got a chance I told old Joe Bowman of the doctor's remarks about V.D. He was very vexed with me and said I should never repeat it to him or anyone else as it was a subject which should not be discussed by a young boy like me.

At this time we were allowed more parcels from home, also two letters per week. I received some underclothing which I badly needed. The letters were

censored but it was hard for the Authorities to prevent our getting news. A girl from Liverpool was allowed a pass to see me. I was brought to the reception room - a guard was present. The girl gave me some cigarettes. I offered a few to the guard and he did not refuse them. The girl then spoke freely and told me that some of our men had been released, but arrests were still taking place all over the country, that up to 600 men and women were under arrest, that in fact everyone and anyone who had anything to do with any organisation participating in the Insurrection were liable to arrest, that the prisons in Ireland and England were packed, that in Dublin, men and women suspected of taking part in, or sympathising with the Insurrection, were dismissed from their employment as a form of censure for their disloyalty to His Majesty, that the prime movers in this campaign of persecution and reprisal were G.S. & W. Railways who had gone further and evicted families of men so dismissed from their dwellings - Messrs. Arthur Guinness, Cramptons, H. & J. Martins, Becketts, had followed suit. In fact, many relatives of men in prison were finding it very hard to get the necessities of life, even if they had money, in some districts; that a form of curfew was imposed, that a pass, signed by a member of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, was needed to get through, a circular cordon drawn all around the city. All this added greatly to the misery of our people, being denied both work and food, their homes wrecked and ruined by continuous raids by police and military, that we, in prison, were better off than some of them.

She spoke of an organisation being formed for the relief of these people, called "National Aid", which expected help from friends in America. The visit left me very sad - I could not but think of my mother who was a cripple and my twelve-year old sister. I told my brother Dan all I had heard. We agreed that in future we would tell of only the brighter side of our prison life in our letters to home. In fact, when writing, we even said we had more food than we could eat and on no account to send any.

I did not tell the other prisoners of the visitor's news, but they soon found out for themselves. It was a hard blow to us all, especially the men with young families. It took a very noticeable effect on them although we all tried to keep their hearts up. No praises or credit of mine would be adequate for these men - I can only say they were really and truly men of steel and no words of mine could praise them adequately. Their spirits could not be broken. They may have got grey hairs and drawn faces but their hearts were as big and as buoyant as on that Easter Monday morning when they, so pitifully few, threw down the gauntlet to challenge the armed forces of the greatest Empire of modern times. Their fighting spirit prevailed against every difficulty and obstacle, whether real or created, by their enemies.

Now, to add to our problems and the problems of our relatives at home, we were both aware of each others miseries. The minds of the older men were sorely tried by the bitter cup of British knavery and vindictiveness. Our peoples' homes were broken up - hundreds of women had to sell what little furniture and valuables they possessed in order to eke out an existence in the absence of the bread-winners. We all had decent working-class homes,

a good many belonged to the professional class, but there was no discrimination. The vast majority of the Irish people were opposed to us, or our methods used in the attempt to obtain freedom. Two possible reasons may be advanced for this attitude of the public - the fact that due to John Redmond and his party encouraging recruiting for His Majesty's Forces, most of them had kith or kin in, or connected with the British Forces. Secondly, the tone of the Irish newspapers almost without exception, which not only condemned in the strongest possible language, the Insurrection, but actually clamoured for the execution of all our leaders.

It can be understood then the difficulties of our relatives and friends at home and of us who had openly declared against the British aggressor. School-teachers Civil Servants, Bank Officials, Government and Semi-Government employees amongst us, had their homes and means of livelihood shattered and when release would eventually come, did not know where to turn for employment.

We heard at this time that the National Aid Fund had been started, that a kind of means test was in operation with the object of relieving the most necessitous cases first. As time went on and money came in, every deserving case was relieved to some extent, we in prison thanked God and said many a Rosary for those who gave their time and money to help our destitute people.

Dick Whelan, in the lavatory one day, told me my oldest brother Frank did not surrender with the rest of his comrades, that the last Whelan saw of him was changing his clothes, donning the pauper uniform in a part of the South Dublin Union. He told Whelan he would not surrender.

Later I learned from a visitor that he had succeeded in boarding a boat travelling to England but that his whereabouts were then unknown.

We heard many stories of the garison at Jacob's Factory, of the men giving sacks of flour to the hungry people, of looters dressed in all kinds of expensive clothing - poor class women in coney, seal and musquash coats, of men stealing cases of boots or shoes and then discovering they were all rights or lefts, of women and young people stealing new perambulators with which to convey their loot, of the most expensive furniture being dragged along the quieter thoroughfares at night and of many instances of the robbers being themselves robbed.

I have previously referred to the concession of exercise on the recreation squares. It became a practice to recite the Rosary at some period before being returned to our cells. Some of the guards took this as a very bad omen as soon after the H.M.S. "Hampshire" was sunk with Lord Kitchener on board - later the "Leinster" went down, followed by serious setbacks for the British forces in France. It is hard to believe, but quite true, that our prayers were linked in some way at least by the British personnel as contributing to these misfortunes. They actually told us so and ordered us to discontinue the community Rosary as it spelt trouble for them.

I have already mentioned that in Dublin City and County only 850 men, about 100 women, took up arms and that with the exception of the Kent family of four brothers, the rest of the country was dead. Despite this, the R.I.C., D.M.P. and military made wholesale arrests. So much so that records which came into my possession afterwards show that the total number of prisoners who

passed through Richmond Barracks was - men, 3,149, women, 77. Men released from Richmond Barracks 1,104; convicted by courtmartial to death and prison sentences, 160; acquitted by courtmartial, 23. The total number given as imprisoned and interned is, 1,862 men; women released from Richmond Barracks, 72; sent to English prisons, 5. Although the figures do not tally, that is what the records show.

On the 1st May, the first batch of men were sent to prisons in England and from the records in my possession they were as follows :-

1st May, 1916	-	to Knutsford 200, to Stafford 289,
3rd May	-	to Stafford 309,
6th May	-	to Wakefield 376,
8th May	-	to Stafford 203,
9th May	-	to Wandsworth 197,
13th May	-	to Wandsworth 54, to Wakefield 273,
20th May	-	to Glasgow and Perth 197, to Woking 40, to Lewes 59,
2nd June	-	to Wandsworth 49, to Knutsford 50,
3rd June	-	to Wakefield 100,
7th June	-	to Knutsford 41,
16th June	-	to Knutsford 25.

That is the record as I have it. I will now quote two typical letters which were sent to the British Authorities in connection with certain people who had been arrested, to show how much they upheld the national cause. They are too numerous to quote, so will give just these as they appear on record. The following statement was published on June 16th :-

"Messrs. Arthur Guinness, Son & Co. Ltd. are authorised by Lord Cheylesmore to state that there was nothing in the evidence at the recent Court Martial to justify any suggestion, that either Mr. Dockery or Mr. Rice were in any way connected with, or in sympathy with, the Sinn Féin rebellion. He regrets that any such idea should have arisen.

(Signed) H.W. Renny Failyown,
Managing Director.

16. 6. '16".

Mr. Octavus Hardy of 17 Belgrave Road, Rathmines, was arrested at that address in connection with the Easter Rising in Dublin. He was released soon afterwards and received a communication from the War Office, enclosing extracts from a statement from G.H.Q. at Dublin, which read :-

"It was made clear that Mr. Hardy was a thoroughly loyal subject and was not in any way connected with the Sinn Féin Movement" ,

and dated 16th June, 1916.

Some time after the ban on the community Rosary, Con Butler got into more trouble with one of our guards, and was confined to his cell for some days. He told me what it was all about when released. One of his guards started a discussion about the Rising and accused Con of being a traitor to England and the King, also of being pro German and stabbing England in the back. Poor Con lost his temper and told the guard a few things about the amount of English in prison for refusing to fight for their own country - namely - the conscientious objectors.

More than half our comrades have by now been released or sent to Internment Camps. Food, parcels and letters were stopped coming in. A few of us were lucky, as the people who had been visiting us periodically still continued to do so, but we had to warn them that if the transfers continued at the present rate, we might not be there to receive them at their next visit. This had the effect of weaning off our visitors and soon we were reduced to prison rations again. As each day passed, more were released and we who were left behind, were given the job of cleaning a block of cells in preparation for military prisoners. Whole Wings were being taken over for this purpose. We were, all of us, transferred to "D" Wing and it was here I had an experience which I recall with horror, which I am sure the reader will understand and forgive when I give the details.

Some Clare and Galway men concerned in this incident may be alive at present, and if brought to their recollection, can verify, as Jack Saul certainly can, particularly so as eight of these countrymen, as we called them, got ptomain poison from eating the rotten sandwiches. Myself, Saul and Butler were cleaning out cells which had been vacated that week. In one cell we found ham and meat sandwiches which had gone bad. I would remind the reader that most of us were reduced to the bare rations again which meant a state of perpetual hunger which the meals only partly satisfied. I ate the crusts of the bread - it was pan loaf. The white of the bread had turned green and yellow with a fungus on it all, but the poor country chaps were so hungry they ate it all just as it was, with the result they had to be transferred to the prison hospital for treatment.

I was very worried that this should happen and it eventually got me into a nice kettle of fish. A Scottish Corporal with a very bad scar on his left cheek, remarked that such food was good enough for Irish pigs. I lost my temper and gave him a wallop on the jaw and was immediately escorted to my cell. That evening, I will never forget. The Corporal arrived with three other Scottish soldiers - they jammed me in the cell, snapped on a handcuff on my right arm above the elbow, forced my arm down to my private, and clipped the other cuff on to my left arm, also above the elbow. I was in a complete black knot and rolled about on the floor of my cell. I was left in this state for three days. The skin was torn from my ears and jaw-bones, my knees, shoulder-blades and ankle-bones. The handcuff swivel had cut my groin and the legs of my pants were almost cut away. I had to relieve myself in this position. My food was left on the floor - with my head I would spill the mug of tea, then lick it up. The bread I had to press into the floor with my face - my chin and nose were also skinned by these contortions. But bad as all this seems, it was infinitely preferable to the dungeon.

The Scottish Corporal, when throwing in my food, would say - "that is what we give the Germans and you pigs are worse". When I was missed by my conrades, Con Butler waited his chance to tell an English Sergeant of the Royal Artillery, and I was found in the condition I have described. I remained conscious all the time. When they removed the handcuffs my two arms were dead, also my left leg. I could not lie straight and was carried to the hospital like a ball and round as a hoop. The Governor was sent for and he asked me for all details. I would say in all honesty, he was really very troubled and that he dealt with the Corporal.

I remained in hospital for three weeks, in a small room to myself, and was very well treated. The Governor came to see me each day and told me it was a frightful thing to have happened - that he and staff knew nothing of it and that when I was well and ready, he had my internment order ready for Frongoch. I never saw any of my comrades while in hospital. I asked the Governor several times to let them up to me, but he always answered, "better not".

One day I was brought from Hell's Kitchen to the railway station. And that was my first, and will be, please God, my last visit at His Majesty's expense to Knutsford Gaol.

SIGNED Robert Holland

DATE 20th April 1950

WITNESS Wm. Joseph Conati.