

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉITÁ 1913-21

NO. W.S. 406

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 406

Witness
Frank Hardiman,
Town Hall Theatre,
Galway.

Identity
Member of I.R.B. Galway 1913;
Member of Irish Volunteers Galway
1915.

Subject
Galway, Easter Week 1916,
and imprisonment of Galway Volunteers.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT OF FRANK HARDIMAN,

Town Hall Theatre, Galway.

About the beginning of the century

Dr. Pat Ryan asked me to become a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I told him that while I preferred to remain outside the organisation, I would be only too glad to give them any assistance in my power. Later, the late Mr. George Nichols, put the same question to me with the same result. About 1913 Seán McDermott asked me to become a member, which I did. I was sworn in by Seán McDermott. George Nichols was Centre. Meetings which were rather irregular, were held, among other places, in what was known as the Old Shambles Barracks, where the Gaelic League also held its meetings. Archie Heron attended one of the meetings and addressed us on the Oath we had taken and on our duties as I.R.B. men. Among the matters discussed at the meetings was the suitability of persons proposed for membership. As far as I can remember, there were about fifteen members in the Circle.

The meeting at which the Volunteers was established in Galway was addressed by Eoin McNeill and Roger Casement, and held in the Town Hall. The result of the meeting was that about 600 Volunteers enrolled, 200 of whom could be considered active. A drill hall was acquired in Williamsgate

Street from the late John O'Donnell, M.P., in which the Volunteers were drilled and formed into Companies. George Nichols was President; Seamus Carter, Secretary; and I was Treasurer. Drills and parades went on in the usual way until a requisition was sent to the Secretary and signed by Martin McDonagh, James Pringle, Luke Duffy (now Senator), Martin Reddington and P.J. McDonnell (Solicitor), requesting that a meeting of the Volunteers be called and held at the Town Hall for the purpose of considering the advisability of placing the Volunteers under the authority of John Redmond. This meeting had disastrous results, ending with the breaking up of the Volunteers in Galway - the larger following going over to Redmond to assist him in his recruiting campaign for the British Army. Those who remained loyal were the members of the I.R.B. and a few others, such as Dr. Walsh, Louis O'Dea and some whose names I cannot recall at the moment.

On Good Friday, 1916, a member of the I.R.B. was sent to inform me that "The Rising" was fixed to take place on Easter Sunday. After Mass on Easter Sunday word was received in Galway that the Rising was postponed.

When the Rising did take place the Volunteers in Galway City were in such a weak position that it was almost impossible for them to act as a unit. The uncertainty of the Rising coming off left the Volunteers without an opportunity of arranging to link up with country units. On Easter Tuesday

I saw George Nichols on the street. I approached him to enquire what we were to do. When I came near him, he said "keep moving, don't be seen talking to me". I went home almost immediately. My house was surrounded by R. I. C. and I was arrested and brought to Eglinton Street Police Barracks. George Nichols, Seamus Carter and Micheál Ó Droighneáin were also arrested and brought there.

After being stripped and searched in Eglinton Street Barracks we were hand-cuffed and placed on two police cars and paraded through the city to the Docks surrounded by the R. I. C. who certainly made no effort to prevent some rowdies from attacking us. On arrival at the Docks our hand-cuffs were removed and we were put on board a motor launch and taken to the patrol trawler 'Guillimot' lying in the Bay, where we were later joined by the late Senator Pádraig O'Máille.

After a night spent playing cards in a small cabin, for love and not for money - as every penny we had was taken from us - we were allowed on deck in the morning and saw the sloop 'Laburnum' steaming towards us. We were soon put on board this vessel and detained there for three days. We were cordoned off by strong canvas and slept in hammocks rigged up by the sailors - they were quite comfortable. About three o'clock in the afternoon of the day of our arrival on board, the 'Laburnum' opened fire on Castlegar hill and the approaches to the city. It happened that some one informed the R. I. C. the Claregalway and Castlegar Volunteers were marching on Galway. The firing of the 'Laburnum' was directed

by an official of the Agriculture Board, while observers were on the roof of the Railway Hotel to report results.

The roads were strongly guarded by the R. I. C. and Redmond's Volunteers, lying in wait to shoot down their fellow countrymen if they made their appearance.

In the meantime the Volunteers, after their fight the previous day with the R. I. C. at Carnmore (in which one policeman was killed), had moved off to Moyode to join the general muster of Volunteers under Liam Mellowes, Larry Lardner and Alf Monaghan.

The 'Laburnum' patrolled the Bay from Galway to Aran and occasionally we got a good view of our surroundings. Our second day on board was a perfect day, with the sea like a sheet of glass. We were outside Aran admiring the beautiful scenery and wishing deeply that we were ashore there. In the distance we saw the cruiser 'Gloucester' entering the Bay and escorting a troop ship with a British regiment on their way to Galway. Soon after we 'put about' and when nearing Galway met a hooker laden with turf heading from Carraroe towards Ardahan. The 'Laburnum' ordered her to 'heave-to'. The poor man in the hooker, apparently not understanding English or pretending not to, took no notice of the order. A shot was fired across the bows of the hooker and as she 'hoved-to' a sailor was sent on board with a tow line. Instead of making fast the line to the bow of the hooker he fastened it to the mast over the turf - any Galway boy of 10 or 12 years with an elementary knowledge of boats could have told that experienced seaman it was a

stupid thing to do. The result as we expected, was that when the strain came on the tow-line the hooker turned at right angles towards us and partly capsized. The next thing we saw was the boatman and sailor in the water, clinging on to the mast which had been pulled out of the boat. A boat was sent out to pick them up. We were prevented from seeing any more but we saw the boatman next day on the 'Gloucester'. I cannot say what happened to his boat.

That evening we were told we could write to our people for any extra clothing we required - so we suspected there was some move on. Next day while entering the launch to convey us to the 'Gloucester' two cables away, a Petty Officer handed us some cigarettes and tobacco. On arriving on the 'Gloucester' we were searched and these taken from us. Here we met Dr. Walsh, Tom Flanagan, Peter Howley of Peterswell, Con O'Leary and Volunteers from Tuam and Dunmore - also John Faller and Professor Steinberger, U.C.G.

After being lined up on deck, and as each prisoner's name was called out, a charge of treason was read out by a naval lieutenant. He told us that the penalty if found guilty would be death, and warned us that any prisoner trying to escape would be immediately shot.

That evening (Friday) at about 7 o'clock, twenty of us were transferred to the sloop 'Snowdrop' on our way to Cobh. We were bundled down through a

manhole into two cells with railed gates facing each other. I believe each of those cells was not intended for more than two prisoners - but here we were, ten of us, squeezed into one cell and eleven into another. To make things worse the porthole in each cell was fastened and the ventilators turned against us - any little air we got was through the entrance manhole. How we all lived through it I do not know. No amount of shouting would attract the sentry. I could see poor Steinberger in the opposite cell. He kept shouting "this is murder, this is murder". After about eight hours we were allowed on deck for five minutes. When we returned to our cells we found the ventilation much improved.

After some time while passing close to the shore I could not but admire the magnificent scenery lit up by the brilliant sunshine which inspired John Locke to write his ever memorable poem "Dawn on the Hills of Ireland". Perhaps I was more interested than the other prisoners as I knew a close friend of his - John Deely, who often spoke to me about him and his sad end in New York.

In Cobh we were transferred to the battleship 'Albion' and were placed below decks where we had to sleep on the floor. The little food we got was of very poor quality. We were not allowed any knives or forks and had to eat our meals off the dish, left on the floor, with our hands. We were allowed one bucket of water every morning for twenty-one of us to wash in. We passed the time as best we could with various amusements, such as concerts, story-

tellings and mock trials at which Pádraig Ó Máille usually presided as Judge, seated on the floor as we had no seats, with a towel over his head to represent a wig. The usual charge against the prisoner was stealing the cutlery we were supposed to be supplied with. The prisoner was made kneel facing the Judge while the jury sprawled around him. If he attempted to sit down he was swiftly reminded by the 'boot of one of the jury' that he must treat the Court with respect. Seoirse MacNiocails was the Prosecuting Counsel and opened the charge with one of his witty speeches which put all of us in good humour. After a careful trial the prisoner was found guilty and sentenced to be detained on His Majesty's ship 'Albion' during His Majesty's pleasure. The jury annoyed by this sentence and led by the Prosecuting Counsel mobbed the Judge for passing such a degrading sentence on an innocent man.

Our quarters were partitioned off with heavy canvas behind which on one occasion a scuffle took place between sailors - one sailor kept shouting we had as much right to take up arms as Carson. He kept this up for some time and refused to be quietened by other sailors. In the end he had to be removed by force. On another occasion Dr. Walsh was called out. We wondered what it was about and as he did not return we felt rather anxious about him. Next morning he joined us and told us they put him in a cell for the night. He could not give any reason but suspected someone in Galway may have been responsible for it.

After some days things improved - the food we

received was very good and plentiful and occasionally we were allowed on deck for a short time.

After a week on the 'Albion' we were transferred to the cruiser 'Adventure', and left Cobh in a gale which lasted throughout the night until we arrived next morning at Dún Laoghaire. We landed at 9.45 and were marched to the R. I. C. Barracks there. We were detained in the yard awaiting the lorry to take us to Richmond Barracks. In the meantime word must have got around of our arrival because while being put on the lorry we were surrounded by a large number of friends who were most kind to us and gave us cigarettes, tobacco, sweets, etc., and as we were leaving for Richmond Barracks gave us a most encouraging cheer.

We were then driven to Richmond Barracks. The first person I saw looking through a window, when we arrived, was our President Seán T. O'Kelly. We were placed in a room under the one occupied by Seán MacDermott and others whom we knew. Our names and addresses and later our finger-prints were taken.

We had to sleep on the floor without any covering and as the nights were cold we had to keep close to each other for warmth. In the mornings we heard loud volley firing - only too well we knew what that meant. After some days we were assembled on the Barrack Square. Seán MacDermott accompanied by Gearóid O'Sullivan was with us - so was Hoey and a number of other G-men moving about among the prisoners. After our names were called we were marched to the North Wall on our way to England, and

to our profound regret leaving Seán whom we knew we were parting with for the last time, behind us. Passing through the throngs of people lining the streets, the prisoners singing lustily "Who fears to speak" and other patriotic songs were received most sympathetically - only in one instance was an insulting remark made by a drunken rowdy.

On arrival at North Wall we were put on a cattle boat. The conditions on the boat were so bad that the transport officer in charge expressed his regret and apologised to several of the prisoners, including myself, for the filthy state of the vessel. Most of the prisoners spent the night in crossing, perched on the rails of the cattle pens.

On arrival in England we were sent to Wandsworth Gaol. We arrived there about 7 a.m. Inside the gaol gates we were marched through a long laneway or passage on one side of which was a grass margin, and immediately over this margin was a long row of stone slabs, embedded in the wall, with the names of those executed in the prison marking their graves. This was the last I saw of Mr. Steinberger. He was released in a delicate state of health and died some short time afterwards.

We were placed in C Wing of the prison, searched, and everything we had taken from us, and then thrown into cells containing two small trestles and three boards to use as a bed; also three dirty coverings to be used as blankets. There were 280 cells in this Wing which were later almost filled with Irish prisoners as well as some conscientious objectors.

The cells were on four landings: commencing on the ground floor - C.1 to C.4 on top. Most of us Galway prisoners were on the second landing, and by the way so was Arthur Griffith - his cell was C.2/65. We were kept in solitary confinement and not allowed to speak or mix with each other. Neither were we allowed to exercise for some days until the convicts had prepared the exercise yard, cindered and rolled it.

The food we got was awful, and the filthy tins we got it in were most revolting, but we were starving and glad to get anything. After about two weeks we were reduced to mere skeletons. Things were so bad that on marching to Mass one of the prisoners broke ranks and made a dive for a dirty crust of bread on the ground. We saw one young prisoner, whom we were told was a mental case, moping about the yard. Mass over, we were marching out of the Chapel when one of the prisoners rushed to the harmonium and struck up the "Soldier's Song". The guards in their ignorance, thinking it was a religious hymn, did not interfere. This was repeated at other Masses.

One day at exercise Arthur Griffith who was near me asked in an undertone who were the two men at the end of the yard speaking to the Sergeant Major. I told him they were Willie Duffy and Captain Gwynn, M. Ps. The thought entered my mind to put an end to going around in circles. I made the suggestion to Mr. Griffith and before getting a reply I fell out of formation and asked the others who were present exercising in the circle to fall out also, which they did. There was considerable commotion among the military who had the prisoners surrounded, but owing to the presence of Mr. Duffy and Captain Gwynn we were

aware the British Authorities could not take any drastic action against us for the present at all events. Anyway as a result of our action that put an end to exercising in circles. The prisoners from then onwards were not prevented from speaking and mixing freely with each other. After this incident while walking around I saw Arthur Griffith in company with a brother of the late Willie Rooney. He smiled and nodded at me apparently satisfied with how things turned out. That was the last I ever saw of him. He was changed to another Wing of the prison with P. T. Daly, a well-known and popular labour leader, and subsequently sent to Reading Prison. Later on Seán T. O'Kelly - now our President - was also sent from here to Reading Prison.

When after a month we were allowed to receive visitors, the late Miss Maggie Lydon, a well-known Galway singer, working in London, organised the visits so that none of the Galway prisoners should be left without a visitor.

The Gaelic League made similar arrangements and afterwards there was a great demand for our autographs from visitors from Australia, America and Italy, as well as various parts of Ireland and England.

The letter of the Most Rev. Dr. Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, was received with great interest and satisfaction by the prisoners. Pádraig Ó Máille was reading it aloud to them. He had almost finished when the guards rushed over - Pádraig closed up the paper and passed it on to another prisoner who got away with it. As the guards were arguing with Pádraig the letter was

read at the other end of the yard until the guards got wise to what was happening when they made a second rush to get the paper but failed. We enjoyed their annoyance at being unable to recover the paper. Anyway all the prisoners got to know the contents of the letter and were delighted.

There was a big number of conscientious objectors in the prison and we were very much concerned with the brutal treatment they were getting. We could hear their cries and moans every night as they were beaten up and we were determined to do everything we could to make the treatment known outside, which we did. One day in the exercise yard some of our prisoners whose cells were on the ground floor, saw a man in No.1 cell, stretched on the floor apparently dead. We knew he was a conscientious objector. Willie Doris, M.P., was in the yard at the time, so I called him over and the whole story was repeated to him.

He asked to have it put in writing, which was promised. That evening about the 18th June, I got my internment order. We were to leave next day. So the prisoners left behind saw that Doris got the statement promised to him. A short time after being released at Christmas I saw in the papers where the matter was brought up in the British House of Commons. The Government denied the man was dead, which it appears was true. What happened was - he attempted suicide by hanging himself but was cut down in time. Anyway it was a pleasure to read that the Prison Authorities responsible for such brutal conduct were dismissed. I think you can verify this if you look up the Irish papers of the early months of 1917.

Among our friends who paid us a daily visit and almost lived with us - certainly he would if he could - was a young Priest named Father Devine from the North of Ireland, who was stationed in London. We got to like him very much and we were most anxious that he should be our Chaplain in the Internment Camp to which we expected to be sent later on. When we were brought up to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison I inquired about him and was told by the Chaplain there that he was changed from his district in London.

Acknowledgment is also due to the memories of the late Larry Ginnell, M.P., Willie Duffy, M.P., and William Doris, M.P., who, although differing from us at the time politically, showed the great interest they took in us by visiting us every day and helping in every way they could. They seldom left the prison without having their pockets stuffed with letters which the prisoners dropped into them, ostensibly without their knowledge. They also helped in many other ways. Several other M.P.s. also visited the prison but very little notice was taken of them by the prisoners except perhaps, Alfie Byrne, who seemed to be very popular with the Dublin crowd. Alfie stood at the main entrance door while the prisoners were returning to their cells and insisted on shaking hands with every one of us.

Word having got out that we were being removed to an Internment Camp, a reception committee awaited us outside the prison and marched with us all the way to the railway station, singing patriotic songs. On the way an incident happened which touched us very much.

A poor shabby old woman stopped me and begged me to take all the money she had in the world - sixpence in coppers. She would not take "no" for an answer, and stayed with me until I had to take it.

Another incident which we appreciated was when some loafer began to shout and jeer at us, he was promptly given a good beating by the British Officer in charge of the escort. At the railway station we were joined by another batch of prisoners from Lewes Gaol. Amongst those was Mr. Seamus O'Neill whom I did not know at the time. He afterwards took a prominent part in the War of Independence, and is now a Superintendent in the Gardai and one of the most popular and respected officials in Galway. Our friends were stopped at the station entrance so we had to shout our thanks and farewells in answer to their cheers and blessings. The day was beautiful and fine which put us all in good humour. It was a relief to breathe the clean air again and see the green fields with the trees in full foliage. At the different stations we passed the crowds there soon learned who we were and what we were. The most patriotic and seditious songs were sung and any attempt at hostility by rowdies was soon shouted down by the prisoners. We crossed the border into Wales and could not but admire the beautiful scenery we passed through. The people at each station appeared rather friendly.

We arrived at Frongoch after 7 o'clock. Frongoch Station is a small siding with a road leading from it to the main road from Bala. This short road separates the South Camp from the North Camp, each Camp being surrounded by barbed wire. The North Camp

was built on a height and consisted of wooden huts. The South Camp, a dismal-looking old distillery, infested with rats. Into this place we were marched and after being counted and handed over by our escort we were marched into an inner yard called a compound where the old Commandant Col. F.A. Heygate Lambert of the Yeomanry read aloud to us the rules of the Camp. He told us there were two ways of running it: one way was for the prisoners to run it themselves, the other way was for himself to run it. His way was at the point of the bayonet. He added that anyone attempting to escape would be shot and that his sentries were all armed with buck-shot. He made the same speech to all prisoners as they arrived and was afterwards nick-named 'Buck-shot'. He concluded by asking us to play the game by him and he would do the same by us. We really believed he did mean what he said, but as he was a man without any sense of humour who had a most exaggerated opinion of his own importance and dignity, we thought him incapable of considering us as anything but prisoners.

We were marched into the ground floor of the building where we were searched and given our numbers. Mine was, as far as I can remember, 193. We were asked by the Sergeant Major if we had any 'jack knives' on our persons; he asked all prisoners the same question and from then onwards he was known as 'Jack knives'. He was rather liked by the prisoners for his blunt honesty and straightforwardness.

I next found myself in No. 1 Dormitory. I think Seamus Kavanagh was in charge as Room Leader. I was afterwards put in No. 2 Dormitory where I remained for some weeks. Tomás McCurtain, the murdered Lord Mayor of

Cork, was in charge and afterwards I was glad to get changed to No. 3 Dormitory which was the best of a bad lot. Dick Mulcahy was my Room Leader here.

Contingents of prisoners kept coming in from various prisons in England until both the South and North Camps were filled. In the meantime a meeting of the prisoners had been called to elect a Camp Council. This meeting was called by an old Fenian, John O'Mahony, popularly known as "Comrades" among his friends, and was presided over by another old and respected Fenian, Mr. Ganly. Dr. Walsh was appointed Medical Officer of the Camp. I also happened to be elected as a member of the Committee. However, this Council only functioned when civil matters had to be dealt with. A Military Council was also appointed to run the Camp which they did in a most thorough and effective manner - as the British Authorities later on learned to their cost and confusion. Things went rather smoothly until after the releases, when about 500 of us were detained. The prisoners in the North Camp who were detained, were brought down to the South Camp and were not long there when they also began to suffer the same ill-effects as ourselves from the poisonous atmosphere of the place, and was it any wonder with hot steam pipes running through each dormitory in the middle of a boiling summer, wretched ventilation, bad sanitary arrangements, rats scurrying over our heads and under our beds throughout the night? Was it any wonder then that strong young men would fall in weakness as our numbers were checked in the compound every morning at 6 o'clock, and was it to be wondered at that four fine young boys had to be sent to Mental Asylums?

In No. 3 Dormitory my bed was next to that of J.K. O'Reilly. J.K., as is well known, was the author of "Wrap the Green Flag" and notwithstanding his advanced age fought with his three sons in the G.P.O. His sons were also prisoners in the Camp. He had rather a quick temper which was soon forgotten. I had many a tiff with him but after the 'blow-over' we always remained good friends, shared our books and magazines before passing them around to the other members of the Camp. One thing J.K. wanted when reading was quietness: if possible - noise got on his nerves. Opposite us was a Mr. O'Riordan of Middleton, Co. Cork. He was a grand old character and was very popular with everyone in camp. He had his violin with him and although not an expert player he knew enough to please himself and play an occasional four-hand reel for some of the Galway prisoners. This was more than J.K. could stand, so when Mr. O'Riordan finished playing, left his violin and bow on the shelf and went to another part of the dormitory, J.K. got a chunk of soap, took the bow off the shelf and smeared it with soap. "That puts an end to the noise", said J.K., sitting down to have a quiet read. I told him he had no right to do it and we had some words which annoyed him, and after a time while we were both lying down reading, in came a deputation led by Michael Lynch. "We were deputed to call on you, Mr. O'Reilly", said Michael, "to know if you would be so good as to start a book-keeping class in the Camp". (J.K. being an Accountant and Auditor). J.K. sat up, took off his pinz-nez, wiped them, put them on again and gave me a look of scorn. He stood up and, pointing to his shelf, said in a loud voice, "do you see that empty shelf - that shelf was filled with my books. Where are

they now, I ask you?". He glowered down at me. "Book-keeping! Why, the devil himself couldn't teach the fellows in this Camp more than they already know about 'book-keeping'". The deputation took their rebuff in good spirits and left the room with their sides shaking with laughter. When Mr. O'Riordan returned to his violin he couldn't knock a squeak out of it. However, the poor man was one of those who never complained. Shortly after he went to his bag, and the next thing we saw was a flute, a yard long, coming out of it. "Great heavens", said J.K., "Look at the 'Instrument of Torture' he has now.

As prisoners of war we were entitled to free postage, but the British Authorities for some reason insisted that in future all our letters sent out of the Camp should be stamped. This, the prisoners resented. A meeting of the Camp Council was called to consider the matter. It was at this meeting I had the privilege of meeting Terence MacSweeney for the first and last time. Some of those present were in favour of getting the prisoners not to write home or send out any letters. In answer to this argument Terence stood up and asked "what about the wives and children of the married men here - are we going to punish them?". This remark reminded me of Seán MacDermott, Cathal Brugha and others, the same mentality, always thinking of others and never of themselves. As far as I remember the result of the meeting was to leave it to each prisoner in camp to decide for himself. Shortly afterwards Terence MacSweeney was sent to Reading Prison. Already a number of others had been sent to Reading, including, P. Ó Máille, Seoirse MacNiocaill, Henry Dickson, Comdt. "Ginger" O'Connell (our Camp Commandant) and many others.

There were a number of prisoners appointed to make roads in the North Camp in the hope that some day we would be removed to there. Their pay was 1/- a day. We dubbed them the "Engineers". We also had boot repairing and tailors' shops. Stephen Jordan of Athenry was in charge of boot repairing. I don't remember who was in charge of the tailor's shop, but anyway Stephen appointed Dick Murphy of Athenry as his assistant. Dick also drew his "bob" a day from the Government. The only thing Dick knew about leather or boot repairing he got from what he wore on his feet. It was a gift to see Dick at work wasting Government leather and he certainly didn't spare the hammer. They also ran a news bulletin called the "Frongoch Humour". It was usually written on brown wrapping paper for the want of better paper and posted on the window of their workshop daily. The humorous writings were certainly good but anyone reading what they gave out as the "gospel truth" would immediately conclude that the authors were the most "beautiful brace of liars" it was possible to meet in a day's walk. Poor Dick has since gone to his reward. His jovial ways made him a great favourite among the prisoners, and he certainly with others, contributed to the "Humours of Frongoch" which in no small way helped to lighten the troubles of many other prisoners.

Another droll character with us was Micheál O'Mullane of Aran. Mick, when he closed one eye and looked at you with the other, could "size you up" from your head to the soles of your feet. You couldn't "cod" Mick. Mick was in charge of the "rag party". His duties were to call at the stores every morning and get the rags for burnishing the brasses in the wash houses and bath rooms. He was also

responsible for the safe return of the filthy things when finished with them. This, Mick did, solemnly counting the number of rags for the old provost Corporal and disputing next morning he had not got his proper number. The old Corporal did not know what to make of Mick - Mick always admonished him by warning him to be more careful of Government property in future. Mick was known as the "Minister for Rags".

There were over 100 young refugee Irishmen who fought in the Rising. Most of them from London and Liverpool liable for conscription. The 'ructions' began when the British started searching for them among the prisoners. Up to then the running of the Camp worked smoothly, so much so that "Buck-shot" addressing us on parade described us as the cleanest and finest body of prisoners he ever had under his charge. He had great pleasure in making that report to the Government. It seems he meant well. Anyway, things took a different turn later on.

The name of the first refugee called out was Frank Thornton - no reply, of course. So soon afterwards all prisoners were assembled in the outer compound and a big array of British bayonets marched in and took up positions behind us while several others were stationed throughout our ranks. Our names and numbers were called. There was no answer. When it came to Frank Thornton's name, he stood out and answered his name. He was immediately placed under arrest and later I heard got two years' imprisonment for refusing to serve in the British Army.

We all enjoyed the frequent route marches into

the Welsh Hills. It was certainly a relief to leave the poisonous atmosphere of the old Distillery even for a couple of hours and enjoy the clean fresh air. We marched in column of fours and I always made it a point to get in the front file to make the pace if possible. Our time limit was an hour outwards. We covered about three miles in that time but by increasing this we could do more. On our homeward journey we would slow down to almost a mere crawl. I was surprised to read in Brennan Whitmore's book "The Irish in Frongoch" that "Buck-shot" ordered those marches as a punishment for the prisoners. If that was so, we certainly enjoyed the punishment. I cannot say so much for our escort who were mostly all middle-aged men and found it hard to keep up with us. On one occasion when we were leaving them behind the officer in charge kept shouting "step short in front", "step short in front". The more he shouted the quicker we went; so he sent a Sergeant on the double to head us off and march in front of us, which they afterwards did on all our marches. During one of the early marches we noticed a woman standing at the door of her house and shaking her fist at us. We were rather surprised at this sign of hostility, and to show there was no ill-feeling between the Welsh people and ourselves, I suggested to a few of those near me to strike up the Welsh National Anthem. Soon we were all whistling it, and in all our marches afterwards we included it with our own patriotic tunes.

My friend, the late Seamus Carter, was usually near me on all those marches. Seamus was a well-known Irish scholar. His wonderful knowledge of Irish enabled him to translate the Welsh road signs which

were very interesting and like our own Irish names of places: usually referred to some noted object in the localities we were passing through. Another thing that attracted my notice was a stone tablet on a house pointing out - "All the material used in the building of this house was got on this estate: Sinn Féin Amháin".

The British Authorities made an order that in future the prisoners were to clean out the soldiers' ash-pits. Naturally, the whole Camp protested against this insult. I found myself one of those who went before "Buck-shot" to do so. Each morning a squad of eight Volunteers went before him. He accused us of insubordination for refusing to carry out his order, sentenced us to 10 days' cells, and afterwards interned indefinitely in the North Camp and deprived of all privileges; that is, we were not allowed to write home or receive any letters or parcels. The cells were already filled so we were sent up to the North Camp where we were searched and deprived of everything, including pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, &c. Liam O'Brien was Commandant of this Camp. When we went there we filled the 3rd hut. The late Seán Hales was hut leader. Seán was one of the finest men physically I ever met. It was a delight to see him in his athletic togs tossing half-hundredweights like rubber balls. Occasionally, the late Wm. Mulryan of Kiltulla, Cranmore, another powerful man, with Mick Collins tried their skill with him in weight-throwing and, although giving some splendid exhibitions of their strength, they were no match for Seán. What a pity those fine young Irishmen should meet with such early and tragic ends!

The North Camp was a great improvement on the other place, the South Camp; but, of course, we missed our letters from home as well as our smokes. However, they say necessity is the mother of invention - and we soon discovered that by driving a knife between the sheeting of the roof and cutting the felt outside covering, it caused a leak which was immediately reported. So "Buck-shot" ordered our "Engineers" up to repair it. Needless to say they did not come with empty pockets. We left the windows open and a shower of tobacco and cigarettes came through when the guards' attention was drawn away by some of the other prisoners. Another method was using the Chaplain's bag when he came up to say Mass. A considerable amount of stuff was smuggled up to us in this way without the Chaplain's knowledge. At last our jailers, seeing the folly of their ways, "threw up the sponge" and allowed us back to the South Camp where we were boisterously received, especially the younger prisoners. After arriving at the South Camp I met Dick Mulcahy and urged him to try and get us all changed to the North Camp which was in every way more healthy and cleaner than where we were. I cannot say if my advice influenced him in any way, but shortly after we were all changed up to the North Camp.

One day while on fatigue duty at the stores we noticed another big display of military marching into the Camp. | Those displays if intended to impress the prisoners, had the opposite effect. Most of them looked on the displays with indifference and some even with amusement. One prisoner turned to me and said, "I wonder what divilmint are they up to now". We were all ordered back to Camp and drawn up in formation and as each prisoner's name and number was called and

answered we were sent into an adjoining field. I followed Dick Mulcahy and asked him what was up. He was not sure but thought they were looking for some of the other prisoners. About half the number of prisoners' names were called when rain came on, so that those not called were marched down to the South Camp. As they were about to enter the Camp, someone shouted "will we answer our names?" and there was an immediate reply of "no". It afterwards turned out they were looking for a refugee named Michael Murphy from London.

A Galway man named Barrett, was picked out in mistake for Michael Murphy, and although he denied he was the man they were looking for, he was sent to London for identification, but they found there they had the wrong man and returned him to camp. That night when the prisoners arrived in the South Camp those who were known, were picked out and returned to the North Camp. Those who were not known, were sent to the North Camp for their beds and private property. They were sent back in relays. Most of them wore beards. Each prisoner was in the charge of a soldier. When they arrived in the North Camp it was quite dark and as the prisoners went into their huts to get their things they were immediately surrounded by the other prisoners while the escorts remained outside. There was, naturally, a long delay and finally the escorts entered the huts but were unable to recognise most of their prisoners who had in the meantime had their beards shaved off. Then a hullabaloo started. "Where is my b....y prisoner" rang all over the Camp. We could hear - "Sergeant, I lost a b....y prisoner". In the hut I was in, one

of the escort came in and sat on a bed - "Look here", he said, addressing us, "I have been over a great part of the world and of all the b...y devils I ever met you blokes are the worst". They went down to the South Camp with fewer prisoners. They were sent back up for the missing ones. When they came back the escort appealed to the prisoners to get them out of their difficulty as they would likely be courtmartialled. They did not care what prisoners they had, so most of the Camp volunteered to go down. Anyway, when they did go down they had too many prisoners and had to come up again to fix the number. The whole thing was a scream, which all of the prisoners thoroughly enjoyed. It reminded me of the Nursery Rhyme :-

"A General had a thousand men,
 And he marched them up the hill,
 And when he marched them up the hill
 He marched them down again.
 And when they were up, they were up,
 And when they were down, they were down".

but in this case they were neither up nor down which only added to "Buck-shot's" worries as he had to provide sentries for both Camps.

After two days' hunger strike the prisoners in the South Camp were returned to the North Camp where they were joyfully received by their comrades and met with a great reception.

Winter was fast approaching and the River Tryweryn passing alongside both Camps on its way to Bala Lake was now in flood. To most Galway men, so accustomed to seeing water such as the sea, lake or river, when away from home the absence water is felt - so that to look on this little river occasionally was a pleasure and restful to the eyes.

Rain came down in torrents making each hut look like a Noah's Ark. After some days it was followed by snow which covered the whole countryside giving it a very picturesque appearance. Then followed heavy frost which enabled the prisoners to enjoy sliding and snow-balling. Even the floors of the huts, which were washed out every morning, were frozen in a short time and also used for sliding, especially after dark.

On November's night the prisoners enjoyed themselves in various ways. At night when roll call came on a new officer shepherded by one of the old staff officers and the Sergeant, paid us a visit. The new officer, who was Scotch, seemed to be a decent and jolly little individual, but not so was his companion. When they arrived further up the line and entered one of the huts they found two rows of the most weird and fantastically garbed individuals with blackened faces standing to attention before them. The older officer was most indignant and took it as a personal slight. He started to rail them when the new officer, who enjoyed the whole thing, tapped him on the shoulder and told him to come on, "they were only enjoying Guy Fawke's night".

A rumour went the rounds of the Camp that those not answering their names in future would be sent back to prison. The arrival of a large contingent of military at the railway siding seemed to give credence to this rumour. They joined the local garrison and all marched into the Camp - about 400 strong. Outside each hut three soldiers stood on guard. At that particular time things were not going well with my people at home. The County Council which was then mostly comprised of

Redmondites plus Unionist officials, put up my place of business in the open market to the highest bidder, so that it was most vital I should keep in touch with my wife to advise her what to do. If any other one got the place it possibly meant my wife and family being evicted and our things thrown out on the road side, as happened on three occasions afterwards during the later troubles. That reminds me - some months before, Dick Mulcahy told me I should not be doing fatigue work, there were plenty of young fellows in the Camp for that purpose. I told him I preferred doing something as it kept my mind off my worries, - this was one of them. Now, after a lapse of so many years and that the sting has gone out of it, I may mention as a coincidence that Dick Mulcahy himself as head of the Free State Army was either directly or indirectly responsible for one of those evictions.

However, all's well that ends well. My wife's tender was the highest offer which saved the situation. That was the position when this raid came on. What was I to do? Thinking it was a challenge and that we were going back to prison, I refused to answer my name. Those who answered their names were told to stand to one side. I then learned, I think it was from Liam O'Brien, that we were only going to the South Camp - so that altered the view I had taken of things and under the circumstances I considered it my duty to answer my name, particularly as I thought it would be much better to put the British Authorities to the expense and trouble of keeping two Camps going.

What gave rise to the rumours we were to be sent to prison was the subsequent courtmartial of the hut leaders which seemingly the British Authorities circulated for reasons of their own. The courtmartial got such an amount of publicity in the Press at the time it is not necessary for me to dwell on them.

Shortly after these events, Sir Charles Cameron made an official inspection of both Camps and it is thought that his report was most favourable to the prisoners and was responsible for their early release.

Two days before Christmas as we were settling down to make arrangements for our Christmas festivities, word came in to us of our release and we were told to be ready in two hours to leave by train. That day I had got a large hamper of hams, plum puddings and other Christmas fare from Mr. Tom Derrig (former Minister for Education). As I could not manage to bring them back again, the only thing I could do was to share the hams and plum puddings etc. as best I could amongst the prisoners, and especially amongst the Dublin Prisoners who were held over for the following day. I cannot say whether our jailers or ourselves were the most pleased in parting company, possibly they were, because many a headache the prisoners gave them.

When we arrived at Chester that night we had to squeeze ourselves into the boat train which was already crowded. We were met by several Press reporters who travelled with us all the way to Dublin. At Liffey Junction as the Galway train was passing, Tom (Baby) Duggan and myself jumped out of the train

we were in and managed, with the help of the passengers, to get aboard the down train for Galway, while the train containing the other prisoners went on to Broadstone.

I must add in favour of Frongoch Camp that no matter what may be said about the hardships of the prisoners, no attempt was made to murder any of us such as has had been done in another Camp in which I was interned later on.

SIGNED *P. Ó hAizé*

DATE 25-6-1950

WITNESS *Seán Brennan Comdt.*

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 406